

Sexual Orientation, Behavior and Identity: How I Feel, What I Do, and Who I Am

A Lesson Plan from *Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum*

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

NSES ALIGNMENT:

Students will be able to:

ID.12.CC.2 – Distinguish between sexual orientation, sexual behavior and sexual identity.

TARGET GRADE:

Middle School – Lesson 2

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Teacher's Resource: *Yellow Flag Language*
- Projector and screen
- Computer with PowerPoint
- PowerPoint: "*Understanding Sexual Orientation*"
- "*Yellow Flag Language*" chart on butcher paper, prepared as described
- Masking tape
- White board and marker
- "*Sexual Orientation: Myth or Fact?*" worksheet (one per student)
- "*Sexual Orientation: Myth or Fact?*" Answer Key (one per student)
- "Resources for Students about Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation" (one per student)
- **Homework:** "*Who Do I Know?*" (one per student)

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON :

- Prepare and post a sheet of butcher paper with "Yellow Flag Language" on it and a drawing of a yellow flag next to the word "language" on the front board, over to the right side of the board so it isn't the main focus of the lesson. Fold the bottom up and tape it to the top so that students cannot see what is written on it when they come in.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Name at least three different sexual orientations. [Knowledge]
2. Describe the three components of sexual orientation (orientation, behavior and identity) and how they are unique from and connected to each other. [Knowledge]

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him," using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom and should make adjustments accordingly.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Tell students that today's lesson is going to be about sexual orientation. Say, "**There's a lot of discussion in the media right now about sexual orientation – some of which is true, some of which isn't. Today's class is going to look at some of the language around sexual orientation and correct a lot of the misinformation that's out there.**"

Go to your "Yellow Flag Language" chart and take down the bottom half of the paper to reveal what is written there. Ask the class, "**When you see a yellow flag out in the world – like by a construction site – what does that tend to mean?**" Probe for the term or concept of "caution." Say, "**A lot of times people are taught certain language around sexual orientation that is outright offensive or wrong – and other times, there are words that are sometimes okay and sometimes not. So depending on who or where we are, we may need to exercise caution before using them.**"

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As we go along, it's very possible that some of these words or phrases will come up. If I hear one – and if I use one, which I may do as I go through today's lesson – I'm going to walk over here and put that word or phrase up on the list. If you've used a word or phrase and you see me put it up, please know you've done nothing wrong – you've actually helped me teach!" (3 minutes)

STEP 2: Start the “*Understanding Sexual Orientation*” PowerPoint and with the Slide 1 visible, ask, “**Let's start with that term itself – what comes to mind when you hear ‘sexual orientation’?**” Possible answers you might hear include:

- Who you like
- Who you're attracted to
- Who you have sex with
- The first time you have sex
- Your sexual preference*

Write responses on the board. If any yellow flag language words (marked with an asterisk*) are shared, walk over to the “Yellow Flag Language” chart and record them there. Tell the class you'll come back to these terms later.

Go to Slide 2 and read the definition there. Say, “**Two things should stand out to you about this definition – what do you think they are?**” After eliciting a few responses, go to Slide 3 and point out the two key points about the definition: that people can be attracted to more than one sex or gender, and that it's about who you love – so you can know what your sexual orientation is even if you've never had sex or been in a relationship before. Explain that if you're in between relationships you don't stop being the orientation you are.

Ask, “**What names do we have for various categories of sexual orientation? For example, if someone is attracted only to people of a different sex, what might that person call themselves?**” (Probe for “heterosexual.” Chances are, you will hear “straight.” Be sure to say, “Straight – or heterosexual” as you put “straight” up on the yellow flag language list). Ask for other ideas, which may include:

- Straight*
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Homosexual*
- Bi or Bisexual
- Queer*
- Pansexual
- Asexual

***Note to the Teacher:** The last three may not come up at all, and it's up to you as to whether you wish to explain them to your students. Some classes will need very basic information, while others may know a bit more or be a bit more knowledgeable and/or mature and thus be able to discuss the last two or three terms.*

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Once the list is up, go to Slide 4 and ask students what they think each term means. Probe for:

- **Heterosexual** – Someone who is only attracted to people of a different gender
- **Lesbian** or **gay** – Someone who is only attracted to someone of their same gender
- **Bisexual** – Someone who may be attracted to people of their own gender AND to people of a different gender.

Note to the Teacher: If you choose to describe “pansexual” or if a student has used that term, this would be the time to explain what it means – that bisexual technically means “two” and pansexual means “many.” So people who are attracted to more than two genders – including transgender individuals – may use the term “pansexual” rather than “bisexual.”

- **Queer*** – This term can be used in a number of positive ways: Someone may feel like the other categories are too restrictive and don’t describe them accurately, or someone may wish to take back the negative meaning of the word and use it as a positive way of describing who they are. (Students often struggle with this term due to its prior negative use.)
- **Asexual** – If this term comes up, you would define it as someone who does not have feelings of sexual attraction. An asexual person can still fall in love with and be in romantic relationships with other people, but these relationships do not include a sexual relationship.

Note to the Teacher: Some students will add in “transgender,” mostly because they have seen the acronym “LGBT.” Be sure to tell them that being transgender is not about sexual orientation or who we are attracted to, but it is about how we understand our gender. For instance, a transgender male also has a sexual orientation; he can identify as straight, gay, bisexual, queer, etc.

(12 minutes)

STEP 3: Go through Slides 5–8 to explain the concepts of Orientation, Behavior, and Identity. Then continue through Slides 9–16 to discuss the examples.

*Note to the Teacher: In the examples provided on the PowerPoint, students will be asked to describe how they think a student identifies based on the examples given. If you ask, “**How does this person identify?**” and a student says, “Confused!” it will be important to stop and talk about that so that all students feel safe and accepted. A helpful response might be, “**Actually, that person isn’t confused – someone who doesn’t feel the same way might be because it’s not them. But people feel the way they feel – it’s not anyone else’s right to label or judge others.**”*

Ask for reactions and questions from the students (there may be a lot!). Students may also be very quiet—this is a lot of information—and it may confuse or overwhelm others.
(10 minutes)

STEP 4: Say, “**There’s a lot of talk in the media about people of all different sexual orientations. Some of it is true, and a lot of it is incorrect. Let’s do an activity now to take a look at some accurate information about sexual orientation and identity.**”

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Distribute the “*Sexual Orientation: Myth or Fact?*” worksheet to each person. Tell them they have about 5 minutes in which to complete it individually.

After about 5 minutes, call time and ask them to pair up with someone sitting nearby to compare their answers. If there are questions where their answers don’t match, ask them to circle them to discuss in the larger group. (7 minutes)

STEP 5: Using the “*Sexual Orientation: Myth or Fact?*” Answer Key, go through each question, asking different students to volunteer their answers. Have the class follow along and correct any they may have gotten incorrect. (13 minutes)

STEP 6: Say, “*Before we finish up, I want to come back to this Yellow Flag Language list here on the board.*” Go through each of the terms that are up there, supplementing as necessary from the Teacher’s Resource: *Yellow Flag Language*. Once you have gone through them all, ask if there are any other terms students have heard and if so, add them to the list and talk about why they should be used with caution.

Note to the Teacher: *Students may use derogatory terms here, such as “faggot” or “dyke” or “homo.” If any of these are used, be sure to explain that they are red flag words, not yellow flag words, and should never be used because they are offensive.*

Distribute the “Resources for Students about Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation” handout. Distribute and explain the “*Who Do I Know?*” homework assignment. Ask students to hand it in during the next class session. (5 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The content provision of the lesson is designed to be an interactive lecture. As such, the contributions of the class and responses to probing questions will be used by the teacher to ensure they have achieved Learning Objectives 1 and 2.

HOMEWORK:

“*Who Do I Know?*” homework sheet.

Note: The Orientation, Behavior, and Identity concept has been used by many sexuality educators over the years and is not an original concept to this curriculum. Original author of framing orientation in this way is unknown.

Teacher's Guide: *Yellow Flag Language*

The following is a guide to some of the terms relating to sexual orientation that belong on the yellow flag list and therefore should be used with caution. If some or none of these are used by the students in class, be sure to add them to the list yourself and explain them to the class.

YELLOW FLAG TERM	RECOMMENDED TERM	REASON(S)
Homosexual	Gay or Lesbian	<p>“Homosexual” was used as a mental health diagnosis until the early 1980s when it was no longer seen as a mental disorder by the American Psychological Association.</p> <p>Today, “homosexual” is often shortened to “homo,” which is used as an insult to people who are or are perceived to be gay (or to heterosexual people to mean they are stupid, like “that’s so gay”).</p> <p>Yet, it is also an accurate category of sexual orientation that some people still use. If someone identifies as “homosexual,” someone else can’t say “you can’t use that term.” It’s their right to use whatever term feels right to them.</p>
Straight	Heterosexual	<p>The opposite of “straight” is “bent” or “crooked.” This can imply that there is something wrong with someone who is not heterosexual.</p>
Sexual Preference	Sexual Orientation	<p>“Preference” is a term that’s used only about non-heterosexual orientations. It is intended to minimize those who are anything other than heterosexual by implying that their orientation is simply something they prefer rather than who they are.</p> <p>This is a “yellow flag” term because bisexual and pansexual people may say, “I am attracted to people of all genders, but I tend to prefer being in relationships with _____.” In this case, the use of the word “preference” is correct.</p>

Teacher's Guide: *Yellow Flag Language*

YELLOW FLAG TERM	RECOMMENDED TERM	REASON(S)
Choice	It depends on: Orientation Behavior Identity	<p>Implying that a person's orientation is a choice is offensive. Heterosexual people do not choose to be heterosexual, it's who they are. Similarly, lesbian, gay, bisexual and other people do not choose to be their orientation, they are who they are.</p> <p>People do not choose their orientation (their feelings of attraction). They DO, however, choose how, whether, and with whom they act on their feelings (behavior). They also choose what to call themselves (identity). This is why "choice" is a cautionary word and depends on how it is used.</p>
Sexual Lifestyle or Gay Lifestyle	Sexual Orientation	<p>"Lifestyle" refers to the manner in which a person lives their life. There is no such thing as one heterosexual lifestyle. Heterosexual people live very diverse lives. They have all different kinds of jobs. They are in short- and long-term relationships, they marry, they divorce, they have children, they travel, etc.</p> <p>Lesbian, gay, bisexual and other people also lead very diverse lives. They have all different kinds of jobs. They are in short- and long-term relationships, they marry, they divorce, they have children, they travel, etc.</p> <p>"Lifestyle" or "gay lifestyle" is a term used to make heterosexual people feel afraid of and disgusted by non-heterosexual people by creating stereotypes about how they live. When someone is depicted as different and less than human, it is easier to discriminate against them. Therefore, sexual orientation is always preferred over these terms.</p>
Queer	Queer, if...	<p>Many people who belong to social or power minority groups will sometimes use offensive terms among themselves in order to defuse the negative power of these words. Many lesbian, gay, bisexual and other people identify as "queer" and many do not. Some will call each other "fags" and "dykes," which we consider to be red flag words. This will be confusing to heterosexual people who don't understand why it is offensive when they do the same.</p> <p>As a general rule, it is best to use lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual. Do not use "queer" or any other term unless a person tells you that that is how they prefer to be identified.</p>

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: MYTH OR FACT?

Name _____ Date _____

Instructions: Decide whether each of the statements is a myth or a fact and circle the corresponding response.

1. You can tell whether someone is heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual by the way they look or act.

MYTH

FACT

2. Most people know what their sexual orientation is by the time they are 13 years old.

MYTH

FACT

3. The way parents raise their children determines whether a child is heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual.

MYTH

FACT

4. If you try really hard, you can change your sexual orientation—regardless of whether you are heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual.

MYTH

FACT

5. In a same-sex relationship, one person always plays a “male” or “butch” role, and the other always plays a “female” or “femme” role.

MYTH

FACT

6. The majority of people in the world with HIV or AIDS are gay men.

MYTH

FACT

7. With the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court Decision on marriage equality, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people now have all the same legal rights as heterosexual people.

MYTH

FACT

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: MYTH OR FACT?

Answer Key

1. You can tell whether someone is heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual by the way they look or act.

MYTH

The answer here is actually “not necessarily.” Sometimes a person will act in a way that fulfills stereotypes about a heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual person. But people act, speak, and dress in all different ways, regardless of their sexual orientation. They have many different kinds of families, jobs, and interests. So while someone may guess correctly that a person is a particular sexual orientation, they could guess the same about someone with similar characteristics and be completely wrong. When in doubt, ask—or better yet, wait for them to share with you who they are. We all have a right to decide when we want to share personal information about ourselves with others.

2. Most people know what their sexual orientation is by the time they are 13 years old.

MYTH

It's different for everyone. Some people know their sexual orientation from a very young age. Many children who do not end up identifying as heterosexual say they had a sense of being “different” growing up, but they didn't necessarily have the language to articulate it. Others are sure they are one orientation, and then they come to discover later that they are something different. Still others know very well what orientation they are but act in ways that will enable them to conceal it. This is particularly risky when it comes to safer sexual behaviors; for example, if someone were to get pregnant or get someone pregnant in order to hide that they are not heterosexual.

3. The way parents raise their children determines whether a child is heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual.

MYTH

The vast majority of lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, and other people were raised by heterosexual parents or caregivers. Similarly, there are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other parents and caregivers who raise heterosexual children. A parent or caregiver does not determine a child's orientation by how they behave with their child, by their own orientation, or by the activities their children do at home or out in the world. (For example, playing with dolls does not “make” a boy gay—he may be and he may not be, but his orientation was already determined before he started playing with dolls.)

4. If you try really hard, you can change your sexual orientation—regardless of whether you are heterosexual, lesbian or gay, or bisexual.

MYTH

Nope. You can change your BEHAVIORS, you can change your IDENTITY—but you can't

change your ORIENTATION or how you feel. Feelings of attraction are discovered, not chosen. Sexual or attraction orientation isn't something a person can turn on and off like a light switch. We don't choose who we are attracted to. Sometimes we can discover new feelings of attraction—for example, always being attracted to one gender and then finding someone or others of a different gender attractive later in life. That is different from sitting down and trying to change the way you feel—or from going to therapy or to church to try to influence your feelings. That does not work and can end up doing real psychological or emotional harm.

5. In a same-sex relationship, one person always plays a “male” or “butch” role, and the other always plays a “female” or “femme” role.

MYTH

Like in question number one, this is also a “not necessarily” answer. Most societies are stuck in a binary gender perspective—meaning that there needs to be a man figure and a woman figure in a relationship for it to work. As a result, people will look to a stereotypically “masculine” person to fulfill the “male” role in a same-gender relationship and a “feminine” person to fulfill the “female” role. In some relationships people do express characteristics that may be judged by some to be either “masculine” or “feminine”, but gender doesn't necessarily determine this. For example, in a different-gender relationship, a female partner may support the family financially while her male partner is a stay-at-home dad and raises the children. In a lesbian or gay relationship, one partner may make more money and the other may stay home and raise children. It is circumstance that causes these decisions to be made, not the desire to “be like a man” or “be like a woman.”

6. The majority of people in the world with HIV or AIDS are gay men.

MYTH

Approximately 37 million people around the world are living with HIV or AIDS. Women and children make up about half of those cases, and men make up the rest. The vast majority of people living with HIV around the world are women who contracted HIV from a male partner. Also, keep in mind that many people have same-sex behaviors but do not identify as gay or lesbian.

7. With the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court Decision on marriage equality, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people now have all the same legal rights as heterosexual people.

MYTH

The U.S. Supreme Court decision granting the right for same-sex couples to marry throughout the United States only applies to the right to legally marry. In many states, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people can still be discriminated against in the workplace, in housing situations, and in medical settings. The right to marry was huge decision relating to equal rights, but there is much work left to do to eliminate prejudice and stigma for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS ABOUT GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

WEBSITES

thetrevorproject.org

genderspectrum.org

gsanetwork.org/ca

glsen.org

HOTLINES

1-866-488-7386 - Trevor Project

(510) 788-4412 - Gender Spectrum

(415) 552-4229 - GSA Network-CA

Who Do I Know?
Homework (Lesson 8-2)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: Please complete the questions below, using people in your own life or people you have seen in the media, whose sexual orientations you know and who represent more than one of the orientations we discussed in class (also listed below). What have you learned from these people about what it is like to be their sexual orientation?

1). Name: _____

How You Know Them: _____

Are they: Heterosexual Lesbian Gay Bisexual Queer

Other: _____

What is one thing you learned about being that orientation from this person?

1). Name: _____

How You Know Them: _____

Are they: Heterosexual Lesbian Gay Bisexual Queer

Other: _____

What is one thing you learned about being that orientation from this person?

1). Name: _____

How You Know Them: _____

Are they: Heterosexual Lesbian Gay Bisexual Queer

Other: _____

What is one thing you learned about being that orientation from this person?
