

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 word of the program: “sonder.” The accompanying video will help them consider how everyone exists as the center of their own world. They’ll investigate ways in which they impact their “supporting cast” and the “extras” in their lives. By the end of this lesson, they will have had the opportunity to understand that in addition to being the main character of their own stories, they also play different roles in the lives of others—who are all also experiencing complex and vivid lives of their own.

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

MATERIALS

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

MEDIA TO PREP

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

Students will Examine

- The idea that everyone—not only themselves—is living a vivid and complex life.
- The roles they play in the lives of others.
- The opportunities they have to positively impact others.

SHARE

N/A

THINK • GIVE

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Opening Message

Have you ever thought of your life as if it were a movie? Have you ever thought of yourself as the world's main character? If so, you're not alone. Have you ever considered, however, that while we are all indeed the main characters in our own stories, we also all exist as characters in many other people's stories? We all play many roles; and it is the interconnection of all our stories that makes our communities strong.

Warm-up Question

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

Introducing Sonder

Watch: [Sonder: The Realization That Everyone Has A Story \(2:38\)](#). The word "sonder" is found in the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows. This video describes how we are all main characters in our own stories—but we also serve as supporting cast and extras in the stories of others.

Discuss:

- What impression did this video have on you?
- What about the message in the video stood out to you and why?
- Why is it important to remember that we are all supporting cast and even extras for others?

Digging Deeper

- How might understanding that others are living their own vivid and complex lives help us to connect with one another?
- How might this connection allow us to offer support and kindness to people with whom we have various relationships?

★ TEACHER TIP

Every lesson will offer an opening message. Display it (see slides) for students to read as they transition. 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 background actor or extra is a performer in a film, television show, who appears in a nonspeaking (silent) capacity, usually in the background.

REFLECT

Suggested time: 20 minutes

A Day in the Life: The Roles We Play

Explain: It's important to recognize that, as the main characters in our own stories, we are all living vibrant, complex lives of our own. We all face challenges, and we all have moments of triumph. During ThinkGive, we'll consider who we are as the main characters in our own lives. We'll find ways to impact our supporting cast and extras, and we'll consider how we can act to uplift and celebrate other main characters.

★ TEACHER TIP

To get students moving, use chart paper for each category instead of the Worksheet: The Roles we Play. Students rotate in small groups and add to each sheet.

In pairs or individually, students think about all the people they interacted with directly or indirectly in the last couple of days (e.g., people in the hallway, street, store, etc.). Ask students to share examples; record them on the board.

Hand out the [Worksheet: The Roles We Play \(PDF | Google\)](#). Students take the following steps to complete the worksheet:

1. Brainstorm at least three things they do to look after themselves.
2. Choose 2-3 people they consider to be their supporting cast (friends and/or family), and write different ways they have had a positive impact on each.
3. Choose 2-3 people they consider to be their supporting cast (acquaintances), and write different ways they have had a positive impact on each.
4. Choose 2-3 people they consider to be extras (names or identifiers such as “person who walks dog by my house,” “server at local restaurant”), and write down different ways they have had a positive impact on each.

Discuss:

- Have you ever considered that you are a supporting cast or extra in other people’s lives? For whom do you play the role of supporting cast?
- How do you think you might enrich other people’s lives as a member of their supporting cast and/or as an extra?

Digging Deeper

- How are sonder and empathy related?
- What does it take to be a great supporting cast member?
- When do you find it challenging to be a great supporting cast member?

CONNECT + CLOSE

Suggested time: 5 minutes

At the end of every lesson, students will be challenged to consider the idea of sonder and take action to impact someone: a family member, a friend, even an extra they have not met yet.

Take Action

Explain: Between now and our next lesson [give date], consider the idea of sonder. Pay attention to the roles that others play in your life and the roles that you play in the lives of others. Depending on the situation, you might be simultaneously a supporting cast member in one person’s story and an extra in another’s. If you like, you could go the extra mile and learn something new about an extra.

★ CONNECTION

Scenario: “A Day in the Life” ([PDF](#)). Use this narrative to help students imagine their own days.

★ TEACHER TIP

Actions that could have a positive impact on extras in your life include a “thank you,” a smile, or holding a door.

📖 VOCAB

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

★ THINKGIVE THREE

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

Things to Consider

- Everyone is living vivid and complex lives—and theirs might look different to yours!
- Even as an extra in someone else’s day, you can make an impact.
- How can you impact or help a member of your supporting cast or 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 are living their own vivid and complex lives help us to connect with one another?

Sample Gifts

N/A

Student Journal Questions

-  Describe a time when you realized that you were a member of the supporting cast or an extra in someone else’s story. How did you feel?
-  How can the idea of sonder help someone support a cause or a group of people?

Extensions

DO

Make a Movie Poster/Book Cover/Album Cover

Students choose a title of their story and make a movie poster, book cover, or album cover. They can also illustrate the back of whichever design they choose. For example: if they make a book cover they could add a plot description; if they make a movie poster they could include reviewer quotes; if they make an album cover they can add song tracks that reference parts of their life. Note: This could be an interesting thing to return to at the end of the program to see if students would want to change anything after examining their lives more closely.

True Colors Personality Assessment

Students take the True Colors Personality Test ([website](#)) to learn a little more about themselves. Fill it out online first and then print, or fill out on pre-printed copies. Each color represents a personality type with tendencies regarding how they act, learn, interact with each other, etc. The goal is for students to consider how these tendencies contribute to the ways they connect to others, either as the main characters of their stories or as supporting cast and extras.

Note: Personality assessments are tools and not a complete description of who we are as individuals. Parts of these color types might feel accurate and/or inaccurate. As such, remind students that they have the right to validate their own results.

WATCH

Video: [How I Became the Main Character of My Life Story](#) (10:37). This video discusses agency and how the choices we make can help to move our personal narratives along.

Discuss:

- What are some of your strengths and limitations?
- In what ways do you feel like you have agency? In what ways do you wish you had more agency?
- How might understanding yourself as your own MC allow you to positively impact others, who are MCs in their own lives?

Video: [Communication Skills: Empathetic Listening – Inside Out, 2015](#) (1:44). This clip from Inside Out illustrates how empathic listening allows us to provide support to those in need—specifically 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 or extra in your life?

READ / LISTEN

Meditation: [Peace Out: Time to Pause: Monday](#) (End: 6:04). This meditation leads listeners through exercises designed to focus kind and intentional thought towards different people in their lives. Students can be led through this exact mediation or facilitators can make adjustments that more specifically 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.)

Note: while published during quarantine, the message is still applicable.

Discuss:

- How did it feel to complete this meditation? What, if anything, came up for you?
- How might this mediation help us offer empathy towards ourselves as well as the supporting actors and extras in our lives?
- How might you practice offering the messages of this meditation (“may you be happy”, “may you be healthy”, “may you be safe”, “may you live with ease”) through your words and actions as supporting actors and/or extras in the lives of others?