

# AFFIRMING GENDER DIVERSITY

## LESSON PLAN

### Elementary grades

*Students in Grades 1 to 6 in every province and territory*



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this teacher resource is to offer activities on the diversity of gender in Canada and around the world. By exploring the diversity of gender within Canadian society (both pre- and post-colonization) and in other cultures, teachers contribute to their students' awareness of diversity on many levels, and to their learning about the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. These activities provide an informative approach to this complex topic.

These activities can be triggering events for students, as they may know someone who identifies as other than cisgender or is struggling with their gender identity, or they may be questioning their own gender identity. Be sure to establish guidelines that make your classroom a safe and comfortable place to talk. To prepare properly and to gain insights on how to lead classroom discussions and activities on the topic, please make certain that you read pages 1 to 6 of the booklet entitled *Affirming Gender Diversity*. Remember always to review resources ahead of time, selecting which portions you may or may not use.

As teachers, you know your students best, and are the best-placed expert in your classroom to determine which issues you should stay away from, and which questions will generate rich dialogue and critical thinking. The goal of the classroom conversation is to focus on the diversity of gender, but for this to happen, students need to understand that gender diversity exists everywhere, and that prior to colonization, that diversity was reflected in most North American Indigenous societies. For more in-depth discussions on the diversity of gender, we recommend a number of reputable sources that are applicable to many grade levels. You can find these in the Other Resources section of this lesson plan, and in the Supporting Resources and the Additional Resources and Links sections of the booklet itself.

## PURPOSE

The Canadian Teachers' Federation has developed the resource booklet *Affirming Gender Diversity* and this lesson plan to support teachers in raising awareness and addressing questions from students around the diversity of gender, as well as social concepts such as cisnormativity, cissexism, and transphobia. There exists a wide variety of genders beyond the boy/man – girl/woman binary. And although great strides have been made in Canada to improve the rights of those who experience, for example, feelings of attraction in all its forms beyond the heterosexual, those strides have yet to be made where gender identity and gender expression are concerned. In addition, children are exposed to heteronormativity and cisnormativity from a wide range of sources. Representing diverse identities in the classroom can help to create safer and more inclusive communities for children and their families.

### How to Talk to School Staff and Parents about Gender Identity

<https://rossieronline.usc.edu/blog/talking-about-students-and-gender/>

Use the term “personal” pronouns, instead of “preferred”.

### Before You Begin

Students will have a range of knowledge levels and experiences with gender identity, gender expression, and attraction. Creating safer spaces to discuss diverse identities requires setting norms of participation. Be sure to establish classroom norms to remind your students that each of us has a responsibility to make sure that the classroom is a safe and respectful place to learn. Norms of participation could include:

- Speak respectfully.
- Respect everyone's privacy.
- Listen to other people's experiences. You are only the expert on your own experiences.
- If your words hurt someone, be willing to listen, apologize, and do better.

It is equally important to continue creating safer space throughout the school year. Displaying 2SLGBTQ+ supportive materials, including diverse books in your classroom library, responding to gender-biased statements from students and adults, and ensuring that your practices do not divide or stereotype students based on gender are a few ways to make the classroom a safer space.

It might happen that students decide to tell you that they identify as 2SLGBTQ+ during one of these activities. It is a sign that they trust you. If that happens, here are some guidelines to help you be a supportive ally:

[When a Student Tells You They Identify as 2SLGBTQ+](#)

# Activity 1: Activating Prior Knowledge

## Objective

- Activate student thinking and assess prior knowledge about gender, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, and attraction.

## A Few Ideas

- Rotational Graffiti

Divide students into small groups and give each group markers and a piece of chart paper with a prompt written on it. Students will have one minute to write their responses to each prompt before rotating their papers to the next group.

## Suggested Prompts

- What do you think of when you hear that someone is masculine? What do you think of when you hear that someone is feminine?
- What do you think it means to be a girl? What do you think it means to be a boy? What do you think it means to be neither, or both?
- What sorts of clothes do you think of as “boy” clothes? What sorts of clothes do you think of as “girl” clothes?
- What are some shows or movies you have seen that show people in love or people who have a crush on someone?
- What are some shows and movies you have seen that show families? What are some different ways a family can look?

Discuss student responses. Responses may show that media students have seen portrays heterosexual attraction and cisgender people most of the time. Discuss whether they have seen any media that shows diversity in individuals, relationships, and families. If not, why are these stories missing on TV? How might this feel to someone who never sees people, families, and relationships they can relate to? What suggestions do students have for making media more diverse?

- In remote learning situations, students may use Google Jamboard to respond to prompts.

## Activity 2: Exploring Terminology

### Objective

- Understand the terms gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, physical attraction, and emotional attraction.

### A Few Ideas

- Show TSER's Gender Unicorn ([Gender-Unicorn.jpg](#), 3300×2550) as an introduction to the terms gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, physical attraction, and emotional attraction.
- Discuss the following videos, which give further explanation of these concepts:
  - [CBC Gender Explained](#)
  - Queer Kid Stuff:
    - [Gender Expression](#)
    - [He, She, They](#)
  - ["This Is Xander. They Are Not a Boy or a Girl, They Are Nonbinary. What Does This Mean?"](#)
  - Audrey Mason-Hyde: ["Toilets, Bowties, Gender and Me"](#)
  - [www.Amaze.org](#) — [Sex Assigned at Birth and Gender Identity: What's the Difference?](#)
  - [What Is Sexual Orientation? LGBTQ+](#)
  - Muppet Babies — [Gonzo-rella Part 1](#), [Gonzo-rella Part 2](#)  
(The second clip is a good example of the use of they/them pronouns.)

# Activity 3: Storytelling

## Objective

- Apply new learning about gender identity, gender expression, and attraction by creating examples of these traits for a fictional character.

## A Few Ideas

- Use the “Create A Character” worksheet to invent a fictional character and consider the character’s gender identity, gender expression, and attraction.
- Provide story prompts to help students work their characters into a short story. Suggested story prompts:
  - Retell your favourite fairy tale, but change one or more of the following:
    - the genders of one or more characters
    - the main character’s love interest
    - how a character looks and dresses
  - Collaborate with 1-2 classmates to create a story about how your characters would react to each other if they met
- Have students create illustrated storybooks or short films featuring their characters and/or take turns presenting their stories verbally to the class.

## Create a Character

Character's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Character's pronouns: \_\_\_\_\_

Is your character interested in romantic relationships? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, what gender(s) would they be interested in? \_\_\_\_\_

What does your character look like? How do they dress? How do they style their hair? Do they like to wear any makeup or jewellery? Draw a picture of your character here:

## Activity 4: Identifying Stereotypes

### Objectives

- Identify stereotypes students may have already internalized or experienced.
- Encourage critical thinking about these and other stereotypes.

### A Few Ideas

- **“Act Like a Boy/Act Like a Girl” activity**  
(Source: The Manitoba Teachers’ Society Teacher-Led Learning Team)

Divide the class into two groups. Provide each group with a large piece of flipchart paper and markers. Explain the following scenario to the group:

“Two aliens have crash-landed on Earth and need our help to disguise themselves as humans. One wants to fit in as a girl, and one wants to fit in as a boy. Group 1 will brainstorm a list of ways our alien friend can act like a human girl. Group 2 will brainstorm a list of ways to fit in as a boy.”

Allow 5-10 minutes to brainstorm lists. Each group should appoint a reporter to share their list with the class.

When both groups have shared their lists, discuss patterns/possible meanings in their lists. For example, if group 1 listed things like “play with dolls,” or “play dress-up,” does this mean that girls/women are expected to be pretty and take care of children? If group 2 listed things like “play sports,” or “don’t cry,” does this mean we expect boys/men to be strong and unemotional? How does it feel to be told what you should feel and do because of being a boy or girl?

# Activity 5: Exploring Stereotypes

## Objective

- Help students to understand what stereotypes and gender roles are, and how they may limit activities and expression.

## A Few Ideas

- Introduce the terms “stereotype” and “gender role”. Consider the following definitions:

*Stereotype:* A stereotype is a mistaken idea or belief many people have about a thing or group that is based upon how they look on the outside, which may be untrue or only partly true. Stereotyping people is a type of [prejudice](#) because what is on the outside is a small part of who a person is.

(Source: Simple English Wikipedia)

*Gender Role:* Gender role is the idea that people should behave in certain ways because of their [gender](#).

(Source: Simple English Wikipedia)

- Discuss media that explains gender stereotypes, such as:
  - [Scoops And Friends](#)
  - Amaze.org: [Gender Roles and Stereotypes](#)
  - Parent Lab: [What Are Gender Stereotypes?](#)

Suggested discussion questions: Have you ever seen someone get bullied for wearing clothes or playing with toys/engaging in hobbies that people think are “for boys” or “for girls”? What might be some ways these stereotypes affect girls/boys? How might a person who is not a girl or a boy feel about these stereotypes?

- **Stereotype Gallery Walk**

Write the statements about boys and girls that students brainstormed in the “Act Like A Boy/Act Like A Girl” activity onto sheets of paper and post these around the classroom. Another option is to prepare stereotype statements ahead of time, such as:

- Boys don’t cry
- Boys don’t talk about their feelings
- Boys play sports
- Girls wear pretty clothes and hairstyles
- Girls play with dolls

Give students sticky notes that they can use to post their reactions to each stereotype as they walk around the room. Invite students to consider questions such as:

Who might be excluded by this stereotype? How might this stereotype limit what people feel they can do? Why might someone feel hurt by this stereotype? Have you seen anyone being bullied because of stereotypes?

## Activity 6: Critiquing Stereotypes

### Objective

Help students to identify ways in which their environment either reinforces or challenges gender stereotypes.

### A Few Ideas

- Use the “Stereotype Detectives” worksheet to help students analyze whether gender stereotypes are supported or challenged in a place or a piece of media of their choice.

Places could include:

- Your school
- A library
- A toy store
- A clothing store

Media could include:

- Books
- Cartoons
- Movies

### Extension Activity: Design a Toy

As students build familiarity with examples of media, toys, and other aspects of their environment reinforcing gender stereotypes, they can build agency by reimagining these aspects of their environment in ways that challenge gender stereotypes. Use the Design a Toy worksheet to identify stereotypes in toys and design a toy that challenges these stereotypes.

# Stereotype Detective

## Your mission

1. Find clues that show there are stereotypes about boys and girls in \_\_\_\_\_
2. Find clues that \_\_\_\_\_ is challenging stereotypes

## 🔍 Clues

- Are girls and women shown taking care of babies and children more often than men and boys are?
- Are girls and women shown paying more attention to their looks than men and boys are?
- Are men and boys shown being strong and active more than women and girls are?
- Are men/boys and women/girls shown doing different jobs?
- Are men/boys and women/girls shown expressing different feelings?
- Can you think of any others?



# Design a Toy

What problem are you trying to solve? (What kind of stereotypes have you noticed in toys?)

What kind of toy are you designing?

- Doll
- Action Figure
- Costume/Dressup accessories
- Art/Craft kit
- Science kit
- Construction toy
- Model
- Video game
- Cooking/baking toy
- Board/card game
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name of your toy:

Draw a picture of your toy:

In what ways is your toy different from the ones you've seen?  
How does it solve the problem you identified?

## Activity 7: Exploring Gender Diversity in Nature (K-8)

### Objectives

- To acquaint students with the presence of gender diversity in nature – birds, insects, other animal.
- Help students develop an appreciation of gender diversity as it manifests in the natural world.

### A Few Ideas

1. Discuss the presence of non-binary gender in nature. Introduce students to “non-binary” butterflies by exploring the term chimera – meaning having both sexes – and examining various images.  
Resource: [CHIMERA BUTTERFLIES: NON-BINARY ANIMALS](#) (Source: Welcoming Schools)
2. Show slide deck (slides 1-20) entitled *It's Perfectly Natural* by Maya Gonzalez, focusing on the slides pertaining to gender diversity in nature. Read the slideshow notes prior to the discussion (see link below). Discuss these examples and invite students to share other examples they might know. Ask students to share their thoughts about this aspect of nature and what it is teaching us about gender.  
[Gender Wheel: Worksheets & Resources](#) (use slideshow notes for *It's Perfectly Natural* – click on the link and scroll down to locate the slideshow)
3. **Social Action Project:** Ask students to create an art project (K-4) where they draw their favorite non-binary insect, bird or other animal, or create an information display/campaign to help raise awareness about gender diversity in nature. (Grades 5-8)

## Activity 8: Understanding Gender Diversity around the World (5-8)

### Objectives

- Acquaint students with the presence of gender diverse people in two cultures.
- Help students understand how colonization contributed to a binary view of gender that is still being imposed today.
- Help students understand the impact of imposing the gender binary on gender diverse people.

### A Few Ideas

1. In small groups, have students start by completing one side of the **Gender Mind Map** activity sheet where they can brainstorm different ways that we define gender in Western society – binary identities, gender roles, etc.  
[Activity Sheet: Gender Mind Maps.pdf](#)
  - Show slide deck (slides 21-34) from *It's Perfectly Natural* by Maya Gonzalez, focusing on the slides pertaining to gender diversity across cultures. Refer to the notes that accompany the slideshow.  
[Gender Wheel: Worksheets and Resources](#)
  - Discuss the different examples of gender diverse people and invite students to complete the second “pre-colonial” Mind Map with new information from the slide deck. Ask students to explain what the differences are between how gender was understood in these cultures and our current understanding of gender.
2. Have students complete the true/false questions on the activity sheet as they view the short film: [Gender identity: “How colonialism killed my culture’s gender fluidity”](#) (Source: BBC World Service). Take up the questions, and then ask students to complete the What Did You Learn? section where they outline what they learned about the impact of colonization on different cultures. Then, have students respond to the reflection questions and share their thoughts in small groups.  
[Activity Sheet: Gender Identity: “How Colonialism killed my culture’s gender fluidity”](#)
3. Introduce students to *Two-Spirit people on Turtle Island* and discuss the roles Two-Spirit people played in their communities prior to settler arrival, how Indigenous communities understood gender in non-binary ways, and the impact of colonialism. (Note: the term Two-Spirited is also used by Indigenous peoples. Remind students that the terms that people use to reference themselves can vary from community to community. It is always polite to ask how each person refers to their gender identity.) Choose these selections for students to read from the document [Safe and Caring Schools for Two-Spirit Youth](#):

### For example:

*A Bit of History* pp. 9-10; (Grades 5-6)

*Coming In: Native American Two Spirit People* by Dr. Alexandria Wilson pp. 11-15 (Grades 7-8) (Graffiti)

*James’ Story* by Dr. James Makokis pp. 16-18 (Grades 5-6) (Graffiti)

4. **Social Action Project:** Divide students into groups and do a Gallery Walk where they can respond to the text. Place chart paper on the walls – one chart for each of the following example questions:

- *What does the author want us to know or understand?*
- *Why do you think the author wrote this text?*
- *What did you find interesting about the text?*
- *What questions would you like to ask the writer?*

Each group will move around the room at 5-7 minute intervals and record their thoughts on the chart paper. When they return to the chart they started with, they can decide as a group what information would be important to share with the class.

Ask students to think about how they could promote an awareness of gender diversity around the world and the impact of colonialism on our current understanding of gender.

The students could create:

- a bulletin board display;
- a carousel activity with different stations depicting gender diverse communities; or,
- a social media campaign.

Ask students to brainstorm topics or questions that they will address through their project:

*Why should we care?*

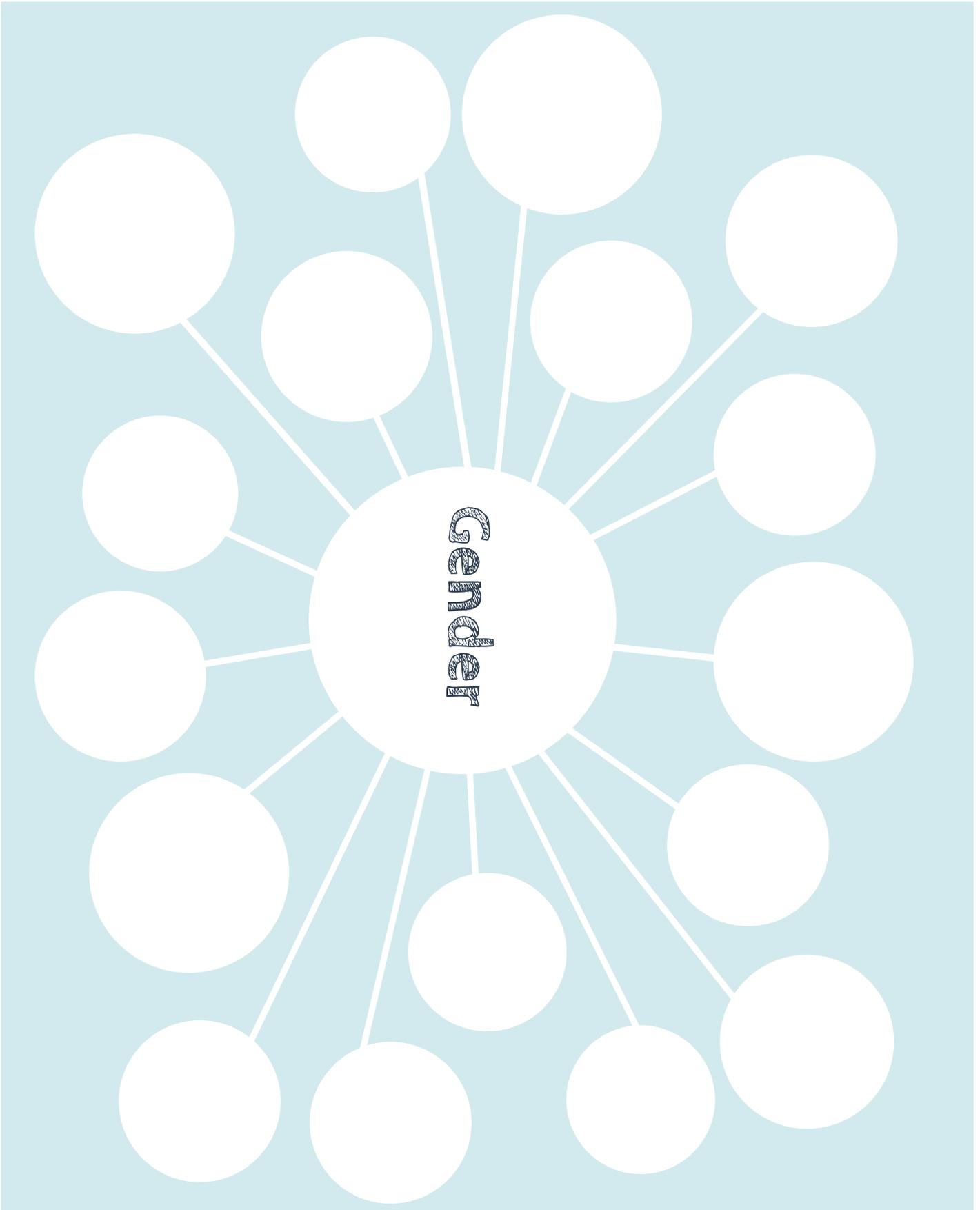
*What needs to change?*

*Did you know that...?*

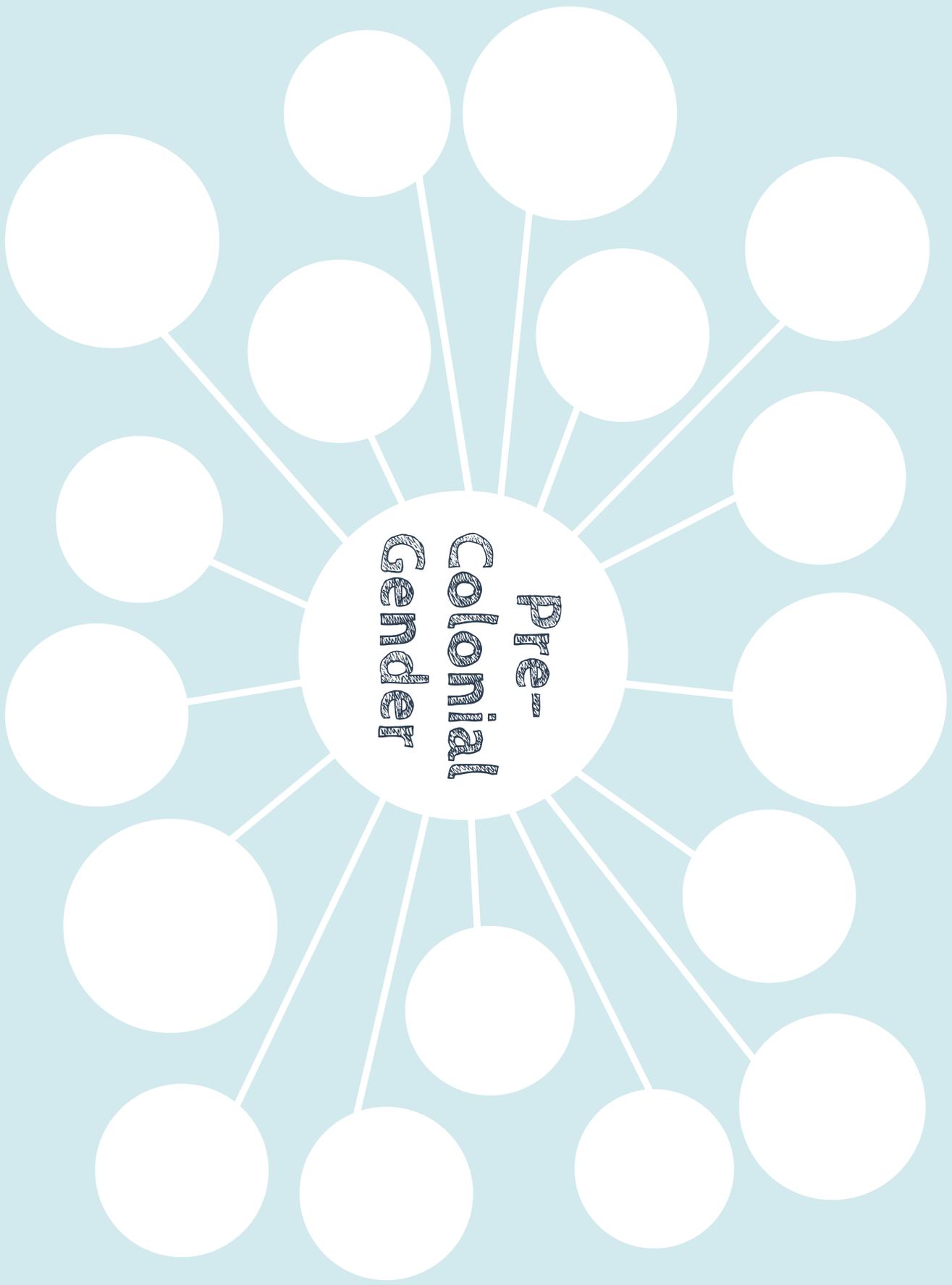
*What is important for us to understand?*

*How did colonialism impact?*

# Gender Mind Maps



**Pre-  
Colonial  
Gender**



# Activity Sheet:

## Gender Identity: “How colonialism killed my culture’s gender fluidity”

Complete the activity sheet as you view the film. If the sentence is false, write the true answer in the column on the right. Then, answer the questions about colonialism and its impact, and share your reflections.

Questions		
1. Gender fluidity can describe a person who is born male but identifies as female or vice versa.	True or False	
2. In the Navajo Indigenous communities, gender fluid people are called “Two-Spirit”.	True or False	
3. The Navajo have three different gender identities.	True or False	
4. Geronimo only wears female clothing.	True or False	
5. In India, gender fluidity is a new and recent trend.	True or False	
6. In India, gender-fluid people are known as the Third Gender.	True or False	
7. Gender-fluid people in India are regarded as sacred.	True or False	
8. “Brotherboy” is a term for a fisherman in aboriginal communities in Australia.	True or False	

## What Did You Learn? Gender Diversity around the World

**A.** Three different ideas about gender that the settlers brought with them to these different cultures.

**B.** Two ways that gender diverse people were impacted.

**C.** One question I would like to ask.

## Small Group Discussion

What was new learning?  
What do you wonder about?  
What questions do you have?

# Other General Resources

## Gender Diversity in Nature

- [CHIMERA BUTTERFLIES: NON-BINARY ANIMALS](#) (Lesson Plan from Welcoming Schools)
- [Symmetrical Butterfly Images](#)
- [Asymmetrical Butterfly Images](#)
- [Bilateral gynandromorphs](#) – animals that are quite literally half male and half female (*for teachers only*)

## Gender Diversity around the World

- [Story Beyond Gender: Indigenous Perspectives, Mapuche](#)
- [Beyond Gender: Indigenous Perspectives, Fa’afafine and Fa’afatama](#)
- [Siva Samoa Choreography by Ella Ganza](#)
- [Genders in Different Cultures | Gender Stuff Ep. 1](#) (Student Project)
- [Gender Variance around the World Over Time](#)
- [Gender identities around the world | News | iowastatedaily.com](#)
- [derekshaferdesign – Nonbinary Gender Identities across the World](#)

## Two-Spirit

- [A Walk in Two Worlds](#) | This is a Canadian Issue: Reflecting on TRC Calls to Action
- [Dancing to Eagle Spirit Society](#) – TWO-SPIRITED PEOPLE