



## **BACKWARDS DAY: READING A CHILDREN'S BOOK TO HELP UNDERSTAND TRANSGENDER TOPICS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

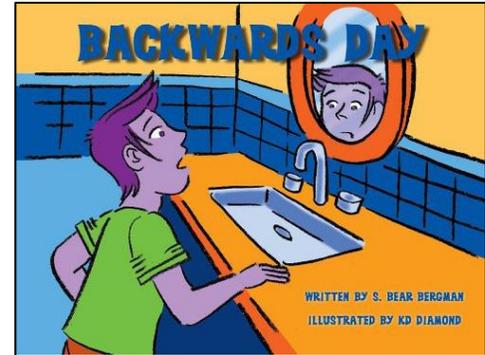
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**SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL:** 2 – 5

**LENGTH OF TIME:** 40 minutes

### **GOALS**

- To expand students' perception and understanding of gender.
- To help understand what it means to be transgender, non-binary or gender expansive.
- To help students cultivate allyship around gender.



### **OBJECTIVES**

- Students will listen to a book read aloud and discuss a fictional story about a transgender character.
- Students will learn new vocabulary words related to gender and gender identity.
- Students will learn about differences and being an ally.

### **ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers. (Also RL.2.2, 4.1 and 5.1)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3: Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events. (Also RL.2.3, 4.3 and 5.3)

### **EDUCATORS' NOTES**

Students are already learning and talking about gender and differences. They receive formal and informal messages about gender from a multitude of sources—their families, peers, communities and the media. As such, it is critical to discuss gender in the classroom.

By guiding discussions about gender with students, you can help to prevent bias-based bullying, harassment and gender stereotyping.

Ensure that every child in your classroom is allowed to express themselves however they want, regardless of their gender identity or expression—or any aspect of their identity that may be considered by other students to be “different.” Understand that gender is a spectrum, not a binary, and that we all express ourselves in many different ways along that spectrum. Each child is an individual with their own unique expression of who they are in the world.

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It is important to review classroom rules about respect and being an ally when having discussions about gender. Gender-based bullying has a high frequency of occurrence in elementary schools and needs to be interrupted and addressed by educators.

If you have students in your school or classroom who are transgender or non-binary, then be mindful not to put those students in the position of teaching other children about their identity. That is the job of the educator, not the student. Also, remember student privacy—it can jeopardize a student’s safety and well-being if they are outed to their peers or non-affirming adults.

### **About the Book**

*Backwards Day* is intended to be an enjoyable, interesting children’s book that features a trans identified character named Andy. It is fun to notice interesting details in the book with your students. For example, the page numbers are backwards.

*Backwards Day*, by S. Bear Bergman, set on the planet Tenalp, introduces us to a world where there are 17 seasons, including one where bubblegum falls from the sky for three days and a single day when everything—everything everywhere—is backwards. Andrea looks forward to Backwards Day eagerly every year, so she can turn into a boy for the day. But one year she doesn't turn along with everyone else. She's miserable. The very next day, however, she turns into a boy—and stays that way! He's delighted, but his parents are distressed and take him to the big city to consult with Backwardsologists. When they finally figure out what's happened, the miracles of Backwards Day are fully revealed to the reader.

### **Before Reading *Backwards Day* to Your Students**

- Read the book yourself and think about what questions you and your students may have, *and* practice how you want to respond. Being prepared will help you to be comfortable with a topic that you may be unfamiliar discussing.
  - Take a look at the Welcoming Schools’ handout [Defining LGBTQ Terms for Elementary School Students](#) to prepare to answer questions and lead a class discussion on gender topics.
  - For ideas on ways to respond to questions or put-downs about gender, take a look at the Welcoming Schools handout: [Be Prepared for Questions and Put-Downs on Gender](#).
  - Reference the [Gender Snowperson](#) a simple tool to break down the concepts of gender identity (how you feel), who you love, girl/boy assigned at birth and gender expression. (Also see: [Student version](#))
  - If a student asks you a question and you’re unsure of the answer, it’s OK to say that you don’t know! You could say you’ll figure it out and get back to them.

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- *Backwards Day* by S. Bear Bergman

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

Let your students know that you are going to be reading a book called *Backwards Day*. As they can infer from the title, there are going to be many things that are backwards in the book. Have students look for details in the book as you read it.

## PROMPTS FOR DISCUSSION

- **Note:** The page numbers are backwards going down as you read the book.
- Pages 34-30: What is the same or different about Tenalp compared to Earth? (See if anyone notices that Tenalp is planet spelled backwards.)
- Pages 29-26: How are gender and gender expression affected on Backwards Day? Make sure to define these terms for your students. (See: [Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#)) Is it the same for everyone? (Page 27: “Some people don’t look very different at all.”)
- Pages 25-20: What have we learned about Andrea? Why does she feel sad on Backwards Day?
- Pages 19-14: Make sure that your students notice the pronouns being used at different points in the book for Andrea. Why do they think the author did that?
- Pages 14-13: Do things change for Andy’s friends? Is Andy different? How does Andy feel?
- Pages 11-6: What does the Backwardsologist tell Andy’s parents?
- Pages 5-1: How does Andy feel? What is the same? What is different? What pronouns are being used for Andy on these pages?

## WRAP-UP DISCUSSION

- Ask your students to share their ideas of what might change if you had a Backwards Day in your classroom. What would they change about themselves on that day? (Make sure students are being respectful with their responses and only speaking about themselves with their examples, not their classmates.)
- Ask your students to share ally behaviors for other students around gender identity and expression. (Answers might include: talking with or befriending the targeted student, getting a caring adult for help, talking with the student who is being mean, causing a distraction to help stop the harassment or speaking up in the moment and saying, “STOP.”)

## EXTENSIONS

- Have your students write a story about what would happen if there was a Backwards Day on Planet Earth.
- Continue the discussion about gender, gender expression and gender identities with some of the books on this booklist: [Gender-Expansive & Transgender Children: Books for Students](#)
- Watch the music video [I Am Me](#) by Willow Smith.

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- Write “I Am Me” poems. (See the Welcoming Schools lesson: [Creating Community in Your Classroom: I Am Me Poems.](#))
  - Continue the discussion of what students can do if they see someone making fun of by another student with the Welcoming Schools lesson: [Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander.](#)

### **ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION**

- Use exit cards to ask about one new thing the students learned and anything that they still have questions about.
- Ongoing teacher observation of gender-based teasing, and if it is recognized more often or becomes less frequent.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS**

[Lessons to Understand Gender](#)

[Books that Look at Gender and Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#)

[Resources for Gender Inclusive Schools](#)

[Be Prepared For Questions and Put-Downs Around Gender](#)

[Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

Credit: Developed by Michele Hatchell, Madison, WI.