



WHAT IS A FAMILY?

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: K – 2

LENGTH OF TIME: One session of 30 – 35 minutes

GOAL

- To use literature to explore the diversity of families.
- To see that the common bond that unites many families and caring communities is love and caring.



OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to define what makes a family and describe a variety of families.
- Students will be able to identify common characteristics within all families.
- Students will learn that families have some similarities and some differences.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.5: With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed. (Also W.1.5 and 2.5)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.8 and 1.8: With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question. (Also W.1.8 and 2.8)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.5: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings. (Also SL.1.5 and 2.5)
- Social Studies Strand 4: Individual Development and Identity – Examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity, development and actions including family, peers, culture and institutional influences.

EDUCATORS' NOTES

What Is a Family? is an introductory lesson focusing on students' own experiences and questions. It also includes a discussion of a book on families such as *The Family Book* by Todd Parr or *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman.

It is natural for young children to notice differences. This lesson offers an opportunity to build classroom community by giving students a chance to share and learn about each other's families. One of the learning objectives of this lesson is to teach children to accept and embrace differences and similarities amongst their families.

Children naturally notice human differences in skin tone, eye color, hair etc. Talking openly and honestly about how families and humans are different in these ways is very important. Teachers need to openly talk about differences while interrupting bias and stereotypes.

In this lesson, it is important to broaden students' understanding of what families are and to explore the notion that the common bond that holds all families together is love and shared tasks or caregiving. Students will brainstorm and discuss family structure and diversity. Students will also share information from their own experiences.

This project centers the concept that all families are unique and different. Your students may have families with two moms or two dads; stepparents; a transgender parent; adoptive parents; or foster parents, it is useful to find out the language they use to refer to their families to help respectfully answer questions that may arise. If, for example, you have only one student in your school with same-gender parents, then be mindful not to put that student in the position of teaching other children about their family. That is the job of the educator, not the student.

MATERIALS:

- A book on diverse families such as *The Family Book* by Todd Parr or *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman. See more ideas below.
- Chart paper and markers
- [Family Diversity Vocabulary](#)

ACTIVITY 1: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT FAMILIES?

- Label a piece of chart paper “What do we know about families?” Ask the class the following questions and record their answers on chart paper:
 - What do we know about families?
 - Who is in a family?
 - What do family members give or share with each other?
 - What responsibilities do family members have?
- Families can be defined in many ways. Each one is unique. Familiarize students with some of the terms used to describe different family models. (see [Family Diversity Vocabulary](#)) Make sure to include all the different kinds of families that are in your classroom. At the same time, it is important to name a wide variety of families (such as single parents or LGBTQ-headed), especially ones that are not represented in your classroom.
- For younger students, you can draw picture symbols or use magazine cut-outs of each family member next to each family model. For example, for “extended family,” draw grandparent(s), parent(s) and children. It is also important for children to define for themselves who is in their family. Their description may include a pet, a church member, a neighbor or someone else.

ACTIVITY 2: READ ONE OF THE SUGGESTED BOOKS

- As you read the book, ask children to watch for different kinds of families: “Let’s see how many different kinds of families we can find in this book.”
- As you read, pause and ask, “What do you see in this picture? Who’s in this family?” Remind students not to engage in appearance-based stereotypes around gender, culture, language, etc. Sometimes it might be appropriate to say, “What are some ways we might describe this kind of family?” At the end of the book you might say, “Are these all the kinds of families that there can be?”
- End the lesson by asking, “What is important in all families? What makes a family?”

ADDITIONAL EXTENSIONS

- Give students a sheet of unlined paper. Have them fold it in half. Have them draw two different kinds of families doing something together. Have them title each picture and indicate which kind of family is illustrated in each and what they are doing.
- Older students can write a poem about what “family” means to them or what is important about families.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- Are students participating in the discussion?
- Can students name two things that they think are important for many families?

SUGGESTED BOOKS

Families. Shelley Rotner and Sheila Kelly.

Families, Families, Families. Suzanne and Max Lane.

The Family Book. Todd Parr.

The Great Big Book of Families. Mary Hoffman.

One Family. George Shannon.

DIVERSE AND UP-TO-DATE RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS

[Children’s Books to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Lesson Plans to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Embracing Family Diversity School Resources](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

Credit: Artwork by Todd Parr.