

Gender and Sexual Orientation: Understanding the Difference

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum
Fostering respect and responsibility through age-appropriate sexuality education.

COLORADO ADAPTATION:

This lesson has been specifically adapted to align with the requirements of Colorado HB 19-1032

NSES ALIGNMENT:

By the end of 10th grade students will be able to:

GI.10.CC.1 – Differentiate between sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and gender expression

TARGET GRADE: Grade 11
Lesson 5

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- White board and markers (have several different colors)
- Flipchart sheets prepared as described
- Flipchart markers (at least 6 of different colors)
- Masking tape
- Two greeting cards for parents of a new baby as described in “advance preparation”
- Gender and Sexual Orientation Scenario handout – one per partner pair

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- Purchase two greeting cards that would be given to someone who just had a baby, one that would stereotypically be given to a parent of a baby boy, and one that would stereotypically be given to a parent of a baby girl. If you can find the same or a similar version of the cards for the genders, that’s ideal; otherwise, two that are clearly gendered as “male” and “female” will work.
- Before students arrive, post these sheets around the room, with the bottom halves folded up to the top and taped to hide the headers on each.
- Review the Gender Tree resource in case it’s a helpful resource to build knowledge as it relates to concepts related to gender identity:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1TFzVuSjXAUa2f4RTXgb9xp4Lq6Sea06C>

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Define sexual orientation, biological sex, gender and gender identity. [Knowledge]
2. Describe at least three sources of messages about gender and sexual orientation. [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. If the word hermaphrodite is used, please let students know it is inappropriate to use.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Greet the class by saying, “I wonder whether you all could help me. A friend of mine just had a baby, and I went to

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the store to get a congratulations card and narrowed it down to two, but I can't decide on which to send. What do you think?"

Hold up the two greeting cards to the class. Someone will ask right off that bat, "Is it a boy or a girl?"

Say, "Good question! That's the same question that's asked when a baby is born so they can announce the baby's biological sex. Now, where do we look to answer that question, at the baby's nose?" The class will likely laugh and say that we look between the baby's legs. On the board write a vertical line. Write the word penis at the top left. As you write, say, "In most cases, we will see a penis or we will see a vulva." Write "vulva" on the right side of the vertical line next to "penis."

Say, "But this isn't what makes us who we are. There are also our chromosomes. If we have a penis, chances are our chromosomes will be 'XY.'" Write "XY" beneath "penis." Say, "If we have a vulva, chances are our chromosomes are 'XX.'" Write "XX" beneath "vulva."

Say, "But this isn't all, either. There's also how we play our part in reproduction – if we have a penis and XY chromosomes, we usually have 'testes.'" (Write "testes" beneath "penis" and "XY"). "If we have a vulva and XX chromosomes, we usually have 'ovaries.'" (Write "ovaries" beneath vulva and XX). "Testes is where sperm and testosterone are made, and ovaries are where eggs and estrogen are made."

Note to the Teacher: *The lists should look like this when done:*

<i>Penis</i>	<i>Vulva</i>
<i>XY</i>	<i>XX</i>
<i>testes</i>	<i>ovaries</i>

Say, "If we have all three in this left column, the announcement is usually 'it's a boy!' and if we have all three in the right-hand column, we'll hear, 'it's a girl!'"

Explain to the class "that in some cases, people are born with sex characteristics that do not fully fit into the box of male or female. This can include external sex organs, internal sex organs, chromosomes, or hormones. This is called intersex. Intersex experiences are actually pretty common with about 1.7% of babies born being intersex, which is about as common as redheadedness. Some intersex babies and children have surgeries performed on them at a young age to make their bodies be more male or female. These surgeries are often non-consensual and not medically necessary. It is important that we talk about intersex experiences and normalize that bodies can look many ways."

Ask students which card they would give to the new baby if the announcement were "it's a boy" vs. "it's a girl" and why. After a few answers, say, "Everything I just shared with you up here has to do with our biology – our biological sex." (Write "biological sex" on the board). "How we respond to that biology – like what kinds of cards we send, or what kinds of clothes we wear or toys we have children play with – all has to do with gender." (Write "gender" on the board.)

Say, "In most cases, babies are born with one of the two scenarios I just described, and are called either 'boys' or 'girls.' In most cases, as a child starts to grow up, this biology matches

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how they feel on the inside. Gender Identity is a person's deeply held sense of gender. It's about how we see ourselves and how we relate to the world more than body parts. Somebody whose gender identity is the same as their gender assigned at birth (such as a person who was assigned male and identifies as a boy) is called 'cisgender.' A person whose gender identity is different than their gender assigned at birth (such as a person assigned male at birth and identifies as a girl) is called 'transgender.'

Sometimes, however, what a person sees in the mirror doesn't match how they feel on the inside. They might see a penis and testicles and think, 'but I'm not a boy.' That person may call themselves 'transgender,' or simply, "female" if that is how they feel.

However we feel on the inside – whether it matches our bodies or not – is our gender identity. Write "gender identity" on the board. And as you're going to see in a minute, our identity is more powerful than our physical bodies or what we do with those bodies."

There are also people who are non-binary. Non-binary is an umbrella term to describe someone who does not identify as strictly male or strictly female. Someone may feel like they do not identify as completely a boy or as completely a girl, identifies as neither, as both a boy and a girl, or as a boy sometimes and a girl sometimes

Some of these terms are connected to – although different from – sexual orientation. Write "sexual orientation" on the board.

Note to the Teacher: *When you are done, here are the terms that should be listed on the board – biological sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.*

Say, "Sexual orientation has to do with the gender or genders of the people to whom we are attracted, both physically and romantically. This is different from our sense of what our gender is. We all have both a gender identity and a sexual orientation.

For example, a person whose biology at birth was characterized as "female" and who also feels female on the inside [write a woman symbol on the board] who is attracted only to people whose biology at birth was characterized as "male" and who also feel male on the inside [write a man symbol on the board, followed by an equal sign] will likely identify as heterosexual. If she does, the fact that she identifies as a woman [circle the woman symbol] and that the partners she's attracted to identify as men [circle the man symbol] – these are their gender identities. The fact that they're attracted to each other [circle heterosexual in a different color] is their sexual orientation." (10 minutes)

Note to the Teacher: *This is what the board should like for this section –written near the list of terms from the previous section.*



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STEP 2: Ask students to “talk with an elbow partner to discuss whether 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 personal to them and there is no need for you to know how your peers identify or who they are attracted to. Each person gets to decide, on their own, how they’d like to label themselves in ways that feel right to them. Knowing that information should not impact how you treat them or how they treat you.” (6 minutes)

STEP 3: Say, even though it’s not okay for us to put labels on others, we may often make assumptions about a person’s gender or sexual orientation based on stereotypes.

Divide students into partner pairs. Once the class has identified their partners say, “I am going to share a scenario with each set of partners. The instructions are to read the scenario and then answer a few questions about the people mentioned in the story. What questions do you have?”

Distribute the Gender and Sexual Orientation Scenario 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 scenario. 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 scenario 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 identify their beliefs, communities, media, culture, and stereotypes that influenced their assumptions. Some of the responses may include:

- That’s how they’re always portrayed on television
- That’s what I know from being _____ myself
- My [friend/family member] is [gender/orientation]
- My parent(s)/caregiver(s) told me
- My friends always said this
- I looked it up online
- My faith community teaches this

Explain that many of our assumptions come from stereotypes, which are often untrue. Ask students to name a stereotype they’ve heard about people of any sexual orientation or gender identity. Explain that in this one case, it’s okay to share stereotypical information.

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For each stereotype, probe students to consider why they might think this. Ask:

- Is this true?
- Where did you get that impression from?
- If it's true for one person who happens to be of that gender identity or sexual orientation, is it true for all people?
- Is it true for someone not of that sexual orientation or gender identity?

After a few responses say, "Probably the most important thing we can all keep in mind is that no matter who we are – no matter our gender identity or sexual orientation – each of us is unique and has the right to describe ourselves in ways that feel right. We have to be mindful of the ways our external influences contribute to the assumptions we make about gender identities and sexual orientations different from ours so we don't perpetuate stereotypes." (25 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The mini-lecture at the beginning of the lesson will fulfill the first learning objective. The scenario activity and discussion that follows will achieve the second learning objectives.

HOMEWORK:

None.

