



## My Many Identities: Creating Affirming Classroom Environments

**Suggested Grade Level:** 4 – 8

**Length of Time:** 1 session of 45 minutes or 2 sessions of 25 minutes

### Goal

- + To see how a person has multiple identities that make up who they are.
- + To look at how different identities can shape the way a person experiences the world.
- + To look at how different identities can shape the way a person may be seen or treated by others.

### Objectives

- + Students will identify at least five aspects of their identity.
- + Students will reflect on how their identities can shape the way they experience the world and how painful it can be not to feel affirmed to share one's full self.
- + Students will reflect on the impact of behaviors (words, actions and intentions) that can cause other students to feel unsafe sharing their whole selves.

### Academic Standards

- + CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL 4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own ideas clearly. (Also SL.5.1)
- + Social Studies Strand 4: Individual Development and Identity – Exploration, identification, and analysis of how individuals and groups are alike and how they are unique, as well as how they relate to each other in supportive and collaborative ways.

### Educators' Notes

While developing cultural knowledge and awareness about others, it is important to uncover and examine our own personal, social and cultural identities. Guided self-reflection and discussion allows students to better understand how social group memberships inform who we are.

What is culture? It is a shared system of meanings, beliefs, values and behaviors through which we interpret our experiences. Culture is learned, collective and changes over time. Culture is generally understood to be "what we know that everyone like us knows."

The following exercise explores the roots of cultural learning by naming aspects of identity important to each individual. It highlights the multiple dimensions of our identities and addresses the importance of self-identification.

## Materials

- + *My Many Identities* handout – attached (one for each student)
- + Strips of paper or index cards (5 for each student)
- + Chart paper, markers
- + In advance, fill out a *My Many Identities Handout* to serve as a model during the lesson

## Introduction

Today we are going to look at different aspects of our identities—those we share with people who are close to us. It is important to remember that we cannot know how someone identifies by how they look. We must respectfully get to know people to learn more about them.

Ask for a few examples of different ways people may identify.

- + These examples would include, but are not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, family structure, home language, where you live, and possibly activities you enjoy.

## Taking a Look at the *My Many Identities Handout*

- + Show the students an example of a completed *Many Identities Handout*.
  - » Use an overhead, a projector, or simply draw your multi-identity self-components on the whiteboard or chart.
  - » Example: Mr. Wong– Teacher – Unicyclist – Multilingual – Multigenerational Family – Solo Parent
- + Share how each of your identity bubbles is a lens through which you see the world.
  - » Mr. Wong might share, for instance, that when he grew up he spoke Chinese at home and English at school. His grandparents live with him now in their multigenerational family household. They help him take care of his two young children. He might share that his two children are very important to him and he is proud that they know two languages fluently. The students will already know that Mr. Wong runs the unicycle club at school.

## Students Looking at Their Many Identities

- + Distribute a handout to each student and give the following directions:
  - » Place your name in the center.
  - » Use the bubbles to name aspects of yourself or identities that are important in defining who you are.

## Reflection and Sharing

- + After students have filled in the handout, allow time for them to silently reflect on what they have written.
- + Ask them to form pairs and share why the descriptors they chose are important to them.
- + If time permits, invite pairs to introduce one another to the class.

**Note:** The lesson can break here and proceed the next day.

## A Look at the Importance of Your Different Identities

- + Have the students write on 5 different strips of paper or index cards the 5 identities they had written on the handout.
- + Ask students to form pairs.
- + Have each student hold their 5 pieces of paper up in front of them so that the other student can't see the writing.
- + Have each student pick one of the pieces of paper from their partner and hand it back to them respectfully. Then have the other partner do the same thing.
- + Have each student read the identity that was taken away by their partner and handed to them.
- + Have your students discuss in the pairs:
  - » What would it feel like if that identity was taken away?
  - » What if you had to hide that identity from other people?
  - » What if no one ever saw that part of your identity, that part of who you are?

## What Can We Do to Help Others Feel Safer Sharing All of Who They Are?

- + Come back together as a class.
- + Ask students to share what it felt like to have an identity taken away or hidden.
- + Ask students what would make them feel welcome to share more of their identities.
- + Acknowledge how hard it is for people when they have to hide parts of who they are or if they are teased or bullied for who they are.
- + Ask you students what your classroom and school can do to create a community where all students can share more of themselves? How can we be allies around identity?
- + Write down your students' responses and post it in your classroom as an anchor for change.

## Extensions

- + Ask students to do a quick write about how it felt to have one of their identities hidden or taken away.
- + Ask students to choose one of their identities and write about why that identity is important to them.
- + Have your students make posters or plan school actions to make everyone feel more welcome.

## Assessment and Evaluation

- + Can students define the concept of identity?
- + Do you observe students getting to know each other respectfully and not assuming how someone identifies based on appearance-based stereotypes?
- + Do you observe students sticking up for each other more?
- + Can students identify ways to be an ally around the identities of their classmates?

## Additional Resources from Welcoming Schools

- + [Preventing Bias-Based Bullying – School Resources](#)
- + [Professional Development Training](#)

Credit: Adapted in part from Teaching Tolerance's lesson [My Multicultural Identities](#)

# My Many Identities

