

# PRONOUNS: LITTLE WORDS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE



## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- English Language Arts - Reading-Literature, Speaking and Listening
- Writing: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking



## MCREL STANDARDS (4TH EDITION)

- Thinking and Reasoning: Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences.
- Writing: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions
- Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes



## OVERVIEW

Welcome to the wonderful world of pronouns! In this lesson, students will learn about pronouns, how they are used, and their importance. They will learn that pronouns are connected to people's gender identity, and that everyone gets to choose which pronouns work for them. They'll practice using gender neutral pronouns, such as they/them/theirs, by writing about Hahir the hamster (they/them). Overall, they'll learn why these tiny words can make such a big difference!



## OBJECTIVES

Students will define pronouns and understand their use in the English Language. Students will apply their understanding of pronouns verbally and in written stories. Students will classify pronouns into groups such as they/them/theirs and she/her/hers. Students will discuss the importance of pronouns as they relate to gender identity.



## THINGS TO PREP & TOOLS NEEDED

- Pictures are used in this lesson. If you have actual class pets, they can be used instead.
- Preparing some of the examples on paper or sentence strips could save time during the lesson.
- For the Game "Pronoun Play" each group of students needs a few small pictures of each pet and blank cards.
- If you think it would better support your students, you can use GLSEN's Gender Visual and Discussion guide to talk more about gender identity with students, and to

introduce nonbinary identity before this activity. Go to [www.glsen.org/trans](http://www.glsen.org/trans) for videos and other resources.

- Chartpaper/Markers or Smartboard/Projector, paper, pencils, Class Pet Images, Class Pet Cards

**TIME**

30 minutes.

**PROCEDURE**

1. Opening: On the board write the pronouns: “she, he, they.” Ask students to raise their hand if they’ve ever seen these words before
2. Write “pronouns” on the board and tell students that these pronouns are types of words that replace the name of a person or thing in a sentence.
3. On the board write “\_\_\_\_\_ likes dogs.” Model saying the sentence first with a name, and then with a pronoun. You can use yourself, a character from a book you’ve recently read with the class, or a TV character that your students are familiar with. *Be careful to be sure you’re using the correct pronouns for the people in your example.*
4. Tell students, “People chose pronouns that stand for what they want others to call them by when they’re not using their name. To show respect for people, we use the pronouns that they want to be called.”
5. Show the class a picture of Nadia the class snake. “Nadia identifies as a girl and uses ‘she/her/hers’ pronouns.” Write “she/her/hers” underneath the picture. You’re in the locker room after gym and one of your classmates keeps making insulting remarks to a much smaller student who has the locker next to you. What do you do?



6. Show the class a picture of Sebastian the class bunny. “Sebastian identifies as a boy and uses ‘he/him/his’ pronouns.” Write “he/him/his” underneath the picture.



7. Show the class a picture of Hadhir the class hamster. “Hadhir identifies as nonbinary. They don’t identify as a boy or a girl, just a hamster. Hadhir uses ‘they/them/theirs’ pronouns.” Write “they/them/theirs” underneath the picture.



8. Underneath all of them, write “they/them/theirs.” Tell students that they/them/theirs can also be used to mean a group. If we want to say all of the pets, we could say “they are all pets.”
9. Put up some blank sentences and ask students to fill in the blank, first with the name, and then with the correct pronoun. For example, if the sentence is “\_\_\_ went to the park” the students could say, “Hadhir went to the park. They went to the park” or “Nadia went to the park. She went to the park.”
- a. Examples:
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ went to the park.
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ can’t wait for recess.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_ could eat all day.
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_ should love \_\_\_\_\_ class.
10. Remind students that everyone gets to choose their own pronouns, and to decide how they identify their gender. Using the pronouns that someone shares is a really important way to show respect.

11. Group Practice: In groups or tables, have students practice with the game, “Pronoun Play.” Give each group a small picture of each pet and a set of blank cards.
- Students write objects or places on the cards, such as “cage”, “outside”, “shoes”, or “food.” (Some cards can be pre-written or developed as a class depending on time and student learning needs.)
  - Put the cards into two piles, face down, with one pile of pets and one pile of objects or places.
  - To play, students take turns being the “dealer” and flipping over one card from each pile. The rest of the group has to try to make a sentence with the correct pronoun. For example, if the “dealer” flips over a picture of Hahir and the card “food”, the sentence could be, “They want their food” or “they love food” or “their food is so tasty!” Whoever can say a sentence first gets to keep the object card.
  - After each turn, the “dealer” rotates to the left.
  - The game is over when the object/location cards are gone, and the person with the most cards is the winner.
12. Individual Practice: As students finish, ask them to write a story about Hahir the hamster. What does Hahir like to do? What do they look like? What should people know about Hahir the hamster? (This can also be done as a class or in partners.)

Closing: Ask students, “Why do you think it’s important to let people choose their own pronouns and to use the pronouns that people share?”

If time allows, invite students to read their favorite sentence from their Hahir the Hamster story.

## FOLLOW UP/EXTENSIONS

- Students can build more cards to Pronoun Play to continue this game after the lesson. Adding characters from books, or with consent, adding people from the school community can be a great way to continue practicing pronouns throughout the year.
- Dedicate a bulletin board to pronouns as a visual reminder.
- Explore the history of the word “they” and read about its acceptance in singular form into the [Merriam Webster dictionary](#) and [AP stylebook](#).
- Study other words that have been added or updated in the Merriam Webster Dictionary or English language, such as binge-watching TV, photobomb, or seussian, and discuss how and why our language is constantly changing.
- Invite people who use gender neutral pronouns into your classroom to talk about their experiences, gender identity, and why these little words make a big difference to them.

- Learn more about pronouns as an educator with [GLSEN's Pronoun Resource](#).
- Learn about and practice using other gender neutral pronouns, such as xe/xem/xyr, and ve/vir/vis.
- Lead a discussion around misgendering\* and other examples of when people use names, words or labels for us that we don't like. Have students practice role-playing how to correct themselves quickly and respectfully.

*Tags: Gender, Transgender, English, grammar*

*Did you participate in this lesson? Tell us how it went and what could have been better!*

*Email us at [educators@glsen.org](mailto:educators@glsen.org).*

*\*Misgendering refers to the experience of being labeled or addressed with a pronoun other than one that a person identifies with. The essential thing to do after learning someone's pronouns is remembering to use those pronouns when referring to that person. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun when identifying someone, please correct yourself in front of that person and begin using the right pronoun. It is not the responsibility of the transgender or nonbinary person to address your feelings after misgendering.*

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER!  
EMAIL US AT [EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG](mailto:EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG).

### CLASS PET CARDS



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