

# Lower Elementary Teacher Guide

Grades K–2 • Ages 5–8



## THE BIG IDEA FOR THIS AGE

**“Different is good, and everyone deserves to belong.”**

Early learners are curious and fair-minded. They can understand a simple science idea (chromosomes come in pairs, like socks) and they’re ready to practice what inclusion looks like on the playground, at lunch, and in the classroom.

**1 Teacher background & key facts**

**3 Lesson plan (30 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  | <del>a Down's kid, a Down syndrome person</del>          |
| has Down syndrome            | <del>suffers from, is afflicted by, is a victim of</del> |
| Down syndrome                | <del>Down's syndrome (U.S. usage drops the "s")</del>    |
| typically developing / peers | <del>normal kids, regular kids</del>                     |
| intellectual disability      | <del>the r word, or "slow"</del>                         |
| their name!                  | <del>a label, or "the student with Down syndrome"</del>  |

## TALKING ABOUT IT WITH 5- TO 8-YEAR-OLDS

- Use one simple science sentence: "Chromosomes are tiny instructions for our bodies. They come in pairs."
- Say clearly that Down syndrome isn't an illness and you can't catch it. Kids this age often wonder.
- Welcome honest questions. "That's a great question" keeps curiosity kind.
- Turn ideas into actions they can practice: inviting, sharing, taking turns, using names.

## IF A STUDENT IN YOUR CLASS HAS DOWN SYNDROME

- Talk with the family first. Ask how they'd like WDSD 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: The Mystery of the Extra Sock

30 MIN

Students solve a sock mystery, learn what Down syndrome is and why we celebrate on 3/21, and practice ways to include a friend.

## STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO...

- Explain that World Down Syndrome Day is March 21 because people with Down syndrome have three copies of chromosome 21.
- Name ways people with Down syndrome are like them.
- Show one way to include someone at school.

## MATERIALS

Paper bags with socks (one bag has a set of three)

Board or chart paper

Scenario cards (see Step 4)

"My 3.21 Page" (last page)

## VOCABULARY

**Chromosome:** a tiny set of instructions inside your body that tells it how to grow

**Down syndrome:** when a person has an extra copy of chromosome 21

**Include:** to invite someone in

**Belong:** to feel like part of the group

1

5 min

## Hook: the sock mystery

Give small groups a paper bag of socks to sort into pairs. One group's bag has a set of three. Let them report what they found.

### SAY

Detectives, what did you discover? One group found a pair with THREE socks! Hold on to that clue. It's going to help us learn something important.

2

8 min

## Teach: chromosomes & Down syndrome

Draw pairs of socks on the board. Then draw the 21st pair with a third sock and write **3 / 21**.

### SAY

Inside everyone's body are tiny instructions called **chromosomes**. They come in pairs, like socks, and most people have 23 pairs. People with **Down syndrome** have an extra copy of number 21. That's why World Down Syndrome Day is on 3/21: three copies of 21! Down syndrome isn't a sickness, and you can't catch it. It's just part of who someone is.

**LESSON, CONTINUED**
**3**
**7 min**
**Turn & talk: alike and different**

Partners find two things they have in common and one thing that's different. Share a few out loud.

**SAY**

People with Down syndrome like games, music, pets, and friends, just like you. Some things might take more time to learn, and that's okay. Everybody learns in their own way.

**4**
**7 min**
**Practice: include a friend**

Read scenario cards aloud and have volunteers act out a kind response. Cards: *Someone is sitting alone at lunch. Someone wants to join your game but doesn't know the rules. Someone talks in a way that's hard to understand.*

**SAY**

Including someone can be as simple as saying their name and "Want to play?", or being patient while they talk.

**5**
**3 min**
**Close: exit ticket**

Students complete Question 1 of **My 3.21 Page** or tell a partner one thing they learned.

**SAY**

What's one thing you'll teach someone at home tonight?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why do we celebrate World Down Syndrome Day on March 21?
2. What are some ways people with Down syndrome are just like you?
3. How does it feel to be left out? How does it feel to be included?
4. What can our class do to make sure everyone feels like they belong?

**CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING**

Students can answer: "Why is World Down Syndrome Day on 3/21?" (Three copies of chromosome 21.) They can also name one inclusive action.

**DIFFERENTIATE**

- Use the sock drawing as a visual anchor for students who are learning English.
- Pre-teach "chromosome" with a picture, and let students clap out the syllables.
- Challenge early readers to write their own scenario card for the class to solve.

**KEEP THE CLUE GOING**


Post the 23 paper sock pairs (with the extra 21) on a bulletin board. During the week, ask "Who remembers what the extra sock means?" and let students retell the story.

## More messages to teach

Short follow-up talks for morning meeting, before recess, or anytime a teachable moment pops up.

### We all learn in different ways

Some friends read fast, some draw well, and some take more time. Everyone's brain works a little differently.

**Try:** Ask: "What's something that's easy for you? Hard for you?"

### Everyone is good at something

People with Down syndrome can be great dancers, artists, athletes, helpers, and friends.

**Try:** Have students write or draw one strength of a classmate.

### Friends, not just helpers

Helping is kind, but friendship goes both ways. We play **WITH** each other, not just help each other.

**Try:** Brainstorm things to do together at recess.

### Use names, not labels

Everyone has a name. Nobody is "the kid who...". We call people by their names.

**Try:** Play a name game so everyone learns each other's names.

### Ask questions kindly

It's okay to be curious. Ask in a kind voice, or ask a grown-up.

**Try:** Practice turning "Why does he...?" into "I wonder..."

### Patience is kind

Some people need more time to talk, move, or answer. Waiting shows respect.

**Try:** Practice "wait time": count to 5 silently before jumping in.

### READ-ALoud IDEAS (PREVIEW FIRST)

Ask your librarian for picture books featuring a character with Down syndrome. Teachers often use *My Friend Isabelle* (Eliza Woloson) and *47 Strings: Tessa's Special Code* (Becky Carey). Always preview first.

### SAY IT ALL WEEK: POST THESE IN YOUR ROOM

Different is good.

Want to play?

Everyone learns in their own way.

Use names, not labels.

3 copies of 21 = 3/21

# Whole-class activities

Hands-on ideas for the week of March 21. Mix and match, or build a full “3.21 Week.”

## Sock Chromosome Bulletin Board

**20 MIN** PAPER SOCK TEMPLATES · MARKERS

Each student decorates a paper sock. Pin them up in 23 pairs, with a third sock on pair 21. Title: **“Different Looks Good Here.”** The display teaches the whole school.

## Rock Your Socks Day

**ALL DAY · 3.21** FUN OR MISMATCHED SOCKS

Invite everyone to wear fun socks on March 21. Take a class “feet photo” (follow your school’s photo policy) and share it with families using #Celebrate321.

## Friendship Chain

**ALL WEEK** PAPER STRIPS · TAPE

Each time a student includes someone or does something kind, they write or draw it on a strip and add it to the chain. Can you reach 21 links by March 21?

## 3.21 Math

**15 MIN** COUNTERS OR SOCKS

Skip-count by 3s to 21. How many groups of 3 make 21? (7.) Count pairs of socks by 2s, then add one extra: how many socks for 23 pairs plus 1? (47.)

## Kindness Bingo

**ALL WEEK**

**BINGO SHEET FROM THE KIDS ACTIVITY PACK**

Give each student the Kindness Bingo page from the Celebrate 3.21 Kids Activity Pack. Celebrate everyone who gets five in a row by 3.21.

## Sock Match-Up Race

**10 MIN** A BIG PILE OF SOCKS

Teams race to match a pile of socks, with one sneaky extra sock hidden inside. Whoever finds it explains why it’s special.

### SAMPLE 3.21 WEEK

#### Mon

Lesson: The Mystery of the Extra Sock

#### Tue

Sock Chromosome Bulletin Board

#### Wed

3.21 Math + start the Friendship Chain

#### Thu

Sock Match-Up Race

#### Fri

Rock Your Socks Day + Kindness Bingo winners

**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.

## My 3.21 Page

### INDIVIDUAL

The reproducible student page (last page) covers why it's 3/21, coloring the chromosome 21 socks, and drawing a way to include a friend.

## Kids Activity Pack

### INDIVIDUAL OR TAKE-HOME

Coloring, word search, maze, secret code, and more, all tied to 3.21. Pull single pages for early finishers or send the whole pack home.

## Learn One Thing

### TAKE-HOME

Send home the one-page fact sheet. Families read it together and each person shares one thing they learned.

## Sock Matching Game

### TAKE-HOME

Students teach their family the “extra sock” game and explain what it means. Teaching someone else is the best way to remember.

### ✂ CUT & SEND HOME

**Dear Families,**

This week our class is celebrating **World Down Syndrome Day** (March 21) with Celebrate 3.21. We solved a sock mystery and learned why World Down Syndrome Day is on 3/21: people with Down syndrome have three copies of chromosome 21. We also practiced ways to include friends.

**Ask your child:** “Why is World Down Syndrome Day on March 21?” 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](https://celebrate321.org).

— \_\_\_\_\_

### ✂ OPTIONAL RETURN SLIP

**Our family celebrated 3.21 by...**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Grown-up: \_\_\_\_\_

# My 3.21 Page

Show what you learned about World Down Syndrome Day!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1** World Down Syndrome Day is on March \_\_\_\_\_.  
People with Down syndrome have \_\_\_\_\_ copies of chromosome 21.

Word bank:

21

three

- 2** Color the chromosome 21 socks!

Most chromosomes come in pairs. How many socks does number 21 have? Count and color them.



- 3** I can help a friend feel like they belong by...

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Draw it here!