

LESSON PLAN

Bellen Woodard, Identity, and “Crayon Activism”

Compelling Question: What can we do when we see unfairness and bias taking place?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	1-4	45 minutes	Speaking and Listening, Language.
5-7	8-12		



Web Related Connections

LESSON PLANS

[Diverse Books Matter](#)

[Identity, Hair and Seeing Myself](#)

[Mo’Ne Davis and Gender Stereotypes](#)

[Who Am I? Identity Poems](#)

Other Resources

[Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice](#)

[Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism](#)

Key Words

activist
assembly line
donate
hero
history
identity
included
judged
language
mission
multicultural
museum
options
represent
respect
skin color
skin tone

LESSON OVERVIEW

Bellen Woodard lives in Leesburg, VA with her parents and four brothers. When Bellen was eight-years-old, she had an experience that changed her life and changed the world. When Bellen was in third grade, she noticed that her classmates asked for the “skin color crayon” and that everyone automatically knew or assumed that was the peach color crayon. Bellen knew something was wrong with this. Using “skin color crayon” instead of the specific crayon color excludes Black and other people of color like her. After changing the language in her school, Bellen started the “More Than Peach Project,” which includes crayons with various skin tones and complexions across the world. Bellen began by donating crayons to schools in her area and she still donates to groups around the country and the world. In 2022, she published a picture book about this experience.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to explore and understand more about Bellen Woodard and her experience in school, reflect on aspects of their identity and learn what activism is and how they can change something they think is unfair or unjust.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand what happened to Bellen Woodard and be motivated to take action.
- Students will explore what identity is and consider the different aspects of their identity.
- Students will understand what activism is and identify something they want to change in their community or the world.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- Video: [10-Year-Old Crayon Activist and Entrepreneur](#)
- [A girl changed how we see crayons and skin color. Now, she’s an author.](#) (Washington Post, June 15, 2022) (for teacher to read aloud)
- Crayons (be sure they include a variety of colors including those reflecting different skin tones represented in your classroom and beyond)



Introduction: What Crayon Colors Match My Skin Color?

1. Explain to students that today we are going to learn about a girl who had an experience in her school with crayons and skin color. That experience motivated her to do something about a problem she saw, and you will learn more about her.
2. Share a collection of crayons by placing them in the front of the room or on the rug (if sitting together on the rug). Ask students to look at the crayons and think about what color crayon they can use to draw themselves and their skin color (face and body). Engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
 - What crayon color would I use to match my skin color? Are those crayon colors here?
 - Is there a color here that matches your skin color? Please explain.
 - Are there crayon colors here that match skin color for those with different skin tones than ours in this classroom?
 - How do you think students might feel if there wasn't a crayon to match their skin color?

[**Note:** When you do this part of the lesson, be sure to have crayon colors that reflect the different skin tones of the children in your classroom, as well as those beyond your classroom, particularly if your students' skin tones do not represent the diversity of our country/society. For example, this means not only having one brown crayon but different shades of brown so that you have a variety of options/colors that reflect student's skin tones.]



Video: 10-Year-Old Crayon Activist and Entrepreneur

1. Play the video, [10-Year-Old Crayon Activist and Entrepreneur](#)
2. After watching the video, engage students in a brief discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What happened?
 - How do you think Bellen felt when her classmates asked for the "skin color" crayon and they meant the peach colored one?
 - How is Bellen Woodard changing the world?
3. Explain that during this lesson, we will learn more about Bellen Woodard and talk about what she did.



Learn More about Bellen Woodard

1. Read aloud Bellen Woodard's book [More than Peach*](#) or this article to share more about Bellen Woodard: [A girl changed how we see crayons and skin color. Now, she's an author.](#) You can read the whole article, with some explanation while you are reading, or just read key parts of the story (i.e., a few paragraphs). Make sure to include the following points:
 - Bellen Woodard is an eleven-year-old child who lives in Leesburg, Virginia with her parents and four brothers.
 - When Bellen was eight-years-old and in third grade, she noticed that her classmates were asking for the "skin color crayon" and that everyone automatically knew or assumed that was the peach crayon. Bellen knew something was wrong with this. Using "skin color crayon" excludes (or "disincludes," as Bellen says) Black and other people of color like her.

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- Bellen talked with her mom about what happened in school and decided that instead of saying nothing when her classmates asked for the “skin color crayon,” she would say, “Which one? Skin can be any number of beautiful colors.”
 - Changing the language can change what people think and believe, and it did in this situation. Students and teachers at Bellen’s school started using her language, and her message began spreading to other schools too.
 - As a result, Bellen started the “More Than Peach Project” which includes crayons with various skin tones and complexions. Bellen began by donating crayons to schools around her area and she still donates to groups around the country and the world. Her book, *More than Peach*, was published by Scholastic in 2022 and she has a new picture book coming out in 2025 called *Ballet Brown*.
2. Engage students in a class discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
- What happened and why?
 - What thoughts and feelings came to mind as you were listening to Bellen’s story?
 - How do you think Bellen felt when her classmates said “Can you pass the skin color crayon?”
 - What did Bellen do next and why?
 - Have you ever felt the way Bellen felt, not only about crayons and skin color, but about other parts of your identity? Please share what happened.
 - Why is it important to see your skin color (and other parts of who you are) in crayons, books, games, TV shows, movies, etc.?
 - How did Bellen’s actions make a difference, for herself and others?

☆ Our Identity

1. Ask: *What is identity?* Elicit/explain the definition of identity as follows: “The qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.”
2. Ask students: *How does the crayon color relate to Bellen’s identity?* If not shared by students, explain that Bellen’s skin color (or skin complexion/skin tone) is part of her identity as a Black person and she wants to see herself represented.
3. Share certain aspects of your identity, something like, “I am a white woman, in my 30’s, with white (or peach-colored) skin and short straight hair.” Then ask: *What aspects of my identity did I name?* Elicit that you named race, age, gender, and some things about your appearance.
4. Ask students: *What are other parts of your identity?* Make a list on the board/smart board which might include some or all of the following:
 - Appearance
 - Race
 - Gender
 - Religion
 - Family Structure
 - Neighborhood/Community
 - Age
 - Ability and Disability
 - Hobbies, Interests

■ Likes and Dislikes

■ Opinions

5. Explain that the aspects of our identity are very important to us—they make us who we are. When we don't see our identities represented in, for example crayons, or on TV shows, video games, movies, books, toys, etc., that can make us feel "dis-included" (as Bellen says) or excluded. However, when we do see ourselves reflected in these places, it can give us the opposite feeling: that we are included, respected and important. Ask: *What do you think about this?*

? What is an Activist?

1. Remind students that Bellen calls herself an "activist." Ask: *What is an activist?* Elicit/explain that an activist is "a person who uses or supports actions to bring about change in their community or the world." Elaborate on this by sharing that there have been many activists over the years who have helped bring about change after seeing something wrong, unfair or unjust in their communities or the world.

Ask: *How is Bellen an activist? What is Bellen trying to change? What other activists do you know or have heard about?*

2. Invite students to talk in pairs and respond to the question: *What is something you believe is unfair or unjust that you want to change (in school, in your town/community/city/neighborhood, or the world)?*
3. Have students come back to the large group and invite them to share some of their ideas of what needs to change. Record their ideas on the board/smart board. For some or all of the ideas, ask questions such as:

■ Tell me more about that.

■ How would our school (or community/world) look different after that change?

■ What are some actions we could take, as Bellen did, to make that change?

■ What are some of the next steps we would need to take?

4. Continue to explore some of the projects that students identified in their pairs and whole class brainstorming. If time permits, have students either work in small groups on different projects (of their choosing) or choose one project as a class and work on it together. You can break down specific tasks for the project that are needed and then divide those up and assign (or let students choose) who task they want to work on. Over the next days or weeks, bring the project(s) to fruition and share with the school community.

Closing

Invite students to respond aloud (or in writing or a drawing) to the following two questions:

Bellen is taking action for change by _____.

I can take action for change by _____.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [You’ve Heard of Ballet Pink. It’s Time to to Embrace Ballet Brown](#) (*Time*, October 11, 2024)
- [6 Reasons Why We Should See Students as Changemakers](#) (*Education Week*, September 6, 2022)
- [Bellen’s More than Peach Project](#)
- [Bellen Woodard: Ensuring That No Kid Is “Disincluded”](#) (*Mack in Community*, July 19, 2022)
- [More than Peach](#) (includes ADL Education discussion guides)
- [This Local Middle Schooler Is Spreading Inclusivity with Her Skin-Colored Crayons](#) (*Northern Virginia*, September 7, 2022)

Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Speaking and Listening
<p>SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> <p>SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.</p> <p>SL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p> <p>SL5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.</p>
Language
<p>L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.</p> <p>L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p>

CASEL SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.