

# “I AM” ME: TALKING ABOUT IDENTITY



## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

English Language Arts - Reading-Literature, Writing, Speaking and Listening.



## MCREL STANDARDS (4TH EDITION)

- Behavioral Studies: Understands that group and cultural differences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.
- Thinking and Reasoning: Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences.
- Language Arts: Listening and Speaking Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.



## GRADES

K-2



## OVERVIEW

Teaching young people about identity helps them to learn about their own unique identities, as well as the myriad identities in their classroom communities. In this lesson, students will read *Looking Like Me*, by Walter Dean Myers, and examine the descriptive words that the main character uses to describe himself (e.g., brother, son, artist, dancer, runner, and dreamer). To conclude, students will create their own “I am” poster using GLSEN’s [“I am”](#) sign.



## OBJECTIVES

Students will reflect on their own identity.

Students will actively listen to *Looking Like Me*, stopping to share describing words and identity terms for the main character.

Students will identify words, describing words, and identity terms that describe themselves. Students will discuss the importance of respecting peoples’ identity terms and descriptive words.

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### THINGS TO PREP & TOOLS NEEDED

- Find a copy of *Looking Like Me* or show [this online reading of the book](#).
- Print out copies of the “[I am](#)” sign for your class.
- Make an example version of the “I am sign” using yourself or a book character who is familiar to your students.
- Chart paper, markers, copies of GLSEN’s “I am” sign.



### THINGS TO PREP & TOOLS NEEDED

35 minutes.

## PROCEDURE

1. (2 minutes) Opening: Begin the lesson by telling students, “Today we’ll be talking about ‘identity’ which is a big word that has to do with who we are, and all the things that make us unique and special. There are lots of different pieces that fit together to make up our **identity**.”
2. (10 minutes) Tell students that you will be reading a book called *Looking Like Me* by Walter Dean Myers. Show students the cover and ask them for any predictions they have about the story. Have chart paper and markers nearby and write “I am” at the top. Tell students that the main character of this story uses lots of different words that tell us more about his **identity**, or who he is inside. “Listen for words that talk about the boy, who he is and what he likes. When you hear one of these words, put your thumb up. We’ll write it on this list to learn more about the boy’s identity.”
  - a. Read or play the story, pausing when the students notice describing words and other identity terms. Write these on chart paper.
  - b. After the story, read the list with the class and ask them to silently show that they agree with a “thumbs up” with their hands if any of these words or identity terms fit them too.
3. (10 min) Tell students, “That story used ‘I am’ to tell more about the boy’s identity. We want to learn more about **your** identity. What makes you special and unique? What words tell people about you?”

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- a. Brainstorm describing words and identity terms with the students and write these on the board or chart paper for reference.
  - b. Show students your example of the “I am” sign, who the sign represents, and read the terms you used.  
*Note: This is a great opportunity to introduce terms to represent race, culture, religion, ability, LGBTQ families, gender identity, and gender expression.*
  - c. Tell students that they will each get a sign to tell us all more about their identities and what makes them special. Specify, depending on the students’ ages and abilities, the expectations for writing words or drawing on the signs.  
*Note: If you have created a sign as an example, show this to the students.*
  - d. Pass out “I am” signs to students. You may want to have students write in pencil, check with a teacher, and then add color.
4. (13 minutes) Closure: Invite students to show their “I am” signs to the class, and to share a part of their identity that feels special to them.
- a. Ask students, “What words or pictures did you use to show your gender identity or gender expression?”  
*Listen out for stereotypes and address them or note them and make a plan to follow up at another time. For example, if students say, “I drew this flower in pink because I’m a girl” you can say, “That’s a very detailed flower! Do all girls have to like flowers and pink?” or “That’s interesting! We’ll talk more about that later.”*
  - b. “Which parts of your identity are you the most proud of?” “How would you feel if someone teased you for those parts of your identity, for being you?”
  - c. “Who should get to fill out your identity sign, you or someone else? Could I go around and write whatever words or names on your sign that I want?”  
*Follow up with, “That’s right, you know your identity, who you are, what names and words you want to be called. When you call someone a name or tease them, it’s like writing on their sign.”*
  - d. “Do you think our class would be better if all of our signs or all of our identities were the same? Why or why not?”
  - e. To finish, tell students, “If all of our signs were the same, it’d be like using only one color to draw with all of the time. We’re lucky to have so many different identities in our class! Turn to the person next to you and give them a compliment about their sign.”



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### OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIFFERENTIATION

The individual work of creating an “I Am” sign can be modified for younger students and students with disabilities by working one-on-one with a teacher and being given stickers or pictures representing the student to place on the sign. Students who need a challenge can be asked to write a paragraph, book, or poem to accompany their “I Am” sign.

### FOLLOW UP/EXTENSIONS

We have all been a bystander to bullying behavior at one time or another in our lives. A bystander is someone who witnesses an incident, but does not take part in it. Bystanders are not to blame for bullying, but if they laugh at it, ignore it, or simply do nothing, they may play a part in keeping it going. Name-calling and bullying are problems that everyone must help to solve. And there are ways that we can all get involved without putting ourselves at risk or harming our standing with peers.

- Students can fill out [GLSEN’s “identity flowers”](#) to delve deeper into identity.
- Dedicate a bulletin board to student identity and hang these posters on the wall.
- Read more books to help students explore identity themes: Try Todd Parr’s [Be Who You Are](#) and [Who are you? the Kid’s Guide to Gender Identity](#)” by Brook Pessin-Whedbee. Go to GLSEN’s No Name-Calling Week for more lessons and activity ideas for putting kindness in action and celebrate the week at your school every January.
- Keep learning! Read GLSEN’s [Gender Terminology Discussion Guide](#) and [Pronoun Resource for Educators](#) to learn more about gender-inclusive language to use in your classroom.
- Find more lessons, activities, and resources in GLSEN’s Elementary Toolkit: [Ready, Set, Respect!](#)

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER!  
EMAIL US AT [EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG](mailto:EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG).