

Understanding Gender

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering respect and responsibility through age-appropriate sexuality education.

NSES ALIGNMENT:

By the end of 12th grade, students will be able to:

D.12.CC.1 – Differentiate between biological sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression.

TARGET GRADE: Grade 9
Lesson 5

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Enough envelopes with four photos in them, prepared as described above, for half the group to each have one
- Computer with access to PowerPoint
- LCD Projector and screen
- Worksheet: “Gender Scripts” – one copy for one third of your students
- PowerPoint titled “Gender Picture Examples”
- Homework: “I Am Jazz” – one per student
- Flipchart paper
- Flipchart markers
- Masking tape
- Extra pencils in case students

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- Go through magazines or search online to find photos of people who visually fulfill gender role stereotypes, those who do not and those whose gender may not be easily identifiable in a picture. Each picture should have only one person in it, they should not be couples or group shots.
- You will need to find enough pictures for each pair in your class to receive four in an envelope.

(Note to the Teacher: To save time or if it is challenging to find that many unique pictures, you can copy some so there is overlap. Please be sure the photos represent a range of ages, races, ethnicities, cultures, physical abilities and body types.)

- Print or cut out the pictures and place four different ones into a regular envelope to create enough individual envelopes for half your class, since the activity that will use these will be done in pairs.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Explain what gender and gender identity are, and how they are different from biological sex. [Knowledge]
2. Define “gender script” while providing several examples of these scripts. [Knowledge]
3. Identify at least three sources of gender scripts and messages they have received growing up. [Knowledge]

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we’ve intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun “they” instead of “her” or “him”, using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to “someone with a vulva” vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

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PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Say, “Today we are going to be talking about gender. Let’s take a look at what that means before we do some activities about it.”

Write the word “gender” on the board. Ask, “What does gender mean?” In most cases, people will say, “it’s whether you’re a boy or a girl.” After a few responses, ask, “How does someone determine whether you’re a boy or girl?” There will likely be a range of responses, but most commonly they will get at “it’s how you’re born.” Ask, “When you’re born, how do they know what your gender is?” Probe for “by looking at the baby’s genitals.”

Explain that there’s a slight difference here – that when you look at the baby’s genitals and see either a penis or a vulva, all you’re seeing is their body parts. Based on what we see, we assign a name to describe that baby – we say, “it’s a boy” or “it’s a girl.” This is called a person’s biological sex (write the phrase “biological sex” up on the board to the left of the word gender).

Say, “Some people are born with external genitals that don’t match their internal organs. For example, someone who has a vulva but no uterus.

All of this has to do with biology – our body parts, our chromosomes and our hormones. This makes up our biological sex. If our body parts are different from our internal organs then we are intersex, sometimes called a DSD (Disorder of Sexual Development). That’s a way of referring to someone whose sexual body parts developed differently from most people.”

Say, “Gender, however, is different – and far more complex. To make it clearer, let’s break it down a bit.”

Say, “If you were to look in the mirror and see your body, what you see in the mirror – what we just discussed – is part of your biological sex. If you were to close your eyes, how you see yourself based on those body parts is your gender identity. In most cases, how people feel when they close their eyes matches what they see in the mirror. This is called being ‘cisgender.’ You might commonly hear people refer to just being ‘male’ or ‘female,’ but the correct term is ‘cisgender.’

For some people, what they see in the mirror and how they feel on the inside are different. This is called being ‘transgender.’”

Say, “Regardless of our gender identity, we are getting lots of messages about what is or isn’t okay to say, do or wear based on who we are.” Write the word “gender script” on the board. Ask, “Has anyone here been in a play yet at school? What does a script tell us in a play or movie or tv show?” Probe for it tells us what we should say, how we should move and how we should react to others. Say, “So our gender scripts are how we’re told to behave based on the answer to that question when we’re born: Is it a boy or a girl?”

Divide the class into groups of three. Say, “I am going to give you all a sheet of paper and would like to ask you to think about the gender scripts you have gotten or have heard about people of a different gender from yours. For right now, we’re just going to talk about boys and girls.”

Distribute the handout, “Gender Scripts” and tell students they will have about 10 minutes in which to complete it. (14 minutes)

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STEP 2: After about 10 minutes, ask students to stop their work. Create two lists on the board and go around the room, asking individual students to share an example from their lists. Record their responses.

Once all the responses are on the board, ask the following questions:

- What do you notice about the two lists?
- How did you know that these were the gender scripts growing up?
- From where/whom have you been receiving these scripts?

Say, “So far, we’ve been talking about people who are assigned ‘male’ and ‘female’ at birth. In most cases, people who are assigned ‘male’ at birth have a penis and testicles, and how they feel on the inside matches those body parts. It makes sense to them. Same thing for people who are assigned ‘female’ at birth – they have a vulva and ovaries and a uterus, and how they feel on the inside matches those parts.

Sometimes, however, the body parts are different from how a person feels on the inside. That person may call themselves ‘transgender.’ How might someone who identifies as transgender react to these scripts?” (11 minutes)

STEP 3: Say, “To what extent do you think our culture as a whole has been scripted around gender? Let’s take a look at that now. To do so, we need to get into pairs.”

After students get into their pairs, say, “Each pair is going to get an envelope. Inside are four pictures. You are going to face each other. One person will start by taking out one of the pictures from the envelope without showing it to the other person. They will then describe the person in the picture and the other person needs to guess the gender of that person. Seems easy, right? But wait – there are a few rules!” (write key words on the board as you go through these):

- The guesser may not ask questions, they can only go by what’s shared by their partner.
- No gender pronouns. You may not use any pronouns other than “they” or “them” – so no “he” or “his” or “she” or “hers.”
- No gender words like “masculine” or “feminine”; “man” or “woman;” and so on. For example, you cannot say, “This person looks like a man but isn’t” or “This person looks really girly.” Just describe what’s in the picture. For example “This person has long hair.” “This person is a child. They are playing football.”
- You may not refer to whatever’s in the picture as a “girl” or “boy” thing – for example, you cannot say “This person is playing with a girl’s doll.”
- If you recognize the person in the picture, please do not just say, “Oh, it’s so-and-so” or describe what tv show or movie they’re in – it’s about what they look like physically.”

Put up the PowerPoint slide with the sample photo. Say, “For example, if you had this person, you might say, ‘this person is smiling. They have dark hair that is styled up over their head.

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They are wearing lipstick and other makeup.’ Then allow the other person to guess.”

Press “D” to darken the screen so the second PowerPoint slide cannot be seen. Then describe the person in the picture, saying, “Let’s try another one – only this time you won’t see the picture, which is what it’ll be like in the activity. This person has dark hair, that’s sort of spiked up. They’re wearing eye makeup and a necklace and a leather jacket.” Once students have thrown out their guesses about the gender of the person in the picture, show the second slide.

Answer any questions and then distribute the envelopes, reminding students to take turns and not show their pictures to their partners. As they work, walk around the room to see how they are doing. (10 minutes)

STEP 4: After about five minutes, ask students to stop their work. Process by asking the following questions:

- What was it like to do that? What was [insert participant responses] about it?
- Did you find it easy to guess a person’s gender? What was the language that tipped you off?
- What made it difficult to guess the person’s gender?
- What was it like to be the person giving clues? What was easy or challenging about doing that?

Say, “In the photos, there were certain features that could apply to someone who is or who we perceive to be female, to someone who is or we perceive to be male or to someone whose gender identity we do not know or who does not identify as male or female. If these terms can apply to someone of any gender, why do you think we gender them in the first place? Why would we say, ‘she’s dressed like a guy’ vs. ‘she’s wearing pants?’”

Say, “What we call ourselves is called our ‘gender identity.’ And while you may assume that someone who looks a particular way on the outside identifies the same way on the inside, that may not necessarily be the case. Ask, “How many people feel they guessed the genders of the people in both of their photos correctly?” Explain that, unless the photo you had was of a famous person who’s made their gender known, you actually wouldn’t know for sure what that person’s gender is unless you asked them.

Say to students, “No one has the right to tell someone else how they are supposed to express their gender. Society will continue to give messages – whether that’s in the media or from family or culture or religious groups. But in the end, every person has the right to discover who they are and to let others know in ways that feel right to them.” (12 minutes)

STEP 5: Answer any questions students may have, then explain that for their homework they will be watching a few minutes of the Amaze video, “My Friend is Transgender” and responding to some questions about it. Distribute the homework sheets and close class. (3 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

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The initial presentation by the teacher will achieve the first learning objective. The gender script brainstorm small group activity and large group discussion will achieve the second and third learning objectives. The homework will also achieve the second learning objective.

HOMEWORK:

Students will watch a brief excerpt from the Amaze video, “My Friend is Transgender” and respond to the questions on the homework sheet.

Student Worksheet: Gender Scripts

Name: _____ Date: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: From the time we are born, we are told how we are supposed to act, dress and speak based on the sex we are assigned at birth – just as if we had been given a script and asked to follow it throughout our lives. In the space below, please provide examples of some of the messages you or people close to you have received about how we are supposed to behave based on whether someone is assigned “male” or “female” at birth.

ASSIGNED FEMALE

ASSIGNED MALE

Homework: My Friend is Transgender

Name: _____ Date: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Please go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gD07wSU1tCA> and Play the Amaze.org video “My Friend is Transgender”. Once you are done, please answer the questions below.

1. Cassie goes to the store to buy clothes for her friend Glenda who is embarrassed to buy for herself. What are some other activities that a transgender person might be embarrassed or uncomfortable to do? Why do you think these activities would be challenging?
2. When Jim finds out Glenda is transgender, why do you think he does not want to be friends with her even though Jim has known Glenda since they were young? Do you agree? Why or Why not?
3. Glenda says that she is taking her time to tell people that she is transgender and asks Jim to respect her and keep this information to himself. Why is it important for Glenda to tell people and not Jim? How do you think Glenda would feel and what could happen if Jim chose not to respect her request?
4. Jim thinks that gender identity is very simple: if you have a penis you're a boy, if you have a vagina you're a girl. What are some suggestions you would have for helping Jim understand more accurately about gender identity and having a transgender identity?