



GENDER SNOWPERSON: UNDERSTANDING GENDER IDENTITY

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 3 – 8

LENGTH OF TIME: 45 minutes

GOALS

- To explore the concepts of gender identity and gender expression with students.
- To help students understand the differences between gender identity, sexual orientation and sex assigned at birth.
- To help students understand that there are many ways to be a girl, boy, both or neither.
- To help students understand that gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and sex assigned at birth are not binaries, but spectrums.



OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the Gender Snowperson to understand the differences between gender identity, sexual orientation and sex assigned at birth using age-appropriate language.
- Students will learn a basic tool to help them understand the concept of gender expression.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (Also SL.4.1 and 5.1)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.7: Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur). (Also RI.4.7 and 5.7)

EDUCATORS' NOTES

The gender snowperson is a simple tool to break down concepts of gender and sexual orientation for students and adults. It is important for students to understand the differences between gender identity, sex assigned at birth (girl/boy/intersex assigned at birth or pronouns she/he/they assigned at birth) and sexual orientation.

For schools that do not want to use the word “sex,” we have provided alternative language, such as “pronoun assigned at birth” instead of “sex assigned at birth” and “who you love or are

attracted to” instead of “sexual orientation.” This model provides age-appropriate language to discuss these topics with students in grades 3 – 8.

Gender is a complex topic, and the Gender Snowperson introduces vocabulary that is used throughout many of Welcoming Schools’ gender lessons. The concept of gender expression is important for educators and students to understand for the purpose of creating inclusive school climates. One cannot know a person’s gender identity (who they are and how they feel) or sexual orientation (who they love or are attracted to) based on their gender expression—the ways they like to express themselves through items such as clothing and hair.

Gender-based bullying is often focused on a student’s gender expression and the assumptions peers make about a person’s gender identity and/or sexual orientation on the basis of appearances and mannerisms. Welcoming Schools offers many [gender lessons](#) to support inclusive school climates around gender identity, gender expression and preventing gender stereotyping.

When we talk about sexual orientation, we use the phrase “who you love” or, for older elementary, we use the phrase “who you love or are attracted to.” Also see the Welcoming Schools handout, “[Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students.](#)”

In our lessons, we are talking about respect, and we are talking about families. Welcoming Schools provides many [lesson plans](#) to welcome and include all families.

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, 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.

Many of these gender concepts are spectrums and that includes sex. We know that around 2% of babies are born intersex. That is about the same percentage as natural born redheads (1.7% of people in the world). You may have students who know that they are intersex, as many families are opting not to perform surgeries on their intersex children. Many states are adding a third gender option on birth certificates. The organization InterACT has a very helpful brochure for educators called [What We Wish Our Teachers Knew.](#)

MATERIALS NEEDED

- [Gender Snowperson teacher handout](#)
- [Gender Snowperson student handout](#)
- Chart paper
- Pencils, markers or crayons

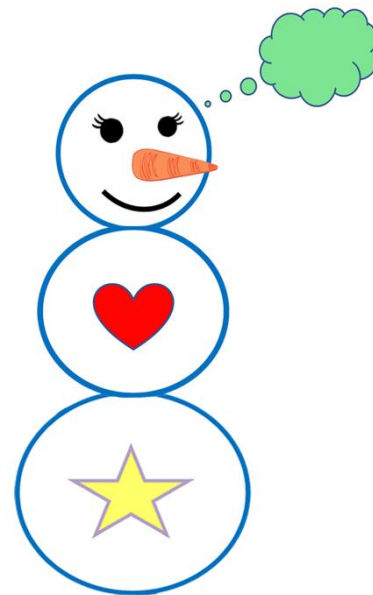
ACTIVITY

Introduction

Before beginning the activity, let your students know that you are going to be learning some important vocabulary around gender identity. Let students know that you are going to be using a tool called the “Gender Snowperson.” (Make sure not to say “Snowman,” and make sure your students don’t revert to calling it a “Snowman” either.)

Creating a Gender Snowperson

- Write the word “Gender” at the top of the chart paper.
(Leave some room, because in the next step you will be adding the word “Snowperson” after the word “Gender.”)
 - Ask students to turn to their neighbor and talk about what that word might mean. Have students share out their responses. Usually, students will say that gender is if you are a boy or a girl.
 - Let students know that gender is your internal sense of being a girl, boy, both or neither. There are many ways that people identify their gender, and there are many genders.
 - Also, let students know that there are many, many ways to be a girl, boy, both or neither and that you all will be discussing this as you do this activity.
- Add the word “Snowperson” after “Gender” so that the heading reads “Gender Snowperson.” (You will want to use the [Gender Snowperson teacher handout](#) to guide you—you will be recreating this visual for your students on the chart paper.)
- Draw three circles in a vertical stack.
- Draw the Snowperson’s eyes and nose on the top circle.
 - Note: At this point, your students may call your drawing a “Snowman”. Let them know that it is a “Snowperson” and that you are intentionally using that language so that the gender identity of the Snowperson is not being assumed. “We don’t know if the Snowperson is a girl, boy, both or neither.”
- Next to the bottom circle, write and explain to your students that the bottom circle is a person’s *sex assigned at birth*. You could also use the words “*girl/boy/intersex assigned at birth*” or “*she/he/they pronouns assigned at birth*.”
 - Note: A simple way to explain this to students is that when a baby is born, a doctor or midwife looks at their body/anatomy and says they are a girl, boy or intersex. However, babies can’t talk yet, so they can’t tell us how they feel. When they start to talk, they may say they are a girl or a boy, both or neither
- In the middle circle, draw a heart. Next to it, write and explain to your students that this part of the snowperson represents *who you love or are attracted to* (sexual orientation).



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- Note: For elementary school, we keep the focus on families, love and respect. You may want to look at our [Family Diversity Vocabulary](#) handout to give some examples of terms such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual or pansexual. It is important to respect all families and all family structures in our schools and to send the message to students that we all get to love who we love.
 - Next to the top circle, draw a thought bubble. Next to it, write “*who you are/how you feel as a person*”. Explain to your students that this part of the Gender Snowperson represents your “gender identity”: girl, boy, both or neither. All of us have a gender identity. Our gender identity is our understanding in our mind and heart who we are.
 - Next, write the word “Gender Expression” under the Snowperson and draw some clothing and hair on your Gender Snowperson.
 - Suggestions might include a bowtie, hair, mustache, a skirt or pants and shoes. Try to be gender expansive in your choices.
 - You may want to invite students up one at a time to add an article of clothing or hair on the Snowperson.

Understanding Vocabulary for Gender Identity

- On a second piece of chart paper, write these words: Cisgender, Transgender and Non-Binary.
- Define these words for your students.
 - Explain that when your gender identity—who you are and how you feel—is different than the what the doctors/midwives said when you were born—girl, boy, or intersex—you might identify as transgender or non-binary (both or neither).
 - When what the doctors or midwives said when you were born—boy or girl—matches who you are and how you feel about your gender, you are cisgender.
 - For reference see: [Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#).
- Gender expression is not always an indication of someone’s gender identity. People of all genders have different gender expressions based on their culture, religion, family, community and individual interests.

Student Activity

- Give each of your students a copy of the [Gender Snowperson student handout](#).
 - Have them fill in the worksheet using the anchor charts as a guide for the vocabulary. Their finished worksheet will look like the [Gender Snowperson teacher handout](#).
 - Students who finish early can work on the gender expression of their gender snowperson by adding clothing and hair as they like.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- Assessment for this lesson will be mostly informal. You will observe your students' interactions during class and small-group activities. By paying attention to their conversations and individual responses, you can assess their comprehension of gender

expression and their ability to apply this comprehension by exploring their own differences with respect.

- Listen to assess if your students are using vocabulary correctly and understanding the differences between sex assigned at birth, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- As an accepting climate is developed in your classroom, you will notice that more students feel welcomed to express themselves freely in clothing, hairstyle or forms of play and interactions with peers.

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](#)

BE WHO
YOU ARE!

Credit: Teaching tool developed by [GSAFE, WI](#)