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The (de)colonial elephant in the room Challenging the comfort zone of academic norms

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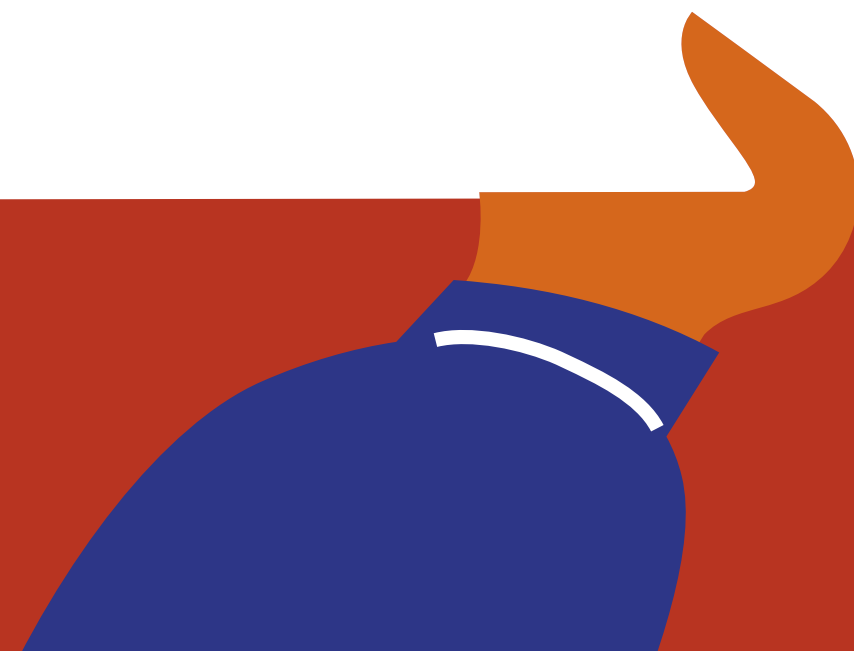
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Learning Intention & Success Criteria

- Critically define decoloniality and decolonising the curriculum, including their theoretical foundations and implications for higher education practice.

Interrogate academic knowledge systems through the lens of epistemic injustice and extractivism, using case studies such as Maslow's hierarchy and Indigenous knowledge.

- Apply decolonial principles to curriculum design, particularly in evaluating and transforming reading lists to include diverse epistemologies and challenge dominant narratives.



Setting the scene why are we here?

What does it mean to
challenge academic norms?

What is the “(de)colonial
elephant” in your subject?

Decolonising is not a metaphor
(Tuck & Yang, 2012)



What is decoloniality?

Colonialism ended but coloniality remains (Quijano, 2000)

A system of power that shapes:

- Knowledge
- Being (ontology)
- Perception



What is decolonising the curriculum

More than adding diverse authors (Bhambra et al., 2018)

Questions dominant knowledge systems Recognises and values multiple epistemologies Challenges Eurocentrism and invisibility

Too often interpreted narrowly: as the inclusion of “diverse voices” or “non-Western authors.” While inclusion is important, it doesn’t fundamentally challenge the structures that determine what is legitimate knowledge in the first place. True decolonisation interrogates the very foundations of the curriculum - its content, its delivery, its assumptions about the learner and the teacher.

Decolonising the curriculum involves recognising epistemic diversity (different ways of knowing the world). It disrupts the universalism of Western thought, asking: Is this theory or framework applicable beyond the Global North? What knowledge systems have been suppressed in the construction of this discipline?

It also means challenging epistemic extractivism - the practice of using knowledge from marginalised communities without acknowledging their origins or contexts. As we’ll explore later in the session, this extractivism is often visible in our reading lists, our citations, and our academic heroes.

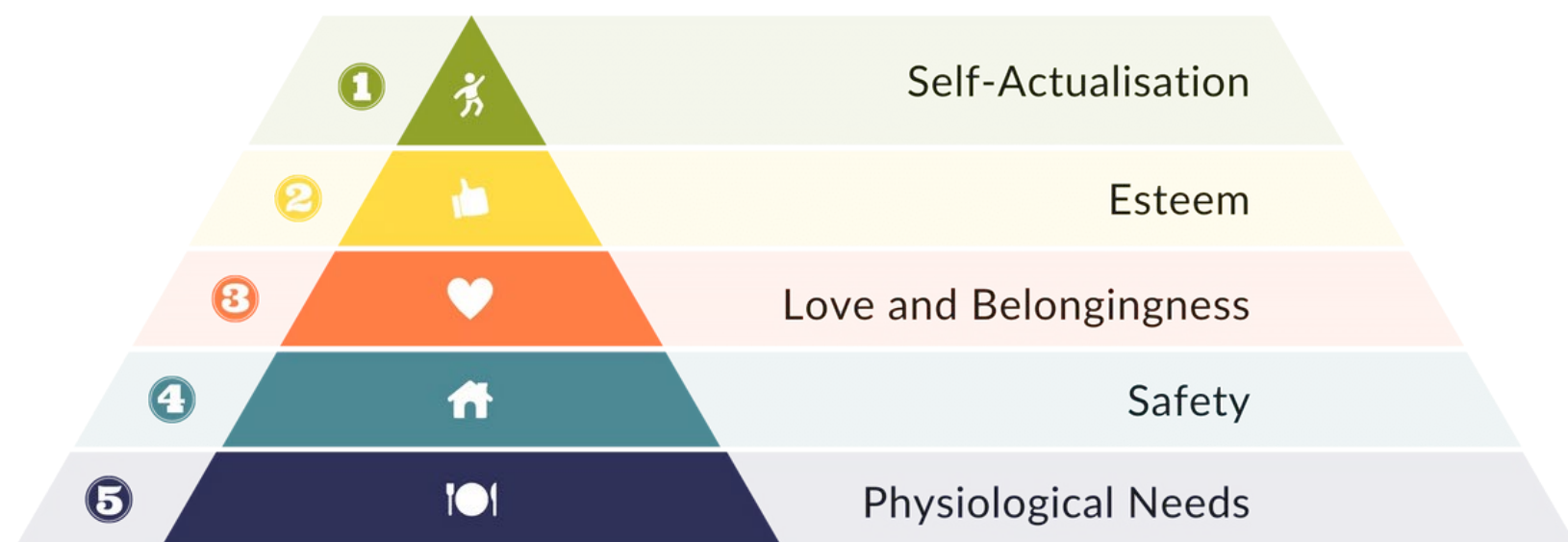


Knowledge is neutral

A foundational principle in decolonial thinking is that knowledge is never neutral. It is always situated and shaped by power, culture, history, and context. What is considered academic or legitimate knowledge is the result of complex systems of validation that have historically privileged Cs pmacl rpg, u fgc, k _jc, and cjgc voices.

Dpgai cp'q concept of epistemic injustice (2007) is useful here. She identifies two forms:

- Testimonial injustice: when someone's knowledge is dismissed due to prejudice (e.g., a student of colour being seen as less credible)
- Hermeneutical injustice: when someone lacks the resources to make sense of their own experiences because dominant discourses exclude their worldview



Niitsitapii Values

Kakoysin- Be aware of your environment, be observant

Pommotsiiysinni- To transfer something to others

Ihkanaitapstsiwa- Everything that is given to a person to do what they want with

Aoahkannaistokawa- Everything Comes in Pairs (Balance)

Isspommaanitapiiysinni- Being Helpful to Others

Aksistoiyipaittapiiysinni- Being Able to Take on Tasks Independently

Ihpiopotsp - Purpose for being there

Niitsitapiiysinni- To be Blackfoot

Innakotsiiyinni- Respect for Others

Kimmapiiypitsinni- Kindness to others

Aatsimoyikaan- Spirituality

Reclaiming Epistemologies

An illustration of three people standing and holding large signs. On the left, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a white shirt with a red collar and a red skirt, holds a blue sign. In the center, a person with short white hair, wearing a blue shirt and orange plaid pants, holds a red sign. On the right, a person with curly orange hair, wearing a blue shirt, holds a blue sign. To the far right, another person with curly orange hair is shown from the chest up, shouting into a blue and red megaphone. The background is a solid light beige color.

Embrace epistemic plurality in many ways of knowing

We can take inspiration from de Sousa Santos (2014), who argues for the recognition of epistemologies of the South—knowledge systems rooted in the lived experience of those historically excluded from the academy: Indigenous, Afro-descendant, peasant, feminist, and subaltern communities.

Beyond written text

He calls for “cognitive justice”, where the dignity of all forms of knowing is upheld. This includes not only the content of what we teach, but also the methodologies through which knowledge is produced and shared—storytelling, embodied practices, land-based learning, collective inquiry.

Shift from extractive to reciprocal learning

This requires a shift away from extractive models of education where learners take knowledge and toward reciprocal models of learning and unlearning. In short, decolonial practice challenges us to move beyond knowing about other cultures, to recognising those cultures as sources of knowledge in their own right.

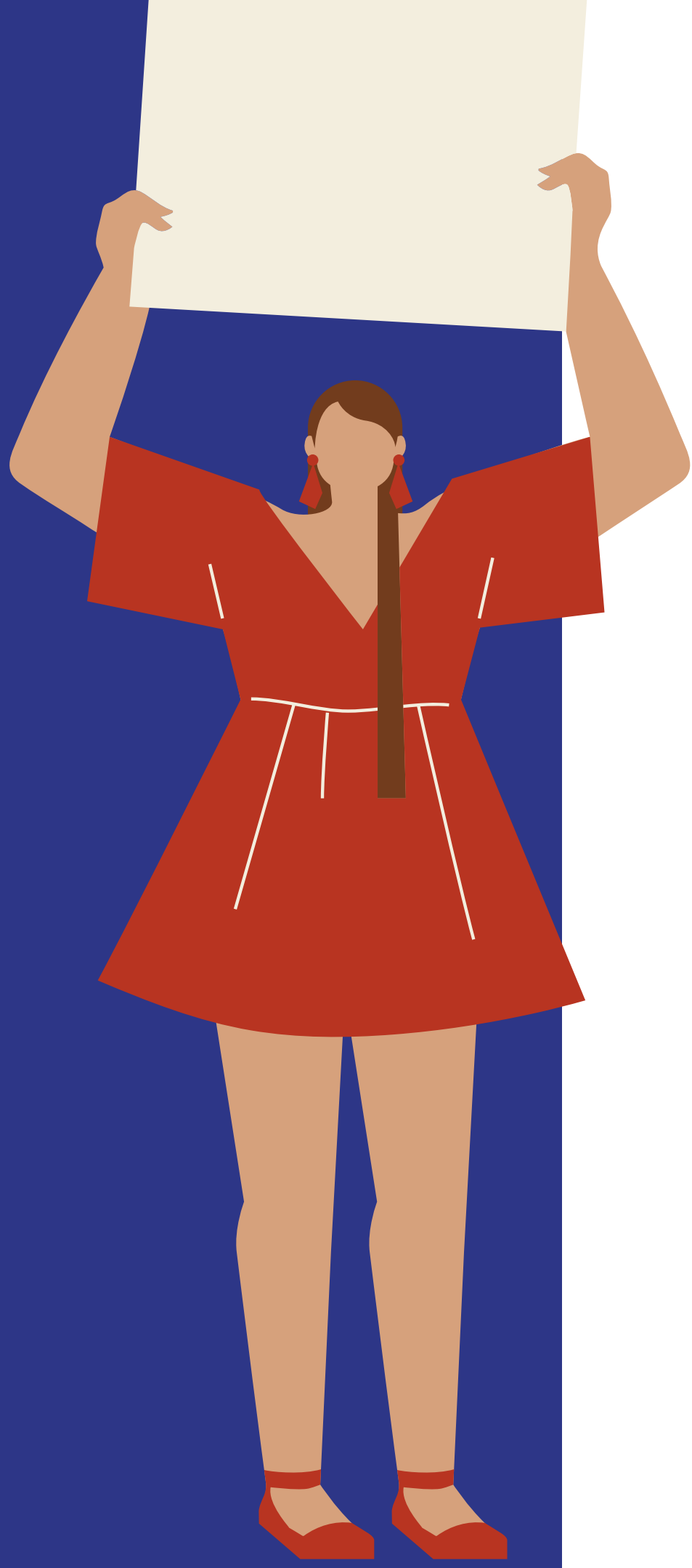
The Reading Site of Power

Reading lists reflect power structures
and disciplinary canons

Foundational texts often = white, male,
Euro-American voices

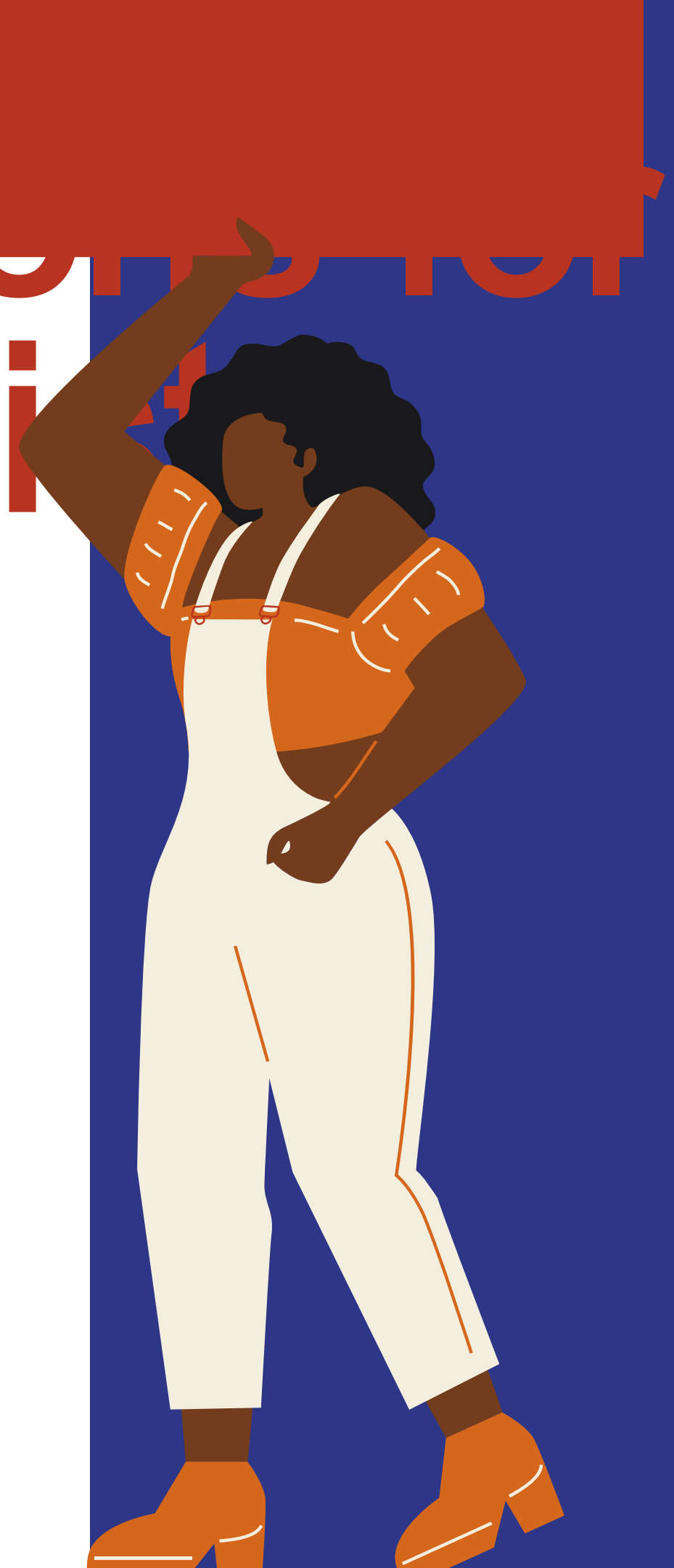
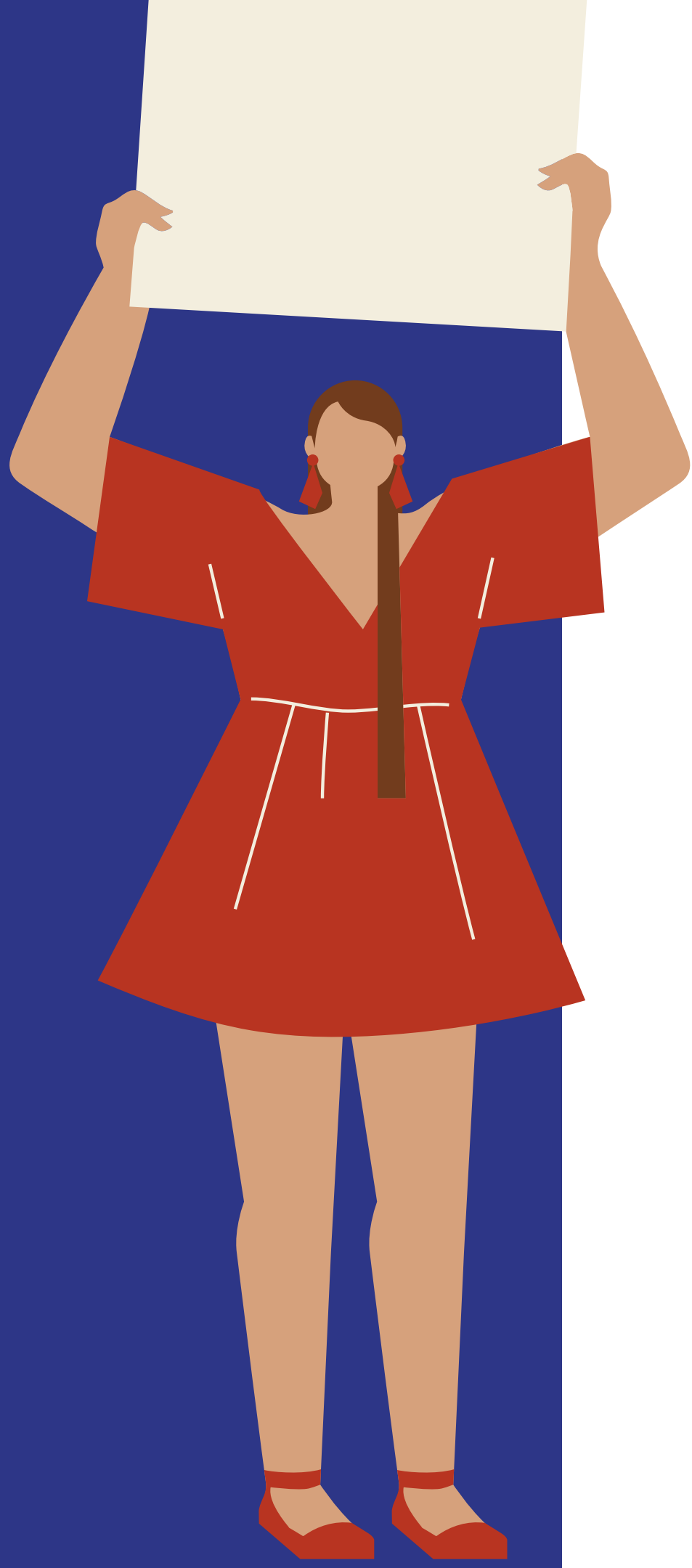
Inclusion \neq transformation (Ahmed, 2012)

U f m g l t g g e j c = U f m g l q g c l a c b =



A Critical Learning Li

1. Where does this knowledge originate?
2. Was it produced in a colonial or imperial context?
3. Who does it serve or benefit?
4. Who does it marginalise or erase?
5. Is it globally relevant?
6. Are other epistemologies present?



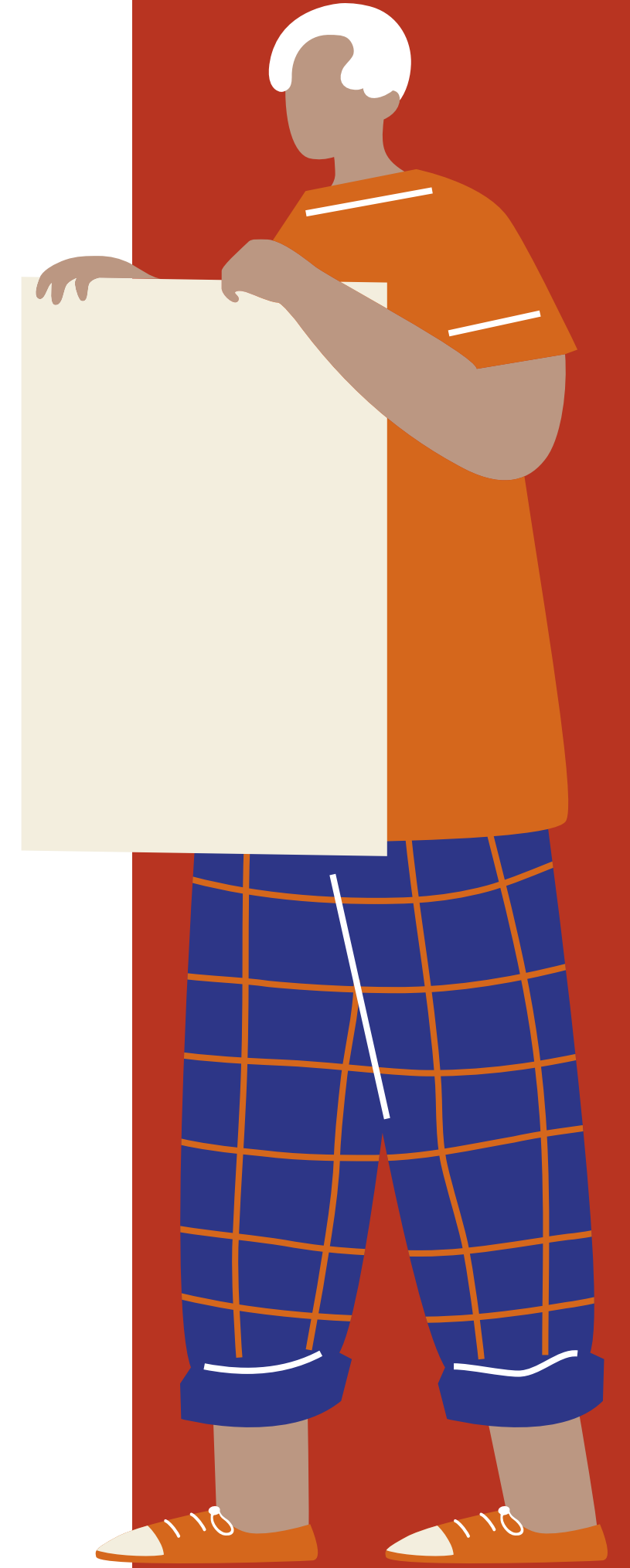
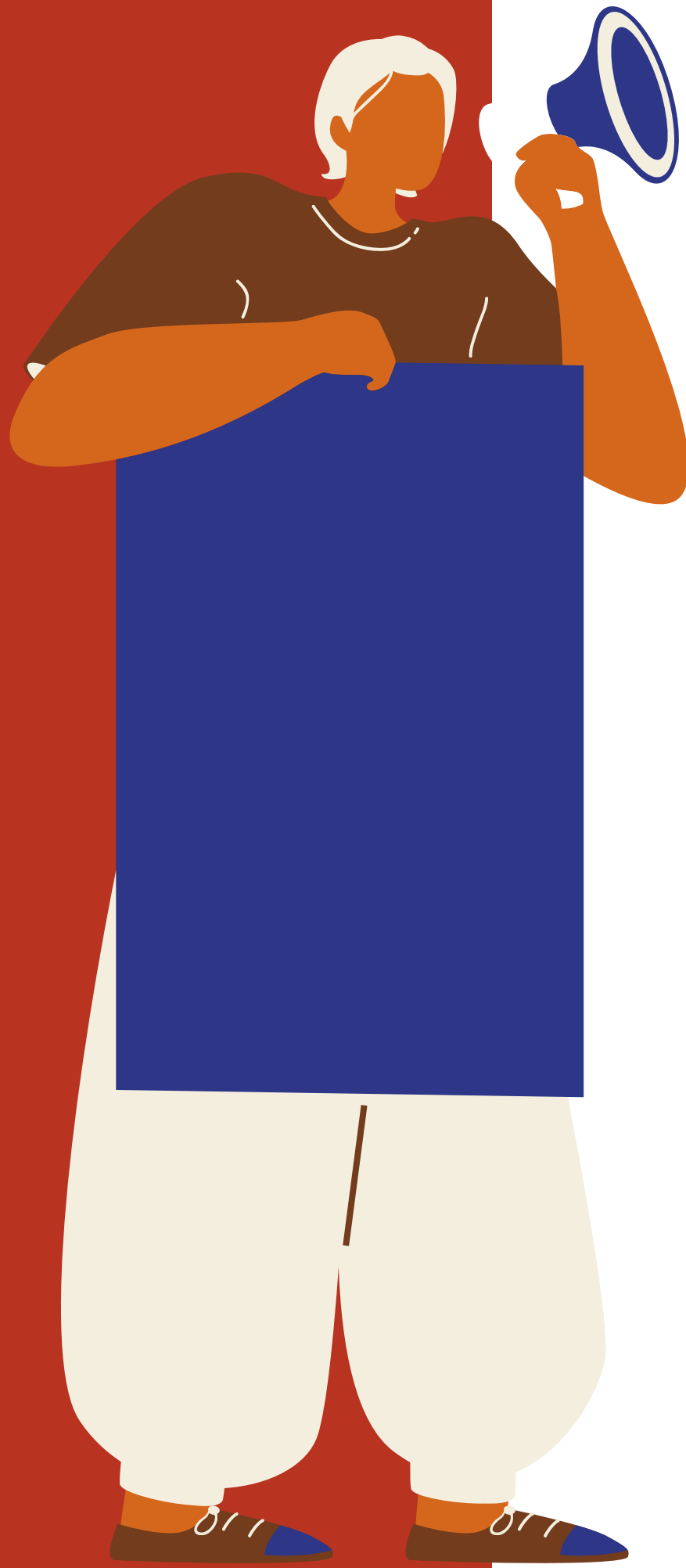
Reworking a Readinglist

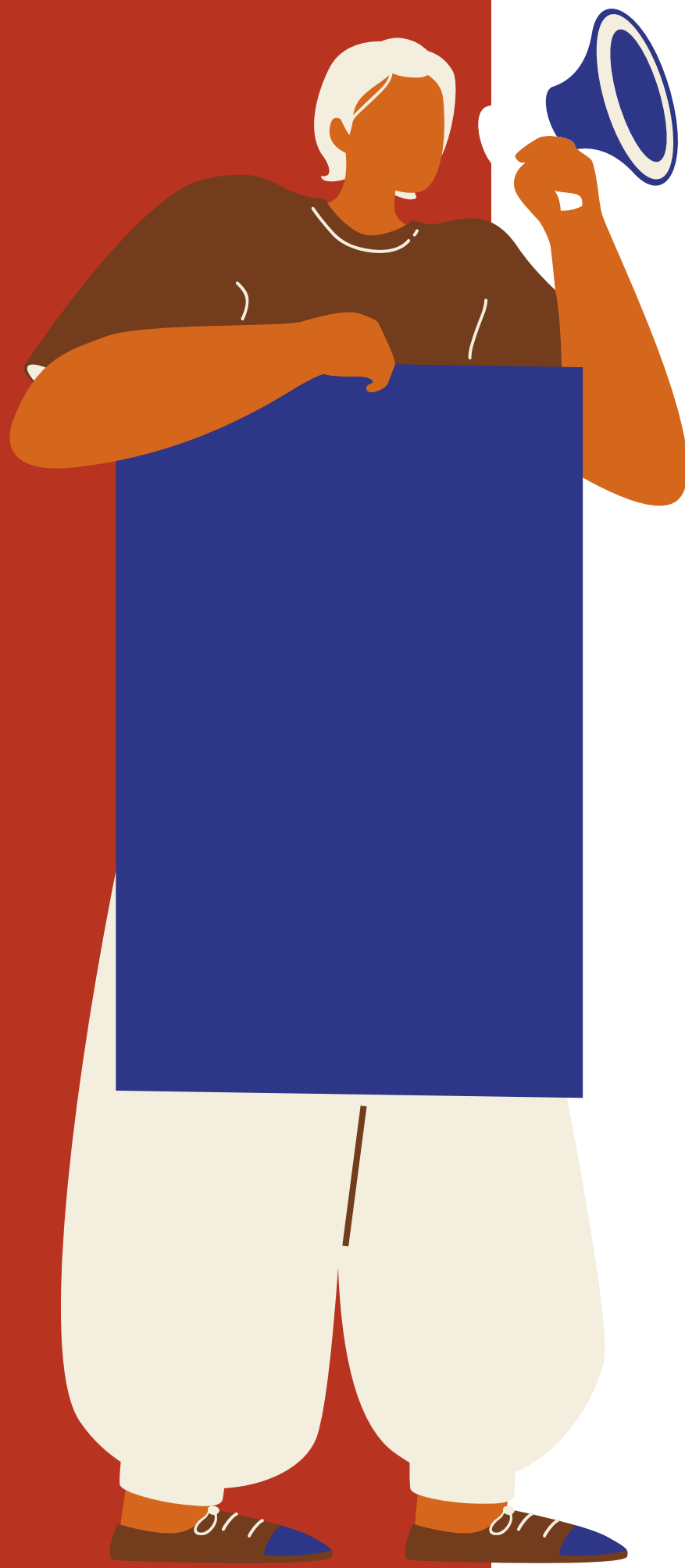
Education module with 90% UK/US white male authors

Actions to take:

- Add Indigenous, Black, and Global South scholars
- Reframe learning outcomes to include epistemic plurality
- Annotate readings with positionality/ context

Hypothetical outcome: More critical engagement and diverse student participation



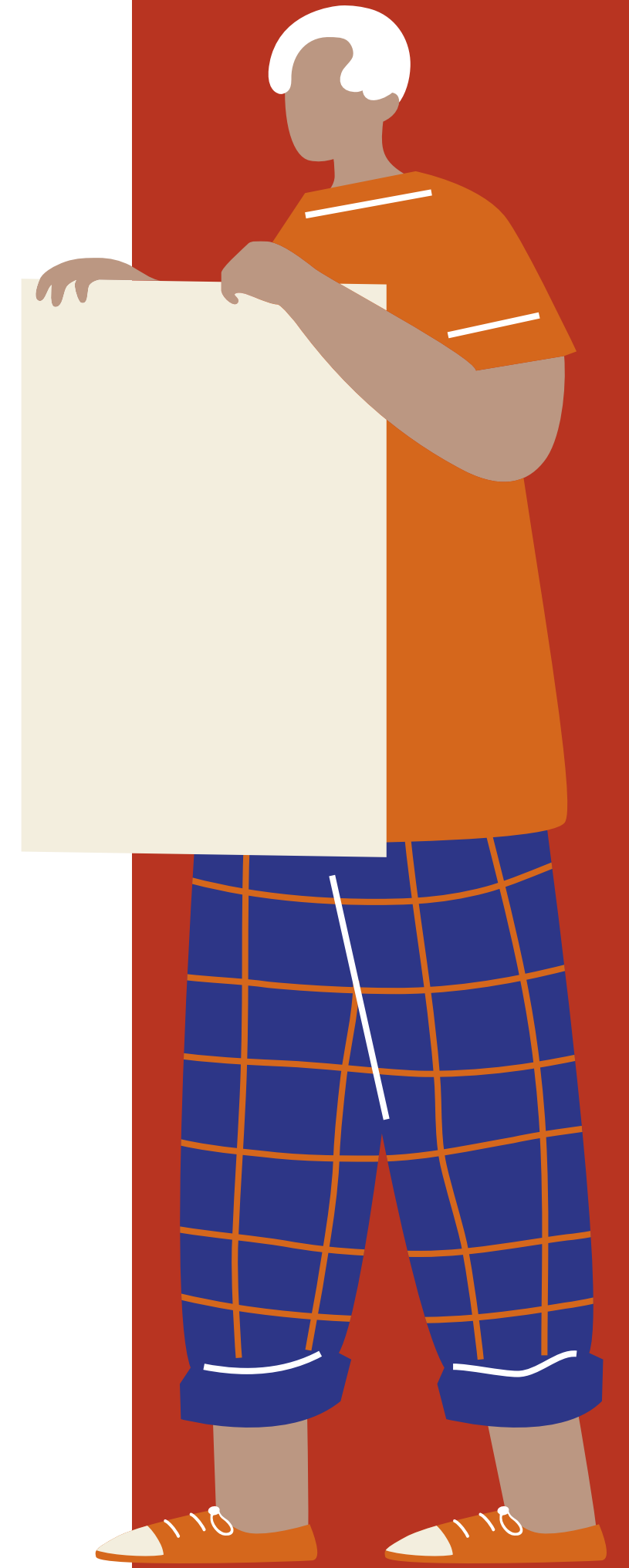


In small groups, examine a sample reading list using the 6 decolonial questions from Slide 10.

Discussion prompts:

- Whose voices dominate this list?
- What knowledge systems are included or excluded?
- What could be added, removed, or recontextualised?

Suggest one new reading and explain why it would challenge or expand the epistemic scope of the module.



Moving Beyond Inclusion

Decolonising is not a checklist or one-time project

It involves discomfort, unlearning, and reimagining

Requires epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009)

A relational, ethical, and continuous practice



Key Takeaway



Reflections

- What assumptions underpin my curriculum design?
- Who is centred and who is erased in my reading lists and teaching?
- How do dominant knowledge systems shape assessment, pedagogy, and recognition?
- How can I hold space for multiple epistemologies in my discipline?
- Am I ready to feel discomfort in pursuit of justice?

Future Work

- What would a decolonised module look and feel like on your programme?
- How can we meaningfully involve students in this work?
- What institutional barriers exist - and how might we challenge them?
- How do we build long-term communities of practice?

Thank you



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