

Understanding LGBTQ+ Identity

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about the different aspects of LGBTQ+ identity and use primary sources to see how LGBTQ+ people describe these aspects.

Grade Level

K-2

Time

Total: 45 minutes (5 minutes introduction, 10 minutes warm-up activity, 10 minutes genderbread person explanation, 15 minutes oral history activity, 5 minutes wrap-up)

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe their own identities.
- Understand that gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are important aspects of many people's identities.
- Explain the differences between gender identity, sexual orientation, sex assigned at birth, and gender expression.
- Connect the categories of gender identity, sexual orientation, sex assigned at birth, and gender expression with common LGBTQ+ identity terms.
- Analyze LGBTQ+ people's statements about identity and determine whether those statements describe gender identity, sexual orientation, or gender expression.
- Discuss LGBTQ+ topics respectfully.
- Articulate the importance of LGBTQ+ acceptance.

New Jersey Social Studies Content Standards

6.1.2.CivicsPD.1: Engage in discussions effectively by asking questions, considering facts, listening to the ideas of others, and sharing opinions.

6.1.2.CivicsCM.3: Explain how diversity, tolerance, fairness, and respect for others can contribute to individuals feeling accepted.

9.4.2.CI.1: Demonstrate openness to new ideas and perspectives.

N.J.S.A. 18A:35-4.36a: Diversity and inclusion instruction

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.6: Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.2.4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.2: Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

Resources Needed

- Blank copies of Identity Wheel (Appendix 1)
- Copies of the Genderbread Person (Appendix 2) OR a projector linked to computer with internet access
- Printed copies of Oral History Excerpts (Appendix 3)
- Optional: student devices, paper, writing utensils

Introduction

Let students know that this lesson will involve topics that many people have strong feelings about and while they are welcome to share their thoughts, they must do so respectfully. To help clarify what respectful dialogue looks like, establish a set of guidelines. The following are suggestions from [the MIT Teaching and Learning Lab](#) that can be adapted with the instructor and students' input:

- Be aware of other speakers. Allow everyone an equal chance to speak and refrain from interrupting.
- Listen actively and try to understand each speaker's views. Keep in mind that there is something to learn from everyone.
- If you disagree with something someone says, focus on their ideas when responding instead of saying something negative about the speaker as a person.
- Stick to the facts. Make sure that you are not guessing, perpetuating stereotypes, or using derogatory language.
- Don't make assumptions about the people in the class. Remember that everyone has different backgrounds and experiences.
- If there are LGBTQ+ people in the class, don't ask them to speak for all LGBTQ+ people or explain their experiences. If they want to share their perspectives, they can offer, but it is not required.
- Remember that we are responsible for our words and their impact. If we say something that hurts a classmate, it's our job to make amends.
- Keep any personal information discussed confidential.

Warm-Up Activity

Provide students with copies of the Identity Wheel (Appendix 1). Ask them to write their name in the center, then fill in as many of the surrounding spaces as they can with various identities they have. If students are struggling, consider modeling the activity or providing the following categories as examples:

- Important relationships – child, sibling, friend
- Hobbies or skills – soccer player, musician, reader
- Groups – club member, Boy/Girl Scout, (Your School) student
- Religious or cultural communities

Once students have finished filling in their wheel, explain to students that for many people, factors like their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation are important parts of their identity, and many of these people are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Let the class know that this may already be the case for some students, but others may not have considered it, and both are okay.

Students may bring up at this stage how they identify in terms of gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. They can share this if they would like, but should not be pressured into doing so. If a student does not bring up how they identify, do not mention it.

Genderbread Person Explanation

Let students know that they will now discuss what gender identity, sexual orientation, sex, and gender expression mean. Introduce the Genderbread Person (Appendix 2) and Vocabulary List (Appendix 3), either by passing out copies or via a projector. Describe the four elements of the Genderbread Person and refer to the vocabulary list when appropriate.

Adapted from [“Breaking Through the Binary”](#) by Sam Killermann, creator of the Genderbread Person

Gender Identity

Gender identity is a word for how you think about your own gender. Some people identify as boys or men, some as girls or women, and some as neither; those people may use a variety of terms, including genderqueer, agender, and nonbinary.

Biological Sex

Biological sex refers to the label “male” or “female” assigned to an individual at birth by a medical professional based on biological factors like organs, hormones, and chromosomes. This is also sometimes called “sex assigned at birth.” These sexes are male, female, and intersex. Intersex people have a combination of biological characteristics that are traditionally associated with people assigned male at birth and people assigned female at birth. A person’s biological sex assigned at birth may not align with a person’s gender identity later in life. People who are assigned a sex at birth that does not align with their gender identity are known as transgender or trans. People who are assigned a sex at birth that does align with their gender identity are known as cisgender or cis.

Gender Expression

Gender expression describes how you demonstrate your gender through the ways you act, dress, and interact with the world. Gender expression can change significantly depending on the day or the context. Some people’s gender expression is feminine—using actions and clothes that are traditionally associated with women. Some people’s is masculine—actions and clothes that are traditionally associated with men. Some people’s is androgynous, which describes a mix between femininity and masculinity.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is about who you are attracted to. People who are attracted to people of a different gender are known as straight or heterosexual, while people who are attracted to people of the same gender are known as homosexual, gay, or lesbian. There are also people who are attracted to people of both the same gender and different genders who are known as bisexual and people who are not attracted to anyone who are known as asexual.

Putting It All Together

These four factors are related since they all have to do with gender and sexuality, but they are not directly connected. There are some stereotypes that say otherwise—for example, the idea that

you can tell someone's sexual orientation or gender identity from their gender expression, or the idea that someone's gender identity is determined by their biological sex. However, these stereotypes are not true. It's important not to make assumptions—the only way to truly know someone's gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, or sexual orientation is if they tell you. However, many people consider this information to be private, so don't pressure anyone into sharing.

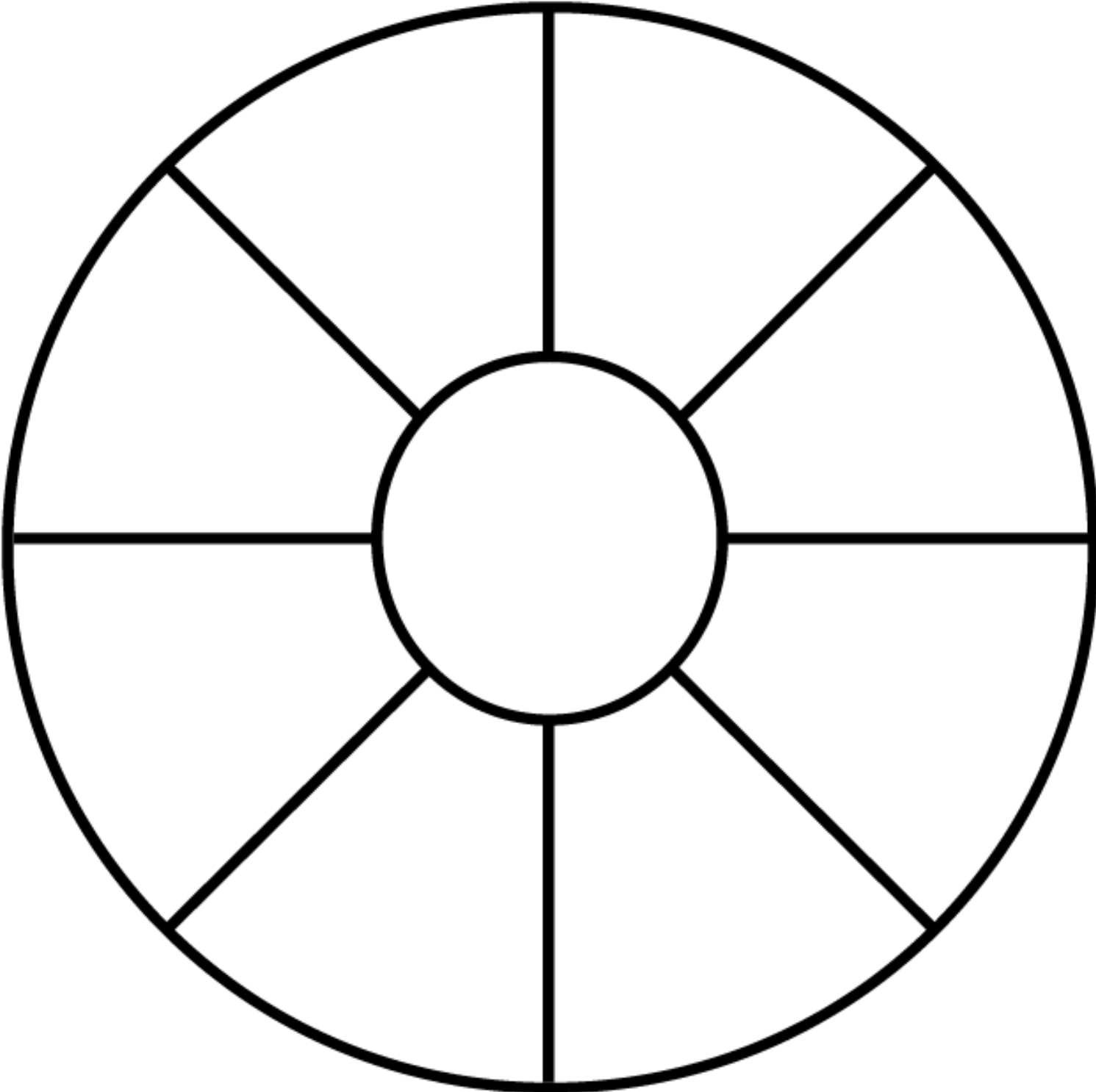
Oral History Activity

Provide students with quotes from the Queer Newark Oral History Project (Appendix 4). Read out loud the excerpts, and after each quote, ask the class to decide which identity category the quote is discussing: identity, sexual orientation, gender presentation, or biological sex. Let students know that since these identities are very personal and can be related, it may be hard to figure out. Emphasize that there may be more than one good answer, so they should provide the reasoning behind their answer in addition to the answer itself. If students are struggling, model the first quote as an example. Allow students to respond verbally or in writing (physically using paper and writing utensils, or online through a site like Mentimeter).

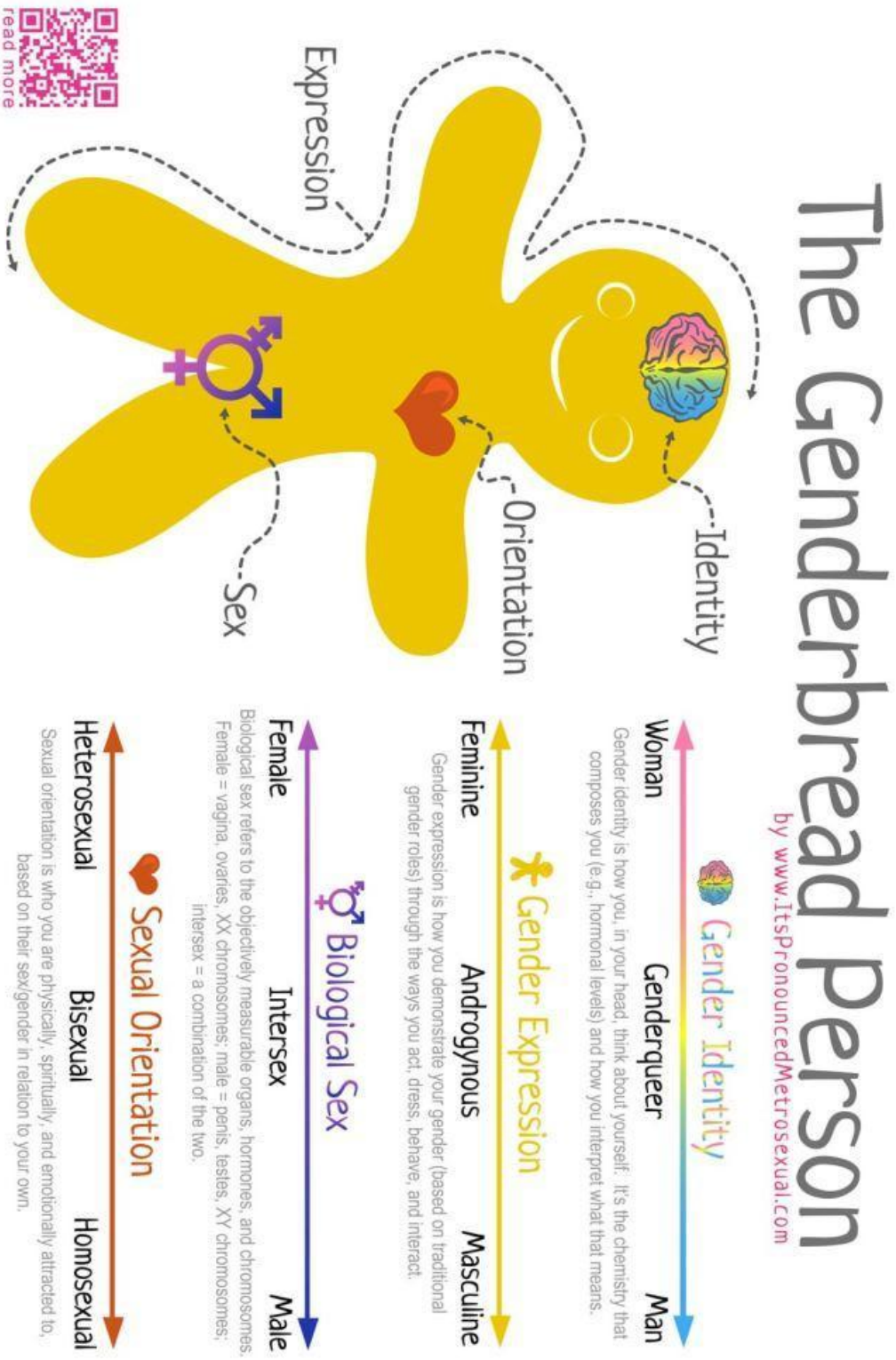
Wrap-Up

To conclude the discussion, talk to the class about the importance of LGBTQ+ acceptance. Ask students if they can find any parts of the oral history excerpts that discuss acceptance, and guide them toward the James Credle quote. Encourage them to think about how they can be accepting of LGBTQ+ people in the classroom and in their daily lives (for example, following the respectful discussion guidelines from the beginning of the class session, using the correct pronouns for everyone, etc.).

Appendix 1: Identity Wheel



Appendix 2: Genderbread Person



Appendix 3: Vocabulary List

Androgynous: having both feminine and masculine qualities

Asexual: people who are not attracted to others

Biological sex: the label assigned to you at birth by a medical professional based on biological factors like your organs, hormones, and chromosomes

Bisexual: people attracted to people of other genders and the same gender

Cisgender/cis: when a person's gender identity does match their biological sex

Feminine: related to qualities or actions traditionally associated with women

Gender expression: how you demonstrate your gender through the ways you act and dress

Gender identity: a word for how you think about your gender

Heterosexual/straight: people attracted to people of other genders

Homosexual/gay/lesbian: people attracted to people of the same gender

Intersex: a label for a person with a combination of biological characteristics traditionally associated with people assigned male at birth and people assigned female at birth.

Masculine: related to qualities or actions traditionally associated with men

Nonbinary/genderqueer/agender: not identifying as a man or woman

Sexual orientation: who you are attracted to

Transgender/trans: when a person's gender identity does not match their biological sex

Appendix 4: Oral History Excerpts

“My gender. Yeah. I mean, basically I definitely identify with being a woman, which is why I never wanted to put myself in any box or sub-category. I love being a woman, but at the same time, I’m not prissy. Whatever that is, that’s who I am. As a kid, I was always sensitive and I wasn’t girly, but I wasn’t a tomboy either. Just always in between.”

- [Burley Tuggle](#)

“Growing up I used to hang out with my sisters and we talked about how cute the captain of the basketball team was and they never said ‘What? Why are you around here talking about that for?’ We never had that kind of conversation. It was sort of natural for them that I would talk or feel that. That is why I say it is kind of interesting when we talk about acceptance they accepted that conversation from me and they never criticized or never called me on it and it was as if it was natural that I would be that way.”

- [James Credle](#)

“I asked myself, ‘Do I truly identify as male?’ I’m just like, ‘I don’t know.’ I don’t think I identify as anything under binary spectrum. I’m like, ‘What identity has this?’ Nonbinary. I actually love bein’ nonbinary...it makes me feel more like I’m me. It’s something I identifies with. I’m just Deion.”

- [Deion Session](#)

Key

Burley Tuggle: gender presentation

James Credle: sexual orientation

Deion Session: biological sex and/or gender identity