



LESSON

Myths and Facts About Transgender Issues

OVERVIEW

With transgender individuals, including Caitlyn Jenner and Jazz Jennings on the TV series “I Am Jazz,” increasingly visible and states across the country making headlines as they debate laws on bathroom usage, more Americans than ever before are becoming aware of transgender issues. But awareness doesn’t automatically result in understanding, and many students have questions. This lesson provides a way to get answers to those questions without “outing” students who may be questioning, transgender, gender queer or gender nonconforming, or requiring students to make value judgments.

The lesson uses clips from the documentary *From This Day Forward*. When director Sharon Shattuck’s father came out as transgender and began living as Trisha, Sharon was in the awkward throes of middle school. Trisha’s transition was difficult for Sharon’s cisgender (and straight-identified) mother, Marcia, to accept, but her parents stayed together. Years later, as the Shattucks gather to plan Sharon’s wedding, she seeks a deeper understanding of how her parents’ marriage, and their family, survived intact. Through the clips and activities, students take on the role (and investigative methods) of journalists to wade through distortion and sensationalism and to distinguish opinion from fact.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

- Analyze stereotypes about transgender people
- Solidify their understanding of the terms sex, gender, gender expression, transgender, cisgender
- Learn to ask probative questions
- Distinguish fact from opinion
- Conduct research and evaluate sources for credibility and relevance

GRADE LEVELS: 9-10

SUBJECT AREAS

Anti-Bias Education
Basic Research Skills
English/Language Arts

Health
Journalism
Media Literacy

MATERIALS

- Film clips from the film *From This Day Forward* and equipment on which to show them
- A way to gather, preserve and use student questions (e.g., recording them on a white board and giving students access to a saved file of the input)
- Library and/or Internet access for students to conduct research
- Handout of video clip transcript (or computer access to the file)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

90 minutes plus in-school supervised research time

FILM CLIPS

(see transcript handout at end of the lesson plan for clip content)

Clip 1: “Meeting Trisha” (5:02 min.)

The clip begins at 4:15 with Sharon saying, “So, where were we...” It ends at 9:18 when Sharon says, “As children we didn’t really understand what that meant.”

Clip 2: “The Kids React/A Matter of Life or Death” (3:40 min.)

The clip begins at 25:40 with Sharon saying, “When you’re in middle school or high school...” and ends at 29:20 with her saying “...until I saw the expression on that clown’s face.”

Clip 3: “Haters” (3:25 min.)

The clip begins at 31:17 with a neighbor saying, “Everybody knows everybody...” It ends at 34:43 with Trisha describing a hospital experience when only one nurse “came to help me that night.”

Clip 4: “Identity and Representation” (3:00 min.)

The clip begins at 40:40 when Trisha says, “I know a lot of what this film is about is the transgender lifestyles...” It ends at 43:40 with Marcia saying, “You just become disoriented.”

Clip 5: “What to Wear for the Wedding” (3:40 min.)

The clip begins at 1:07:44 with Sharon saying, “I wanted you to wear what you wanted to wear...” It ends at 1:11:22 with Trisha saying, “Try to get by.”

ACTIVITY

NOTE TO TEACHERS

Gender nonconforming students, those who are questioning and/or those with LGBTQ family members may feel exceptionally vulnerable when talking about gender identity issues with their peers. Encourage students to be sensitive to one another, and be prepared to offer private support to students who may be grappling with personal issues. Prior to starting the lesson, please consider informing parents, school counselors, administrators and other support personnel so they can be prepared to offer their help if a student needs a professional referral.

Step 1: The Difference Between Sex and Gender

Introduce the lesson by telling students that they are now journalists who have been assigned to help those in their community who are confused or misinformed by providing their audience with accurate information about being transgender. In a moment, they will view excerpts from a documentary about a trans woman named Trisha and her family, but first, they need some background information.

Ask students to identify the difference between “sex” and “gender.” If they need help, you can share the definitions below and/or this helpful resource from Teaching Tolerance (<http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-50-summer-2015/feature/sex-sexual-orientation-gender-identity-gender-expression>).

Sex – The characteristics that identify a person as male, female or intersex (people born with physical features, especially genitals or chromosomes, that are neither clearly male nor clearly female or are a combination of female and male).

Gender – The set of behaviors and activities that are culturally identified as “masculine” or “feminine.” These include clothing, hairstyles, body language, occupations, hobbies and so on.

It is important for students to understand fully the difference between these terms before they start their assignment. It might also be helpful to introduce the term “gender expression,” i.e., the outward signals (e.g., make-up, clothing, hairstyle) that people often adopt to express their gender identities, which may or may not reflect their biological characteristics.

Note: You may also want to familiarize students with the term “cisgender,” which can be used in place of “straight” or “straight-identified,” to describe people whose sex and gender align. According to Teaching Tolerance, “Cisgender is an important word because it names the dominant experience rather than simply seeing it as the default.”

Step 2: Meeting Trisha

Introduce the film *From This Day Forward* to students by letting them know that it’s a documentary about a family in which the father came out as a transgender woman and changed her name to Trisha. The film is made by Trisha’s older daughter, Sharon, who they will hear asking questions from behind the camera. And they’ll also meet the younger daughter in the family, Laura, and Sharon and Laura’s mother, Marcia.

Before showing **Clip 1**, be prepared to record students’ questions so that the questions can be used later in the lesson. Remind students of their role as journalists who have just been assigned by their news director to inform their community about what it means to be transgender. They will have access to a transcript of the clip, so they don’t need to take notes about what is said. Instead, their focus at this stage should be on generating questions that will help them go beyond the superficial who, what, when and where. To keep the questions serious, briefly talk about what a probative question is, emphasizing that high quality questions are those that help journalists (and ultimately their audiences) to understand the issues clearly and in depth.

Divide students into small groups (4 to 5) and show **Clip 1**. After the clip, give the groups several minutes to generate questions and post all their questions on the class master list (e.g., on a white board or in a Google doc). To help them recall what they saw, provide them with access to the transcript, either digitally or on a handout.

Step 3: The Rest of the Film Clips

Show as many or as few of the remaining clips as you deem appropriate for your class. The procedure is the same as that used with the first clip with one addition. To reflect a genuine journalistic process, not only should students be formulating questions, but they should also be listening to determine whether the clip provides answers to any of their previous questions. So give everyone a chance to scan the master list of questions prior to showing each clip.

Step 4: Looking for Information

Once students have viewed the film clips, let them look at the master list of questions. In their small groups, have them sort the questions into those that have high probative value for the assignment and those that do not. For example, “Why did Sharon decide to make this film?” might be an interesting question, but the answer isn’t likely to provide information on being transgender, so it isn’t a good match for the assignment.

Have each group post its high value questions to a new master list. As a class, discuss what makes a question probative and high quality. Then have students remove questions that they aren’t likely to be able to answer, keeping in mind that they will not be able to interview anyone who appeared in the film, so they won’t be able to get answers to personal questions.

Step 5: Research

Each student should choose one of the remaining questions on the master list. The next phase of their investigation is for each student to answer the chosen question. To do that, they must use at least three different sources and in their final presentation (written, video or multimedia—you choose based on what students need to practice most), they must annotate the sources, indicating which they found most credible and most useful, and why. They must also clearly distinguish between opinion and fact. If needed, provide some guidance, making clear that believing something to be true does not necessarily make your belief factual.

Note: It is possible to assign this step as homework, but because of the topic, we strongly recommend that the research process be supervised and take place in school. You (or your library media specialist) may even want to prepare a set of pre-approved websites to avoid accidental hits on sexually explicit sites.

Step 6: Conclusions

Once their research is complete, in a go-round, invite students to complete this sentence: “The most important thing I learned about people who are transgender is...”

Optional: Using their classmates’ research as well as their own, along with the film, have students actually write or create video feature stories that would inform their community about being transgender.

EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS

1. Work with a local LGBTQ resource center to find a speaker to talk to your class and answer students' questions about what life is like for transgender people in your community.
2. Have students investigate cultures that recognize gender identities other than just male and female (e.g., *hijra* in South Asia, *two-spirited* in some Native American tribes, *mahu* in native Hawaiian culture, *fa'afafine* in Samoa).
3. Study current controversies over transgender people serving in the military and/or state laws governing use of restrooms and locker rooms by transgender people. Encourage students to share their views with their political representatives.
4. Examine your school's policy or culture on treatment of gender nonconforming students (and/or students with LGBTQ parents/family members) and make any revisions students think are important. Encourage students to consider presenting their suggestions (with supporting evidence) to administrators and the school board or, if they approve of current policy, to voice their support. Some examples of policy subjects include use of restrooms and locker rooms, dress codes, permission forms that only list mother/father and prom dates. For information on national guidelines, visit <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/us-departments-justice-and-education-release-joint-guidance-help-schools-ensure-civil-rights>.

RESOURCES

POV: From This Day Forward

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/fromthisdayforward/> - The site includes a general discussion guide with additional activity ideas.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php>

This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

Terms

GLAAD: "An Ally's Guide to Terminology"

http://files.glaad.org/files/2011/documents/talkingabout_terminology.pdf - "An Ally's Guide to Terminology"—published by the largest anti-defamation organization in the U.S. focused on the LGBTQ community—clarifies terminology for people engaged in conversations about LGBTQ people and issues.

Teaching Tolerance: "A Gender Spectrum Glossary"

www.tolerance.org/LGBT-best-practices-terms - Among its many resources for creating a school climate that is supportive of LGBTQ students, the Teaching Tolerance project of the Southern Poverty Law Center offers this helpful glossary of terms.

Transgender Issues and Anti-Bias Education

American Civil Liberties Union: “Transgender People Aren’t a Threat to You”
aclu.org/blog/speak-freely/transgender-people-arent-threat-you – This page reviews current debates over legal protections and discrimination and debunks common myths.

Family Equality Council: “Creating Transgender Inclusive Schools”
http://www.familyequality.org/_asset/xz7npo/Creating-Transgender-Inclusive-Schools-Aug2016.pdf - The Family Equality Council provides a number of resources for the LGBTQ community, including this guide to creating transgender inclusive schools; the guide breaks down the federal guidelines from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education and provides background on why those guidelines were issued.

GLSEN

www.glsen.org – The resources offered by GLSEN (which stands for Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) include a recent national survey on the realities of school life for gender nonconforming youth, as well as guidelines for establishing a school gay-straight alliance, teaching strategies and lesson plans.

Human Rights Campaign: “Transgender Visibility Guide”
www.hrc.org/resources/entry/transgender-visibility-guide - The Human Rights Campaign offers a downloadable pamphlet that includes resources for those who are beginning to identify as transgender.

National Center for Transgender Equality: “Frequently Asked Questions About Transgender People”
http://transequality.org/Resources/NCTE_UnderstandingTrans.pdf - The National Center for Transgender Equality offers many helpful resources, including a series of questions and answers geared to enhancing understanding of transgender individuals.

Teaching Tolerance: “Perspectives for a Diverse America”
<http://perspectives.tolerance.org/> - Teaching Tolerance provides a standards-style framework for anti-bias education.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

[SL.9-10.1](#) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[SL.9-10.2](#) Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally), evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

[SL.9-10.6](#) Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

[W.9-10.2d](#) Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

[W.9-10.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

[W.9-10.9](#) Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin, 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 250 independent films.

HANDOUT

TRANSCRIPT for *From This Day Forward* Clips

CLIP 1

Sharon: So, where were we? Let me just...okay. So you were saying?

Trisha: Choosing a name.

Sharon: Choosing a name.

Trisha: Years ago as a little child, when I was introduced to the first baby I had ever seen, a newborn baby, and so I was pretty young—I'm going to say I was four—I was told that the baby's name was Trisha. And I don't know why, but I really wished that my name had been Trisha.

I'm sure that this is probably typical of anybody who's gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. You sense—you have a definite sense that something's not quite right. How come I wasn't born a girl?

Sharon: When I was younger I pretty much rejected my dad. I just didn't want to deal with the fact that I had a transgender parent.

[Video playing]

For me I think that a lot of the past is kind of unresolved. As hard as it might be for my family, I want to ask the questions that I couldn't ask back then.

Trisha: Hi.

Child: Hi.

Trisha: There's my family. Gee, am I still filming?

Trisha: I like a skirt that has some pleats. Kind of helps give me some hips that I don't have. I've had people tell me, they say, "Good God, are you tall." I say, "Can't that be elegant?" I look nice. Shall we?

Sharon: Sure, let's do it.

When I was young we lived in Chicago. My mom was a young doctor, so she was working all the time. Mom was the primary breadwinner and Dad was the primary caretaker. And at first it was a pretty average childhood.

Trisha: Enjoying the evening. I've come over to read your magazine, catch up on casual reading. She's stretching. [Laughs]

I've always wanted to have children and I had a chance to put you on my hip and carried my diaper bag around and hang out with other mothers. And so vicariously it's as close as I could come.

Sharon: To what?

Trisha: To being a mother. You know, to being your mom.

Sharon: Did you feel alone in that situation?

Trisha: Oh yeah, I felt very, very alone trying to keep the cross-dressing hidden from neighbors and relatives and going out at night to events or whatever or looking both ways and changing clothes in the back of your vehicle in large parking lots with nobody around. You know, after a while that gets old.

Sharon: It was a Christmas morning and I was really young. I might've been in third grade, and so my sister was, like, first grade. I remember my sister was snooping in my dad's office and found some photos that had been glued together and she peeled them apart and saw Dad dressed as a woman. And so she brought them to my mom and was like "Why is dad dressed like grandma?" My parents felt that it was time to tell us, and so my dad left the room and then came back dressed in women's clothing. As children we didn't really understand what that meant.

CLIP 2

Sharon: When you're in middle school or high school, even if you don't have a transgender parent, you don't really want anything to do with your parents. Dad was really hands-on. Every time we had a field trip or a school dance, Dad would be there chaperoning and it was mortifying, the kind of thing where you just want to crawl into a hole or disappear.

Laura: It was really unfortunate timing that you have two young children who are just growing up and trying to find out who they are and their place in the world, and then you yourself decide, "Okay, this is my time to figure out who I am, too."

Sharon: I dealt with the situation at home by becoming independent as quickly as I could and just really tried to separate myself from needing any help, but Laura was younger so she couldn't really make that choice.

Trisha: Laura's in elementary school, and what a nightmare that is for her, because she has to go through elementary and junior high at a crucial stage where you don't want to stand out, you don't want to be different, and what hell I put her through. And I did it blithely and I regret that.

Sharon: You went full-time at a time when Laura and I were so young, and I just feel like I want to know why. What was the impetus?

Trisha: I suppose I was trying to just force myself through to a situation where I had a consistent gender identity. By that time I felt like I couldn't go back. I was like the genie that got let out of the bottle. When you carry around this feeling that you're not normal and that something's not right in your head it's incredibly depressing

and it's a heavy weight upon your shoulders. You have thoughts that filter through your head where you just feel like this is just never going to end.

You can move around a little bit, Sharon. It's okay. You know it even tapes your voice, too, if you wanted to say something.

Sharon: I love you, Daddy.

Trisha: Oh, I love you, too. You're a gem.

And I had these two beautiful daughters that I'm sitting here raising and I should be the happiest person in the world but I just wanted to die. And I'd get so depressed that I'd call a suicide line because I don't know what else to do.

Sharon: So it was literally life or death for you.

Trisha: It was.

Sharon: There's a painting that my dad did in the eighties. It shows a clown staring at the video with these very masculine features, and I didn't realize until very recently that that's a self-portrait of my dad as a man. This person dressed as a man feels like they're living a lie. I didn't really understand what it felt like to be in the closet until I saw the expression on that clown's face.

CLIP 3

Female 1: Everybody knows everybody and I'm sure everybody in town knows your dad.

Trisha: Oy, argh, there she blows!

Female 1: What's amazed me, too, and I'm going to be very blunt with you, I'm amazed that your parents have maintained such a loving, close relationship from an outsider's viewpoint. I mean, that's amazing to me. And I also have a hard time with which gender to use. I still want to call Trish Mike, and my husband, Dave, still calls him Mike. He says, "That's his name. That's what it's going to always be."

Trisha: Ultimately I changed my name legally. I was formerly Michael Shattuck. I painted a painting and I painted the date of my name change onto the painting, so that's what helps me keep that date in mind.

Sharon: Which painting is it?

Trisha: That is *Into the Stubble Before the Storm*. The gathering storm and the turbulent clouds behind it. I probably knew that there would be problems.

Sharon: We knew that my dad was going to change names, but legally the name change had to be announced in the newspaper. There's only one newspaper. Everyone in town was going to see it. And I think in our minds the headline was going to be plastered across the front page of the newspaper.

- Laura: I didn't know until that morning that it was going to be in the newspaper. To me, that seemed really official and I spent the day in the office. I'm, like, in the sick room because I was so convinced that when the newspaper would come out, I just thought all this bad stuff was going to happen.
- Sharon: My sister came home from school crying one day and she said that her math teacher had pulled her aside after class and said, "I know what your dad is doing and I don't approve."
- Female 1: I think some people were just disgusted. I mean they just couldn't fathom it. This is a small community and they just thought that it was probably the weirdest thing they'd ever encountered.
- Trisha: I lost friends. I lost close friends. Neighbors would hustle their kids away and I had two neighbors who moved out of the neighborhood next door. During one surgery where I had my eyebrows ground down I lost a lot of blood and late at night I couldn't sleep and I'm all bandaged up. I was surprised at how many nurses at the hospital would have nothing to do with me and would not answer my calls because basically it's like, why on earth would a person elect to have these surgeries done? And there is one gay nurse who is the only person who came to help me that night.

CLIP 4

- Trisha: I know a lot of what this film is about is the transgender lifestyles and me, I guess. I'm probably a poor representative of a transgender individual. The way I behave is kind of unpredictable.
- So I kind of lead two separate lives with the way that I present myself in public. I shift back-and-forth a lot between masculine and feminine, so psychologically I'm kind of in a bind.
- Taking on the persona of a woman is a lot of work. It's the slips; it's the makeups; it's the nylon; it's the shoes, and heels hurt my feet.
- I'm trying to speak a little higher and try to pass yourself off by doing kind of this constrained vocal cord approach where everything just goes higher, and are you going to try to sing in a high voice, too, and does this feel real? Or am I being just as real as I can be?
- Sometimes people will say, "What are you, a man? Are you a woman? What are you?" You ask yourself, "Well, aside from being born male, what kind of woman or what kind of a trans woman would I be?"
- Sharon: Are you good with you being you, too?
- Trisha: You know what? In terms of my expression, part of me wants to express more of my femininity and wants to put my dresses and my outfits and my skirts and stuff on periodically, but also my concern has to do with my spouse.

Sharon: How do you feel seeing Trish wearing a dress? I mean, does it make you question your identity?

Marcia: Yeah, you do. You're sort of like, okay, I'm in this relationship. I'm attracted to men and my spouse is now looking very feminine and it becomes really confusing, you know? Then who am I? What does that mean to me and my femininity? You just become disoriented.

CLIP 5

Sharon: I wanted you to wear what you wanted to wear, you know? I mean it feels to me like you made a sacrifice at my wedding. I kind of feel a bit sad.

Trisha: Okay, well let me tell you. When I put on the tux and when Marcia and I were like this side-by-side I felt good. It was okay. And when we were with you that moment and the wedding—it was the happiest day of my life so far.

Test, test, test, test. Folks, are you having a good time tonight? I want to tell you that even though there's a lot of work to putting on a good party, there's even more work to putting on a good marriage. And if your marriage is really built on that foundation I spoke of and if you know how to communicate with each other and if you know how to smile your way through arguments and come back and try to work on your differences then you'll go far. Thank you so much. Thank ya, thank ya, thank ya.

Announcer: I would like to invite Sharon and her father to the dance floor for a father-daughter dance.

Trisha: In my own life on any given day I have a very fluid concept of what my gender presentation may be. As I started meeting women who were mucking out barns, working barefoot in their gardens, getting dirty, I decided there are all different kinds of women. If I'm going mushroom hunting I can throw on some camo and I can slip in and out of attire. Really when it comes right down to it and when you start letting go of preconceptions, I feel like a lot of the weight is gone.

[Whistling] I've got a wet dog. But I'm not saying I'm completely happy. So it's not like I have resolved my transgender being. I haven't. I don't think I ever will. So just kind of take it as it is. Try to get by. [Whistling]