

Lesson Plan: What Inclusion Looks Like, Sounds Like, and Feels Like (1 of 3)

Grade Level: Upper Elementary (Grades 4–5)

Duration: 20–25 minutes

Content Area: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) / School Counseling

Text Connection: *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio

Standards Alignment (ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors)

- **M 2:** Sense of acceptance, respect, support, and inclusion for self and others
- **B-SS 2:** Create positive and supportive relationships with other students
- **B-SS 4:** Demonstrate empathy
- **B-SMS 7:** Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem

Lesson Objective

Students will be able to:

- Identify subtle verbal and nonverbal behaviors that communicate inclusion or exclusion
- Explain how body language and tone impact others' sense of belonging
- Demonstrate inclusive behaviors through role-play and discussion

Materials

- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Marker
- Optional: Talking piece (for restorative circle)
- *Wonder* (for reference/discussion)

Key Vocabulary

- **Inclusion:** Actions that help others feel welcomed and that they belong
- **Exclusion:** Actions (intentional or unintentional) that make others feel left out
- **Body Language:** Nonverbal communication through posture, gestures, and facial expressions
- **Tone of Voice:** How something is said, not just the words used

Procedure

1. Mini-Lesson (10 minutes)

Objective: Students identify subtle signs of inclusion/exclusion and understand impact.

1. Define Inclusion vs. Exclusion

- **Inclusion:** Making sure everyone feels they belong.
- **Exclusion:** Actions that make someone feel left out—sometimes on purpose, sometimes without knowing.

2. Subtle Clues Discussion

Use examples from *Wonder* (from the first 4 sections):

- “*When people looked away really fast.*”
- “*No one wanted to sit with him.*”
- “*Jack sat with him at first because Mr. Tushman asked.*”

Ask:

- “*Did anyone say something mean out loud?*” (Usually no.)
- “*Then why did it still feel hurtful?*”

3. Body Language + Tone Signals

Make a short list on the board:

- Turning away
- Whispering
- Ignoring someone’s “hi”
- Moving belongings to avoid sitting next to someone
- Eye-rolling, sighing
- Saying something “nice” in a cold voice

4. Emphasize: Kindness = Words + Actions

- “You can say ‘Sure, sit here’ kindly or unkindly.”
- “Actions like saving a spot, or not moving someone’s lunch show kindness more loudly than words.”

2. Activity (5–8 minutes)

Body-Language Freeze Game

You model “inclusion” vs. “exclusion” postures:

- Open shoulders vs. turned back
- Smiling vs. blank stare
- Patting a seat next to you vs. moving a backpack

Students guess: “*Is this inviting someone in, or pushing them out?*”

Then have pairs practice:

- One shows a welcoming posture
- One shows an unwelcoming posture
- Switch

Emphasize awareness: “You may not realize what your body is saying.”

3. Restorative Circle (5–7 minutes)

Use talking stick; students may pass.

Prompts (choose one):

- “I feel included when...”
- “One time I felt left out was... (no names)”
- “When I notice someone alone, I could...”

Model an **I-statement**:

- “I feel hurt when I think someone doesn’t want me to sit near them.”
- Rules:
- No naming others
 - Speak from “I”
 - Listen with eyes, ears, and heart
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Lesson Plan: Inclusion Means Making Space — Not Just Being Nice (2 of 3)

Grade Level: Upper Elementary (Grades 4–5)

Duration: 15–20 minutes

Content Area: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) / School Counseling

Text Connection: *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio

Standards Alignment (ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors)

- **M 2:** Sense of acceptance, respect, support, and inclusion for self and others
- **B-SS 2:** Create positive and supportive relationships with other students
- **B-SS 4:** Demonstrate empathy
- **B-SS 5:** Demonstrate ethical decision-making and social responsibility

Lesson Objective

Students will be able to:

- Explain the difference between passive kindness and active inclusion
- Identify how actions (not just words) impact others’ sense of belonging
- Generate specific, actionable strategies for including others in shared spaces

Materials

- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Marker
- Optional: Talking piece (for restorative circle)
- *Wonder* (for reference/discussion)

Key Vocabulary

- **Inclusion:** Actively making space for others to feel welcomed and valued
- **Exclusion:** Behaviors that leave others out, even unintentionally
- **Intentional Inclusion:** Making a conscious choice to include others through actions

Lesson Procedure

1. Mini-Lesson / Direct Instruction (10–12 minutes)

Review:

Begin by connecting to the previous lesson:

“Last time, we talked about subtle clues that include or exclude people. Today, we’re going a little deeper.”

Reinforce:

“Kindness is not just what we say—it’s what we do.”

Introduce Key Concept: Active Inclusion

Explain:

“Sometimes people think, ‘I’m not being mean, so I’m being kind.’ But inclusion is more than not being mean—it’s about actively making space for others.”

Text Connection:

Reference *Wonder* (Halloween chapter):

- Discuss how Jack is outwardly kind but later says something hurtful about Auggie
- Highlight the disconnect between words and actions

Discussion Questions:

- “What mattered more to Auggie—what people said or what they did?”
- “How might this connect to our own classroom or lunch experiences?”

Real-Life Application:

Provide relatable examples:

- Saying “You can sit here” but turning away
- Moving someone’s belongings to avoid sitting near them
- Always sitting with the same group, leaving others without a place

Ask students:

- “If you always sit in the same spot with the same people, who might get left out?”
- “Who might never get a chance to join you?”

Teach: Intentional Inclusion

Create a visible list on the board:

Ways to Actively Include Others:

- Make space at the table
- Invite someone before they have to ask
- Respect and protect someone’s saved seat
- Occasionally rotate seating or groups
- Use open body language (eye contact, smiling)
- Speak in a warm, welcoming tone

Key Teaching Point:

“Inclusion means making room—literally and emotionally. It means noticing and choosing to act.”

2. Closure Activity: Restorative Circle (5–7 minutes)**Structure:**

- Use a talking piece (optional)
- Students may pass
- Establish norms:
 - Speak using “I” statements
 - No naming others
 - Listen respectfully

Prompts (choose one):

- “One action that helps me feel included is...”
- “One action I could take this week to include others is...”

- “When someone makes room for me, I feel...”

Teacher Role:

- Model a response using an “I” statement
 - Reinforce non-blaming, reflective language
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Lesson Plan: We Build Our Community Together (3 of 3)

Grade Level: Upper Elementary (Grades 4–5)

Duration: 20–25 minutes

Content Area: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) / School Counseling

Text Connection: *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio

Standards Alignment (ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors)

- **M 2:** Sense of acceptance, respect, support, and inclusion for self and others
- **B-SS 2:** Create positive and supportive relationships with other students
- **B-SS 4:** Demonstrate empathy
- **B-SS 5:** Demonstrate ethical decision-making and social responsibility

Lesson Objective

Students will be able to:

- Describe how individual actions contribute to overall classroom community
- Identify and commit to specific inclusion habits
- Demonstrate understanding of inclusion as a shared responsibility
- Connect personal acts of inclusion to broader themes of equity and fairness

Materials

- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Sticky notes or index cards
- Poster paper titled: **“We Choose Kindness in Action”**
- Optional: Talking piece for restorative circle
- *Wonder* (for reference/discussion)

Key Vocabulary

- **Community:** A group of people who share a space and responsibility for one another
- **Inclusion:** Actions that help everyone feel they belong
- **Courage:** Doing something kind or right even when it feels uncomfortable
- **Habits:** Actions we practice regularly that shape our behavior over time

Lesson Procedure

1. Mini-Lesson / Direct Instruction (10–12 minutes)

Introduction:

“Today we’re going to talk about how we, as a class, shape what our community feels like every single day.”

Text Connection (*Wonder*):

- Introduce Summer’s decision to sit with Auggie at lunch
- Emphasize:
 - No one told her to do it
 - She noticed he was alone
 - Her choice changed how Auggie experienced school

Discussion Questions:

- “Why might it be hard to invite someone new to sit with you?”
- “How did Summer show courage?”
- “What does it look like to choose kindness even when it feels uncomfortable?”

Teach: Courage in Inclusion

“Inclusion sometimes takes courage. It might mean changing routines or stepping outside your usual group—but it doesn’t mean leaving your friends behind. It means widening the circle.”

Community Reflection

Ask students:

- “What kind of classroom community do we want?”
 - One where people feel unsure where to sit?
 - Or one where everyone feels like they belong?”

Create Class Inclusion Habits

Co-create a list on chart paper:

Inclusion Habits for Our Class:

- Notice when someone is alone
- Invite others before they have to ask
- Keep space open at shared tables
- Respect others' belongings (do not move them)
- Use welcoming body language and tone
- Talk to a variety of classmates
- Rotate seating occasionally

“We don’t have to be best friends with everyone, but everyone deserves respect and a sense of belonging.”

Black History Month Connection: The Power of Small Actions and Collective Change

As we learn about inclusion in our classroom community, we also recognize that these ideas connect to larger moments in history where individuals and communities worked toward fairness and belonging.

- **Ripple Effect of Change:**
Just like the Civil Rights Movement led to major changes in laws and schools, our small everyday choices can create a ripple effect in our own classroom and school community. When we choose inclusion, respect, and kindness, we are contributing to a more welcoming environment for everyone.
- **Small Actions Matter:**
Speaking up for what is right, including others, and choosing kindness even when it feels uncomfortable are examples of small actions that can lead to meaningful change over time.
- **Courageous Action:**
Rosa Parks showed that one intentional act of courage can help spark a larger movement for fairness and dignity. Her example reminds us that even quiet, individual choices can have a powerful impact.
- **Educational Inclusion and Equity:**
Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was a landmark decision that helped challenge school segregation and move toward more equitable access to education for all students.

Connection Back to Students:

“In the same way these moments in history helped create more fair and inclusive schools, your daily choices—how you include others, how you speak, and how you treat people—help shape what our classroom feels like right now.”

2. Guided Activity: Inclusion Pledges (5–8 minutes)

Students write an “I will...” statement, such as:

- “I will notice when someone is alone.”
- “I will invite someone new to sit with me.”
- “I will use kind and welcoming body language.”

Students place their pledge on a class poster:

“We Choose Kindness in Action”

3. Closure Activity: Restorative Circle (5–7 minutes)

Structure:

- Talking piece (optional)
- Students may pass
- Norms:
 - “I” statements only
 - No naming peers
 - Respectful listening

Prompts (choose one):

- “One way I want our class to feel is...”
- “I feel proud of myself when I include others by...”
- “One change I want to try this week is...”

Closing Message:

“We don’t have to be best friends with everyone, but everyone deserves to feel welcome—and we get to create that together.”