



#trending

A Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum Guide for Middle School

Elizabeth Johnson, M.Ed. and Jillian Luft, M.Ed.

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Session 3

The Mirror and Its Many Reflections

SEL: SELF-AWARENESS/SOCIAL AWARENESS

Story to Use: “The Identity Experiment” by Lily Mai

Story Summary: Lily is curious about how others will see her and how she will see herself if she wears different styles of clothing. Through her experiment, she discovers that there are some ways she likes to see herself and other ways she doesn't. After experimenting, she has a better idea of who she is, but realizes she isn't limited to one way of dressing or being.

Learning Objectives

Youth will build their SEL by:

- Reflecting on their sense of self and identity
- Being able to take the perspective of others from diverse backgrounds

Youth will increase their literacy by:

- Making meaning of text through group read-aloud and discussion
- Using their background knowledge to make connections to the text

Materials

- Two signs for Opinion Continuum (“agree” and “disagree”)
- Chart paper, markers
- Drawing paper, colored pencils

Preparation

- Read the story ahead of time. Reflect on your personal response and how the group may respond.
- Read the session plan and prepare the agenda. Plan for the Explore the Ideas activity.
- Before leading the Opinion Continuum activity, clear a large open space in the center of the room.
- Post “agree” and “disagree” signs at either end of the room.
- Create “Three Mirrors” example to model the Draw It activity.

GETTING STARTED (5 minutes)

Welcome everyone and have them sit in a circle. Review the agenda (posted):

Agenda: The Mirror and Its Many Reflections

- Review group agreements
 - Opening Activity: Opinion Continuum
 - Read and Discuss: "The Identity Experiment" by Lily Mai
 - Explore the Ideas Activity: Draw It
 - Closing Circle
- OPTIONAL ✓

OPENING ACTIVITY — OPINION CONTINUUM

(8 minutes)

This pre-reading activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. After reviewing the agenda, tell the group that they are going to do an activity where they move around while learning more about what they and their peers think about a topic. Together, they will notice and respect where others stand.
2. While the group is still seated, review the directions. Tell them:
 - "On either side of the room, there are signs that read 'agree' and 'disagree.'"
 - "I will read a statement and you will decide whether it's true for you (agree) or not (disagree). Then you will move somewhere in between the two signs that reflects your opinion. (If you're unsure, you should stand somewhere in the middle.)"
 - "Once everyone has moved, I will invite volunteers to share why they chose to stand where they are."
3. Next, ask the group to stand up and move to the center of the open space you've prepared.
4. Read the first statement and ask group members to move to a spot between the two signs:
 - "It's OK for someone's style or look to change from year to year."

5. Once all group members have moved, ask them to notice where other group members are standing. (You can support minority positions by moving closer to someone who is alone at one end of the continuum.)
6. Ask for volunteers to share why they are standing where they are. You might want to ask at least one group member from each side of the continuum. Tell group members they may change their position if they are influenced by another group member's opinion.
7. After each question, have everyone return to the middle.
8. Repeat for the following statements:
 - "People who often change their style are considered "fake" or posers."
 - "Clothes, hairstyles, and makeup are the best way to show the world who you are."
 - "The way people see themselves is more important than how others see them."
9. Thank group members for sharing their opinions.

READ AND DISCUSS THE STORY (20 minutes)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, group members build comprehension and support fluency.

1. **Introduce the story:** Explain to the group that they are going to read a story by a young woman who experiments with her appearance.
2. **Set expectations for reading the story:** Sitting in a circle, group members take turns reading aloud. They should be given the option of passing when it's their turn.



Tell the group to turn to p. 21 in their anthologies. (See the leader's version in this guide for stories with discussion questions included.)

3. **Read and discuss the story together:** As the group leader, you should pause the reading when you arrive at an open-ended question within the text (**in bold**). Ask the group this question and facilitate a brief discussion before returning to the text.
4. **After reading the story:** Continue to reflect on the story using the question below. Decide if your group will discuss, pair share, write, or draw before reading it aloud:
 - “Would you ever try an experiment like this? If you did, what do you think would happen?”
5. After about two minutes, continue to either the Explore the Ideas activity or Closing Circle, based on your choice as Leader.

 OPTIONAL

EXPLORE THE IDEAS ACTIVITY — DRAW IT

(15 minutes)

During this post-reading activity, group members will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors. This activity can be used during the session or to extend the learning afterwards.

1. Introduce the next activity by saying to the group:
 - “Now that we’ve read the story, we are going to draw three boxes to represent the three mirrors that show how we see ourselves, how others see us, and how we *want* others to see us.”
2. Provide a model for your group members by drawing your own mirrors on a large piece of chart paper. Label each mirror (“How I See Myself,” “How Others See Me,” and “How I Want Others to See Me”) and include details in each about your dress, style, and facial expression. You can also include words or symbols. Briefly discuss how your mirrors are similar or different from one another.
3. Offer suggestions for what group members may include in their mirror portraits (details about clothing, makeup, facial expression and/or words and symbols), but allow them to come up with their own ideas of what they wish to include.
4. Pass out drawing paper and markers or colored pencils.

5. Give group members 10 minutes to complete their drawings. Move around the room offering encouragement and support.
 6. Once group members have completed their mirror drawings, ask them to circle the mirror that they feel is closest to who they really are. Ask them to consider why.
 7. Time permitting, group members can do a Gallery Walk to share their drawings. Have them lay their drawings out on a table or other flat surface. The group can get up, walk around, and take a closer look at one another's drawings.
 8. Thank these volunteers for sharing. Then, invite all group members to reflect on and share what stood out to them in the activity.
-

CLOSING CIRCLE (10 minutes)

In Closing Circle, group members make personal connections to the story and share their take-aways with each other.

Guide group members in a go-round share of responses to these prompts:

1. "What stood out for you in Lily's story, 'The Identity Experiment,' and our activities today?"
2. Finish this sentence: "When I look in the mirror, I want to see someone who..."



 OPTIONAL

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS EXTENSION

If you choose to extend the learning beyond this session, you can use this inquiry question to design an activity to engage group members in community and global issues.

What would happen if I performed my own “identity experiment”?

For further exploration, ask group members to change their clothing style or appearance for one day—it can be a small or big change. Have them keep a log and take notes on how they feel about their appearance, how others respond to these changes and how they wish others (both strangers and friends) would see them when they are dressed this way.



The Identity Experiment

By Lily Mai

One morning last month, I curled my hair and tied a bit of it back to show my face. I also wore eyeliner and my mother's black shoes with heels and tight jeans. When I got to school, a classmate looked me up and down with a "What's the occasion?" look. Before I knew it, the whole class was saying things like, "Are you doing something special after school?" and, "Do you have a date?"

I blushed and looked away. I didn't want to be the center of attention. I knew I looked good, but to me it wasn't something to talk or brag about. It was more of an inside feeling, a confidence that I'd longed to feel for a while.

Even though the attention was a little uncomfortable, I was happily amazed by all the compliments I got that day. All I'd done was add eye makeup and wear tight jeans, and I felt completely different. And other people saw me completely differently, too.

I wondered, "How much does our appearance affect how people perceive us and how we feel about ourselves?" If I got this big a reaction from a little eye shadow, what if I looked completely different? Would people react differently? Would I feel different?

I decided to do an experiment to figure out just how much our appearance can shape how we think of ourselves. I would try out different identities on different days—goth, party girl, hip-hop, and my normal look—to see if people would react differently.

["What do you think is going to happen during Lily's experiment?"]

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

The next day, a friend who wears goth clothing helped me dress like her. I wore a black lace collar, black Converse sneakers, black pants with gold zippers everywhere, a spiked belt, and silver chains wrapped around my hips. I also wore three huge necklaces, including a heavy back cross on a chain. I drew a black star below my left eye to enhance the dark look.

When I looked at myself in the mirror, I saw the same person, just wearing a different outfit. I didn't feel different until I was out in public. As I walked along the street, a middle-aged guy looked at me. After we crossed paths, he turned his head and continued to stare. I knew from his eyes that he wasn't looking at me because I was beautiful, but because I looked different.

More heads turned as I continued down the street. Their stares seemed to say I wasn't like them and I didn't belong in this society. I was starting to hate being dressed like this. After being stared at and even laughed at on the train home, my stomach felt queasy and I was crying inside. I wanted to get out of this outfit immediately.

I have friends who are goth and they tell me they don't care at all when people stare. Their attitude is "screw what everyone thinks—normal people suck." I think these friends dress goth because it's a reflection of who they are, but I hated people's mean reactions. This was not an identity I'd try again.

For my next outfit, I went for a party girl look. I put on makeup and dressed in a green top, a gauzy, black miniskirt, and heeled ankle boots. I felt more naked than I'd ever felt in my entire life. Walking to the subway was embarrassing and I wanted to walk faster to get away, but I couldn't. Not in these shoes.

I felt everyone's eyes on my bare legs. I got some comments from guys on the street that made me feel complimented—and some that made me feel uncomfortable and self-conscious. As the day went on, I found that I didn't like the attention after all. I couldn't wait to get home and change into a pair of jeans.

For my hip-hop outfit, I wore a borrowed basketball jersey and a flat-brimmed baseball cap. I felt miserable because I thought I looked boyish and fake.

When I walked the same streets as I had in all my other outfits, people's eyes clung to my face and some girls gave me this weird "Who is she trying to be, dressing that way?" look. When I was in the deli, a teenage girl looked at me up and down and breathed in my entire outfit. I could tell she thought I was trying too hard to fit in and that made me angry because I would never wear something just to fit in.

READ-ALoud
QUESTION

["What do you think would have happened if Lily had been a boy in this outfit?"]

3

At the end of the day, there was nothing I liked about my hip-hop outfit. I didn't look or feel pretty. The shirt was too long, the cap was huge on my small head, and the entire look was way out of my league. I'd never wear it again.

It was a relief to dress as my regular self the next day. I wore a plain black T-shirt and jeans, with no makeup or accessories. I liked the simplicity of the outfit. I felt relaxed, like this was the real me. The quiet, innocent me.

This experience confirmed my idea that we're judged immediately by what we wear. Our clothes are windows into our identities. When strangers see us, they make assumptions about who we are based on our appearance, and they react accordingly.

["What do you think matters more to Lily: how others see her or how she sees herself?"]

READ-ALoud
QUESTION

I also learned how much my feelings about myself are based on other people's reactions. In the goth outfit, I didn't feel one bit different until I went outside. When people started staring, it really hurt and made me want to take off the outfit right away.

And when I wore the short skirt, I felt flattered by some of the compliments I got. I'd never thought I was pretty, but those reactions gave me a little hope that I might not be bad looking after all. At the same time, when men looked me up and down, I felt naked and uncomfortable.

When I look in the mirror, I want to see myself in what I wear, and I want other people to see who I am. This experiment gave me a better idea of who that is. I found that I was afraid to wear outfits like goth and hip-hop, but I was excited about wearing the girly outfits. Maybe I'm more of a girly girl than I'd thought.

I never admitted that to myself before. I didn't want to be one of those girls who has to buy the latest trends and cries when she breaks a nail. But I actually like wearing girly clothes and a little makeup, and I like getting compliments (as

long as they're from guys my age).

I like feeling comfortable too, though. For now, I'll probably keep my same look and just wear a little eye makeup occasionally, and maybe even a skirt. One that covers my legs though—I've already returned the miniskirt.

Lily was 17 when she wrote this story. After high school, she went to Brooklyn College.