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# CAITLYN JENNER AND THE POWER OF COMING OUT

Caitlyn Jenner has been in the news because she was recently interviewed on ABC's *20/20* news program and came out as transgender; more than 16.8 million people tuned in to hear her story. Caitlyn Jenner's fame spans several generations: she was an Olympic athlete in the 1970s where she won the decathlon, Jenner has been in several television programs and she's also known by many people because of her marriage to Kris Kardashian Jenner and her participation on the reality show, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, for eight seasons. Now that Caitlyn Jenner has told her story, she has become the most famous openly transgender person in America.

As a country, we have engaged in discussions and actions on LGBT issues for several decades and progress has been made. However, the "T" in LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) has received much less attention until very recently. Moreover, transgender people continue to face higher rates of bullying, discrimination, ridicule, harassment, violence and even murder. [Research](#) indicates that heterosexual people who know they have gay and lesbian friends and family members have more positive attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals and related issues like marriage equality. If it is true that knowing someone gay or lesbian has contributed to the personal and political progress our country has made, that should hold true for transgender awareness also.

This high school lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about Caitlyn Jenner's experiences, reflect on what it means to "come out" and explore the impact of coming out on the individual, others, policies and society as a whole.

See these additional ADL resources: [Discussing Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity and Issues](#) (Suggestions and Resources for K-12 teachers), *CEC* lesson "[Transgender Identity and Issues](#)," *Curriculum Connections* "[Unheard Voices: Stories of LGBT History](#)" and [ADL and the LGBT Community](#).

**[NOTE TO TEACHER:** In preparation for this lesson and to ensure a safe and constructive dialogue, see [Establishing a Safe Learning Environment](#) for guidelines on building safe forums for discussing sensitive issues. It is important to reflect on and consider that you may have students in your classroom who are LGBTQ or whose parents are LGBTQ and it is critical to be sensitive to that and prepared. Further, it is possible that if the student has not shared this previously, she or he may disclose it during the course of the lesson. That information should only come from the student directly. Be aware that young people do not always feel comfortable sharing this information with their friends and family, so do not assume that everyone in the young person's life knows this aspect of their identity.

This lesson plan was originally written after the Diane Sawyer interview in April 2015 in which Bruce Jenner came out as transgender. On June 1, 2015, Caitlyn Jenner introduced herself and her new name to the world through a *Vanity Fair* magazine cover titled "Call Me Caitlyn," which will appear in the upcoming

July issue and an interview with Friday Night Lights author Buzz Bissinger. On coming out, she told Bissinger, “If I was lying on my deathbed and I had kept this secret and never ever did anything about it, I would be lying there saying, ‘You just blew your entire life.’” In her debut tweet, she posted: “I’m so happy after such a long struggle to be living my true self. Welcome to the world Caitlyn. Can’t wait for you to get to know her/me.”]

**Grade Level:** grades 9–12

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Common Core Anchor Standards:** Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will learn more about Caitlyn Jenner, her experiences as a transgender individual and her process for coming out.
- Students will explore what it means to come out and its potential impact on individuals, policy and the larger society.
- Students will reflect on the coming out processes of other famous people.

**Material:**

- *Bruce Jenner’s ABC Interview with Diane Sawyer* video clip (one minute, CNN, <http://money.cnn.com/2015/04/24/media/bruce-jenner-interview-diane-sawyer/>)
- [Caitlyn Jenner Quotes](#) (cut into strips in advance, one quote per small group of 3–4 students)
- “Why NBA center Jason Collins is coming out now” (*Sports Illustrated*, April 29, 2013, [www.si.com/more-sports/2013/04/29/jason-collins-gay-nba-player](http://www.si.com/more-sports/2013/04/29/jason-collins-gay-nba-player)), one copy for each student
- “Anderson Cooper: “The Fact Is, I’m Gay” (The Dish blog, July 2, 2012, <http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2012/07/02/anderson-cooper-the-fact-is-im-gay/>), one copy for each student

**Vocabulary:**

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL’s [Glossary of Education Terms](#) and [Terminology Related to Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity](#).)

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|------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| • coming out     | • gender identity | • policy       | • marriage equality  |
| • confront       | • identity        | • prejudice    | • segregation        |
| • decathlon      | • inclusion       | • psychologist | • self-discovery     |
| • discrimination | • judgment        | • publicly     | • sexual orientation |
| • equality       | • LGBTQ           | • repealed     | • transgender        |

**WHO IS CAITLYN JENNER?**

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *Who is Caitlyn Jenner? Why has she been in the news lately?* Depending on what students say, explain that Caitlyn Jenner has been in the news recently because she was interviewed on ABC’s *20/20* and came out as transgender. Explain that when the interview took place, Jenner referred to herself as Bruce and used male pronouns but has since come out as Caitlyn

Jenner. Caitlyn Jenner is well known and her fame spans several generations: she was an Olympic athlete in the 1970s where she won the decathlon and she's also known by many people because of her marriage to Kris Kardashian Jenner and participation on the reality show, *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, for eight seasons. Ask students: *Did anyone watch Caitlyn Jenner's interview or parts of it? If so, what are your thoughts and observations?*

2. Ask students: *What does it mean to be transgender?* Allow some sharing and discussion and then define **transgender** as:

*An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth and/or whose gender expression does not match society's expectations with regard to gender roles. The term may include identities such as: transsexual, gender queer, gender nonconforming, FTM, MTF, and gender-variant. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically. (See [Terminology Related to Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity](#) for explanation of additional terms included here.)*

You may want to have this definition ready on chart paper or smartboard in advance and have students copy it down.

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**NOTE:** It is important to share with students that this is Caitlyn Jenner's own story and her decisions about name, gender, pronouns, hormones, surgery, etc. are uniquely hers. Explain that there is no one set of ways to come out and transition.

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3. If you are able to show video, show this one minute video clip of a few brief quotes from "[Bruce Jenner's ABC Interview with Diane Sawyer](#)."
4. Divide the class into small groups of 3–4 students each. Distribute one quote to each small group from the list of [Caitlyn Jenner Quotes](#). Explain that each small group is going to read a Jenner quote from the interview and discuss it among their group. Instruct students to complete the following tasks in their group:
  - a. Read the quote out loud.
  - b. Discuss what the quote means in your own words. Take notes on this.
  - c. Discuss what connections you can make to the quote in a general way (not necessarily about being transgender). Take notes on this.

Give students 10 minutes for their small group discussions.

5. Reconvene the whole class and have each small group share their quote and the outcome of their discussion. Then, engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:

- Why do you think Caitlyn Jenner decided to come out?
- From the quotes, what did you learn about Caitlyn Jenner and being transgender?
- What impact will Jenner's public disclosure have on her as a person?
- What impact do you think Jenner's interview will have on other people?
- What impact does Jenner hope her interview will have on society as a whole?
- Do you know of other famous people or TV/movie characters who are transgender? (e.g. Laverne Cox and her character Sophia on *Orange is the New Black*; Jazz Jennings, the characters of Coach

Beiste and Unique Adams from *Glee*; the character of Cole on *The Fosters*; Janet Mock, the character of Brandon Teena from *Boys Don't Cry*; the character of Maura Pfefferman from *Transparent*).

- What do you think Jenner means when she says “we can save some lives here?”

**COMING OUT**

1. Ask students: When someone says they are “coming out” or “coming out of the closet,” what does that mean? Record their responses and then define coming out as:

*To be “in the closet” means to not share a part of one’s identity. Some LGBTQ people choose to disclose that part of their identity in some situations (to be “out”) and not in others (to be “closeted”). To “come out” is to publicly declare one’s identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. Coming out is a lifelong process.\* In each situation, a person must decide where they are at that point in time with their identity. In each new situation, a person must decide whether or not to come out.*

*\*Note that for transgender people, coming out is not necessarily a “lifelong process” and it is not necessarily relevant that they come out at different points in their lives. For example, a transgender man is a man and may never need to disclose that information or may only need to in certain very specific situations (e.g. for healthcare purposes) when relevant.*

2. Explain to students that the term “coming out” is most often used around LGBTQ identity, but it has also been used for other aspects of a person’s identity. Ask: *Can you think of other aspects of identity that you sometimes share and other times don’t?* (e.g. being undocumented, racial identity, religion etc.)
3. Ask students to silently think about people they may know—either personally, famous people or TV/movie characters—who are LGBTQ and reflect on whether they “came out” and how. Have students reflect on that and ask: *Why is coming out significant? Do heterosexual people come out? How so? What is the potential impact (both positive and negative) of coming out on the person coming out, others, society, policies and laws?*
4. Ask students if they can name any famous people who have come out. Examples may include: Ellen Page, Ellen DeGeneres, Anderson Cooper, Michael Sam, Robin Roberts, Raven Symone, Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Frank Ocean, Don Lemon, Wanda Sykes, Adam Lambert, Clay Aiken, Neil Patrick Harris, Rosie O’Donnell, Ricky Martin, Jason Collins.

Ask: *What impact is there when famous people or celebrities come out publicly?*

5. Ask students: *What is positive about coming out, either personally (to family and friends) or publicly as Caitlyn Jenner did? What are some reasons why people decide to come out?* Brainstorm a list on a T-chart (see below).

Then ask: *What is potentially negative about coming out? Why do you think some people choose not to come out?* Record the student responses on the T-chart.

Positives/Pros of Coming Out	Negatives/Cons of Coming Out
Can be honest about who I am	Possible rejection

6. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - Was it more difficult to come up with pros or cons?
  - What do you notice about the chart?

- What can we do to change the negatives?
- What should people keep in mind in deciding to come out?
- Has your opinion about coming out shifted and if so, how?

## READING ACTIVITY

1. Ask students: *Do you know who Jason Collins is?* If students do not know, explain that Jason Collins is a professional basketball player who came out as gay publicly in 2013. Ask: *Do you know who Anderson Cooper is?* Explain that Anderson Cooper is a CNN news reporter who came out publicly in 2012. Distribute a copy of "[Why NBA center Jason Collins is coming out now](#)" or "[Anderson Cooper: 'The Fact Is, I'm Gay'](#)" (or distribute one article to half the students and the other article to the other half) and give students 10 minutes to read their article silently (or give it to them the night before for homework).
2. When students are done reading the article, engage them in a discussion by asking:
  - Why did Jason Collins (or Anderson Cooper) come out?
  - What was his process for coming out?
  - What is the difference between coming out privately to family and friends and coming out publicly to everyone?
  - What do you think is the impact of coming out?
  - What are some "unintended outcomes" of not coming out, especially when you are a public figure?
  - What is the difference between coming out and being "outed?"
  - How does this relate to Caitlyn Jenner's story?
  - Do you think if people knew more transgender people, there would be change? How so?

## WRITING ACTIVITY

1. For homework, have students write a 3–5 paragraph essay that responds to one of the following questions. They should reflect on the class discussion, readings and do additional research and reading if necessary.
  - How does coming out change individuals and society?
  - What should people, who are considering coming out, think about and prepare for?
  - Do famous people like Caitlyn Jenner and others have a responsibility to come out? Why or why not?
2. After students have completed the writing assignment, have some students share their essays with the class.

## ADDITIONAL READING

- [A Survey of LGBT Americans](#) (Pew Research Center, June 13, 2013)

- [Bruce Jenner: ‘For All Intents and Purposes, I’m a Woman’](#) (ABC News)
- [Bruce Jenner Isn’t a Teacher, But We Are](#) (Crawling Out of the Classroom blog, April 26, 2015)
- [Bruce Jenner’s Teachable Moment on Being Transgender](#) (*The Washington Post*, April 27, 2015)
- [Coming Out: A Guide for Youth and Their Allies](#) (GLSEN, Buffalo)
- [Coming Out Can Reduce Sexual Prejudice](#)
- [List of transgender characters in film and television](#) (Wikipedia)
- [LGBT Adults Have Better Self Esteem, Less Depression If They Came Out In School: Study](#) (*The Huffington Post*, February 10, 2015)
- [The 2013 National School Climate Survey: Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth In Our Nation’s Schools](#) (GLSEN, 2013)
- [The One Big Problem with Diane Sawyer’s Interview with Bruce Jenner](#)
- [Time to Talk About the T in LGBT](#) (*The Washington Post*, June 2, 2014)

## COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Standard 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to building knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Writing
Standard 2: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Standard 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

## CAITLYN JENNER QUOTES

My brain is much more female than it is male. It is hard for people to understand that but that is what my soul is.

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I look at women all the time and think how lucky are they that they can wake in the morning and be themselves.

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When you deal with this issue, you don't fit in.

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What I'm doing is going to do some good. We're going to change the world. We're going to make a difference in the world with what we're doing.

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I was running away from who I was.

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I would like to work with this community to get this message out. They know a lot more than I know. I am not a spokesman for this community. I believe we can save some lives here.

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I'm saying goodbye to people's perception of me and who I am. But I'm not saying goodbye to me. This has always been me. [When you think of me], please be open-minded. I'm not this bad person. I'm just doing what I have to do.

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There are two different things here. Sexuality is who you are personally attracted to. Gender identity is who you are as person and your soul, who you identify with inside.