

IDENTITY FLOWERS



AGE/EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Grades 3-5.



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts - Reading-Literature, Writing, Speaking and Listening.



MCREL STANDARDS (4TH EDITION)

- Behavioral Studies: Understands that group and cultural differences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.
- Thinking and Reasoning: Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences.
- Self-Regulation: Maintains a healthy self-concept.



OVERVIEW

Teaching young people about major identifiers helps them to learn about their own unique identities, as well as the myriad identities in their classroom communities. This lesson supports each student's ability to empathize, connect, and collaborate with a diverse group of peers—skills that are of increasingly important in our multicultural, global society. In this lesson, students will explore their own identities and personal experiences with race, culture, ability, family structure, religion or spirituality, and gender identity and expression. After individual reflection and group discussion, students will create their own identity flowers, filling each petal with words, adjectives, and/or identity terms that describe them.



OBJECTIVES

Students will reflect on their own identity in regards to group identities.

Students will analyze story book characters to determine fitting identity terms and adjectives.

Students will identify words, adjectives, and identity terms that describe themselves.

Students will discuss the importance of respecting people's identity terms and descriptive words.

Note: This lesson is designed as an introduction and exposure to the concept of gender as an identity. While we've included language you can use to discuss gender identity and gender expression with your students, their ability to grasp these concepts will depend on their prior knowledge. Likewise, their deeper understanding will come from continued discussion and follow-up activities suggested at the end of this lesson.



THINGS TO PREP & TOOLS NEEDED



- Choose picture books or story books with familiar characters to the students. This is a good opportunity to review your classroom library and shared stories for diversity. Find at least one copy of each book per group.
- Print out one copy of the [Identity Flower handout](#) for each student in your class, and another copy for the group work activity.
- Decide if you want to model the Identity Flower using yourself or a book character that is familiar to your students, and have some ideas for each petal/group identity ready.
- (Optional) - Print or review [GLSEN's gender visual and discussion guide](#) for talking points around gender identity vs. expression.
- Chart paper, markers, paper, pencils, Gender Terminology Handout, Identity Flower Handout



TIME

40 minutes.

PROCEDURE

1. (2 minutes) Opening: Begin the lesson by telling students, “Today we’ll be talking about ‘identity’ and the many different pieces that fit together to shape our experiences and ultimately make us who we are.” If you have a projector, display a blank Identity Flower handout or draw one on chart paper. Explain that each petal represents a different part of your identity.
2. (10 minutes) Talk through each of the petals with the students, and model adjectives, identity terms, and drawings that could go in each petal. Ask students if there are any petals/groups that they have questions about. Depending on your students’ background knowledge, they may have questions about the “gender” petal. Use the Gender Terminology Handout to explain these two terms.  **Gender identity** and  **gender expression**.
 - a. Tell students, “Gender identity is how you identify and see yourself. You may identify as a girl or a boy. If you don’t feel like a boy or a girl, you might just identify as a person. Maybe none of these words feel like you today. Or maybe you feel like a girl or a boy today, but later that word doesn’t seem to fit. It’s your brain, and you tell us and the rest of the world what feels right to you.”
 - i. “Take a second to think about what gender identity term feels right to you today, if there is one.” Pause to let students think.
 - ii. “Gender expression is the way we show our gender. Just like how we make facial expressions when we’re feeling happy or sad on the inside, we have gender expression to show our gender to other people. This can include the way that we talk, what toys we play with, the clothes and accessories we wear, the colors we like, our haircuts, and much more!”

- iii. “Take a second to think about how you are showing or expressing your gender today.” Pause to let students think.
 - iv. “You can represent your gender identity or expression in this petal using words, pictures, or even colors.”
- b. Fill in a copy of the Identity Flower for the students, using yourself or a familiar character. Here are some suggestions for inclusive and appropriate language for each of the petals:
- i. Family - This is a great opportunity to show positive representations of other family structures such as two moms, two dads, trans parents, single parents, foster and step families, grandparent-headed families, etc. and to steer away from the idea that the nuclear family can and should be the default family structure. Be sure these are represented in your model and in the characters that the students will explore in group work.
 - ii. Race/Culture - Tell students that race is one way to group people, usually based on skin color, hair texture, and places, countries, or lands that your family (grandparents and great-grandparents and before!) came from. Culture is a way of living that is passed down in your family—including food you eat, beliefs you have, holidays you celebrate, languages you speak, and more! Using the model example will help students better understand this larger concept. For more information check out this [Teaching Tolerance lesson](#).
 - iii. Ability - Tell students that this part of identity has to do with to the different ways that people move or learn or communicate. Tell them, “Think about the tools that you need. Some people need glasses to see, a walker or wheelchair to get around, a computer or sign language to communicate, or a bumpy seat or movement break to help them learn.”
 - iv. Spirituality - It’s important to explain that some people don’t have a religion or spiritual sense, and may center, or focus on, being kind to others or ongoing learning about the world through other practices.
 - v. Neighborhood - This can show a student’s home or reflect restaurants or monuments that are close by. This is also an opportunity for students to talk about their commutes to school.
 - vi. School - This can be symbols of your school or represent favorite subjects or celebrations.



GENDER IDENTITY

How you identify and see yourself.

Everyone gets to decide their gender identity for themselves.



GENDER EXPRESSION

The way that we talk, how we interact with others, our clothing, accessories, hairstyles, activities we enjoy, and much more!

3. (10 minutes) Group work: In partners or groups, students fill out an Identity Flower for a familiar character in a book. After students have worked together to complete an Identity Flower for the character, have students share as time allows. This can be done by partnering groups who finish first to share with each other. Here are some example books and characters:
 - a. Jazz Jennings's *I am Jazz*
 - b. Alex Gino's *George*
 - c. Ami Polonsky's *Gracefully Grayson* (fifth grade)
 - d. Taye Diggs' *Mixed Me!*
 - e. Robert Coles' *The Story of Ruby Bridges*
 - f. Mary Hoffman's *Amazing Grace*
 - g. Celeste Shally's *Since We're Friends: An Autism Picture Book*
 - h. Rukhsana Khan and Sophie Blackall's *The Big Red Lollipop*
4. (10 minutes) Individual practice: Tell students, "Thinking about these 'group identities' helps us to learn more about these characters' identities. Now we want to learn more about **your** identity. What groups feel right to you? What makes you special and unique?"
 - a. Pass out individual Identity Flower handouts to students.
 - b. Tell students that they can write words, names, or draw pictures or symbols for each of the petals in the Identity Flower. You may want to have students write in pencil, check with a teacher, and then add color.
5. (13 minutes) Closure: Invite students to show their Identity Flowers to the class, and to share a part of their identity that feels special to them. Be prepared for students to share aspects of their identity that may be new to you or the class, particularly around gender. Be sure to model affirming responses to identity aspects that students' share.
 - a. Ask students, "What words or pictures did you use to show your gender identity or gender expression?" *Listen out for gender stereotypes, and be ready to follow this lesson with [That's a \(Gender\) Stereotype!](#)* For example, if students say, "I drew this flower in pink because I'm a girl" you can say, "That's a very detailed flower! Do all girls have to like flowers and pink?" or "That's interesting! We'll talk more about that later."
 - b. "Which parts of your identity are you the most proud of?" "How would you feel if someone teased you for those parts of your identity, for being you?"
 - c. "Who should get to fill out your identity flower, you or someone else? Could I go around and write whatever words or names on your identity flower that I want?" Follow up with, "That's right, you know your identity, who you are, what names and words you want to be called. When you call someone a name or tease them, it's like filling out their identity flower for them."
 - d. "Do you think our class would be better if all of our flowers or all of our identities were the same? Why or why not?" To finish, tell students, "If all of our identity flowers were the same, it'd be like using only one color to draw with all of the time. We're lucky to have so many different identities in our class! Turn to the person next to you and give them a compliment about their flower."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIFFERENTIATION

The individual work of creating the Identity Flower handout can be modified for students who need more support by working one-on-one with a teacher and being given stickers or pictures representing the student to place on the sign. Students who need a challenge can be asked to write a paragraph, book, or poem to accompany their Identity Flower handout or asked to compare their identity to the character from their group work.

FOLLOW UP/EXTENSIONS

- Students can fill out GLSEN's ["I Am" signs](#) to have students continue to reflect on and share words, names, and identifiers that feel good to them.
- Read more books to help students explore identity themes: Try [Todd Parr's "Be Who You Are"](#), [You Be You! Explaining Gender, Love & Family](#) by Jonathan Brantman, and ["Who are you?: the Kid's Guide to Gender Identity" by Brook Pessin-Whedbee](#).
- Dedicate a bulletin board to Student Identity and hang the Identity Flowers on the wall.
- Go to www.glsen.org/nncw for GLSEN's No Name-Calling Week and more lessons that put "Kindness in Action".
- Keep learning! Read GLSEN's [Gender Terminology Discussion Guide](#) and [Pronoun Resource for Educators](#) to learn more about gender-inclusive language.
- Find more lessons, activities, and resources in GLSEN's Elementary Toolkit: [Ready, Set, Respect!](#)

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER!
EMAIL US AT EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG.



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_____’S IDENTITY FLOWER