

**Excerpted from a Proposed Teacher's Guide  
for the Lifetime ® Original Movie *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story***

**Curriculum Connections:**

This classroom module addresses curriculum standards in social studies, social science, language arts, English, visual art, music, and media studies.

**Lesson Preparation:**

- Review the relevant sections of *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story* before starting this lesson.
- Cue DVD to the correct time code before class begins.
- Prepare copies of *Student Handouts* for distribution.

**Rationale:**

This classroom module leads students in an examination of how, in a social situation, confusion can turn into fear, and fear can turn into violence. By examining this phenomenon, students will be encouraged to break similar cycles of violence or intolerance in their own lives. The lesson also provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their feelings and experiences with different forms of intolerance.

**Student Objectives:**

- Students will analyze the dynamics of confrontation, including how differences can be perceived as threats.
- Students will explore the destructive force of hate and the constructive force of empathy in society.
- Students will discuss the importance and definitions of individual and community identity.
- Students will apply what they learned from the film *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story* to their thinking about their own lives.
- Students will examine and define their role in society as it relates to the topics and themes addressed in the film *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*.
- Students will have the opportunity to reflect on their emotional responses to the film, *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*.

**Requirements:**

**Materials:**

- Lifetime ® Original Movie, *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story* (DVD)
- DVD Player and TV or Monitor
- Chalkboard and chalk, or chart paper and markers
- *Student Handouts: Journal Prompt, Confrontation Analysis, Lyrics: Feeling Good, Drawing Parallels*

**Time:**

- 2 class periods (plus an extension activity to be completed outside of class)

**Techniques and Skills:**

Journal writing, interpreting quotations, vocabulary building, small group work, large group work, literary analysis, organizing information, multimedia literacy, comparing and contrasting information sources and media, critical thinking, responsive and creative writing, creative thinking, creating visual art, oral presentation.

**Procedures:**

1. Distribute *Student Handout: Journal Prompt* to each student and allow 10 minutes for students to respond in writing.
2. Conduct a short discussion with the class using the following questions as a guide:
  - What were some of the emotions you imagined this person would feel in this scenario?
  - Why did you imagine this person would feel those emotions?
  - What do you think this person would do in the scenario?
  - How do these actions relate to the emotions the person was feeling?
  - When a person feels confused, or feels like their understanding of a part of the world is being undermined, how do you think a person feels? How do you think a person reacts? Why?
  - When you feel afraid or confused, how do you cope? What do you do?
3. Distribute *Student Handout: Confrontation Analysis*. Allow 10 minutes for students to complete it independently or in pairs.
4. Conduct a short discussion with the class, using the following questions as a guide:
  - What emotional responses did you list on your handout? Why?
  - What physiological responses did you list?
  - Why do you think a person would have these sorts of sensations in response to being surprised or startled?
  - How do these immediate mental and physical impressions shape how a person might outwardly respond to someone or something?
  - Why is this sort of analysis important?
5. Screen the next section of the film, *A Girl Like Me: the Gwen Araujo Story* (time code: 36:13 – 51: 41).

*Note:* In this segment, the doctor who works at the Gender Identity Project testifies in court, Gwen meets Joey's friends, Joey meets Gwen's family, and Sylvia tells Joey that Gwen is biologically male.

6. For homework, instruct students to free write on the following quote in their journals or notebooks:

“Hate is a thing, a feeling, that can only exist where there is no understanding.”  
-*Tennessee Williams*

**Day II**

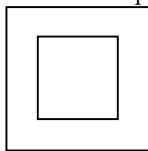
1. Discuss the section of the film screened in class yesterday, using some or all of the following questions as a guide:
  - According to the doctor's courtroom testimony, there is a lot of violence directed at transgendered people (the lawyer quotes 34 transgendered people being killed that year). Why do you think there is so much violence against transgendered people?

- Do you agree with the doctor that the people Gwen dated didn't need to know that she was biologically male?
- Do you think the fact that Gwen hid her biological gender justified violence against her?
- Why did Joey love Gwen?
- As a viewer, how do you feel watching Joey and Gwen kissing, knowing that Gwen is biologically male, and knowing that Joey doesn't know?
- Why do you think watching this scene make you feel this way?
- How do you think this sort of viewer response might add meaning to the scene?
- The girl in the bar is very aggressive with Gwen, pointing out the size of her hands. Why do you think she acts that way? How did this aggression make you, as a viewer, feel?
- When Gwen tells Joey that they have "something in common... I have a grandfather who likes to sew," what does that mean? What else do you think she is trying to say?
- What role do gender stereotypes play in this film? Explain.
- Do you agree or disagree with Sylvia's concerns for Gwen's safety? Why?
- Do you agree with Sylvia's decision to tell Joey? Why or why not?
- What is the significance of the fact that Sylvia keeps calling Gwen "Eddie?"
- When Sylvia admits to Gwen that she told Joey about her secret, Gwen responds, "You hate me!" Why do you think this is her response?
- At the end of this section, Gwen's little brother Danny tells their mother: "They hate him. Everyone. They can't leave him alone. It's because it doesn't make sense. I mean, even if he's cool, you don't want to like him. Because if you like him, everything's all messed up. And then you want to hurt him. Because if you hurt him, maybe you're OK." What do you think about this observation?
- Why do you think Danny thinks people would feel better if they hurt Gwen?
- How or why do you think confusion can turn into fear?
- How or why do you think fear can turn into hate?

2. Screen the next section of the film, *A Girl Like Me: the Gwen Araujo Story* (time code: 51:42 – 1:14:50).

*Note:* In this segment, Gwen is rejected by Joey, Gwen's partying gets out of hand, Gwen's friend and one of the defendants testify in court, Gwen is attacked by a group of boys who find out she is biologically male, there is a dream sequence where Gwen (as a teenager and a little boy) is running through a forest, and Gwen's family finds out she has been murdered.

3. Draw a large box on the chalkboard or on chart paper, with a smaller box inside of it, like this:



4. Label the drawing "Identity Box." Explain to the class that we all have an outside identity, which is the way that others see us, or how we project ourselves to others. We all also have an inside identity, which is how we see ourselves, or who we are on the inside. Sometimes these two identities are the same, sometimes they overlap, and sometimes they are very different.

5. Explain that the class will now create an “Identity Box” for Gwen, based on the sections of the film they’ve seen so far.
6. As a large group, brainstorm words that represent how Gwen thinks others see her, or how she wants others to perceive her. Record the responses in the “frame” area of the box. This represents Gwen on the outside.
7. Then, brainstorm words that represent how Gwen feels on the inside, or how she sees or perceives herself. Record these responses in the center box. This represents Gwen on the inside.
8. Discuss the class’s responses, using some or all of the following questions as a guide:
  - How do Gwen’s external and internal personae differ?
  - Does anyone know both the “inside” Gwen and the “outside” Gwen?
  - Is the inside Gwen male or female? Why do you think this?
  - Which of your classmates’ responses to this exercise surprised you?
  - Why do you think people have external personae that differ from their internal personae?
9. Pose the following question to the class and allow for a short dialogue: What was the importance of the dream-like sequence where Gwen (as an adult and a young child) runs through a forest? What is the meaning of the feathers falling from the sky? What is the meaning of the bright light? What are some of the different ways this scene might be interpreted, and what additional meaning does it add to the story?
10. Distribute *Student Handout: Lyrics: Feeling Good*. Remind the class that this was the song that played during the opening credits of the film. Allow a few minutes for students to read through the lyrics.
11. Conduct a short discussion about the handout, using some or all of the following questions as a guide:
  - Why do you think the filmmakers chose this song for the opening credits of this film?
  - How do the lyrics relate to Gwen’s story?
  - There are a number of examples of symbolism in each verse. How might these symbols represent Gwen? What else might they symbolize?
  - How do the lyrics relate to your life?
  - Why does the speaker feel that the natural world knows how he/she feels? Why is this important?
  - How might the lyric “it’s a new dawn for me,” be ironic in the context of the film?
  - How do these lyrics relate to the dream-like sequence that was just discussed?
  - How does the content of the film add meaning to the song, and vice versa?
12. For homework, students should complete *Student Handout: Drawing Parallels*.

Extension Activity:

For a longer-term extension activity, students can create an “identity box” of their own. Start with a shoebox, or any other box that is large enough to access the inside easily. Alternatively, students can create their own “identity book” by folding a few unlined pieces of paper in half and stapling them to form a booklet. This version also allows for discussion of the idiom “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” For either format, students should decorate the outside of the box (or book) to represent their outward identities. Students can use words, drawings, or objects. Encourage creativity – suggesting collage, favorite quotes, personal photographs, etc. Then, students should fill the inside of the box or book with objects, symbols, writings, and photographs that represent their internal, or private identity. Again, encourage students to be creative and to “think outside the box!” If the class feels comfortable sharing their finished projects, hold an informal class “exhibit,” or, alternatively, divide the students into pairs for “pair sharing,” which allows for a less intimidating but equally validating peer assessment experience.

Student Handout: *Journal Writing – Scenario Response*

Directions: Write in your journal or notebook using the following prompt as a guide.

---

*Choose one of the following scenarios. Imagine you are the character in the scene. Write a monologue in your notebook or journal from the perspective of that character, describing in detail your thoughts, feelings, emotions and reactions to what has just happened.*

Scenario #1

You are a very religious and spiritual person, and you worship every week. One week you show up for services and the leader of your congregation tells you that the religion you've been following is not what you thought it was. He/she lists all the beliefs that you thought were central to the religion, and says that they are false. How do you feel? What do you do?

Scenario #2

You show up at school on a Monday morning to find out that your boyfriend (or girlfriend) has stopped speaking to you. He/she gives you a note saying that your relationship is over, but won't explain why or what happened. Later that day after school, you see him/her flirting with someone else. How do you feel? What do you do?

Scenario #3

Your parents ask you to come into the living room, because they need to speak to you about something very important. They tell you that you are not their biological child, and that they adopted you when you were a baby. They explain that they wanted to tell you before, but didn't know how to bring up the subject. How do you feel? What do you do?

Scenario #4

You have a great after school job at a pharmacy nearby. Your boss is your mentor. You speak to him about all of your problems, and he gives you advice about friends, school, and family. You look up to him in every way. One day you come into the store and there is a letter waiting for you. The letter is from your boss, and it explains that he is not who you think he is, that he has been misleading you, and that he had to leave unexpectedly. How do you feel? What do you do?

Directions: Complete the handout below.

---

**SOMETHING STARTLES OR SURPRISES YOU...**

...such as....

...a person suddenly approaches you who you did not see or hear coming

...you take a big drink from your glass of ice water without looking, and the glass is actually full of milk

...you see someone you know in a place that is out of context (your teacher at the mall, a friend at the doctor's office, your mom or dad at your favorite hangout)

... you hear someone shout "STOP, POLICE!" from behind you, as you're walking down a street at night

... or anything else you can imagine: \_\_\_\_\_

**DESCRIBE THE  
EMOTIONAL OR MENTAL RESPONSE**

*What might a person's emotions be, and  
what might they be thinking?*

**DESCRIBE THE  
PHYSICAL RESPONSE**

*What sort of physical sensations might accompany those  
emotions and thoughts?*

**DESCRIBE THE REACTION**

*What might a person do as a result of these emotional, mental, and physical  
responses to the startling or surprising event?  
Why do you think a person might act in this way?*

Student Handout: *Lyrics: Feeling Good*

**Feeling Good**

By Anthony Newley and Leslie Bricusse

Birds flying high - you know how I feel  
Sun in the sky - you know how I feel  
Reeds drifting on by - you know how I feel

It's a new dawn  
It's a new day  
It's a new life  
For me...  
...And I'm feeling good

Fish in the sea - you know how I feel  
River running free - you know how I feel  
Blossom on the tree - you know how I feel

It's a new dawn  
It's a new day  
It's a new life  
For me...  
...And I'm feeling good

Dragonfly out in the sun - you know what I mean  
Butterflies all having fun - you know what I mean  
Sleep in peace when day is done - that's what I mean

And this old world is a new world  
And a bold world...  
...For me

Stars when you shine - you know how I feel  
Scent of the pine - you know how I feel  
Oh freedom is mine - And I know how I feel

It's a new dawn  
It's a new day  
It's a new life  
For me...  
...And I'm feeling good

Student Handout: *Drawing Parallels*

*Directions:* Complete the chart below, drawing parallels between the topics listed on the left, and examples from the film, the theme song, experiences from your own life, and world events.

---

Topics ↓	List examples from the film <i>A Girl Like Me</i> that relate to the topic.	Relate the topic to the theme song from <i>A Girl Like Me</i> ( <i>Feeling Good</i> ).	Using experiences from your own life, discuss how the topic relates to you.	Connect the topic to the world. Consider history, a current event, or a contemporary issue.
Freedom and Limitation				
Identity				
Relationships				
Bias and Hate				

About the film, *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*  
(more information can be found at: [www.lifetimetv.com/movies/originals/agirllikeme.php](http://www.lifetimetv.com/movies/originals/agirllikeme.php))

Imagine feeling like you're trapped in the wrong body, that there's been some sort of mistake — that you're supposed to be a girl instead of a boy. How would you tell your family and friends that you wanted to change genders? Would you bring it up with someone you had a crush on? And what would you do when society not only refused to accept the new you, but was violent toward you? Well, Eddie Araujo didn't know the answers, but he did know he was supposed to be female, so he began to dress as a girl and changed his name to Gwen.

You won't believe what Gwen endured just to live her life as who she was and feel normal. It's a shocking true story about courage and tolerance, and is sure to stay with you long after the credits roll.

Directed by: Agnieszka Holland

Written by: Shelley Evans

**Sample Correlation to National Standards (Grades 7-12)**  
*From the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning website*  
(<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>)

**Thinking and Reasoning Standard 6:** Applies decision-making techniques

1. Uses a decision-making grid or matrix to make decisions involving a relatively large number of criteria and/or alternatives
2. Uses a decision-making grid or matrix to study decisions involving a relatively large number of criteria and/or alternatives
3. Evaluates major factors such as personal priorities that influence personal decisions
4. Evaluates major factors such as environmental conditions that influence personal decisions
5. Evaluates major factors such as peer groups that influence personal decisions
6. Analyzes the impact of decisions on self and others
7. Takes responsibility for consequences of decisions
8. Takes responsibility for outcomes of decision

**Civics Standard 28:** Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals

1. Understands how participation in civic and political life can help bring about the attainment of individual and public goals
2. Understands the importance of both political and social participation and what distinguishes one from the other, and knows opportunities for both political and social participation in the local community
3. Knows historical and contemporary examples of citizen movements seeking to promote individual rights and the common good
4. Knows historical and contemporary examples of citizen movements seeking to expand liberty, to insure the equal rights of all citizens, and/or to realize other values fundamental to American constitutional democracy

**Language Arts Standard 8:** Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

1. Understands elements of persuasion and appeal in spoken texts (e.g., purpose and impact of pace, volume, tone, stress, music; images and ideas conveyed by vocabulary)
2. Uses criteria to evaluate own and others' effectiveness in group discussions and formal presentations (e.g., accuracy, relevance, and organization of information; clarity of delivery; relationships among purpose, audience, and content; types of arguments used; effectiveness of own contributions)
3. Makes formal presentations to the class (e.g., includes definitions for clarity; supports main ideas using anecdotes, examples, statistics, analogies, and other evidence; uses visual aids or technology, such as transparencies, slides, electronic media; cites information sources)
4. Makes multimedia presentations using text, images, and sound (e.g., selects the appropriate medium, such as television broadcast, videos, web pages, films, newspapers, magazines, CD-ROMS, Internet, computer-media-generated images; edits and monitors for quality; organizes, writes, and designs media messages for specific purposes)
5. Understands influences on language use (e.g., political beliefs, positions of social power, culture)
6. Understands how style and content of spoken language varies in different contexts (e.g., style of different radio news programs, everyday language compared to language in television soap operas, tones of news bulletins on "serious" and youth-oriented stations) and how this influences interpretation of these texts

**Behavioral Studies Standard 4:** Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions

1. Understands that being a member of a group can increase an individual's social power and also can increase hostile actions toward or from other groups or individuals
2. Understands how role, status, and social class may affect interactions of individuals and social groups
3. Understands how tensions might arise between expressions of individuality and group or institutional efforts to promote social conformity
4. Understands that conflicts are especially difficult to resolve in situations in which there are few choices and little room for compromise
5. Understands that conflict within a group may be reduced by conflict between it and other groups

**Health Standard 5:** Knows possible causes of conflicts in schools, families, and communities, and strategies to prevent conflict in these situations

1. Knows possible causes of conflicts in schools, families, and communities.
2. Knows strategies to prevent conflict in schools, families, and communities.
3. Knows strategies for solving interpersonal conflicts without harming self or others
4. Knows how refusal, negotiation, and collaboration skills can be used to avoid potentially harmful situations

**Family/Consumer Sciences Standard 2:** Understands the impact of the family on the well-being of individuals and society

1. Understands ways that the family contributes to the development of its members (e.g., lifestyle, home environment, ethical standards)
2. Understands the role of the family in developing the independence, interdependence, and commitment of family members
3. Knows types of family problems (e.g., co-dependency, relationships) and possible responses to these problems
4. Understands the reciprocal impact of individual and family participation in the community