

7th Grade Lesson: I AM THE ONE

OVERVIEW: A poem that provides students with a personal reflection on name-calling by a young person who has been targeted because of his/her sexual orientation. Follow up questions are included to explore the effects of name-calling and build empathy in students. This lesson can be used to establish a safe classroom space and respectful language with which to discuss sensitive issues before talking about actual incidents of name-calling in students' lives.

OBJECTIVES:

- To help students recognize the importance of a safe school environment
- To build empathy and compassion for others among students

TIME: One class period (option for extension activities).

MATERIALS: Pens, paper and "I Am The One" poem.

PROCEDURE: This lesson includes a poem with discussion questions that encourage students to reflect on the impact that an unsafe environment can have on young people. It can be used to encourage discussion about creating a safe school environment, giving voice to silenced students, and building empathy in your students. Below are suggestions for ways to utilize the texts:

Previewing Poem for Students:

1. Ask students to think about who the speaker of the poem might be (*although don't tell students that it is a closeted GLBT student*).
2. Suggest students highlight words or phrases that they can identify with.

Read the poem:

Have the poem read aloud, perhaps different students taking different lines, choral reading, or in small groups.

I AM THE ONE

I am the one
I am the one who is subject to whispers
I am the one who is always being told to be different. I am the one who has to pretend, the one who can't tell my family, the one who walks alone in the hallway.
The one who isn't sure anymore. I am the one who is afraid I will be the victim of a hate crime.
I am the one you are afraid to be seen with.
I am the one who is quick to point fingers and laugh, whose friends are on both sides of the line, who conjures assumptions and spreads rumors. I am the one who is surrounded by people who are all the same.
Who wants to stick up for people but doesn't know how, who wants to say something back. I am the one who just wants to be accepted
I am the one who feels powerless
I am the one who wants to be set free
I am the one who wants my parents to love me for me
Who cares inside but is afraid to speak up. Who always wanted to have the perfect life, but doesn't know what that means anymore.
I am the one who is threatened by difference. I am the one who disagrees with my parents, I am the one who is never safe, who doesn't know who I can talk to, who avoids the ones that call me names.
I am the one who is outraged at the harassment I see in my school.
I am the one.

Discuss student responses to PREVIEW QUESTIONS and ask students:

“What is your emotional response to this poem? How does the tone and the voice of this poem make you feel?”

1. What may have caused the poet to feel that it was unsafe to share this part of their identity?
2. In what ways can name-calling and harassment undermine (harm) a safe school environment?

Share: “This poem was written from the perspective of a gay or lesbian student who doesn’t feel safe enough to share this part of his or her identity. Now that you know this information we will reread the poem and discuss the following questions:” (In groups, individually or as a class.)

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why are some students targeted with anti-gay names or taunts? What do you think about this?
4. What does it mean to be “in the closet”? What impact do you think silence and secrecy have on students who hide their sexual orientation?
5. What would make it possible for a student to be openly gay or lesbian and safe in your school?
6. What can you do personally to make the school environment safer for gay and lesbian students and families?
(Be an ally)

If time permits you may have students write their own one-line “I am the one who...”

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the one who is never safe, who doesn't know who I can talk to, who avoids the ones that call me names.

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