

Being Respectful About Gender Identity: Pronouns and Practice!

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

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

NSES ALIGNMENT:

GI.8.AI.1 - Access medically accurate sources of information about gender, gender identity, and gender expression

GI.8.IC.1 - Demonstrate ways to communicate respectfully with and about people of all gender identities

SO.8.AI.1 - Access credible sources of information about sexual orientation

TARGET GRADE: Grade 7

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Computer with internet
- Ask the IT person at your school to make sure you can access YouTube and test and/or download the following two short video clips:
 - [What are pronouns](#)
 - [Pronouns: How do you ask?](#)
- PowerPoint, screen and speakers
- Internet access for students to complete small group work
- Copies of activity handouts:
 - Comic Panel Worksheet
 - Instagram Post Worksheet

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Describe why using a person's correct pronoun is respectful. [Knowledge]
2. List at least two accurate and credible sources of online information about gender identity and gender expression. [Knowledge]
3. Practice at least two ways to communicate respectfully with and about transgender and nonbinary people. [Skill]

LESSON RATIONALE:

The volume of myths and misinformation about gender identity and gender expression online and in the media makes it especially critical for students to learn how to access accurate and credible sources of information. In addition, most transgender youth consider school-based sex education unhelpful due to a lack of relevant information, and often turn to other sources of sexual health information, particularly online, where they can more easily find relevant information and community connections. In this lesson we will explore accurate and credible sources of online information about gender identity, gender expression, and other topics related to transgender youth and their health and well-being that will benefit transgender youth and their friends, alike. Students will learn about the importance of and practice ways to demonstrate respectful communication and messages of support for transgender and nonbinary people, including using their correct pronouns and names. Affirming a student's gender by using the name and pronouns that align with their identity has been shown to improve mental health outcomes. The Trevor Project's 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that youth who reported having their pronouns respected by all -- or most -- of the people in the lives attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected.

MATERIALS NEEDED (CONT.):

- Art supplies for drawing/coloring (pens, markers, colored pencils, crayons, etc.)
- Tape
- One activity option includes making a short video or TikTok; if the technology required for this is not available, simply offer the other two activity options, the comic and the Instagram post.
- Copies of Recommended Websites: Gender and Gender Identity Handout - one per student

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ADVANCED PREPARATION:

- Preview the short video about pronouns (What are pronouns?) that will be used in class to familiarize yourself with the concepts before facilitating the discussion
- Download PowerPoint slides for supplemental visual teaching tools
- Make copies of blank comic panel and Instagram post handouts for creative art project
- Make copies of Recommended Websites: Gender and Gender Identity Handout

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is extremely important. It is one way you can be explicitly inclusive around often underrepresented and not as commonly acknowledged sexual orientations and gender identities. We've intentionally been very thoughtful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language that seems less familiar, for example, using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him", and simply referring to the body parts and processes we are teaching about rather than unnecessarily gendering them. We have also explicitly included scenarios and role plays that use a variety of names typically coded to certain genders, as well as ones that are not as readily coded to assumptions about gender. We have also used a variety of gendered and gender-neutral pronouns and names to be sure we are actively including various gender identities, sexual orientations, and relationships in our activities and discussions. This commitment to inclusiveness across our lessons is aimed at building new habits within our classrooms related to actively and more seamlessly representing a broader range of genders, orientations, and lived experiences.

***Note to the Teacher:** Being prepared to teach about gender identity and expression may be new skills for some teachers. Preparation can include checking out some of the links below, talking with colleagues who have taught these topics before, and taking a minute to practice new phrases or use of pronouns. You have transgender young people in your classes, you always have! Your preparation to actively acknowledge and include them can be lifesaving!*

- [**I Think I Might Be Transgender, Advocates for Youth**](#) – Written by transgender youth, this pamphlet provides answers for young people who find that the gender to which they were born, or assigned at birth, does not fit them.
- [**Developing LGBTQ-Inclusive Classroom Resources, GLSEN**](#) – Educator guide on creating an inclusive curriculum, responding to anti-LGBTQ behavior and implementing social emotional learning in the classroom.
- [**Framework for Gender-Inclusive Schools, Gender Spectrum**](#) – Background on the four entry points for the intentional development of gender-inclusive school settings and resources to approach each.
- [**Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools, ACLU**](#) – Handbook on providing safe environments for transgender high school students that is targeted toward administrators, teachers and parents.

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- [Pronoun Guide, GLSEN](#) – Guide for members of the school community to learn how to use people's correct pronouns.
- [Gender Support Checklist for Transgender and Non-Binary Students, Welcoming Schools](#) – Set of questions for educators to confirm they have the answers and resources necessary to best support gender-nonconforming students.

PROCEDURE:

***Note to the Teacher:** Teaching about transgender and nonbinary people from the expectation that you have transgender and nonbinary students in your class, and people with transgender and nonbinary friends and family members, is critical. This means using phrases like “this lesson is important because we have transgender and nonbinary students and staff at our school that can really benefit from our support and kindness.” These small and simple affirmations of the existence and presence of transgender people can have a positive impact on your students and your school climate.*

We have actively chosen not to focus on sharing an exhaustive and detailed list of risks and poor mental and physical health outcomes experienced by transgender youth as a result of stigma and discrimination. We believe that transgender youth themselves are extremely aware of the challenges they see and experience, and their cisgender peers benefit more from very brief information about the challenges and risks, and instead, dedicating classroom time to a clear focus on the protective and helpful actions and behaviors they can practice.

STEP 1:

Introduce the lesson by explaining that we will be talking about where to find accurate and credible information online about gender identity, gender expression, and other topics related to transgender youth and their health and well-being. Share that we will also be talking about pronouns and chosen names and why using them is important, respectful, and easy to do and we'll practice ways to communicate respectfully with and about transgender and nonbinary people. Explain that this information is helpful for both transgender and nonbinary people *and* as a friend or classmate, having access to correct information and resources can be a helpful way to be in allyship with and offer support to transgender and nonbinary friends and classmates.

Explain briefly that transgender young people often face stigma and discrimination in school from classmates and teachers, and from their family. Being transgender isn't the problem at all! It is the people who are unkind, unfair, and uninformed that make it hard and can lead to things like feeling depressed, alone and even suicidal. The good news is that transgender youth are also amazing and resilient and small actions and support from friends, at school and at home, can make a positive difference and quite literally, save lives!

Share that one of the things that friends and classmates can do to have a positive impact on transgender people in their schools, families, and communities is to use their correct pronouns and names.

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Explain that most people have been taught it's OK to make assumptions about the gender of another person based on the person's appearance or name. Unfortunately, these assumptions aren't always correct, and making assumptions can not only be wrong, it can be hurtful and harmful. It can send a message that you think people have to look a certain way to be themselves, and those gendered rules are often limiting and based on stereotypes.

Using someone's correct personal pronouns is a way to respect them. It also can have a really big and positive impact on your friends and classmates! Young people who report having their pronouns respected by people in their lives attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected. Using someone's correct pronouns can literally save their life!

Let students know that now we are going to watch two short videos about pronouns and then have a group discussion about them. The first video will explain what pronouns are, the second will show how to ask someone's pronouns.

Play the videos in this order:

1. What are pronouns (5 minutes 18 seconds)

2. Pronouns: How do you ask? (1 minutes 50 seconds)

After the videos are shown, facilitate a brief large group conversation. You can use any of these questions to start or build on the group conversation:

- What stood out to you in the videos?
- What felt like the most important points in the videos?
- Have you ever asked someone what their pronouns are?
- Can you share an example of how to respectfully ask for someone's pronouns?

Be sure to add the following highlights if not shared by students:

- Pronouns are ways we refer to people when we don't use their name
- Pronouns can refer to genders and can be gender neutral
- Never assume you know someone's pronouns
- Asking about pronouns can be really easy and simple, even if it feels like a new question to ask for some people
- Getting someone's pronouns right is respectful
- If you get someone's pronouns wrong, offer a really short apology and then use the correct one!

(15 minutes)

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Note to the Teacher: There is [an interactive website](#) that lets you try out using new pronouns that you may not be familiar with. This practice website is made by the same LGBTQ youth program in Australia that created the first short video that was shown! They, She and He are all examples of common pronouns. Some people also use less common pronouns. Some might be new to you and practicing how to use them can help you build a new habit and use the pronouns that show respect to the people you are referring to!

STEP 2:

Explain that now we're going to work in small teams to explore some accurate and credible online sources for information about gender identity and expression and the lived experience of transgender and nonbinary people.

Explain that teams will spend a few minutes examining at least two – more is great! – of the following websites and then will choose which creative art project they will make that will be shared with the class.

Either write up these web sites on a white board or display them using the slide provided; distribute handouts with additional information about each program/organization to students.

Trusted Websites:

- [Trans Student Educational Resources](#)
transstudent.org
- [Trans Lifeline](#)
translifeline.org
- [National Center for Transgender Equality](#)
transequality.org
- [The Trans Youth Equality Foundation](#)
transyouthequality.org/
- [GLAAD](#)
glaad.org
- [The Trevor Project](#)
thetrevorproject.org
- [Gender Spectrum](#)
genderspectrum.org/stories
- [Minus18: Changing the lives of lgbtqia+ youth in Australia](#)
minus18.org.au

Explain that now we will use the information we just found, the learning from the videos we watched, and the discussion we had, to practice ways to communicate respectfully with and about transgender and nonbinary people through a short creative art project.

Explain that teams will be able to choose the short art project they create to share with the class. They can choose between:

- Drawing a comic book page with up to 9 panels
- Drawing – or creating online! - 4 Instagram posts
- Creating a short video or TikTok (dependent on access to technology)

Note to the Teacher: If accessing tools to create a short video or TikTok is not an option, have teams choose between the other two options.

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Explain that teams will have 15 minutes to complete their project. The goal of each of the art projects is to address one or more of the following things:

- Respectfully ask a friend's pronouns
- Respectfully correct someone who uses an old name of a friend
- Respectfully correct someone who uses the wrong pronoun for a friend
- Tell a friend you have a new pronoun you'd like them to use
- Tell a friend you have a new name you'd like them to use
- Stand up for a friend when someone says something unkind about their gender identity or expression

Divide students into teams of 3-4 people, give them 1 minute to choose the art project they wish to create, then distribute blank comic and Instagram worksheets and art supplies.

While groups are creating their art projects, circulate from group to group to encourage students, answer questions, and offer ideas if prompts are needed.

***Note to the Teacher:** Some groups may make jokes or begin to give intentionally bad advice in their art projects. If you see this happening, gently step in and remind the students why this matters. You could say something like, "I hear that you're making a joke about pronouns, I really hope you might take a different approach since we know this is literally life-saving information for some of our classmates" or "I know that sometimes new ideas or information can be intimidating. I'd like to ask your group to start over and try to work on this project from a place of kindness and care for classmates who find this really important and helpful."*

(20 Minutes)

STEP 3:

Have teams that created drawn art projects tape them on a wall, whiteboard, or chalkboard and teams that created video art projects have them ready to show the class (in small groups if only viewable on a phone). Invite the whole class to circulate through the art gallery and view videos. Reconvene the larger group and ask the group for highlights and things they learned or ideas they got from the projects. Ask some or all of the following processing questions:

- What ideas did you see about how to respectfully ask a friend's pronouns?
- What ideas did you see about how to respectfully correct someone who uses an old name of a friend?
- What ideas did you see about how to respectfully correct someone who uses the wrong pronoun for a friend?
- What ideas did you see about how to tell a friend you have a new pronoun you'd like them to use?
- What ideas did you see about how to tell a friend you have a new name you'd like them to use?

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- What ideas did you see about how to stand up for a friend when someone says something unkind about their gender identity or expression?
- What ideas stand out to you and why do you think they made an impression on you?
- What ideas do you think you could use?

(10 minutes)

STEP 4:

Thank students for their participation and their artwork! Remind students that there are several accurate and credible sources of online information about gender identity, gender expression, and other topics related to transgender youth and their health and wellbeing and that these can be helpful to remember as resources! Reflect on the importance of being respectful and supportive to transgender and nonbinary people, including using individual's chosen pronouns and names. Remind students that similar acts of kindness and support can have a positive impact on so many people! Whether that includes interrupting biased and racist statements, or challenging ableism or ageism, or stepping up against fatphobia, when you can use your voice to interrupt bias and share kindness and support, it can make a positive difference.

(5 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

Step 1 is designed to address the first learning objective; Steps 2 and 3 address the second and third learning objectives.

HOMEWORK:

- **Practicing Pronouns!**
Invite students to check out the pronoun practice website shared during the lesson and report back about the experience. What was easy? Challenging? Invite students to share the website with friends or family members to practice together!
- **Mini-Research & Reflections**
Go online and read about International Pronouns Day. Reflect on why this could be a powerful and positive event for transgender and nonbinary people. Write a journal entry about why schools should consider celebrating International Pronouns Day.
- **International Pronouns Day - pronounsday.org**
Invite students to research International Pronouns Day, which seeks to make respecting, sharing, and educating about personal pronouns commonplace. Referring to people by the pronouns they determine for themselves is basic to human dignity. Being referred to by the wrong pronouns particularly affects transgender and gender nonconforming people. Together, we can transform society to celebrate people's multiple, intersecting identities.

HANDOUT

Recommended Websites: Gender and Gender Identity

Trans Student Educational Resources

transstudent.org

Trans Student Educational Resources is a youth-led organization dedicated to transforming the educational environment for trans and gender nonconforming students through advocacy and empowerment. In addition to our focus on creating a more trans-friendly education system, our mission is to educate the public and teach trans activists how to be effective organizers.

Trans Lifeline

translifeline.org

Trans Lifeline is run by and for trans people. It is a grassroots hotline and non-profit organization offering direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis – for the trans community, by the trans community.

National Center for Transgender Equality

transequality.org

The National Center for Transgender Equality advocates to change policies and society to increase understanding and acceptance of transgender people. NCTE works to replace disrespect, discrimination, and violence with empathy, opportunity, and justice.

The Trans Youth Equality Foundation

transyouthequality.org/

The Trans Youth Equality Foundation is a national nonprofit foundation that advocates for transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex youth ages 2–18.

GLAAD

glaad.org

GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love.

The Trevor Project

thetrevorproject.org

The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning (LGBTQ) young people under 25.

Gender Spectrum

genderspectrum.org/stories

Gender Spectrum works to create gender sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens. Their “Stories” webpage shares videos of first person stories from youth, families, and teachers.

Minus18: Changing the lives of lgbtqia+ youth in Australia

www.minus18.org.au

We’re leading change, building social inclusion, and advocating for an Australia where all young people are safe, empowered, and surrounded by people that support them.

ART PROJECT: COMIC PANELS

ART PROJECT: INSTAGRAM POSTS
