

Celebrating Differences



45 min



GRADES 6-8

LESSON PLAN

LENS/DOMAIN

Anti-bias

SUBJECT

Identity & Belonging

TOPIC

Inclusion

This lesson is meant to engage students in discussions to recognize and appreciate individual uniqueness.

Enduring Understanding

While people share many things in common, each individual's identity is shaped by a distinct mix of culture, family, community, and personal experience. When we follow the same instructions, we do not always arrive at the same result -- and that is not a problem to fix. Difference is information. Learning to see, name, and value what makes each person unique is the foundation of genuine inclusion and the first step toward understanding people whose lives look different from our own.

Essential Questions

1. Why do people follow the same instructions differently, and what does that reveal about perspective?
2. What does it feel like to be "different," and how does that feeling shape the way we treat others?
3. How do our individual identities -- the things that make us each unique -- connect us to, or separate us from, the people around us?
4. What does it mean to truly include someone, and how can knowing more about a person change the way we treat them?

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Readiness

 10 MIN

Explain to students that they will be asked to complete a number of tasks - you cannot answer any questions they have, but you can repeat the information. Students will likely ask questions such as, what way the paper should be folded, etc. Do not answer these questions. Ask that they do not talk during the activity.

Each student should have a blank piece of paper. Recite the following directions:

1. Close your eyes- hold the piece of paper in your hands and listen and follow directions.
2. Fold the paper in half.
3. Fold the paper in half again.
4. Tear off the bottom right corner of the paper.
5. Turn the paper upside-down and tear off the bottom right corner.
6. Keeping your eyes closed, open the paper up. Hold it over your head and open your eyes.
7. Look around the room to see everyone's paper.

Ask students:

1. What did you find yourself looking for when you looked around the room?
2. Did you look around to see if anyone else's paper looked like yours? Why or why not?
3. Did anyone feel like hiding their paper because it looked different from everyone else's?
4. Was there a "right" or "wrong" way to complete this task?
5. What do you think the purpose of this activity was?

Explain to students that the purpose of this activity was:

1. To demonstrate that people frequently have different perspectives from one another and that there is not always any one "correct" perspective.
2. To illustrate how and why miscommunications can occur and provide an opportunity for participants to experience the human tendency to respond to feeling "different" by seeking out like-minded individuals.

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Input

 20 MIN

Everyone will receive [the "Find, Share, Connect" worksheet](#). Once you have it, take a minute to read the page and mentally note which questions you can answer, but do not write on your own paper.

When I tell you to begin, circulate the room to find others who can respond to the questions in the squares. When you receive an answer from someone, ask them to sign that square on your paper. When a person signs your worksheet, ask them to share their response with you so you can learn more about them.

You should have as many peers as possible sign at least one square on the sheet. Depending on class size, the goal is to have no more than one square signed by a single person.

You will have 10 minutes to fill in as many squares as possible, with as many different people as you can.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which of the questions did you find most difficult?
2. How did it feel to ask people for information and to have other people ask you for information?
3. Did anything surprise you about this activity, either your own cultural knowledge or that of your peers?
4. Is there anything you learned from this activity which might encourage you and your peers to be welcoming to students who appear different in any way?

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Output



15 MIN

Tell students that we've examined many ways we can be alike and different through today's activities. Ask students to take a Post-it note and write a word that best describes how they most strongly identify themselves.

To respect everyone's privacy, have them hand you the note and put it on the wall yourself. Once all the notes are up, invite students to take a moment to look around and read them.

Discussion Questions:

1. Raise your hand if you connected with anyone else's response.
2. Was it easy or hard to determine what word you chose to self-identify?
3. Does knowing more about each other's self-identities impact how we interact with each other?
4. Can you share ways in which knowing more about a peer could help you make them feel included during the school day?

Final Comments:

- The purpose of today's activities was to challenge each of us to recognize that while we may have things in common (live in the same city, attend the same school, might be the same age, etc.) we are also different in some ways.
- Recognizing differences is one of many ways we can learn more about each other and from each other.

TEACHER TIPS:

- **On the Paper-Folding Activity:** Resist the urge to clarify instructions even when students are visibly frustrated -- that discomfort is the point. The moment students open their eyes and look around the room is the pedagogical core of the Readiness. Let it breathe before you debrief. If a student feels embarrassed that their paper looks "wrong," that reaction is worth naming gently in the debrief: it is exactly the human response the activity is designed to surface.
- **On the Cultural Bingo/Signature Sheet:** Preview the worksheet yourself before the lesson to make sure the squares reflect your actual student population. If your class has limited cultural diversity, some squares may go unsigned -- and that itself becomes a discussion point about whose experiences are centered and whose are invisible. Keep the energy light and moving during the 10 minutes; the reflection is where the real learning happens.

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TEACHER TIP:

- **On the Post-it Identity Words** Having students hand you their Post-it rather than placing it themselves is a deliberate privacy move, honor it. When reviewing the wall, give students unstructured looking time before launching discussion questions. Some of the most powerful moments in this activity happen in the silence before anyone speaks.
- **On Sensitive Disclosures** Students may choose identity words that reveal something personal — religion, family structure, disability, immigration status. Be prepared to hold that with care. If the room goes quiet after a particular word appears on the wall, that silence is worth acknowledging rather than moving past. Use your best judgement, regarding anything that may be unsafe to disclose, even anonymously.

WISCONSIN STATE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS:

Speaking and Listening

SL.6.1 / SL.7.1 / SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing one's own clearly. *Rationale: All three phases of the lesson center structured discussion. Students debrief the paper-folding activity, exchange personal cultural knowledge during the signature sheet activity, and discuss identity words in the Output. Each requires listening, responding, and building on what peers share.*

SL.6.4 / SL.7.4 / SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using relevant descriptions, facts, and details. *Rationale: During discussion debriefs, students are asked to explain their reasoning, why they looked for similarity, what surprised them, how knowing more about a peer could change their behavior. These are not opinion-only responses; they require students to support their thinking with observations from the activities.*

Language

L.6.6 / L.7.6 / L.8.6 Acquire and use grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases. *Rationale: Students work with vocabulary central to this lesson's goals: identity, perspective, culture, similarity, difference, inclusion, and belonging. The Post-it activity in particular asks students to select a single precise word to represent their strongest self-identification, requiring meaningful engagement with vocabulary.*

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WISCONSIN STATE STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES:

Social Studies Inquiry Practices and Processes

SS.Inq1.a.m Formulate open-ended questions for further research within one or more social studies disciplines. *Rationale: The debrief questions across all three phases ask students to move beyond observation into genuine inquiry -- why do people seek similarity, what does difference feel like, what does inclusion actually require? Students are generating and sitting with open questions rather than arriving at fixed answers.*

Behavioral Sciences

SS.BH1.a.m Identify patterns such as culture, prior knowledge, family, peers, school, communities, and personal interests that influence a person's identity and development. *Rationale: This is the lesson's central standard. The paper-folding activity surfaces how prior knowledge and interpretation shape outcomes. The signature sheet explores how culture, background, and community differ across individuals. The Post-it Output asks students to name their own most salient identity marker. The entire lesson is a structured investigation of what shapes who we are.*

SS.BH2.a.m

Investigate interactions between individuals and groups, including the impact of those interactions on individuals and groups. Rationale: The signature sheet activity directly enacts the dynamics of in-group and out-group behavior — students circulate, seek out peers who share knowledge, and experience the social texture of similarity and difference in real time. The debrief asks them to reflect on how those interactions felt and what they reveal about inclusion.

SS.BH3.a.m Examine the role of culture, cultural diffusion, and cultural change on the development of societies and individuals. *Rationale: The signature sheet worksheet surfaces cultural knowledge: Traditions, foods, languages, practices that students carry but may not have previously named or shared. Students discover both the diversity within their classroom and the cultural knowledge gaps that lead to miscommunication or exclusion.*