

Influencers of Life

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:

SO.10.INF.1 - Analyze how peers, media, family, society, culture, and a person's intersecting identities can influence attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about sexual orientation and sexual identity

TARGET GRADE: High School

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Computer/laptop
- PowerPoint
- Projector
- Screen
- Life Influencers Case Study - one per pair of students
- Handout - one per student
- Influencer Signs - one set
- Tape

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Define sexual orientation [Knowledge]
2. Define sexual identity [Knowledge]
3. Analyze how external influences impact a person's beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity [Skill]

LESSON RATIONALE:

Often people will think, believe, or hold attitudes regarding all aspects of life without understanding why they feel or think the way that they do. This lesson aims to allow students to analyze how the people, communities, and our personal identities can impact so much of what we believe. This student-centered approach to analyzing why we think a certain way allows students the ability to evaluate whether external factors positively or negatively influence their thought process in order to maximize or minimize these influences appropriately.

ADVANCED PREPARATION:

Prior to the lesson, print and copy the case study so that each pair can get a copy. Review and identify how you can maintain a safe learning environment for the entire class but specifically for LGBTQ students. Print one set of the external influencers' signs and tape them around the room to allow for each group to communicate when necessary.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1:

Say, **"Welcome to class. Raise your hand if you have heard of the term social media influencers."** The majority of the class should know what a social media influencer is, you can ask for a volunteer to share a description with the class. Please make sure that the following is included in the description of a social media influencer: a person who uses their privilege of a large platform to bring attention to different causes, products, media, etc. **"Now how many of you have heard of the term life influencers?"** This is a term created for the lesson so it should be new to students. **"A life influencer is a person who uses their privilege to help shape how other people think, believe, or view different parts of life. Now this is a term that has been created specifically for this class so you won't find it anywhere else but we are all life influencers as we share with each other our**

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personal beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and thoughts around everything we encounter in life. We influence others and other people have influenced us. Today we are going to take a deeper look at these influencers and see just how much of a role they have taken in shaping how we view the world and the people in it.” (4 minutes)

STEP 2:

Say, **“Before we get started let’s quickly review two terms, sexual orientation and gender identity. Can anyone tell the class what sexual orientation is?”** Write both definitions on the board for students to reference for the remainder of class. Please make sure the following is stated in the definition provided by the student: Sexual orientation is how a person identifies the gender or genders they find sexually attractive. **“Who can define gender identity?”** Please make sure the following is stated in the definition provided by the student: Gender identity is a person’s internal sense of who they are. **“Now for a bonus question, please talk with an elbow partner to answer if it is important for you to know how your peer’s identify their gender or who they are attracted to sexually?”** Allow the student’s to discuss with their partner for about a minute but make sure you answer the question before any groups can share. Say, **“That is actually a trick question. A person’s sexual orientation and gender identity is their business and there is no need for you to know how your peers identify or who they are attracted to. Knowing that information should not impact how you treat them or how they treat you.”** (6 minutes)

STEP 3:

Ask the class to find a new partner to work with for the remainder of class. Perhaps someone they haven’t worked with previously. Once the class has identified their partners say, **“I am going to share a case study with each set of partners. The instructions are to read the case study and then answer a few questions about the people mentioned in the study. What questions do you have?”** Distribute the Life Influencers Case Study handout to each set of partners and allow them about 7 minutes to complete the exercise. Once the class has completed the exercise, ask for a couple of volunteers to share their thoughts on the case study. After the partners share, ask the class, **“How? How did you come to these realizations?”** Some students might respond with, “it was the goal of the assignment”. Say, **“The assignment was to read the case study and answer the questions that followed but take a moment to reflect and think if your brain automatically assigned a gender to the people mentioned in the case study. Did your brain automatically imagine if the people in the case study identified as straight, gay, asexual, queer?”**

Note to the Teacher: These questions are all hypothetical and it is important to make sure that students understand that it is normal if they in fact did assign gender or assume sexual orientation. It is important to be affirming in order to maintain a safe learning space.

Say, **“Now I want to ask you why? Why did some of our brains assign gender or assume the sexual orientation of the people in the case study?”** Push for the students to connect to the life influencers, the people and communities in our lives who have shaped how and why we think and believe the way that we do. Say, **“Let’s take a closer look at these influencers who have made such a large impact on our personal beliefs.”** (15 minutes)

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STEP 4:

Distribute the handout and say, **“Around the room you will find six different influencers who impact our personal beliefs, attitudes and thoughts. These influencers are our peers, family, media, society, culture, and our own identities. Take about 3 minutes to walk around to each station and reflect on how each influence impacts the way you think and specifically the way you think about gender identity and sexual orientation. You can jot down any thoughts that come to mind on your handout. These three minutes are a time for self-reflection and we will have time later in class to reflect with others.”** Feel free to play meditation music while the students walk around and reflect on their influences. Encourage the students to use the time as a space for self-reflection and to respect quieter voices as a result.

After the three minutes, say, **“Thank you for reflecting on these influences. Now I am asking you to walk to the sign that has the most POSITIVE influence on you when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity.”** Once the students have moved to their sign, encourage them to take a few minutes to talk with the people at that sign as to why that influence is so positive and how they could make the influence even larger.

After three minutes, say, **“Now I am asking you to walk to the sign that has the most NEGATIVE influence on you when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity.”** Once the students have moved to their sign, encourage them to take a few minutes to talk with the people at that sign as to why that influence is negative and how they could reduce the influence.

After three minutes, say, **“Now I am asking you to walk to the sign that has NO influence on you when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity.”** Once the students have moved to their sign, encourage them to take a few minutes to talk with the people at that sign as to why that influence doesn’t have much impact and whether that is a positive, negative, or neutral impact. Say, **“Thank you for being so willing to participate and share with each other about the influences in your life. Please return to your desk so we can debrief.”**

Once students have returned to their seats begin a discussion with the class to debrief the experience. Ask the following questions:

“What was it like to do that activity?”

Students might respond with; hard, easy, weird, uncomfortable, strange, etc.

“Tell me more about that? Why was it [enter the student’s response to the first question]?”

After the students analyze their thoughts in greater detail, follow up by saying, **“So what does that tell you about life influencers?”** Push the students to identify that life influencers are important but also our internal sense is just as important and that we have the ability to increase the positive influences and decrease the negative influences in our life as we start to understand our internal sense around life and the people in it. (23 minutes)

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STEP 5:

Say, “We all have influencers that shape how we think, what we believe, and our attitudes but our internal influence is also important. As we learn more, we are capable of analyzing how the influencers in our life may be more positive or negative and then we have the ability to increase the positive and reduce the negative influences in order to live the lives we want to lead and respect the people we are lucky to have in our lives. Although we all have many influencers in our lives, it is important to remember that we ultimately have the flexibility and control to decide how we want our lives to look and the ability to make that life happen. Thank you for your participation.” (2 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

Objectives 1 and 2 were completed in Step 2, and Objective 3 was completed in Steps 3 and 4.

HOMEWORK:

Create a job listing for a positive external influence for yourself. What should that external influence have that would make it a positive influence and what should it not possess?

Life Influencers Case Study

Person A is a new student at Anytown High School and is nervous to meet new friends. Person A left behind their partner at their old school and is feeling really sad about the breakup. Person B is asked to show Person A around the school. Person B is popular and enjoys school a lot. They become really good friends and hang out after school all the time. Person B even gets Person A a job at the local ice cream shop. When homecoming comes around Person A asked Person B to go as their date. They had a great time at the dance and won homecoming court. They started dating after the dance and are really happy together.

Please answer the following questions with your partner:

1. Would you describe this scenario as realistic?
2. What gender is Person A?
3. What gender is Person B?
4. Would you feel comfortable assuming the sexual orientation of Person A or B? If so, what would you assume their sexual orientation is and why?

Self Reflection Handout

Write down any thoughts that come to mind as you're reflecting on the influence from each category.

THE INFLUENCE OF PEERS IS...

THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY IS...

THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA IS...

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY IS...

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE IS...

THE INFLUENCE OF MY OWN
IDENTITIES IS...

SPREE

FAMILY

MEDIA

COMMUNITY

CULTURE

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES