LESSON

My Family Rocks!

This lesson is the first in the series “Family Tapestry.” One goal of these lessons is to help students recognize and accept differences among themselves and within the larger community. Another is to recognize how each student’s unique family contributes to a richer society. As students begin to understand themselves better, learning opportunities will likely emerge to explore biases and prejudices. In this introductory lesson, students explore the definition of family, learn about different kinds of family structures and explore what makes their own family unique.

Grade Level  K-2, 3-5

Subject: Reading & Language Arts, Social Studies, SEL, ELL/ESL, Science & Health
Social Justice Domain: Diversity

OBJECTIVES

Activities will help students:

- understand, appreciate and respect differences and similarities in their classroom and school
- exhibit pride in their own unique family without judging other families
- learn about different types of families

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What makes a family?
- What is unique about my family?
- What makes a family a type of community?
- How does having different kinds of families make our community richer?
- Why is it important to learn about different types of families?

MATERIALS
We live in an increasingly diverse world, and that’s true even for family structures. The “nuclear” family is not as prevalent in our society as it once was. More children are being raised by single parents, by same-sex parents, by grandparents, in blended families and in families with mixed race, religion and ethnicity. Even though variety is common, children are not always comfortable with their own family situations or with differences in their peers’ families. As they encounter other family structures, it is important to help children recognize and accept differences.

If we reinforce these lessons, children will learn to appreciate, rather than fear, differences and to recognize bias and stereotypes when they see them. As children begin to compare their family situation with others, they may start expressing concerns about being different—they need to be reassured that differences are fine. The exposure to families that may not be like their own, in particular, should encourage acceptance as they see that, even within their own classroom, everyone’s family is unique!

Recommended Resource

- *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards (2010)

Glossary

**diversity** [dih-vur-si-tee] *(noun)* variety

**family** [fam-uh-lee, fam-lee] *(noun)* a group of people going through the world together often adults and the children they care for

**extended family** [ik-sten-did fam-uh-lee, fam-lee] *(noun)* all of the relatives or people making up a family, whether or not they live together; often this includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.
guardian [gahr-dee-uhn] (noun) a person other than a parent who is legally responsible for a child or children

immediate family [ih-mee-dee-it fam-uh-lee, fam-lee] (noun) a person’s smallest family unit, often consisting of parents/guardians and children

unique [yoo-neek] (adjective) having no like or equal

Activities

(Note: Before students enter, place the five numbered signs in different areas of the room.)

1. What does family mean to you? (Note: Write the following sentence starter on a flip chart: “A family is…”) Read the sentence starter and write a word or series of words on a sticky note to complete the sentence. Put the sticky note aside.

2. (Note: Distribute magazines and newspapers.) Look through one of the magazines and find a picture of a family. Tear or cut out the picture.

3. Look at the numbered signs around the room. Get up and stand by the sign that shows the number of people in your magazine picture. For example, if you have cut out a picture that shows four people in a family, stand by the sign that says 4-5.

4. Count the number of people standing by each sign. Which sign has the most people? Which sign has the fewest people?

5. The people standing by your sign will be your group for the first part of the lesson. If one of the signs doesn’t have enough people to form a group, feel free to pair up with another group. Sit down with your group members. Show your picture to your other group members and explain to them why you think your picture represents a family.

6. (Note: Read the following family descriptions to the class.) Listen to the family descriptions and stand up every time a family is described:
   - An African-American mom and her adopted Chinese daughter.
   - A man and a woman with no children.
   - Parents and guardians with 11 children and a grandchild.
   - A mom, a stepdad and a son.
   - A girl and her two dads.
   - A boy and his foster parents.

7. Hopefully you stood up each time because every one of these describes a family! Each of us can have our own definition of family. To some people, our family represents the people we are related to. To others, it is the people who love and support us. A family can be two people or 10 people. It can have two moms, one mom or no mom at all. It can have a grandma. It can
have one child or six children! It can have children from around the world. Every family is unique!

8. As a group, look back through the magazines and identify pictures of families that look different from the one(s) you originally identified. Then go back to your sticky note and see if you want to change your definition of what a family is. Share your first and final sentences with the class.

9. Now think about your own unique family. Just like each of us has our own identity, each of our families has its own identity too. (Note: If you haven’t explored identity yet, you might want to review the activity “Who We Really Are” with students.) Count to yourself the number of people in your own immediate family (this is usually, but not always, the people who live with you). Get up and move to the sign that shows how many people you have in your immediate family. Do a recount of those standing by each sign. Now which sign has the most people? Did the groupings change? In your new group, have each member share who is part of their family. Is everyone’s family exactly the same, or are there differences?

10. Distribute the “Family Scavenger Hunt handout (Grades K-2, 3-5). We all have families and, in this lesson, you will learn something unique about each of the different families in your class. There are 10 family descriptions on the handout. For this part of the lesson, you will walk around the room with classmates and try to find someone who matches each family description. When you find someone, write his or her name on the line. See if you can find 10 different people who fit the 10 different descriptions.

11. Review answers. Did anyone find all 10? (Note: Have students share what they learned about their classmates from the activity.) How does it make your community better to have so many different types of families? How many people think their family rocks!

12. (Note: Distribute paper and art materials.) You just learned that every family is unique, including yours. Using art materials, create a family portrait that shows each member of your unique family and includes the following sentence: “My unique family rocks because ______.” You can draw each family member, include an actual photograph of each, or include something that represents each member. For example, if your brother plays soccer, you can draw a soccer ball. Remember that every family rocks so no one family is better than any other!

13. When you are finished, present your family portrait to the rest of the class and make sure you let them know why your unique family rocks! Then be prepared to listen to your classmates share why their families rock, too!

**Extension Activity**
Sometimes people in the same family can have different viewpoints. Interview each of your family members to see why they think your family rocks. Then find a way to incorporate their opinions into the family portrait.

**Activities and embedded assessments address the following standards from the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts:**

**CCSS:** SL.1, SL.3, SL.4, SL.6, W.1

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