



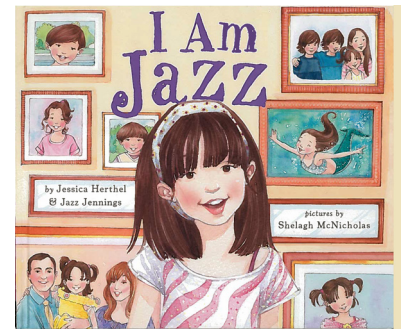
I Am Jazz: Transgender Topics in Elementary School

Suggested Grade Level: K – 5

Length of Time: 40 minutes

Goals

- + To expand students' perceptions and understandings of gender.
- + To help students understand what it can mean to be transgender using developmentally appropriate language for younger students.
- + To increase student understanding of ally behavior.



Objective

- + Students will read and discuss a story based on the true story of a transgender girl named Jazz Jennings.
- + Students will learn important vocabulary related to gender.
- + 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.K.1,1.1,2.1, 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.K.3,1.3, 2.3, 4.3 and 5.3)

Educators' Notes

I Am Jazz is a first-person account of a transgender girl, written by transgender activist Jazz Jennings and co-author Jessica Herthel. Jennings was one of the first transgender children to talk publicly about her identity. At the age of 6, she spoke with Barbara Walters on 20/20. Herthel is not transgender, nor does she have any transgender children. She co-wrote the book based on her desire to explain to her daughters what being transgender can mean, hoping to create a book that other parents and caring adults would be able to use to start important conversations about gender with their kids.

Before Reading *I Am Jazz* 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 you may be unfamiliar discussing.
 - » To prepare how to define words on gender topics look at the Welcoming Schools' handout [Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#).
 - » It is important to note that the book simplifies the idea of being transgender to “a girl brain but a boy body” however, being transgender is far more complex. One’s gender identity is about how you feel and who you know yourself to be.
 - » For ideas on ways to respond to questions or put-downs about gender, take a look at Welcoming Schools' handout: [Be Prepared for Questions and Put-Downs on Gender](#).
 - » 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.
- + 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.
- + Messages to students can be as simple as: “There is no such thing as a boys’ color or a girls’ toy,” “colors are colors,” “toys are toys,” “clothes are clothes,” “hair is hair!”
- + Students are already learning and talking about gender and difference. They receive formal and informal messages about gender from a multitude of sources—their families, peers, communities and the media. Many of the messages empower them, and many of the messages limit them. As such, it is critical to discuss gender in the classroom.

- + By guiding discussions about gender with students, educators, families and other caring adults, you can help to prevent bias-based bullying, harassment and gender stereotyping.
- + Finally, it is often important to review classroom rules about respect and being an ally when having discussions about gender, given that gender is a common way that children participate in identity-based bullying. 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.

Materials

- + A copy of the book *I Am Jazz* by Jazz Jennings and Jessica Herthel
- + Optional: [Video](#) of Jazz Jennings reading *I Am Jazz*. Includes Spanish subtitles.

Introducing and Reading *I Am Jazz*

Note: The book purposefully introduces you to Jazz—what she likes to do, her favorite colors and her friends—before mentioning that she is transgender. Avoid introducing it as a book about a transgender girl. Instead, you could simply say that this is a story based on the real-life experiences of a girl named Jazz.

Prompts for discussion:

- + Jazz says that her favorite colors are silver and green. What are your favorite colors?
- + What are some things you have in common with Jazz? What are some things that are different?
- + If Jazz went to your school, what could you do to help her feel safe and welcomed?
- + In the book, Jazz says that she is transgender. Who can describe what transgender means?

Note: Allow students to ask questions. Help clarify the meaning of the word transgender. You can define the word transgender as: when your gender identity (how you feel) is different than what doctors/ midwives assigned to you when you were born (girl/boy, she/he pronouns or sex assigned at birth).

Note: If you have students ask questions about Jazz's body, surgeries, etc., share with them that all of our bodies are private, including, of course, transgender bodies, and it is not appropriate to ask about that.

- + Being transgender is just one part of Jazz's identity. What other things have we learned about Jazz that make her who she is?
- + How does Jazz feel when other kids at school make fun of her because she's transgender?
 - » How does it make you feel when someone makes fun of you?
 - » What can you do if you see someone making fun of another student?

Note: Students have many options. Mention some of these ideas if they are not brought up by your students: Speak up in the moment; tell a caring adult, such as a parent or teacher; talk to either the student who is being made fun of or the student who is being mean later, in private; cause a distraction so the mean teasing stops; or help the student who is getting teased to get away from the situation.

Extensions

- + Continue the discussion about gender identity with some of these [Children's Books to Understand Gender and Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#).
- + Pair this lesson with one of our other [Lesson Plans to Help Students Understand Gender](#).
- + Watch the music video, [I Am Me by Willow Smith](#).
- + 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 another student with the Welcoming Schools' lesson: [Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander](#).

Assessment and Evaluation

- + Exit cards asking 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.
- + Ongoing teacher observation of whether or not students feel comfortable making choices outside the gender binary.

Additional Resources from Welcoming Schools

- + [Resources for Gender Inclusive Schools](#)
- + [Diverse Children's Books Transgender, Non-Binary and Gender Expansive Children](#)
- + [Transgender Children: Books to Help Adults Understand](#)
- + [Gender And Children: A Place To Begin](#)
- + [Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#)
- + [Welcoming Schools Professional Development Training](#)



Illustration from *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel & Jazz Jennings with illustrations by Shelagh McNicolas.