SOGI 123

A First-Grade Classroom Visit with *Introducing Teddy: A Gentle Story About Gender and Friendship* by Jessica Walton

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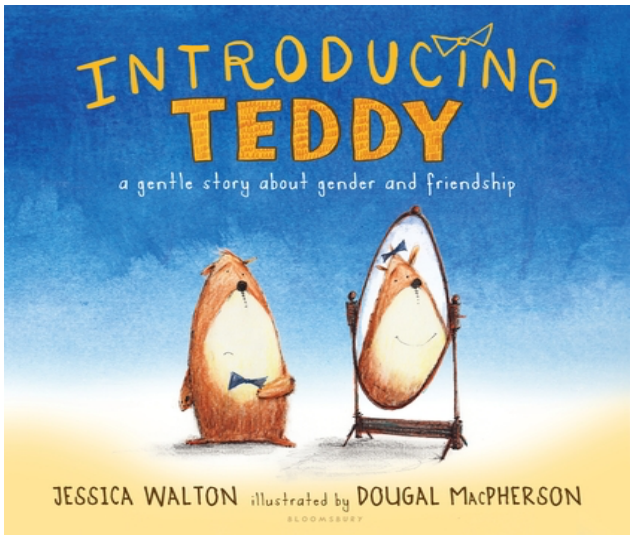


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Big ideas:

Kindergarten - Grade 2:

- Language and story can be a source of creativity and joy.
- Stories and other texts help us learn about ourselves and our families.
- Everyone has a unique story to share.
- Through listening and speaking, we connect with others and share our world.

Curricular Competencies:

- Use developmentally appropriate reading, listening, and viewing strategies to make meaning.
- Engage actively as listeners, viewers, and readers, as appropriate, to develop understanding of self, identity, and community.
- Recognize the importance of story in personal, family, and community identity.
- Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to stories and other texts to make meaning.
- Recognize the structure of story.

Developing Understandings:

- A person's appearance can change.
  - Sometimes the change is subtle or superficial.
  - Sometimes the change is more profound.
- People are entitled to be called by the name that they identify with.
  - When people identify the name that they want to be called, it is respectful to use it.
- How to be a good friend.

Summary of Classroom Visit (i.e., Lesson Plan):

I started by introducing myself and asking if students had seen me around the school. I talked about how sometimes when they see me, I might look different. I asked them to brainstorm ways they might notice that I looked different. Suggestions that were generated were wearing a hat one day, wearing different shoes, getting a haircut, etc.

Some possible differences:

- Wearing different clothing
- Changing hair styles; differences in beard (clean-shaven, stubble, trimmed beard, fuller beard)
- Gaining or losing weight
- Having a visible injury (wearing a cast or bandage, having a bruise); getting sunburnt etc.

I talked about how sometimes they might see me and one day I might have a full beard. On other days, I would have no beard. And on other days, I might have something somewhere in between. I elaborated on how sometimes when I've had a beard for a while, it gets kind of fuzzy, and when I shave it off, people don't always recognize me because I look different, but they are always able to recognize that I'm still the same person in the end.

Understanding: Regardless of physical appearance, I am still the same person.

I then spoke to students about my name. I had been introduced as Mr. Gidinski, and I explained to them that most people call me Mr. G. I also shared with them that my friends call me Bryan. I used this to illustrate that I have 3 names, and that names are important. I asked them how they would know what they should call me, to which they responded, "we could just ask you what you wanted us to call you." We all want to be addressed by the name that is most comfortable for us. Kids gave examples of how they had two names. Someone shared their first name and then their middle name. Another shared that his name was Benjamin, but he preferred to be called Ben. A trans student identified that she used a different name last year. In each scenario, students were asked how to determine which name to call someone, to which the simple answer was "we call someone the name they ask us to call them."

Some possible reasons why someone might have more than one name:

- Changing your name (or adding a new one) after immigrating
- Changing your last name to match your spouse
- Having first, middle, and last names
- Having a nickname
- Being referred to by your last name (e.g., Mr. Gidinski)
- Etc.

Understanding: <u>When someone shares their name, it is respectful for us to use the name they ask us to use.</u>

We then talked about how to be a good friend, and we worked together to identify things that good friends do – e.g., sharing, playing together, being silly together, etc. Next, I shared *Introducing Teddy*, a book touching on appearance, names, and friendships, with the class, pausing to ask questions in order to clarify understanding(s) and emphasize how the activities at the end of the story mirror the activities at its beginning.

The story presented in *Introducing Teddy* can be deconstructed on a number of levels that vary in sophistication. Depth of engagement will be dependent on the developmental level of students as well as on which topics are most relevant to the social dynamics in the classroom.

In more advanced classrooms, *Introducing Teddy* and this lesson plan can be a springboard for conversations about:

1. Non-binary understandings of gender.
2. Deconstructing stereotypical gender roles (i.e., Errol plays with Teddy and hosts tea parties, while Ava rides a scooter and builds a robot)