

TITLE: Families: Different and the Same

Grade Level 4 through 6

Subject Areas Language Arts, Social Studies

California State Standards

Language Arts

Fourth Grade

A. Listening and Speaking

1., 2. Make organized and detailed oral presentations.

B. Written and Oral Conventions

1. Use language correctly.

C. Writing

1. Write multiparagraph compositions.

Fifth Grade

A. Listening and Speaking

1., 2. Present orally about new information.

Sixth Grade

D. Writing

2. Write multiparagraph narrative and expository compositions that develop the topic, use precise details and include conclusions.

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 family's composition and that of their classmates'.

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 **That's A Family!**

Book **The House on Mango Street** by Sandra Cisneros (optional)

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Go over the general ideas and vocabulary presented in the video. You may wish to make a poster of the points below 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 new 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?

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. Have each child make a booklet about **That's a Family!** each page describing a different kind of family from the video and featuring a picture of that family. This could be a ribbon book where 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:

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

3. 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.

4. Have students interview someone they know who is part of a family that is different from their own.

5. 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?

6. Make connections between the families in the video and people your students know. Do they know anyone who is divorced? a single parent? adopted? Gay or Lesbian, or has Gay people in their family? biracial? bilingual?

7. 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 what they would like the class and 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.

8. Have students write a poem about **That's a Family!**

9. Ask students to choose a person from the video. Have them describe five ways that person is similar to or different from them.

10. 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 to thank the families.

11. 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...

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

Activity Three

The purpose of this activity is for students to think more deeply about how laws and cultural attitudes affect family compositions.

1. Assign a research project on families. Have some students research the history of laws about mixed-race marriages in the United States and one other country of their choice. Have others find out statistics on mixed-race, mixed-religion, and bilingual families in your state and one other state, comparing these statistics to those from 10 years ago. Other research topics could include the history of adoption, Native-American perspectives on adoption or international policies on adoption. Brainstorm similar research topics on divorce, single-parent families, Gay parents and so on.
2. Have students read Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*. Use each chapter as a model for students' writing. If students write multiple pieces, they can create their own book, titled "The House on _____ Street."

Extensions Related Art Projects

1. Make a version of **That's a Family!** in your classroom! Filming with a home video camera, have students introduce themselves and the members of their families and describe what they would like others to understand about their families. You can do this activity with actual family members present or just by interviewing the students themselves. Students can work in groups running the camera, asking the questions, and being interviewed.
2. Collect all the statements about windows and mirrors (explained in the "Before You Begin" section on the Web site) and make a windows and mirrors bulletin board. Point out again that the same items may be a window for some people and a mirror for others.
3. Have students draw a picture or design a poster that explains the many ways to be a family.
4. 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.
5. Have students create a family tree, but without prescribed family slots (mother, father, grandparents and so on). In this version, the child is the trunk; he or she decides which ways the roots and branches will grow, and how they will be labeled. This more flexible structure validates many different kinds of families, leaving space for stepparents, birth parents and so on.

6. 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.
7. 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?"
8. 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.
9. Create "family mobiles" using hangers, yarn, 5- by 7-inch cards, crayons and markers. Hang mobiles around room.
10. As a class, paint a mural that represents the different family compositions.

Home Activities Students 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 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.