

# Lesson Seven – Life Can Be Hard... But Hard Moments Can Be Transformative

“ The most beautiful people are those who have known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.  
– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry ”

## CREATIVE ACTIVITY – Music Playlist

### Lesson Intention:

The message of this lesson is that you aren't failing at life if you are going through a difficult time. Life can be hard sometimes. There are places where it gets particularly tough – after someone you love has passed away or when you or a loved one are sick or injured, or if you are going through a big change in your family. These changes can be physical, hormonal, emotional, and especially painful during the adolescent years. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson created a theory to help map these periods of transformation, which he divided into eight distinct stages of life. In categorizing human development into different life stages, he provided one theory about our collective experience as we grow as people. Of course, young people have incredibly different circumstances throughout this country as it relates to resources, privilege, and historical marginalization. However, despite our varying circumstances, we all move through this psychosocial development, and often at similar times. **It is helpful for high school students to have an understanding that they are not alone in many of the challenges they are facing in their lives. Rather, they are negotiating this stage of development along with their peers.**

### Social Emotional Learning Goals:

- Raise awareness that difficult feelings can be situational but can also be part of a larger context: students' natural developmental growth.
- Recognize the central role identity development plays during adolescence.

## Materials for Lesson:

- [Featured Video \(2\) - Dr. Gowri Aragam and Cordelia Zars](#)
- [Additional Video \(2\)](#)
- Lesson Plan (this document)
- [Lesson PowerPoint](#)

## In Preparation for Lesson:

*Prior to teaching this lesson, **watch the expert and guest artist videos** and create your own music playlist, draw your cover art, and make a title for your playlist.*

*Gather colored pencils, crayons or markers for the cover art as well as paper and pens if students choose not to do this digitally. If your students do choose to do this digitally, Canva.com offers many album design covers. If they are doing this digitally, make sure all students have a personal electronic device (i.e. laptop, tablet, Chromebook). This is a lesson that can be extended into a second class period, especially if you invite students to play their musical selection for the class.*

## Featured Video:

1. Dr. Gowri Aragam describes several key ideas that offer students more information about the way identity develops over time. She shares that music often supports her in pausing to reflect on her identity and determine who she wants to be.
2. Cordelia Zars describes her experience with an eating disorder as a teenager and explains that writing her own music supported her in expressing the feelings that felt locked inside of her.

## Additional Videos:

1. George Lopez shares the way music has helped him learn how to navigate life's difficult moments while also offering him a sense of identity and self-confidence.
2. Meaghan Birnie and Clare Kehoe - founders of Morgan's Message - share the way music was one support that helped them get through the loss of their friend Morgan to suicide. They also share their friend Morgan's connection to music.

## Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the Lesson 6 PowerPoint as you begin.

*\*Slide 1*

As discussed in the teacher training, remember to make the suggested language below authentic to yourself and meaningful for your students.

## Launching the Lesson:

\* Slide 2

The teacher connects today's lesson with previous ones by explaining that this lesson circles back to a main idea of the curriculum – everyone is going through something you can't see. Rather than viewing the difficult emotions adolescents are grappling with as problems to be solved, a more developmental lens helps to illustrate that some of the challenges students are moving through are likely connected to transformation and growth. High school students will hopefully feel reassured and comforted with this knowledge that there is not something wrong with them as they struggle with tough issues, but that this is an inherent part of what it means to be a teenager and developmentally appropriate.

### **Examples of What You Could Say:**

“In earlier lessons you have written stories, drawn pictures, and created art that spoke to challenging experiences from your lives. There is a common thread in all of those lessons that we keep returning to: everyone is going through something you can't see, and you are not alone if you are having a difficult time. Today, we're going to learn more about a theory that explores a new way of thinking about the way we are all connected to each other. In the field of developmental psychology, there is a theorist named Erik Erikson who created a map of sorts to help show the distinct stages of development in our lives. He argued that there are eight stages that everyone passes through as we develop as humans, and that each stage offers a specific opportunity for growth. This is just one of many theories that attempts to explain social and emotional development, but it is one that helps us to understand that we are more connected than we may initially think. Of course, there are incredibly different circumstances for young people across this country and we've explored that idea in this curriculum as well. Students across this country and world have varying access to resources and different degrees of privilege along the lines of race, gender, socio-economic levels. These differences are all very real, and this lesson is not meant to overstate your similarities. However, this lesson looks at the collective experience you may share because of your age and because of the current developmental stage you are in.”

### **Notes on What You Plan to Say:**

## Launching the Lesson Part Two:

\*Slide 3

Walk students through the stage of development called Identity vs. Role Confusion and point out that this is a time in their lives when knowing who they are is *meant* to become a bit more difficult. Mention that if they would like, students can learn more about all of the stages in this theory in a supplemental handout or link to an article that explains this concept in more detail.

### **Example of What You Could Say:**

“We’re going to zoom in on just one of the stages of our development as social and emotional human beings, and it’s actually the fifth stage out of Erikson’s eight, which is called Identity vs. Role Confusion, and this stage is meant to last from about 12-18 years old – although everyone is of course different, and the search for identity doesn’t simply end when your teenage years do. However, this is a specific period of time when you begin to decide who you want to be as you develop your sense of self. In this stage, you explore your unique values, beliefs, and goals. But this can be really challenging because you are making these decisions in the face of the influence of friendships, social media and your own family and cultural expectations. Trying to stay authentic and true to yourself in the midst of so many other influences and opinions can be really hard. But you aren’t alone. Out of all of these eight stages that we move through – from infancy to old age – the awareness that you are now in this same important and transformative stage at the same time...hopefully this can be comforting and helpful.”

### **Notes on What You Plan to Say:**

### **Introducing the Expert Video:**

Introduce a video from an expert who will describe identity development and share the way music helps her to understand her own identity.

#### **Example of What You Could Say:**

“We are going to watch a video from a mental health expert who shares some more information about identity development and connects these ideas to today’s creative activity.”

#### **Notes on What You Plan to Say:**

### **Play Expert Video:**

An expert in mental health describes the role music can play in supporting identity development.

### **Reflecting on Expert Video/Introducing the Guest Artist Video:**

Reiterate the main idea from the expert video- that the developmental phase of adolescence is a significant time for self-discovery. Connect the expert video to the guest artist video by noting that the guest artist provides a real life example to show the way writing music helped her with identity development.

**Example of What You Could Say:**

“As you can see from the expert video we just watched, this transition between childhood and adulthood is pretty significant. This is when we are meant to test and set limits, to try out various roles, even to be more influenced by our peers. This is when we are searching to establish a new identity that feels authentic. And oftentimes as teenagers, music is part of this journey of self-discovery. We just heard from an expert that there is a developmental reason for this, and now we are going to watch another video from a musician who gives a real life example and shares the way writing music helped her with her own identity development during a very difficult time.”

**Notes on What You Plan to Say:**

**Play Guest Artist Video:**

The guest artist describes the way music has supported her in developing her identity.

Before you play the guest artist video, remember to give students a description of the video content, so that they can decide if they would like to view the video. The video descriptions are listed above each video. As always, prior to playing the video, you will remind students—“Stories hold potential for various forms of connection to the lives of those who hear them. This story may connect deeply to others who have had a similar experience. In this video, (read the one sentence description that is above the video). At this moment, you may welcome that connection or you may wish to make a different choice to delay or opt out.”

**Introducing the Creative Activity:**

Introduce the creative activity: making a music playlist that reflects your identity. Explain that students will not only select a few songs for their playlist, but they will also design their own cover art as well as giving their playlist a title. The act of reflection as students select their songs (why they’re choosing a particular song and how it represents at least a part of them) is important in this activity. If students are interested in doing some writing during this time, encourage them to not only do the above three tasks during this creative activity, but as an extension, they can write a sentence or two as to why they choose each song on their playlist.

**Example of What You Could Say:**

“While I was listening to this guest artist, a few songs came to my mind that I think really reflect who I am, and I would like to share one of those songs with you now. (Play a section of one song that represents your identity and explain how that song represents you). Now you are going to create your own playlist too. You will choose three or four songs that best represent your identity. After, you will create ‘cover art’ for your playlist and give your playlist a title. For some people, reflecting on why you selected your songs can be done while drawing your cover art or creating a playlist title, but for other people, writing is an important part of the reflection process. If you would like to write why you chose a particular song and how that song represents you, please feel free to write one or two sentences about each song selection. When selecting music, you might pick a song that illustrates your values, something you believe in, or a personal goal you feel passionately about. The song might even feel like a kind of “theme song” for who you hope to be. You can list the songs in a word document or google doc – however you want to create it. Next, you will design the cover for your playlist. On the App Canva.com there are many album cover designs. Choose one of the options they provide and give your playlist a title by typing it into the App. Add your cover design to the word document or google doc where you list your songs. This activity should feel really individualized for who you are. In order to make this activity feel authentic for me, I actually made mine as a cassette ‘mix tape’, because that was my version of creating a playlist when I was a teenager. (Show students your work.) If you do not want to create a digital playlist on a computer, you could write your playlist and title on paper and draw, by hand, the design for your playlist cover. I’ll circulate the room to help you with the technology or to answer any questions that come up as you are making the playlist!”

**Notes on What You Plan to Say:**

## Creative Activity:

\* Slides 4 and 5

Students spend approximately 20 minutes choosing the songs for their playlist and listing them along with their playlist title (and song descriptions if they would like to write why they selected each song). Students will also create cover art for their playlist.

## Lesson Closure:

Invite students to share the songs they chose for their playlists, and if there is time, to play an excerpt from one of their songs for the class.

### Example of What You Could Say:

“I would love to hear what songs you chose for your playlists and why you chose those songs. Would anyone like to tell us what is on their playlist? And perhaps even share a small part of one song? Was it easy to come up with a playlist title that represents the songs you chose, and how was it to create your cover art as you reflected on how this music helps to express your identity?”

### Notes on What You Plan to Say:

## Supplemental Information:

If you or your students would like to learn more about the ideas in this lesson, additional resources and third party links are included below.

1. For teachers interested in learning more about Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, can explore the resources on the website [verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com), a partner with the Cleveland Clinic. Their article [Identity vs. Role Confusion in Psychosocial Stage 5](#) provides a concise overview of the stage that is explored in this lesson but they also have a [comprehensive guide](#) that describes all 8 of the stages. Students who find this lesson interesting may also want access to this additional resource.
2. Erik Erikson's approach to thinking about identity development is one central theory within the field of psychology, but other diverse disciplines provide other ways of conceptualizing this process. Martha Beck's *Finding Your Own North Star* uses a somatic, or body-based method to guide readers in feeling in their bodies whether or not an aspect of their life is authentic. This method also supports decision-making. Students who raise questions about how to find their way to a life that feels like a good fit for who they really are might want to explore Martha Beck's books.