



Facilitation Guide:

# OUR UNIQUE IDENTITIES

## A Note to Educators

Helping students understand and appreciate the concept of [intersectionality](#) can be challenging. Meeting students “where they are” with “who they are” will vary given their age, language skills, developmental stage, life experience, and more. The activities below are designed to help you introduce and initiate discussion around the importance of recognizing and celebrating the intersectional identities of every member of the class/school community (teachers too!).

This resource — a visual infographic and accompanying facilitation guide — was developed by a working group made up of representatives of the [Educating All Learners Alliance](#) (EALA), whose 70+ member organizations are committed to systemic change that nurtures effective and inclusive PreK–12 teaching and learning communities.

We encourage you to display the posters in your classroom, refer to its visual language, and revisit discussions about identity frequently. We recommend this resource for students in third grade and above.



## Prologue: Discussion on Aspects of Identities

Share the following with students to set the stage for focused discussions.

- “Today we are going to focus on different parts of our identities.”
  - “What are identities? Put most simply, identities are who you are.”
  - “Identities are, largely, self-defined. In other words, each person determines how they define their identity.”
  - “We commonly refer to these identities. But there are many, many more.”
    - **Race:** This refers to how people are categorized into different groups based on perceived physical differences. Race should not be confused with ethnicity. For example, Asian is a race.
    - **Ethnicity:** This refers to the social and cultural groups one belongs to on the basis of shared traditions, ancestry, language, history, nation, religion, etc. For example, Korean American is an ethnicity.
    - **Gender identity:** This refers to a personal sense of their own gender. It can be a person’s assigned sex at birth or can differ from it.
    - **Language:** This refers to the way a person speaks, reads, and writes. These things can vary in different settings. For example, some students use Spanish in their community and use both English and Spanish at school.
    - **Religion/spirituality:** Religion is a specific set of organized beliefs and practices, usually shared by a community or group. Spirituality is more of an individual practice and involves the recognition of inner awareness or sense of belief in something greater than oneself.
    - **Disability:** This refers to any physical or mental condition that limits a person’s movements, senses, or activities. Some disabilities are easily seen (visible), while others are hidden or not easily recognized (invisible).
    - **Age:** This refers to a number of years, generation (i.e., Gen Z), or category (i.e., teenager, elderly) and often is used to reflect a person’s range of experiences during their lifetime.
    - **Appearance:** This refers to how someone appears to other people (i.e., skinny, tall, red hair color).
    - **Geography:** This refers to a person’s physical location or where they originally come from (i.e., Pennsylvanian, Bostonian).
    - **Relationship/role:** This refers to the relationship or role that a person holds with someone else (i.e., daughter, father, friend, boyfriend).
    - **Talents:** A person’s strengths that they recognize as part of their identity (i.e., chess player, dancer).
    - **Socioeconomic:** This refers to the social standing (status) or class of an individual or group, often measured as a combination of household education level, income, and occupation (i.e., middle class).



## Part 1: Discussion on *Intersectional* Identities

### Intro

- Ask students to think about who they are and what words they would use to describe their *identity*.
- Share with students: “People are unique and many identities are possible. We call this *intersectional* or *intersectionality*.”
- Ask students: “What does it mean to have intersecting or overlapping identities?”
- Give an example of how two (or more) parts of your own identity intersect and affect your experience in the world.
- Reiterate that everyone has intersectional or overlapping identities.

### Individual Student Activity

- Instructions: “Think about the following identities: race, ethnicity, gender identity, language, religion/spirituality, ability/disability, age, appearance, geography, relationships, talents, socioeconomic (and many others). In words, drawings, or another format of your choice, describe the various parts of your identity and how those parts intersect or overlap. If there is a part of your identity that you do not feel comfortable sharing on paper in this activity, that is OK.”

### Group Discussion

- Share with students: “I encourage you to think about the parts of your identity that you identified in the individual activity. You may share your own identities or perspectives in your participation, but you’re not required to.”
- Facilitate a discussion with the following questions. Potential discussion points are included, if needed.
  - What would happen if we saw people for only one part of their identity?
    - *We might not see or recognize the “whole person,” especially the invisible parts of their identity.*
    - *All of us have complex identities and diverse experiences. No single part can define us or predict how we will behave or feel in any situation.*
  - How do our identities shape our experiences?
    - *Who we are shapes how we think, act, and interact with people.*
    - *How we perceive our identities affects how we respond to events and experiences.*
  - And vice versa: How do our experiences shape our identities?
    - *Our experiences shape the way we think about ourselves and how we perceive different parts of our identity.*
    - *Our surroundings can make us want to recognize or hide various parts of our identity.*



## Part 2: Discussion on *Varied* Identities

### Intro

- Share with students: “Identities are *varied* for different people. Parts of identity differ in meaning and prominence for each person. These parts can also change depending on the situation.”
  - *What would happen if we saw people for only one part of their identity?*
- Some examples to share:
  - Jessy is in a STEM girls club at school. When she is there, both identifying as female and liking STEM subjects stand out as prominent parts of her identity.
  - Reggie has a learning disability. In some settings, like football practice, this part of his identity does not feel very prominent, because he doesn’t require accommodations. But it is prominent in his math class, where he needs to self-advocate to get additional support.
  - Hannah is adopted. She recently joined a Facebook group with other children who share her adoptive status and has become a lot more vocal about being adopted as part of her identity.

### Individual Student Activity

- Instructions: In words, drawings, or another format of choice, respond to the following prompts.
  - What parts of your identity do you think about most often?
  - What parts of your identity do you think about least often?
  - Why might you think more about some parts than others? What experiences lead you to think about these identities?
  - What parts of your identity do most people not (yet) know about? Would it be OK if more people knew about them?

### Partner Discussion

- Share with students: “Think about the parts of your identity that you have named, and share them with your partner. It’s OK to select certain parts of your identity that you are comfortable sharing.”
- Give three minutes for students to share responses to the following questions with their partner. Then ask them to switch roles and repeat.
  - What is one part of your identity that you think about the most often?
  - Why might you think about this part more than others?
  - What experiences have led you to thinking about this part of your identity the most?

## Part 3: Discussion on Dynamic Identities

### Intro

- Share with students: “Identities are also *dynamic*. This means that they are not set in stone and are constantly shifting and changing, now and throughout our lives. Parts of a person’s identity can be chosen, born into, visible, invisible, stable, and shifting over time.”
- Some examples to share:
  - Kumiko has chosen to learn a new language. She already speaks English and Japanese and has begun to learn Spanish through an app. She hopes to soon add “multilingual” to her list of identities.
  - Tia has ADHD. This disability is invisible, but she is choosing to let others know that she has ADHD and how it affects her.
  - Natalie has red hair. She loves being part of less than 2 percent of the world’s population who share this trait and considers this to be a stable part of her identity. Her red hair is a source of pride, and she says that she never wants to dye her hair another color.

### Individual Student Activity

- Instructions: In words, drawings, or another format of your choice, describe how your identity is dynamic. Feel free to highlight which parts of your identity are chosen, born into, visible, invisible, stable, and shifting. Reflect on how your identity has changed as you have grown older.

### Wrap-Up

- Point out the three individuals from the infographic and the statements they’re making.
  - “Many aspects of people’s identities are invisible and complex, so it’s important not to jump to conclusions.”
  - “I have a desire to learn from those around me with identities like and unlike mine.”
  - “My identity is constantly changing as I experience the world — and that’s a good thing!”
- Emphasize that it’s important to build an understanding and appreciation of identities that are intersectional, varied, and dynamic in the classroom and throughout the school community.



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