

Upper Elementary Teacher Guide

Grades 3–5 • Ages 8–11



THE BIG IDEA FOR THIS AGE

“Differences make us stronger, and inclusion is something we DO.”

Upper elementary students love real science and fairness. They can handle the idea of chromosomes and trisomy, spot a stereotype, and bust a myth, and they’re old enough to plan real actions that make their school more welcoming.

1 Teacher background & key facts

3 Lesson plan (40–45 min)

5 Whole-class activities

7 Family note

2 Words that work

4 More messages to teach

6 Individual & take-home activities

8 Reproducible student page

Before you teach

Five minutes of background so you can teach this with confidence. You don't need to be an expert. Curiosity and kindness go a long way.

KEY FACTS

3.21

World Down Syndrome Day is March 21. The date stands for **three** copies of chromosome **21**.

46 → 47

Most people have 46 chromosomes (23 pairs). People with Down syndrome have 47, with an extra copy of chromosome 21.

#1

Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal condition in the U.S. About 5,700 babies are born with it each year (CDC).

~60

Average life expectancy today, up from 25 in 1983 (NDSS). Better health care and inclusion changed lives.

Not contagious

Down syndrome isn't an illness and can't be caught. It happens naturally, in every race and kind of family.

2012

The first official World Down Syndrome Day. The United Nations declared it a global observance in 2011.

WORDS THAT WORK

SAY	INSTEAD OF
a person with Down syndrome	a-Down's-kid, a-Down syndrome-person
has Down syndrome	suffers from, is afflicted by, is a-victim-of
Down syndrome	Down's-syndrome (U.S.-usage drops-the-"s")
typically developing / peers	normal-kids, regular-kids
intellectual disability	the r-word, or "slow"
their name!	a-label, or "the student with Down-syndrome"

TALKING ABOUT IT WITH 8- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS

- Go a little deeper on science: cells, chromosomes, 23 pairs, and "trisomy" (three copies).
- Name stereotypes, even "positive" ones like "they're always happy," and explain why they flatten real people.
- Connect to fairness: not long ago many kids with disabilities weren't allowed in public schools.
- Give students ownership. They can lead announcements, make posters, and teach younger grades.

IF A STUDENT IN YOUR CLASS HAS DOWN SYNDROME

- Talk with the family first. Ask how they'd like WDS handled and whether their child wants a role.
- Let the student lead, or not. Some love to share, and others would rather just celebrate with everyone.
- Don't make one child the lesson. Keep the focus on the whole class belonging together.
- Keep health and IEP details private. Share only what the family and student have okayed.

Lesson: Cracking the Code of 3.21

40-45 MIN

Students learn the science behind Down syndrome, bust common myths, and plan a real action to make their school more inclusive.

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO...

- Describe chromosomes as genetic instructions that come in pairs.
- Explain Down syndrome as an extra copy of chromosome 21 (trisomy 21) and connect it to 3/21.
- Tell the difference between myths and facts about Down syndrome.
- Plan one specific action to include others.

MATERIALS

Board or slides

"Myth" and "Fact" signs for two corners

Learn One Thing fact sheet (1 per pair)

Myth or Fact? student page

VOCABULARY

Chromosome: a package of genetic instructions inside our cells

Trisomy: having three copies of a chromosome instead of two

Stereotype: an unfair idea that everyone in a group is the same

Inclusion: making sure everyone can take part and belong

1

5 min

Hook: what do 3 and 21 have in common?

Write **3.21** on the board. Take guesses. Then reveal that it's a date, March 21, and that it's a code.

SAY

Today we're cracking a code that's inside every one of us, and finding out why people around the world wear mismatched socks on March 21.

2

10 min

Mini-lesson: the science

Explain cells → chromosomes → 23 pairs (46 total). Show a karyotype diagram (or the sock version in the Celebrate 3.21 Sock Matching Game). Circle #21.

SAY

Chromosomes are like instruction manuals for our bodies. They come in pairs, one from each parent. People with Down syndrome have **three** copies of chromosome 21. Scientists call that **trisomy 21**. So 3.21 means three copies of 21. It's nobody's fault, it isn't contagious, and it happens in every kind of family.

LESSON, CONTINUED

3

10 min

Four corners: myth or fact?

Label two corners MYTH and FACT. Read statements from the student page. Students move, then one from each side explains their thinking before you reveal the answer.

SAY

Myths can be unfair even when they sound nice. “People with Down syndrome are always happy” is a myth. Everyone has a full range of feelings.

4

10 min

Teach-back: Learn One Thing

Pairs read the Learn One Thing fact sheet, choose the fact that surprised them most, and teach it to another pair in 30 seconds.

5

5–7 min

Action plan & exit ticket

Students complete “My inclusion action” on the student page. Invite a few to share.

SAY

Awareness is knowing. Inclusion is doing. What will YOU do this week?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think people started wearing mismatched socks on 3/21?
2. Why can even a “nice” stereotype be unfair?
3. What’s the difference between being in the same room and being included?
4. Where at our school might someone feel left out? What could we change?
5. How would you explain Down syndrome to a younger student?

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Students correctly explain why the date is 3/21 and score 6+ out of 8 on Myth or Fact. **Answer key:** 1-M · 2-F · 3-M · 4-F · 5-F · 6-M · 7-F · 8-M.

DIFFERENTIATE

- Provide a labeled karyotype diagram and sentence frames (“Down syndrome means...”).
- Read myth statements aloud. Allow thumbs up/down instead of moving.
- Extension: research how chromosomes are passed from parents to children.

LEVEL IT UP



Have your class teach a younger grade using the Sock Matching Game. Explaining it to a 6-year-old is the best check for understanding there is.

More messages to teach

Mini-lessons for morning meeting or advisory. Each one works as a 5- to 10-minute conversation.

Stereotypes flatten people

“They’re always happy” or “they can’t do that” both ignore who a person really is.

Try: List stereotypes kids hear about any group, then discuss why they’re unfair.

Person-first language

Say “a person with Down syndrome,” not “a Down syndrome kid.” The person comes first.

Try: Rewrite three sentences using person-first language.

Included vs. just there

Being in the room isn’t the same as being invited to the game, the group, or the table.

Try: Brainstorm what real inclusion looks like at lunch and recess.

Everyone has strengths

Everyone has things they’re great at and things that are harder, with or without a disability.

Try: Students write a “strengths card” for a classmate.

Things have changed

Not long ago, many kids with disabilities weren’t allowed in public schools. A 1975 federal law began to change that.

Try: Ask: why does being in school together matter?

Words can hurt

Some words, like the r-word, are used as insults and hurt people with disabilities. We choose better words.

Try: Make a class list of kind replacements.

SAY IT ALL WEEK: POST THESE IN YOUR ROOM

Awareness is knowing. Inclusion is doing.

Person first.

Bust the myth.

Included, not just there.

Different Looks Good Here.

Whole-class activities

Pick a few for your 3.21 week. Many can be student-led.

Chromosome Sock Math

20 MIN

GRAPH PAPER · CALCULATORS (OPTIONAL)

How many chromosomes in our class if everyone has 46? What if one person has 47? If 21 students wear mismatched socks, how many socks is that? Students write their own 3.21 word problems to trade.

Class Inclusion Pledge

15 MIN

POSTER PAPER · MARKERS

Students write the pledge together (“In our class, everyone...”) and sign it. Hang it by the door for 3.21 and all year.

Design-a-Sock Showcase

30 MIN

CREATE YOUR OWN FUN SOCK PAGE

Students design a sock that represents what makes them unique, plus a sentence explaining it. Display them as a hallway “sock gallery.”

Student-Led Announcement

PREP 20 MIN

SCRIPT PAPER

A small team writes and reads a 60-second morning announcement: what 3.21 is, why socks, and a call to Rock Your Socks. Coach them on accurate, kind language.

Teach a Younger Class

20 MIN

SOCK MATCHING GAME

Pair up with a K-2 class. Your students lead the sock mystery game and explain the extra sock. They become the experts.

Rock Your Socks Challenge

3.21

FUN SOCKS · TALLY CHART

Challenge other classes to see who has the most sock-rockers on March 21. Share a class sock photo with #Celebrate321 (follow your school’s photo policy).

SAMPLE 3.21 WEEK

Mon

Lesson: Cracking the Code of 3.21

Tue

Chromosome Sock Math

Wed

Design-a-Sock Showcase

Thu

Teach a Younger Class

Fri

Rock Your Socks Challenge + sign the Inclusion Pledge

Heads up: March 21, 2027 falls on a **Sunday**, so most schools will celebrate on **Friday, March 19**.

Individual & take-home activities

For quiet work time, early finishers, or sending home so families can celebrate too.

Myth or Fact? page

INDIVIDUAL

The reproducible student page (last page) covers myth-busting, chromosome math, and a personal inclusion action.

Teach Your Family

TAKE-HOME

Students take home Learn One Thing and teach their family three facts. A grown-up signs to say they learned something new.

BELONG Acrostic Poem

INDIVIDUAL

Students write an acrostic poem using B-E-L-O-N-G or C-E-L-E-B-R-A-T-E about what inclusion means to them.

Secret Code & Word Search

EARLY FINISHERS

Pull the secret code and word search pages from the Celebrate 3.21 Kids Activity Pack for fast finishers.

✂ CUT & SEND HOME

Dear Families,

This week our class is celebrating **World Down Syndrome Day** (March 21) with Celebrate 3.21. We learned the science of Down syndrome (three copies of chromosome 21, which is why the date is 3/21), busted some common myths, and each made an inclusion action plan.

Ask your child: “Can you teach me the difference between a myth and a fact about Down syndrome?” On our **Rock Your Socks day** (_____), send your child in fun, mismatched socks! Share a family sock photo with [#Celebrate321](#). Free family activities are at [Celebrate321.org](#).

— _____

✂ OPTIONAL RETURN SLIP

Our family celebrated 3.21 by...

Student: _____ Grown-up: _____

Myth or Fact?

Read each statement. Circle **M** for myth or **F** for fact.

Name: _____

1 You can catch Down syndrome from someone.

☐ M ☐ F

2 Down syndrome happens in families of every race and background.

☐ M ☐ F

3 Down syndrome is very rare.

☐ M ☐ F

4 People with Down syndrome feel the whole range of emotions, not just happy.

☐ M ☐ F

5 People with Down syndrome can go to school, have jobs, and play sports.

☐ M ☐ F

6 People with Down syndrome can't learn new things.

☐ M ☐ F

7 Most people have 46 chromosomes. People with Down syndrome have 47.

☐ M ☐ F

8 Being included only means sitting in the same room.

☐ M ☐ F

Chromosome math

Most people have _____ pairs of chromosomes.

23 pairs $\times$ 2 = _____ chromosomes.

People with Down syndrome have one extra copy of #21, so they have _____

What date does "three copies of 21" give us?

Pick one myth and bust it!

Myth #____ is wrong because...

My inclusion action

This week, one thing I will do to help someone feel like they belong is...

