



LESSON 2

Exploring Individual Identity

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can we work together to create an open, supportive, and reflective learning community?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Who am I? What factors shape my identity?
- What parts of our identities do we choose for ourselves?
- What parts of our identities are determined for us by other people or by society?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will identify social and cultural factors that help shape their identities and then create their own personal identity charts.

OVERVIEW

“Who am I?” is a question all of us ask at some point in our lives, and it is a particularly critical question for students’ own social, moral, and intellectual development. Our society—through its particular culture, customs, institutions, and more—provides us with language and labels we use to answer this question for ourselves and others. In the previous lesson, students considered how one student struggled to navigate two seemingly conflicting identities when introducing herself to her class in school. In this lesson, students explore the factors that make up their individual identities and how the ways in which they perceive themselves are similar to and different from the ways others may perceive them. Through this process of reflecting on their own identities, sharing their stories, and hearing from others, students continue the process of getting to know each other as individuals while at the same time contributing to the process of building a community of learners where students are known and understand that their ideas and experiences matter.

DURATION

30-minute class period

MATERIALS

- **Handout:** Starburst Identity Chart
- **Handout:** Don’t Misunderstand Me! Exit Card

TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Journaling
- Identity Charts
- Concentric Circles
- Exit Cards

SEL COMPETENCIES AND PEDAGOGICAL MOVES

1. Use paired and small-group activities to develop relationship skills.

In the opening days of the school year, it is important to give students opportunities to share their stories so they can start to see each other as unique individuals who also share common interests, values, and experiences. Working in pairs and small groups of three can feel safer and more welcoming, especially at the outset of the year, for many students. When students begin the year working in smaller configurations, they can start to build trust among the group members so that as the opening week progresses, they feel more prepared to participate in larger-group and whole-class activities and discussions.

2. Differentiate instruction by varying teaching strategies.

While scholars continue to debate the idea of individuals having intelligence preferences or learning styles, and to what extent culture and gender may or may not play a role in learning, differentiation experts David A. Sousa and Carol Ann Tomlinson argue that it is fair to say that all students benefit from having opportunities to reflect on what they are learning and how they learn, choice in how they process and show their learning, and opportunities to work in a variety of modes of learning.¹ The

Concentric Circles teaching strategy provides a framework for students to interact with a wide range of peers in structured paired discussions. The strategy gets students up and out of their seats, and we know that movement improves students' learning. While some students will prefer the seated pair-shares and small-group discussions you did in the last lesson, others will get excited by this more kinesthetic mode of expression. Help students understand that everyone processes information differently by explaining *why* you are using specific teaching strategies in your lessons. By making your thinking visible to them, they will come to understand and embrace the idea that the world is made up of different kinds of learners who have different needs but who can all work toward the same learning goals.

3. Use exit cards to get to know your students.

Many students may start the year feeling as though their teachers have already labeled them. Perhaps they have an older sibling at the school. Or they act in every musical, play all the sports, struggle academically, get straight As, or don't show interest in school at all. It is important to remember that each student has a complex identity and worldview that is changing and developing as they move through their adolescence. In order to foster a classroom community where students believe they are known and valued for who they are at this moment in time, they need to feel as though they

¹ David A. Sousa and Carol Ann Tomlinson, *Differentiation and the Brain: How Neuroscience Supports the Learner-Friendly Classroom* (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2011), 162.

can be their most authentic selves. This lesson's exit card invites students to clear up any misconceptions they believe teachers may have about them and sends the powerful message that you are interested in learning their truths. This exit card also offers the opportunity for you to model risk-taking by sharing misunderstandings that you feel other people in the school, your life, or society may have about you.

NOTES TO TEACHER

1. Using Identity Charts as a Teaching Strategy

- Identity charts are a graphic tool that can help students consider the many factors that shape the identities of both individuals and communities. In this lesson, students will use the Starburst Identity Chart to analyze the ways they define themselves and the labels that others use to describe them.
- Sharing information from their own identity charts with peers can help students build relationships, break down stereotypes, and start to build classroom community. In this way, identity charts can be used as an effective classroom community-building tool. It is important to remember that your students may not know each other yet and have not established norms and expectations for their interactions with one another. Because identity is personal and can be difficult to discuss, students should have a choice about what aspects of their identities they share with you and others in the class.
- Modeling the identity chart activity by creating your own starburst on the board sends the powerful message that you are willing to take risks and engage in the collective effort of building a strong classroom community. Also, like journaling alongside your students, engaging in activities that involve sharing stories demonstrates that you are a participant in the learning along with your students and lets them start to build a meaningful relationship with you as you get to know them in the opening weeks of school.

2. Preparing for This Lesson's Kinesthetic Discussion Strategy

Before teaching this lesson, familiarize yourself with the Concentric Circles teaching strategy. To ensure that all of your students have equal time for sharing and listening, set a time limit (such as one minute) for each circle to talk. If you don't have space in your classroom for concentric circles, use a "line dance" variation, where students stand in two lines facing each other along one side of your classroom or in the hallway. To create the two lines, you can first ask students to form one long line based on their birthdays or a "ROY G BIV" line based on the color of their shirts. Then form two lines by having the two students in the center of the line stay put while everyone to the left and right of them takes big steps toward each other (like a closing V) until the students have formed two lines facing one another.

ACTIVITIES

1. Reflect on Your Identity with a Journal Response

- Remind students that in the last lesson, they learned Jennifer Wang’s story about her name and the ways in which it does and does not reflect her complex identity. Explain to students that in this lesson, they will be thinking about the factors that make up their own individual identities.
- Ask students to respond to the following two questions in a journal entry. They can list the first seven to ten ideas that come to mind for each question. Project or write the questions on the board one at a time so students can focus separately on each one.
 - » Who am I? What words or phrases would you use to describe yourself?
 - » How might others (family, friends, teachers, mentors, strangers) describe you?

2. Create Individual Identity Charts

- Pass out the **Starburst Identity Chart** handout and explain to students that they will be transferring ideas from their journals to the charts in order to capture how they see themselves (arrows pointing outward) and how others perceive them (arrows pointing inward). Model the activity on the board, using ideas from your journal entry that you feel comfortable sharing to create an identity chart for yourself. Let students know that they might not use all of the arrows or they might need to add more to the starburst.

- Then have students create their own identity charts on their handouts. Inform students that they will be able to keep their handouts private, but they will be discussing aspects of their identities that they feel comfortable sharing with a partner.

3. Start to Learn about Each Other’s Identities

- Debrief the activity using the Concentric Circles teaching strategy. Explain the strategy and let students know that they will be choosing from four questions about identity to discuss in each round. Partners can answer the same or different questions, and students can choose which questions to answer in each round.
- Project the four questions and invite students to choose the question they would like to answer in the first round. Repeat the strategy as many times as you would like, reminding students to introduce themselves at the beginning of each round and to thank their partners after their discussion:
 - » What is the most important part of your identity? What is a story that explains its significance to you?
 - » What is one thing that you want other students in the class to know about your identity, and why?
 - » What is one way that how you think about yourself is different from how others might describe you?
 - » Who is a historical or fictional figure that you identify with or admire, and why?

4. Provide an Opportunity for Students to Share an Important Truth

- Pass out the **Don't Misunderstand Me! Exit Card** handout and explain that you are interested in getting to know each of your students so you can help them reach their academic and personal goals for the class and in school. Before students complete the exit card, share your own response to the two sentence starters:
 - » One misunderstanding a teacher might have about me is . . .
 - » But in reality, the truth about me is . . .
- Observe the concentric circle discussions to assess how students are thinking about the factors that shape their identities and others' perceptions of them, as well as how they are interacting with each other.
- Give students a homework assignment in which they choose one of the four concentric circle discussion questions to develop into a short written response. Collect their homework in the next class and look for patterns across their responses to identify groupings of students who share immediate writing needs that you can start addressing in the upcoming weeks.

ASSESSMENTS

TEACHER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

After teaching this lesson or at the end of the day, take some time to reflect on the following questions. You can think about your answers as you plan for the next class period and/or record your ideas in writing on your lesson plan or in a teacher journal so you can refer to them later in the year or when planning next fall.

1. What do you feel went well today?

2. If you could teach this lesson again, what would you change?

3. What did you observe about your students' speaking and listening skills today (individuals and whole class)?

4. What do your exit cards reveal about your students' identities and their truths?

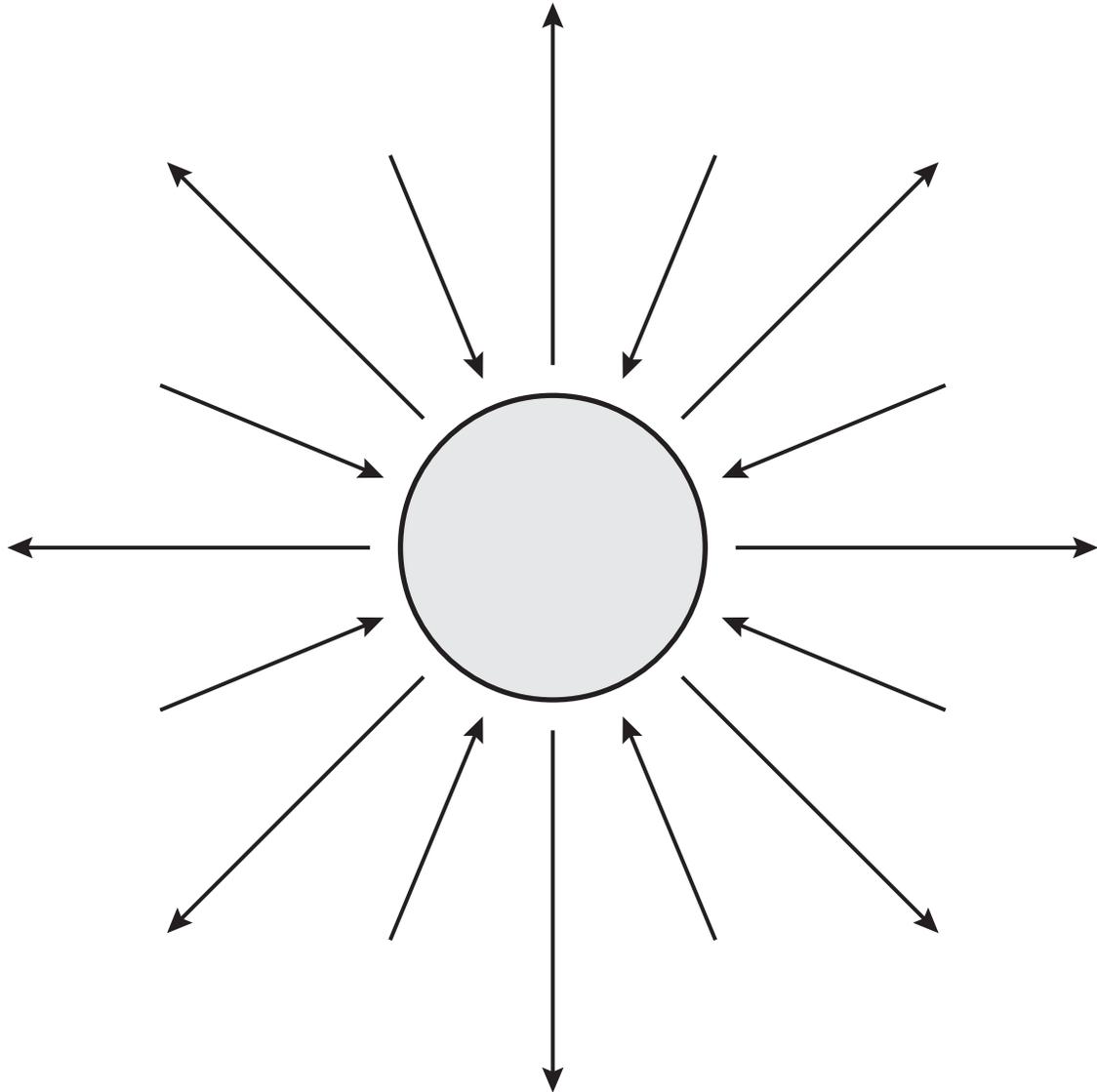
5. How will you use your observations and the exit cards to help you plan the next lesson?



Handout

Starburst Identity Chart

Directions: Write your name (or the name of a person or character) in the circle. At the ends of the arrows pointing outward, write words or phrases that describe what you consider to be key aspects of your identity. At the ends of the arrows pointing inward, write labels others might use to describe you. Add more arrows as needed.





Handout

Don't Misunderstand Me! Exit Card

EXIT CARD

Name:

1. One misunderstanding a teacher might have about me is . . .

2. But in reality, the truth about me is . . .

EXIT CARD

Name:

1. One misunderstanding a teacher might have about me is . . .

2. But in reality, the truth about me is . . .