

# GENDER IDENTITY AND PRONOUNS: LITTLE WORDS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

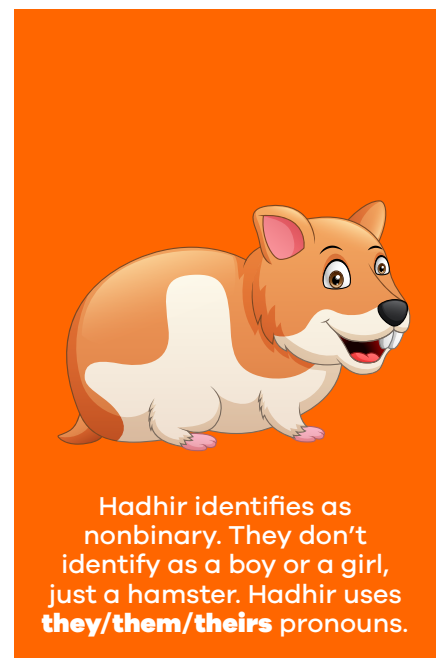
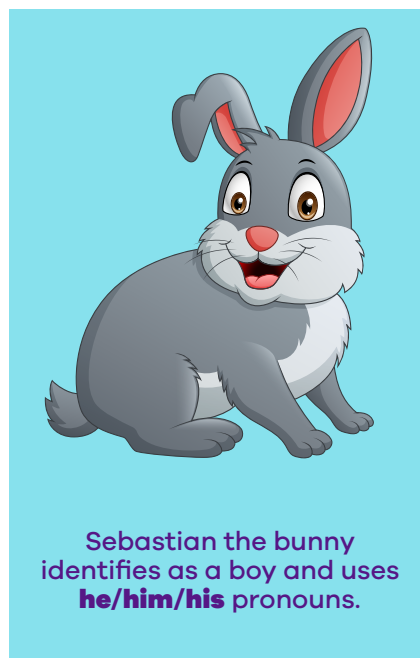
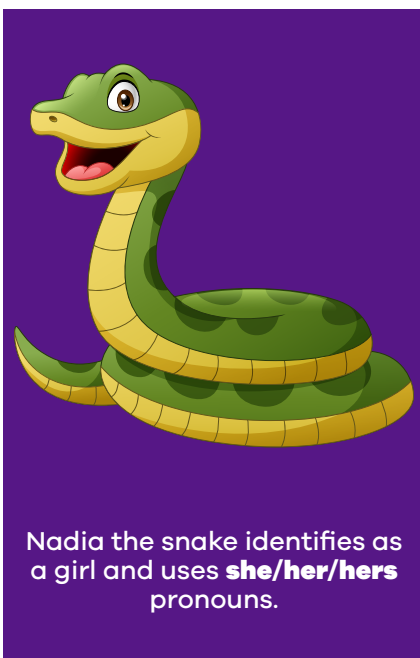
When we're born, we are probably labeled male, female, or **intersex**. For some people, these labels line up with their gender identity, and we refer to these people as **cisgender**. For others, these labels may not fit their **gender identity**, and we refer to them as trans or transgender. For example, someone might be assigned male at birth, but identify as a girl. They would be a transgender girl. You can never know someone's gender identity based on their appearance, so if you're curious, you can ask: "What gender do you identify as?" or "What are your pronouns?"

We use pronouns like she, he, or they all the time! Pronouns make it easy for us to talk about people without having to use names. For example, you could say, "Molly likes dogs," or "She likes dogs." Pronouns can sometimes be a signifier for someone's gender identity but not always. We do not want to assume people's gender identity based on their physical expression (like their clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms etc.). By providing an opportunity for people to share their pronouns, you're showing that you're not assuming that their gender identity is based on their appearance.

People can choose pronouns 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. By not assuming gender identity and providing welcoming spaces, LGBTQ+ students are given equal opportunities as their friends and classmates to participate and belong.

When we do not know someone's pronouns, it is best to use their name. Remember: Everyone gets to choose their own pronouns, and to decide how they identify their gender.

Share the below animals and their pronouns with your class. Then have them answer the questions.



**For each statement, fill in the missing name or pronoun based on each character.**



\_\_\_\_\_ went to the park. They rode their bike and picked flowers.



Nadia can't wait for recess. \_\_\_\_\_ wants to see \_\_\_\_\_ friends.



Sebastian is so hungry \_\_\_\_\_ could eat all day.



\_\_\_\_\_ loves \_\_\_\_\_ art class where \_\_\_\_\_ paints and draws.



Hadhir's parents love \_\_\_\_\_ very much.



\_\_\_\_\_ likes to go to the beach with \_\_\_\_\_ friends and family.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- How do you think Hadhir the hamster would feel if someone refused to use the pronouns they want to be called? How do you think Sabrina or Sebastian would feel? How would you address Hadhir, Sabrina, and Sebastian as a group?
- What are gender neutral ways to address your classmates?
- Why do you think it's important to use the pronouns that other people want to be called?
- A new student joins your class and you are unsure of their gender. What can you do if you are unsure of which pronouns to use?

### EDUCATOR TIPS:

- Because it can be a challenge when learning to refer to a singular person as "they" or "them," have students practice using they/them/theirs pronouns. Write sentences on the board, then have students update the pronouns to they/them.  
**Example:** Jade went to the store. → They went to the store.  
Cooper forgot his homework. → They forgot their homework.
- To prime students for this lesson, consider introducing yourself to the class using your own pronouns ("My name is Mr. Jones and my pronouns are he, him, his.")
- Use gender-neutral language in your everyday teaching. Use words like students, friends, people, everyone, folks, etc.
- If you have a substitute, make sure you inform them of your students' pronouns. Consider keeping the pronouns on their desk name tags for the entire school year.



### Resources

[GLSEN Pronouns Guide](#) | [GLSEN Pronoun Form](#) | [GLSEN Pronoun Lesson Plan](#)