

High School Teacher Guide

Grades 9–12 • Ages 14–18



THE BIG IDEA FOR THIS AGE

“Inclusion is a choice communities make, and you’re part of the community.”

High school students are ready for real science, real history, and real responsibility. This guide works in biology, health, social studies, or advisory. It moves students from awareness to action, and it invites them to help their whole community Show Up for 3.21.

1 Teacher background & key facts

3 Lesson plan (50–55 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"~~

TEACHING IT IN GRADES 9-12

- Cross-link to curriculum: meiosis and nondisjunction (biology), disability rights laws (civics), and media literacy (ELA).
- Frame students as leaders. They can run school-wide campaigns and reach out to local businesses.
- Topics like prenatal testing may come up. Keep the focus on respect and belonging, not debate: "Every person with Down syndrome deserves to be valued."
- Emphasize "nothing about us without us": plan with people with disabilities, not just for them.

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: From Awareness to Action

50–55 MIN

Students connect the biology of trisomy 21 to the history of disability rights, evaluate how media portrays people with Down syndrome, and design an inclusion initiative.

STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO...

- Explain how nondisjunction during cell division can lead to trisomy 21.
- Describe how laws like IDEA (1975) and the ADA (1990) expanded inclusion.
- Evaluate media representation of people with Down syndrome using clear criteria.
- Design a realistic, student-led inclusion initiative.

MATERIALS

- Slides with karyotype & meiosis diagram
- Jigsaw reading cards (IDEA, ADA, UN/WDSO)
- 2–3 teacher-previewed media clips or ads
- Inclusion Action Plan (last page)

VOCABULARY

Nondisjunction: chromosomes failing to separate properly during cell division

IDEA: federal law (1975; renamed 1990) guaranteeing a free, appropriate public education to students with disabilities

ADA: the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), a civil rights law against disability discrimination

Ableism: discrimination or bias against people with disabilities

1

5 min

Opener: the big question

Project: “Can an entire community show up for 3.21?” Students write what “showing up” would look like in their school or town.

SAY

Today isn’t just about awareness. It’s about what communities choose to do, and you’re part of that choice.

2

10 min

The science

Review meiosis. Show how nondisjunction can leave an egg or sperm cell with an extra chromosome 21. Share the three types: trisomy 21 (~95%), translocation (~3%), and mosaicism (~2%) (NDSS).

SAY

The chance increases with parental age, but because younger people have more babies, many babies with Down syndrome are born to younger parents. It happens in every population, and it’s nobody’s fault.

LESSON, CONTINUED

3

12 min

Jigsaw: rights & recognition

Expert groups read one card each: **IDEA (1975)**, the right to public education; **ADA (1990)**, civil rights in work and public life; **UN & WDSD (2011–2012)**, global recognition. Then regroup and teach each other.

SAY

Before 1975, many students with disabilities in the U.S. had no guaranteed right to go to public school. Consider how recent that is.

4

13 min

Media representation check

Show 2–3 short clips or ads you’ve previewed. Students rate each: Is the person shown as a full person? Do they speak for themselves? Is it a stereotype (pity, “inspiration,” “always happy”)? Who made it?

5

10 min

Design: Inclusion Action Plan

Teams start the Inclusion Action Plan. Share-outs can become the class’s 3.21 project.

SAY

The best plans are specific, involve people with disabilities in the planning, and last beyond one day.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does “showing up” for a community actually require?
2. Why do you think it took until 1975 to guarantee a public education to students with disabilities?
3. What’s the difference between “inspiration” stories and real representation?
4. Where does ableism show up in everyday language or school life?
5. How can inclusion efforts avoid being one-day events?

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Students can explain nondisjunction and trisomy 21, name what IDEA and the ADA changed, and submit a first-draft Inclusion Action Plan with at least three concrete steps.

DIFFERENTIATE

- Provide a guided notes sheet for the science section and pre-labeled diagrams.
- Offer jigsaw cards at two reading levels.
- Extension: analyze how employment rates or life expectancy have changed and what drove it.

CONNECT TO THE COMMUNITY



Celebrate 3.21 is asking every business in town to participate. Student teams can invite local businesses to Rock Your Socks, display a sign, or create a 3.21 special. That’s real civic engagement, and a great service-hours project.

More messages to teach

Discussion starters for advisory, health, or civics. Each can anchor a 10- to 15-minute conversation.

Ableism is everyday

It shows up in words (“that’s so r-word”), assumptions (“they can’t”), and design (stairs-only entrances).

Try: Students list examples they’ve seen and one fix for each.

Beyond “inspiration”

People with disabilities aren’t here to inspire others. Going to prom or getting a job is just life.

Try: Compare two headlines and discuss the framing.

Work & opportunity

Adults with Down syndrome work in restaurants, offices, retail, the arts, and their own businesses.

Try: Ask: what makes a workplace truly inclusive?

Nothing about us without us

The disability rights movement’s principle: include people in decisions that affect them.

Try: Apply it to planning a school event.

Unified is better

Unified sports and inclusive clubs pair students with and without disabilities as equal teammates.

Try: Explore starting or joining a unified team or club.

Your digital footprint

Share stories with consent and dignity. No viral “reaction” videos at someone’s expense.

Try: Write a class code for posting about others.

SAY IT ALL WEEK: POST THESE IN YOUR ROOM

Nothing about us without us.

Representation, not inspiration.

Inclusion lasts longer than a day.

Can an entire community show up for 3.21?

Different Looks Good Here.

Whole-class activities

Student-led ideas that make a visible difference across the school and community.

School-Wide 3.21 Campaign

1-2 WEEKS
STUDENT TEAM · ADMIN APPROVAL

Students lead announcements, a Rock Your Socks day, hallway displays, and school-approved social posts with #Celebrate321. Track participation and report results.

Show Up for 3.21: Business Outreach

2-3 WEEKS
CELEBRATE 3.21 BUSINESS MATERIALS

Teams invite local businesses to participate by rocking socks, displaying a window sign, or creating a 3.21 special. Students practice professional communication and civic leadership.

Unified Event

1 EVENT
PARTNER WITH SPECIAL ED STAFF

Co-plan a unified game, art showcase, or lunch with students with disabilities as co-leaders, not guests. Partner with an existing unified sports team or inclusion club if your school has one.

Media Literacy Project

2 PERIODS
DEVICES · RUBRIC

Students analyze a film, show, or ad featuring a person with Down syndrome using the representation criteria from the lesson, then present findings or make a better version.

Science Connection

1 PERIOD
KARYOTYPE WORKSHEETS

In biology, students build and analyze karyotypes, identify trisomy 21, and model nondisjunction during meiosis with pipe cleaners or paper chromosomes.

Rock Your Socks Challenge

3.21
FUN SOCKS

Class vs. class or staff vs. students: who has the most sock-rockers on March 21? Share results (and feet photos, following school policy) with #Celebrate321.

SAMPLE 3.21 WEEK

Mon

Lesson: From Awareness to Action

Tue

Science Connection: karyotypes

Wed

Media Literacy Project

Thu

Unified Event

Fri

Rock Your Socks Challenge + campaign results

Heads up: March 21, 2027 falls on a **Sunday**, so most schools will celebrate on **Friday, March 19**. Start the school-wide campaign and business outreach 2-3 weeks earlier.

Individual & take-home activities

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

Inclusion Action Plan

INDIVIDUAL OR TEAM

The reproducible planner (last page) walks students from a problem they noticed to goals, partners, steps, and how it lasts past 3.21.

Reflective essay

INDIVIDUAL

Prompt: “What would it take for my community to truly show up for people with Down syndrome, and what’s my part?” (500 words)

Generational interview

TAKE-HOME

Students interview an adult about how inclusion in schools and workplaces has changed since they were teenagers, then compare with the lesson timeline.

Design a 3.21 graphic

INDIVIDUAL

Students design a social graphic or poster explaining why we Rock Your Socks, using Celebrate 3.21 colors and #Celebrate321. Choose the best ones for school channels.

✂ CUT & SEND HOME

Dear Families,

This week our class is celebrating **World Down Syndrome Day** (March 21) with Celebrate 3.21. We studied the biology of Down syndrome, the history of disability rights, and how media portrays people with disabilities. Students are now designing Inclusion Action Plans, and some may be reaching out to local businesses to help our community Show Up for 3.21.

Ask your child: “What’s your Inclusion Action Plan, and how can our family help?” 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: _____

Inclusion Action Plan

From awareness to action: design something real for 3.21 and beyond.

Name(s): _____

1. What we noticed

Where do students with disabilities, or anyone, get left out at our school or in our community?

2. Our goal

What will be different if our plan works? Make it specific and measurable.

3. Who we'll partner with

Plan *with* people, not just *for* them. Include students with disabilities in planning.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Students with disabilities / self-advocates | ☐ Special education or intervention staff |
| ☐ Student council or clubs | ☐ Administration |
| ☐ Families / local Down syndrome organization | ☐ Local businesses (Show Up for 3.21) |

4. Action steps

STEP	WHO	BY WHEN

5. How we'll know it worked

6. How it lasts past 3.21
