

TITLE: Understanding Families With Gay and Lesbian Parents

Grade Level K — 6

Subject Areas Language Arts, Social Studies

Overview

In this chapter we meet Josh, who lives with his sister and two moms; Breana, who lives with her two dads; and Dominique, Alma and Taquisha, who live with their two moms. Their stories are framed by other families where the parents are Gay or Lesbian.

Currently in the United States The American Bar Association estimates that between 6 and 10 million children live with Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual parents. Until 2000, children from two-parent Lesbian or Gay households were considered by the census as being raised by single parents. Today about 20 percent of all Gay and Lesbian households have a child in the home.

Gay and Lesbian families are an integral part of American society, with Gay couples residing in 99.3 percent of all counties across America. According to 2000 U.S. Census Bureau figures

- same-sex partners head households in nearly every county in the country.
- Gay and Lesbian couple-led homes totaled nearly 600,000 nationwide.
- California, with 10.9 percent of U.S. households, had almost 16 percent of same-sex homes.
- New York, with 6.7 percent of U.S. households, had 8 percent of same-sex homes.
- Texas, with 7 percent of U.S. households, had 7.2 percent of same-sex homes.

Growing numbers of children have parents who are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender. Children with Gay parents may be in mixed-race families, single-parent families or adoptive families. They may be the biological children of one parent. Gays or Lesbians may have decided to become parents while in committed Gay relationships, or they may have had their children earlier in life while involved in a relationship with a person of the opposite sex.

Objectives

Students should be able to

- describe six different family structures.
- identify four different ways families can be mixed.
- 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 **That's a Family!** Segment highlighting families with Gay and Lesbian parents.
The Sneetches by Dr. Seuss (optional)

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

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

Lesbian: A woman who loves a woman in a romantic way.

Heterosexual: A person who loves someone of the opposite sex in a romantic way.

Homosexual: A person who loves someone of the same sex in a romantic way.

Straight: Another word for heterosexual.

Bisexual: A person who can love either a man or a woman in a romantic way.

VIEWING ACTIVITIES

1. Review the model of using windows and mirrors in the Before You Begin section of this Web site. Ask students to think about the questions below while watching the video segment.

- **Windows:** In what ways are these families different from your family?
- **Mirrors:** In what ways are these families similar to your family?

2. 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.

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Materials:

Videotape **That's a Family!** Segment highlighting families with Gay and Lesbian parents.
The Sneetches by Dr. Seuss (optional)

- If you are in a Gay- or Lesbian-headed family, what would you like the world to know about your experience?
- Alma says sometimes people with Gay parents are afraid to tell other kids at school. How could you support a classmate who has a Gay or Lesbian family member?

2. Use these quotes from this chapter to prompt class discussion and journal writing or to make bulletin boards or posters:

- "I like having a mom that's more playful and a mom that's more serious."
- "My moms are the main things in each other's hearts."
- "The only hard thing about having two moms is that kids use mean words for Gays and Lesbians."
- "I wish they knew that it is OK to be different."
- "My moms are Lesbians That means they only like men for friends"
- "You're not Gay when you grow up just because you have Gay parents."
- "I wish more people understood."

3. With older children, talk about the word "faggot" and the phrase "You're so Gay!" which are often used by children as put-downs. Research shows children as young as first and second grades begin to use the word "faggot" as an insult without understanding what it means. Ask, "Do you know the history of this word?"

Explain what a faggot is (a bundle of sticks or twigs, bound together and used as fuel). In the Middle Ages, many people were burned at the stake because they were accused of being witches. Most of the time, these women were actually midwives or healers, or widows with property that other villagers coveted. Gay men were also discriminated against and persecuted. Some estimate that 9 million women lost their lives during this time. When witches were burned, men accused of being Gay were dipped in oil, set afire, and used as the faggot to light the burning pyre. This word has a history of torture and discrimination and death. It is not an acceptable word. It hurts people that you don't know you are hurting.

Activity Two

1. Have each child make a booklet about this segment of **That's a Family!** each page describing the different kids from the video and featuring a picture of that family. This could be a ribbon book — students glue 3- by 5-inch cards onto a ribbon so they fold into a book or hang with the story sequenced from top to bottom. Have them finish the following sentences (or similar ones) for each family in the video:

- Josh's family likes to . . .
- Josh's parents are Lesbians. That means . . .
- The people in Josh's family are . . .
- Josh's family is like mine because . . .
- Josh's family is different from mine because . . .

2. Think about this segment of **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...

3. Have the students make connections between the families in the video and people they know. Do they know anyone who is Gay or Lesbian or has Gay people in their family?

4. 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?"

Home Activities Students Can Do With Their Family

1. Discuss with your family ways you can be supportive of people who are different from you.
2. Work with your family to complete the family tree assignment given by your teacher.
3. Read one or more of the books from the related list or the further resources list with a family member.
4. For each of the segments 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:

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

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POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Activity One

This activity is for students to process the information presented in the film segment about Gay and Lesbian families.

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

- What did you learn from this video about families with Gay parents? What else would you like to know?
- Was there anything in this part of the video that surprised you?
- Who is in Josh's family? Who is in Breana's family? Who is in Taquisha's family?
- List the activities each family likes to do together (doing homework, playing board games, gardening, bowling, celebrating birthdays and so on). Which of these activities do you do with your family?
- Josh describes one mom as playful and one as more serious. How would you compare and contrast the different members of your family?
- Josh says his two mothers are "the main things in each other's hearts, except for me and Mara." What do you think he meant by that?
- What is challenging about having two dads or two moms?
- Breana says her dads are the best dads in the whole world. Give some examples of what makes them a strong and loving family.
- Josh says he wishes people understood that it's OK to be different. What do you think he meant by that? What other ways are people different?
- Sometimes Josh says he hears people use bad words to describe gay and lesbian people. Do you ever hear people use words like "faggot" (see definition below) or phrases like "that's Gay" to put someone or something down? What happened? How did you feel about it? What could you do the next time someone uses these words around you?
- Do you think when kids use anti-Gay names they really think the person they are teasing is Gay? What do you think they are really trying to say? Why do you think someone would call another kid an anti-gay name?
- Breana says she doesn't think if you have gay parents that you will grow up to be Gay. "You could or you could not." Why did she say that? What do you think?
- Have you ever heard someone say something mean or insensitive to someone who has a Gay or Lesbian family member? What did you do? What could you do if you heard that again?

- If you are in a Gay- or Lesbian-headed family, what would you like the world to know about your experience?
- Alma says sometimes people with Gay parents are afraid to tell other kids at school. How could you support a classmate who has a Gay or Lesbian family member?

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