

Introduction



grades 7-8



35 minutes

“But there in the background, faint and out of focus are the extras. The random passerby, each living a life as complex and vivid as your own.”
– Sonder video

Lesson Summary

This lesson introduces students to the central program theme: "sonder." The accompanying video explores how everyone exists as the main character of their stories, each with their "supporting cast" and "extras." By the end of the lesson, students will understand that they play different roles in others' lives, all of whom are also experiencing complex and vivid lives of their own.

NOTE: Consider providing students with a dedicated ThinkGive notebook for use throughout the program. See the Student Journal Guide ([PDF](#)) for suggestions on incorporating a student notebook in lessons. If students will be using ThinkGive Journals, find a time for them to decorate the front (and back) cover. Use the Journal cover template ([PDF](#)) or model your decorated journal cover to provide design ideas.



MATERIALS

ThinkGive Three Poster (Yellow [PDF](#) | Purple [PDF](#))
ThinkGive Journals
Student Journal Guide ([PDF](#))
Journal cover template ([PDF](#))
Chart paper
Worksheet: The Roles We Play ([PDF](#) | [Google](#))
Exit Ticket ([PDF](#) | [Google](#))

Students will Examine

- The idea that everyone is living a vivid and complex life.
- The roles they play in the lives of others.
- What opportunities do they have to impact others positively?

Pre-Activity Prep

- (Optional) Prepare four chart papers using headings from the Worksheet: The Roles We Play ([PDF](#) | [Google](#)) (REFLECT section).
- (Optional) Print or digitally share the Worksheet: The Roles We Play ([PDF](#) | [Google](#)) (1/student) (REFLECT section).
- (Optional) Print or digitally share the Exit Ticket ([PDF](#) | [Google](#)) (CONNECT + CLOSE section).



MEDIA TO PREP

Slides: [Introduction](#)
Video: [Sonder: The Realization That Everyone Has A Story \(2:38\)](#)

SHARE

N/A

THINK•GIVE

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Opening Message

Have you ever imagined your life as if it were a movie and you were the main character? If so, you're not alone. We all feel that way! While we are all the main characters in our stories, it's important to remember that everyone feels the same way. We all play the starring role in our movies and exist as characters in other stories. We play many roles, and the interconnection of our stories makes our communities strong.

Warm-up Question

If you wrote a movie about yourself and your life, what would the title be? Why?

Introducing Sonder

Watch: [Sonder: The Realization That Everyone Has A Story](#) (2:38).

"Sonder" is a word in the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows. This video helps students understand that we are all main characters in our stories, but we also act as supporting cast and extras for others.

Discuss:

- What stood out to you about the video's message? Why?
 - How does recognizing that everyone has their own story and struggles change how we treat others?
 - Why is it important to remember that we are all supporting cast and even extras for others?
 - How might understanding that others live lives as vivid and complex as yours help us connect?
 - How might this connection allow us to offer authentic support and kindness?
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TEACHER TIP

Every lesson will offer an Opening Message along with a Warm-up Question. Display it for students to read as they transition (see slides). The Warm-up Question could be a quick share, or students could reflect on a Post-it or in their ThinkGive Journals.



VOCAB

Sonder: noun; the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own.

Extra: noun; a person engaged temporarily to fill out a scene in a movie or play, especially as one of a crowd.

REFLECT

Suggested time: 25 minutes

A Day in the Life: The Roles We Play

Explain: As the main characters in our stories, we all lead vibrant and

complex lives. We encounter challenges and experience moments of triumph. Through ThinkGive, we will reflect on our roles as main characters and find ways to support the people who play supporting roles in our lives, recognizing that they, too, are the main characters of their own stories.

Brainstorm individuals students have recently interacted with, directly or indirectly (e.g., people in the hallway, street, store, etc.), and record ideas on the whiteboard or chart paper.

OPTION A:

Set up chart paper (one per category on the Worksheet: The Roles We Play ([PDF](#) | [Google](#))). Students form small groups and circulate among the stations, responding to the prompts on each chart.

OPTION B:

Hand out the Worksheet: The Roles We Play ([PDF](#) | [Google](#)) (1/student). Students work independently to complete the worksheet.

Discuss:

- For whom do you play the role of supporting cast?
- For whom do you play the role of extra?
- How might you enrich other people's lives as a member of their supporting cast and/or as an extra?
- What are some things you can say or do to be a great supporting cast member?
- When is it challenging to be a great supporting cast member?

DIGGING DEEPER

Discuss:

- How are sonder and empathy related?
- What would our world be like without the practice of sonder?
- How does the practice of sonder impact our world?

★ TEACHER TIP

After finishing "The Roles We Play," students can engage in role-playing scenarios based on their responses from the activity and then have the group guess the positive impacts.

★ CONNECTION

Scenario: "A Day in the Life" ([PDF](#)). Use this narrative to help students imagine their days. Discuss: When was Randall the main character? When was he the supporting cast or extra?

★ TEACHER TIP

Actions that could positively impact extras include your thanks, a smile, or holding a door.

📖 VOCAB

Empathy: noun; the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

CONNECT + CLOSE

Suggested time: 10 minutes

At the end of every lesson, challenge students to take positive action to impact someone: themselves, a supporting cast member (family member and/or a friend), or an extra they have yet to meet.

Take Action

Explain: Between now and our next ThinkGive session on [give date], notice the supportive roles that others play in your life and the roles you play for others. Pay attention to what makes the person's supportive role stand out to you and its positive impact.

Things to Consider

- Everyone lives vivid and complex lives—theirs might look different to yours!
- How can you positively impact a supporting cast member or an extra?
- You can impact someone's day, even as an extra.

Closing Quote

Use this quote to close out the lesson. The reflective questions could serve as an Exit Ticket ([PDF](#) | [Google](#)).

"But there in the background, faint and out of focus are the extras. The random passerby, each living a life as complex and vivid as your own." – [Sonder video](#)

- How might understanding that others live vivid and complex lives help you connect?

★ THINKGIVE THREE

1. True: be authentic
2. Small: small is all
3. Brave: step into your courage zone

Sample Actions

N/A

Student Journal Questions

- Describe when you realized you were a supporting cast member or an extra in someone else's story. How did you feel?
- How can the idea of sonder inspire you to support a cause or group?

Extensions

DO

Make a Movie Poster/Book Cover/Album Cover

Students should choose a title for their life story and then create a movie poster, book cover, or album cover based on that title. If they make a book cover, they can include a plot description. For a movie poster, they can include reviewer quotes, and for an album cover, they can include song tracks referencing different aspects of their life.

NOTE: Revisit this activity at the end of the program. Do students change anything after examining their lives more closely?

True Colors Personality Assessment

Students take the True Colors Personality Test ([website](#)) to learn more about themselves. Have students complete the test online or pre-print copies of the blank test and have them complete it offline. Each color represents a personality type with tendencies regarding how they act, learn, interact with others, etc.

Discuss:

- What does knowing your color tell you about how you connect to others, either as the main character or as a supporting cast or extra?
- Why is it helpful to understand someone else's color and how they contribute as a supporting cast or extra in your life?

NOTE: Remind students that personality assessments are tools, not a comprehensive description of who we are as individuals. Some color types might feel accurate, and others might not.

WATCH

Video: [Becoming the Main Character](#) (3:06). Simon shares how 24 films gave him insights into being his life's main character.

Discuss:

- What does Simon mean when he says, "The amazing parts of these movies weren't the plots per se, but the small moments of life, joy, sadness, and emotion that they capture" (1:14)?
- Do you agree with Simon when he says, "I think being the main character is less about being a superhero or doing some amazing things and more about appreciating the small aspects of life that we sometimes overlook..." (2:22)? Why or why not?
- Simon suggests ways to become the main character of your own life at 2:36 (consider safety and responsibility to yourself and others first!). What does he suggest?
- How might understanding yourself (as your main character) allow you to impact others (who are their main characters) positively?

Video: [Communication Skills: Empathetic Listening—Inside Out](#) (1:44). This clip illustrates how empathic listening allows us to support those in need, highlighting perspective-taking and feeling validation.

Discuss:

- How does Sadness demonstrate empathy?
- How might her actions connect to the concept of sonder?
- When have you/how can you offer(ed) empathy to a supporting cast member or extra?

READ/LISTEN

Meditation: [Peace Out: Time to Pause: Monday](#) (end: 6:04). This meditation leads listeners through exercises designed to focus kind and intentional thoughts toward others. Lead students through this meditation or adjust to reflect the concepts of sonder (e.g., think of and repeat messaging to three people in your life: yourself, a supporting actor, and an extra).

Discuss:

- How did this meditation feel? What, if anything, came up for you?
- How might this meditation help us offer empathy towards ourselves and our supporting cast and extras?

- How might you offer the messages of this meditation (“may you be happy,” “may you be healthy,” “may you be safe,” “may you live with ease”) through your actions as supporting actors and/or extras in others’ lives?

Article: “Main Character Energy...?” ([PDF](#) | [website](#)). A 15-year-old writes about “main character energy.”

Discuss:

- What are your thoughts about this article?
- In the second to the last paragraph, pianowriter writes, “Your future is where you are the main character and you dictate what occurs. You dictate whether or not you become an influential figure in society or remain an extra.” Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
- How can one embody the “main character energy” in the present rather than just focusing on the future?
- In what ways has being a supporting character for someone else been as significant as being the main character?