

No Place for Hate[®] Activity Library

Beneath the Surface: Exploring Identity Through Books and Ourselves

Lesson Plan and Overview

Identity is not a single story; it is layered, complex, and deeply personal, and the way young people come to understand their own identity is shaped by the Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors that they encounter in the books they read. When students see themselves reflected in a character's internal and external traits, they build confidence, self-worth and a vocabulary for articulating who they are. When students encounter characters whose identities differ from their own, they build empathy, curiosity and a foundation for respecting difference rather than fearing it. Through this lesson, students will learn that identity deserves careful, thoughtful attention, that it is made up of both what is visible on the outside and what is felt on the inside, and that understanding themselves and understanding others are not separate skills but two sides of the same essential practice.

Grade Level

Grades K-5

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Apply the See, Think, Wonder protocol to make observations, draw conclusions, and generate questions about a piece of literature.
- Identify and articulate their own internal and external identity traits using words or images.
- Explain why encountering characters both similar to and different from themselves in books is valuable for building empathy and self-understanding.

Materials Needed

- A picture book about identity. (We would recommend a book like: [Osnat and Her Dove](#) by Sigal Samuel and Vali Mintzi or [Shoham's Bangle](#) by Sarah Sassoon)
- Handouts:
 - [Character Close-Up](#)
 - [Inside & Out](#)

Words You Might Use

Identity: The qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.

Core Activity

- Begin with a book about identity. (We would recommend a book like: [Osnat and Her Dove](#) by Sigal Samuel and Vali Mintzi or [Shoham's Bangle](#) by Sarah Sassoon)
 - Using a See, Think, Wonder protocol, have students reflect on what they noticed in the book, what they learned or thought about from the book and what they wonder after reading the book.
- Transition by asking students what stood out to them about the main character. (Capture student responses on the board or chart paper).
 - For example, for the book [Osnat and Her Dove](#), students might notice about Osnat:
 - She loves to learn.
 - She loves animals.
 - She is respected.
 - She is important in her community.
 - She can heal animals.
 - Religion and learning are important to her.
- Have students create a character identity analysis using the [Character Close-Up handout](#).
 - For grades K-2: Students should illustrate the character with things that they learned from the book and the transition discussion.
 - For grades 3-5: Students should note a minimum of 3 internal characteristics and 3 external characteristics. Remind students of the brainstorming they did as a class.
 - **If time is an issue, have students complete this in small groups or as a full class.
 - **If time permits, have students share their handouts with the class OR display them in the classroom or hallway.
- Inside & Out
 - Once students have analyzed the character from the book that they read, explain that it is now time to think about themselves and their own identities. Distribute the [Inside & Out handouts](#)—1 for each student.
 - For grades K-2: Have students fill their Inside & Out handout in with images that depict who they are, remind them of the images they came up with based on the character in the book they read.
 - For grades 3-5: Have students fill their Inside & Out handout in with words that describe who they are. Instruct students to fill in at least 3 internal traits and 3 external traits.
 - **If time allows, have students share their Inside & Out handouts with the class. Consider displaying them in the hallways or classroom.

Core Activity (Continued)

- **Closing Discussion/Reflection:**
 - Close the lesson by engaging students in a conversation using questions like:
 - Why do you think it's important to read books with characters who are different from you? What can these books teach us?
 - Why do you think it's important to read books with characters who are like you? How does it feel when you see yourself reflected in books?
 - What steps can we take to make sure we read books that teach us about those who are different from us AND books that reflect our identities in school?

Student Leadership Suggestions

How can students in grades 3-5 take more leadership during this lesson?

- **Discussion Facilitators:** Pair a student leader with each small group during the See, Think, Wonder conversation, having them prompt their group with the sentence starters ("I see..." "I think..." "I wonder...") and gently draw out quieter voices before the whole-class share.
- **Peer Coaches for the Character Close-Up:** Have student leaders circulate as "coaches" while their peers illustrate/write their Character Close-Up handout, asking guiding questions like "What did the character do that showed you that?" to help students connect their images back to evidence from the book. (This is a great opportunity to pair older students with younger students in the school community).
- **Gallery Curators:** If and when displaying Inside & Out handouts or Character Close-Up sheets in the classroom or hallway, have student leaders take the lead on arranging the display, writing a title card or short introduction for the gallery, and giving a brief "tour" explaining the purpose of the display to visiting classes or families.

Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further

Note: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.

- After students have completed the core activity above, have students watch the [Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors video](#). Ask students to discuss why it's important to read books. Have students brainstorm the books that they've read during the school year, and place them on a handout as windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors. Close by having students research additional books that they can recommend to the English department or library to ensure all categories are fully represented.
- Now that students have completed the core activity, have students watch the [Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors video](#). Have students complete a scavenger hunt (either in-person OR using the digital library catalog). They should find a book that is a mirror, a window and a sliding-glass door. Have students discuss what the process was like, and discuss if any categories need more representation in their library and why that is.

Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further (Continued)

- After students have engaged in the core activity, have students use their Inside & Out handout to write and/or illustrate an identity story about themselves. If time allows, have students share their stories with the class. If space allows, display the stories in the classroom or hallways.

Home Connection

Share the [Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors](#) video with families.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

Students will engage in learning, reflection and discussion about the importance of identity representation in books. This will contribute to a school and classroom environment where discussing representation and identity, and the importance of diversity are encouraged.

Character Close-Up

Directions: Use the space to describe in words or drawings the main character of the story you read and discussed. Think about internal (inside traits like thoughts, feelings, likes, etc.) and external (outside traits like looks, actions, favorite things, etc.).



Inside & Out

Directions: Use the space to describe in words or drawings the parts of you that you would want others to know. Think about internal (inside traits like thoughts, feelings, likes, etc.) and external (outside traits like looks, actions, favorite things, etc.).

