

TITLE: Exploring Family Compositions

Grade Level Kindergarten through 3

Subject Areas Language Arts, Social Studies

California State Standards

Language Arts

Kindergarten

A. Listening and Speaking

1. Understand and follow one- and two-step directions.
2. Use description.

First Grade

A. Listening and Speaking

1. Listen attentively.

B. Reading

2. Follow one-step written instructions.

C. Written and Oral Conventions

1. Write and speak in complete sentences.

D. Writing

- 1., 2. Select a focus in brief narratives and expositions.

Second Grade

A. Listening and Speaking

1. Use listening skills.
2. Distinguish fact from opinion.

D. Writing

1. Maintain focus.
2. Write brief narratives and letters with logical sequence.

Third Grade

A. Listening and Speaking

1. Compare ideas and points of view.
2. Make brief narrative and dramatic presentations.

D. Writing

1. Create a paragraph by developing a topic sentence supported by facts.

History

First Grade

A. Social Science

- 4., 5. Understand cultural similarities and differences.

Overview

That's a Family! takes a tour, from a child's point of view, through a wide range of family structures. The activities in this lesson are designed to help children explore their own families' composition and that of their classmates. If you have not already done so, check out the "Before you Begin" section on our Web site helpful.

Objectives Students should be able to

- describe six different family structures.
- define all vocabulary words and use them in original sentences
- tell how their own families are similar to and different from the families in the video.
- list specific ways they can support classmates whose families are different from their own.

Materials

Videotape of **That's a Family!** (30 minutes)

Optional books

The Sneetches by Dr. Suess

Everybody Bakes Bread by Norah Dorley

Everybody Cooks Rice by Nora Dorley

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Go over the general ideas and vocabulary presented in the video. You may wish to make a poster of the below points and display it during the unit.

- General Ideas Presented in the Video
- There are many ways to be a family.
- Families come in all sizes and configurations.
- Families of all kinds have things in common.
- All families are "normal" families, even though there may be more of some kinds than others.
- Conflict is part of being a family.
- Families are not happy all the time.
- Teasing can lead to hurt feelings and low self-esteem.
- Individuals can interrupt teasing and be allies for others.
- Families change, just like people change.
- Different kinds of families can support each other and be stronger than any one type of family on its own.

Key Vocabulary and Other Related Terms

Mixed family: When people of different racial backgrounds are part of the same family it is a mixed-race family. People of different ethnic, religious, or national backgrounds can also form families that are "mixed" in terms of culture, skin color, language, and religious practices. Emily's family is mixed because her father is Asian (Chinese-American) and her mother is Caucasian/White (German-American). Sofia's family, shown in the adoption section, is a mixed family because she is Latina, her parents are White, and her brother is African American. The word "mixed" is used in **That's a Family!** because that is the expression the children in the film use. Other terms include "blended," "double" and "interracial."

Note that trying to define race and ethnicity in simple terms for children is challenging. There are many different ways to define race and ethnicity. These terms are complex and fraught with strong feelings, as terms, categories and labels have been used as excuses to divide people. The intention here is to be respectful, to teach children to be respectful and to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

Adoption: A situation in which adults take children into their families and legally become the parents of those children.

Birth mother: The biological mother, the woman who gave birth to a child.

Birth father: The biological father, the man who created a baby with the birth mother.

Divorce: When people legally separate and end a marriage.

Stepparent: When a divorced parent marries a new person or has a committed relationship with a new partner, that person can become a stepparent.

Blended family: Two families that come together to form a new family.

Single-parent family: A family in which one parent raises the child or children.

Gay: Describes a man who loves another man in a romantic way and a woman who loves another woman in a romantic way.

Lesbian: Describes a woman who loves another woman in a romantic way.

Guardian: A person entrusted by law with the care of a child; a person other than the biological parent who protects and takes care of a child.

Foster parent: A person entrusted with the temporary care of a child who is not currently living with his or her permanent family. Sometimes foster parents go on to become adoptive parents or guardians.

FOCUS FOR VIEWING

Watch one segment at a time and review the vocabulary words above to reinforce learning. Then have students write their (anonymous) questions about the video and about families on cards and put them in a question box. After you watch the tape you can lead a discussion based on students' questions. This activity can help you become familiar with students' questions and give you a chance to clarify any misconceptions they might have. It helps to have a question box available throughout the unit.

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Activity One

This activity is for students to process the information presented in the film.

1. Use the following questions for discussion and suggestions for journal writing (these can be done individually, in pairs or in small groups).

- Draw or list the different family structures presented in this video.
- Make a list of facts you learned from this video.
- Which part of this video felt the most familiar to you? Does anything in this video remind you of something that has happened to you?

- Which part of this video felt the most unfamiliar to you?
- What was your favorite part of this video? Why?
- How did you feel about some of the teasing these children experienced? Have you ever seen people in this school tease other children because of their families? What did you do? What else could you have done?
- Do you think there is such a thing as a perfect family? Why or why not?
- How would you feel if someone said bad things about your family? What would you do about it?
- If you are being teased because of your family situation, what can your classmates or adults in school do to support you?
- An ally is a person who comes to the aid of someone else. Sometimes when someone is being teased or bullied they are too upset to know what to do. It helps to have an ally interrupt the teasing and say that it is not OK. Has anyone ever done that for you? Have you ever done that for someone else?
- Why do you think the filmmakers decided to make this video?
- What did you learn from this video? from the different kids in it?
- Find ways to help students talk about their families. What are some of the things that families have or do together? Many families go through change. What changes can happen in families? What helps children cope with change? What skills did the children in this video use to cope with change? How do families solve problems? Did you ever feel upset about something that happened in your family? What helped you feel better?
- Make connections between the families in the video and people your students know. Do you know anyone who is divorced? a single parent? adopted? Gay or Lesbian, or has Gay people in their family? biracial? bilingual?
- If there are several children in the room who fit in each category of family (adopted kids, Gay or Lesbian parents, divorced parents, biracial family members and so on), ask students to form subgroups and discuss within their groups what they would like the class and the world to know about their way of being a family. Ask them to discuss, write down and report to the class the benefits and challenges of being in this type of family (adopted, in a single-parent family and so on). Do this activity only if there is more than one child for each group.

Activity Two

The purpose of the following activities is for students to explore their own and others' family compositions. You may pick and choose the activities that you think will best work for your class.

1. Have students write books about their families. On each page, have them draw a picture of one family member, describe that person, and tell about things they like to do with that person. If their

families are touched by any of the issues raised in **That's a Family!** suggest that they write about them and other important issues as well.

2. Ask students to bring in a family memento or important artifact. Sit in a circle and talk about each object and its meaning in the child's family. Create a class "museum," with each object labeled by the student who brought it in. Use the museum as a lead-in for descriptive writing and story-telling exercises.

3. Have students do any or all of the following:

- interview someone they know who is part of a family that is different from their own.
- write a story in which two people from different sections of this video meet and talk.
- compare and contrast two characters from the video.
- write a poem about **That's a Family!**

4. Invite significant adults from students' families to come to school and be interviewed by the class. Let the class generate the questions they want to ask. Write letters home as invitations and thank-yous.

5. Think about **That's a Family!** and complete some of the following phrases:

I feel...	Maybe...
I know...	I can't really understand...
I wonder...	I began to think of...
I question...	I noticed...
I believe...	If I had been...
I wish...	I was reminded of...
I hope...	I can't believe...

6. Write or dictate a letter to a friend describing **That's a Family!**

Activity Three

Before and after showing the video, you may choose to read one or more of the books listed in the bibliography in the Resources section of this Web site.

Select books on each section from the bibliography; have them available to students at reading time. Choose several to read aloud to the class and use them for possible writing assignments. Remember that picture books can be useful tools even for children in the upper grades.

The following activities tie in books on related topics.

1. Read **The Sneetches** by Dr. Seuss to the class. Help them talk about how we form groups in which people belong or don't belong. Ask: "Have you ever been left out of a group? How do you feel when you are left out? How do you feel when you are part of a group?"

2. Read **Everybody Bakes Bread and Everybody Cooks Rice** to the class (see bibliography). For homework, have students ask for a family soup recipe and a story to accompany it. As a class, create a book, called **Everybody Makes Soup**, consisting of recipes with accompanying stories. Every Friday, invite one student's family to visit the class and make soup for lunch. If you have a child in your class whose family is different from the majority, this exercise might cause some anxiety. With sensitive support, this can still be a valuable activity. For example, a child in a single-parent family in a class of

two-parent families might go third or fourth instead of last so they won't have time to make comparisons and feel anxious.

3. Read students the Arnold Adoff poem "In Both Families" (from **Families: Poems Celebrating the African American Experience**; see bibliography in the Resources section).

Extensions

Some related art projects:

1. Collect all the statements about windows and mirrors (explained in the Before You Begin section on this Web site) and make a windows and mirrors bulletin board. Point out again that the same item can be a window for some people and a mirror for others.
2. Have students draw a picture or design a poster that explains the many ways to be a family.
3. Have students make torn-paper self-portraits (provide many choices for skin colors). Students use small bits of different colored paper to paste a collage, using paper instead of paint or crayons. These can be displayed in class and used later as covers for student autobiographies.
4. Have students make paper bag, papier-maché or finger puppets of their family members. Use the puppets to create a dialogue or play.
5. Ask each student to draw a picture of his or her family and label it with names. (Students should decide whom to include.) Discuss whom they consider to be part of their families: pets? people they live with? people who live far away? Display pictures.
6. Have students bring in family photos and make a collage. Ask students, "What way(s) of being a family are not yet represented in this collage? How can we include them?"
7. Have students look through magazines and find pictures of families. Make a collage called "That's a Family!" As a class, make lists of what the families shown are doing together.
8. Create "family mobiles" using hangers, yarn, 5- by 7-inch cards, crayons and markers. Hang mobiles around room.
9. As a class, paint a mural that represents **That's a Family!**

Home Activities Children Can Do With Their Family

1. Interview the adult(s) in your family about the different family structures they and their parents grew up in. Include the siblings of your caregivers and your grandparents.
2. Emily's family celebrates Christmas like her mother's family and Chinese New Year like her father's family. Do you have family traditions that come from different sides of your family? What are they? With a family member, tell and write about the holidays and traditions your family celebrates. Bring your work to school to share with the class.
3. Discuss with your family ways you can be supportive of people who are different from you.

4. Work with your family to complete the family tree assignment given by your teacher.
5. Read one or more of the books from the related list or the further resources list together with a family member.
6. For each segment of the video, fill out the following chart
(find an adult in your family to help you fill in this chart::

Ways our family is the same: Ways our family is different:

7. With an adult in your family, find a memento, photograph, or artifact that has significance for your family. Talk about its history and why it is important to you. Write down or dictate to the adult the story of this artifact. Bring the story and, if possible, the artifact to school to share with your classmates.