

Lesson Plan – What is A Family?



(based on content from [the Gender Spectrum: What Educators Need to Know](#))

Overview: This lesson explores the diverse types of family that exist in society. The interactive activity teaches students that all families are special, express love and support their family members in similar ways to others families and are of equal importance and value within society. The lesson can be followed by a book/lesson featuring same-sex parents.

Curriculum Connections: Social Studies – K/1 and Physical Health Education – K/1

Big Ideas:

- Our communities are diverse and made of individuals who have a lot in common (SS K)
- Healthy communities recognize and respect the diversity of individuals (SS 1)
- Learning about ourselves and others helps us develop a positive attitude and caring behaviours, which helps us build healthy relationships (PHE K/1)

Curricular Competencies:

- Explore different perspectives on people, places, issues, or events in their lives (SS 1)
- Develop and demonstrate respectful behaviour when participating in activities with others (PHE K/1)
- Identify caring behaviours among classmates and within families (PHE K/1)

Content:

- Ways in which individuals and families differ and are the same. Sample topic: Same-sex families (SS K)
- Caring behaviours in groups and families (PHE K/1)

Core Competencies:

- Communication – Acquire, interpret and present information (includes inquiries)
- Creative Thinking – Generating ideas
- Critical Thinking – Analyze and critique
- Personal and Cultural Identity – Relationships and cultural contexts
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility – Self-determination
- Social Responsibility – Valuing Diversity

First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story
- Learning requires exploration of one’s identity

Teaching Strategies and Questions

Ask students “Who’s in a family?” Record their ideas on chart paper along with key words and picture symbols (i.e. people’s heads) so that non-readers can tell who is who. Be careful not to draw girls and boys in gender stereotypical ways (i.e. stick figures with skirts or pants) or using gendered colours (i.e. pink and blue). Instead you could use letters with the stick figures, ie. F=Father, M=Mother, etc

Prior to reading about diverse families, ask students to listen and watch for the different kinds of families they see within the book, and how these families are like theirs. Emphasize that while there are many ways that families are different, there are even more ways that families are the same. The most important is that families love each other.

Recommended Books for Teaching Family Diversity:

The Family Book by Todd Parr – Short, colourful and whimsical

Who’s in A Family? by Robert Skutch and Laura Nienhaus – Introduces a wide range of families described as “the people who love you the most”.

All Families are Special by Norma Simon and Teresa Flavin – Students tell their teacher about their many different kinds of families.

Families by Shelly Rotner and Sheila Reynolds – Family diversity depicted through simple text and photographs.

The Great Big Book of Families by Mary Hoffman – Discusses different families, homes, celebrations, etc.

After reading, show students a chart with different kinds of families on it (you may need to refer back to specific pages in the books)

- Adoptive Parents
- Foster Parents
- Families with Step Parents
- Couples without Children
- Extended Families
- Same Ethnicity Families
- Multi-Ethnic Families
- Gay and Lesbian (Two Dads or Two Moms) Parented Families
- Single Parent Families

Ask students to take turns using a pointer and being “the teacher” to point out where their own family may fit. Some students may identify with multiple categories, which can reinforce that “identity” includes several different parts of who they are. Help those who might be challenged to identify their own family. (Make sure you know the families of all students well before you teach this lesson).

When you mention gay and lesbian parented families, some children may giggle or think that these are bad words. Take this teachable moment to let students know that these are the proper words to describe people who fall in love with someone of the same gender. “Gay” is usually used to describe two men, but can be used for two women also. “Lesbian” is only used for two women who fall in love. It’s not OK to use these words in a mean way, or to tease someone.

On another day, you may wish to read a second family diversity story and see if the students can pick out the different kinds of families and match them to the ones on the chart. Return to your chart throughout the unit to re-teach the names of the different kinds of families.

Assessment

- Use the final page of “Who’s in a Family?” which depicts all the families (without words) and ask students individually to point to different kinds of families as you verbally prompt them with questions i.e. Can you find the single parent family? Can you point to the family with two moms? Where is the multi-ethnic family?
- Use formative assessment strategies to have students brainstorm how families are the same and differ using a T-Chart and scribing their ideas within small groups or as a class.

Recommended Videos for Teaching Family Diversity:

Our Family: A film about family diversity – 2016, Not in Our School - www.niot.org/nios (7:31) – Prim/Int

This upbeat and touching video allows children to see and appreciate their own families, and to learn about those who are different from themselves. All kinds of families are featured and a teacher’s guide is also available.

That’s a Family! – 2000, New Day Films – www.newday.com (Trailer 3:21, Film 35min) - Prim/Int
That’s a Family! stretches the minds and touches the hearts of people of all ages. Children from over 50 diverse families open the door to their homes, and explain things like divorce, mixed race, gay and lesbian, adoption, single parent, and guardian, letting us know what they wish others would understand about their families. This film also comes with an extensive Discussion and Teaching

Guide.

Possible Extensions

Homophobia is still a problem in society. As such, this unit on families is a terrific opportunity to do another lesson and read a book about same-sex parents. Because it is based on a true story and features a student favourite (penguins) we recommend a lesson featured on TEACH BC using:

- ***And Tango Makes Three*** by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell – Heart-warming true story of two male penguins who yearn to have a family.

Another option is the book, ***ABC - A Family Alphabet Book*** by Bobbie Combs and the following activity can help extend this conversation.

- Prior to reading, brainstorm all the activities your students do with their own parents and guardians on a T-chart. Add picture symbols to the words you scribe on the chart.
- Read the story and ask students to watch for other activities that families do together.
- After reading, add additional ideas to the chart from the story based upon student responses.

Other titles to extend the conversation about same-sex parents:

- ***Stella Brings the Family*** by Miriam B. Schiffer and Holly Clifton-Brown - Stella has two dads and no mom to invite for Mother's Day. What will she do?
- ***Donovan's Big Day*** by Leslea Newman and Mike Dutton – Donovan prepares to be the ring bearer when Mommy and Mama get married!
- ***Daddy, Papa, and Me*** by Leslea Newman and Carol Thompson – Board book showing loving family activities in a two-dad family.
- ***Mommy, Mama, and Me*** by Leslea Newman and Carol Thompson - Board book showing loving family activities in a two-mom family.