

# Speak **Truth** to Power

Youth Defenders  
for Human Rights





# Fae Johnstone

## Gender Diversity

*“When queer and trans young people leave the house, we (Canadians) have this idea that our society is so inclusive and that it has come so far but the reality is they all too often face violence, they face erasure, and they are not safe to be in the communities that should be built to include our experience.”*

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## INTRODUCTION

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Canada prides itself on being a diverse and multicultural country; however, the truth is that there is still a long way to go before there is equitable treatment and equality for all its citizens. 2SLGBTQQIA+ students continue to experience bullying at school around gender and sexual orientation. When the school community reflects inclusive practices, the foundation is being laid for a better civil society. By creating safer spaces and adopting inclusive language, schools foster the protection of dignity and authenticity. As classroom teachers it is important to intentionally create an environment where all students are valued as individuals. Through the activism and advocacy of Fae Johnstone, youth will learn that there is space for all.



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## BACKGROUND ON ISSUES

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The 2SLGBTQQIA+ community has faced systemic bias, prejudice, and discrimination in Canada through government practices and policies. Yet progress is being made. There has been legislative recognition of the needs and rights of 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities. The educational sector has responded with more inclusive curriculum. Educators who visibly and explicitly support gender diversity across all curriculums play an integral role.

The significance of gender identity is becoming more widely understood. When Bill C-16 passed in 2016, it enshrined gender expression and gender identity into the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. The pride flag was raised on Parliament Hill. Most provinces have since followed suit by protecting against gender discrimination and harassment. And in 2021 Canada became the first country to collect census data on both sex at birth and gender, which allows cisgender, transgender, and non-binary citizens to be reflected in the census. Fae Johnstone, a trans activist affiliated with the consulting firm Wisdom2Action, reflected on the census change in a CTV interview: “Having this data on a symbolic level, it tells every trans person that our state, our government and our society see us.” They added, “I hope it tells the government that we have a number now, you can’t ignore trans people.”<sup>1</sup> This data can now be used to drive change and bring forward a more inclusive society. Another encouraging step is the appointment of a federal Minister of Diversity whose role it is to ensure that public policies are informed and developed through an intersectional lens. The climate is changing.

Educational settings can better recognize the diversity of others. For some students, the school environment is the safest place to be their authentic selves, yet it remains an environment riddled with homophobic or transphobic comments. According to the recently released final report on the second climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia (HBTP) in Canadian schools, entitled *Still in Every Class in Every School*, 64% of students report hearing homophobic comments daily or weekly at school. 2SLGBTQQIA+ students report more incidents of HBTP verbal, physical, and sexual harassment as well as other forms of targeted bullying (e.g., cyberbullying) than their cisgender heterosexual peers.<sup>2</sup> Throughout her journey of fighting for the rights of all 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, [Fae herself has undergone numerous attacks](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Nicole Thompson, “Over 100K people are transgender in Canada, 2021 census shows,” *The Canadian Press*. Posted April 27, 2022. Retrieved May 12, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Tracy Peter, Christopher P. Campbell, and Catherine Taylor, 2021, *Still in Every Class in Every School: Final report on the second climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools* (Toronto, Ontario: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust).

Introducing an inclusive, gender-affirming curriculum benefits all students by not only providing the opportunity to understand the experiences and perspectives of a diverse group of peers, but also offering a mirror for 2SLGBTQQIA+ learners who will see themselves reflected in the content. As the acceptance and understanding of gender and sexual diversity evolves, the stigma of gender diversity diminishes and will hopefully lead to improved mental health outcomes within the community.

On the route to an inclusive society, it is important to challenge attitudes and beliefs which are barriers to equity and inclusion. It begins with empowering children from a very young age to develop a framework to understand people's identities. Beginning in the primary grades (Grades M–3), students can learn that families are on a rainbow spectrum. They can learn how to listen to and respect others, and develop a skill set to get help in situations involving bullying or abuse or when they feel uncomfortable, confused, or unsafe. Junior (Grades 4–6) and Intermediate (Grades 7–9) students can apply these skills to build healthy relationships and counter unhealthy relationships, they can experience gender-free socialization and learn the role of being an ally. Senior (Grades 10–12) students preparing for their entry into the world of work will bring the variety of experiences from their education to civil society. The impact of creating and sustaining an inclusive environment at school means that graduates are ready to make a commitment to correct and address imbalances. Organizations such as [Wisdom2Action](#) and the [Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity](#) offer support to all Canadians to make space for equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The recent census shows the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community, age 15 and older, is over 1 million people strong.<sup>3</sup> This figure confirms the importance of developing a consciously inclusive society. Schools can cultivate a positive culture which will lay the groundwork for a just and equitable society and in turn, the supportive school environment will serve as a protective factor for 2SLGBTQQIA+ youth.

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<sup>3</sup> “A statistical portrait of Canada’s diverse LGBTQ2+ communities,” *The Daily*, Statistics Canada. Released June 15, 2021.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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Fae Johnstone comes across as force to be reckoned with, confident and all-embracing. You can just tell that they are doing the work they are meant to do. Fae grew up in Ottawa and describes a complicated journey along the way to realizing they were a trans woman. It's the journey that has made them who they are and fuels their work and passion. Fae continues to walk their path and through their lived experience can share insight and wisdom on what it is to be a trans person in Canada today.

Fae initially volunteered at the Gay Straight Alliance at their school and from there, began advocacy work at 2SLGBTQQIA+ non-profits, and worked for the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity. In 2019, Fae's work as a community activist was recognized with the LGBT Youth Line Trans Activism Award. University-trained as a social worker, Fae started a social enterprise and consulting firm which has evolved into the full-fledged business Wisdom2Action. As co-owner of the business, Fae is busy, along with a team of people, providing training, education, and resources which will change and shape the lives of those in 2SLGBTQQIA+ and women's communities. In addition, the non-profit known as "Momentum Canada" has grown out of the work of Wisdom2Action. This organization seeks to accelerate social and gender justice for 2SLGBTQQIA+ people. Fae also writes for a variety of news sources to elucidate the politics and the policies which can direct change. When asked how they found their way to activism, Fae describes the microaggressions of daily life for a trans person moving about Canada and said they had a choice: to remain enraged by the injustice or to channel the energy into the power of advocacy. Fae has done more than channel energy; they are a champion of 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities.

Ultimately, Fae is part of a social movement which is not going away; they seek to eradicate the social, economic, and political inequities that shape 2SLGBTQQIA+ and women's lives.



### **Speak Truth to Power – Youth Defender Fae Johnstone**

Fae Johnstone, Executive Director of Wisdom2Action, addresses youth in Canadian schools about her activism around 2SLGBTQQIA+ rights and allyship, underscoring that trans and gender-diverse youth are just like all other young people.

[Watch video](#)

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# INTRODUCTION TO LESSON FORMAT

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The purpose of this resource is to support teachers on the diversity of gender in Canada and around the world. By exploring the diversity of gender within Canadian society (both pre- and post-colonization) and in other cultures, teachers contribute to their students' awareness of diversity on many levels and to their learning about the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As teachers, you know your students best, and are the best placed expert in your classroom to determine which issues you should stay away from, and which questions will generate rich dialogue and critical thinking. The goal of the classroom conversation is to focus on the diversity of gender, but for this to happen, students benefit from understanding that gender diversity exists everywhere and that prior to colonization, that diversity was reflected in most North American Indigenous societies.

These activities can be triggering events for students, as they may know someone who identifies as other than cisgender or is struggling with their gender identity, or they may be questioning their own gender identity. Be sure to establish guidelines that make your classroom a safe and comfortable place to talk. To prepare properly, to gain insights on how to lead classroom discussion and activities on the topic, use the booklet from the CTF/FCE Student Voice series, *Affirming Gender Diversity*, and the accompanying lesson plan ideas.

The lessons and activities in this profile use the Spiritual Domain based on the work of Dr. Marcella LaFever, in place of Bloom's Taxonomy. Learning to see the world through an Indigenous lens requires us to consider the interconnectedness of all living things. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its 94 Calls to Action in 2015. Calls #62–65 are specifically directed towards the education sector. Call # 62ii. states: "to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms."<sup>4</sup> We also acknowledge the important principle of "[two-eyed seeing](#)," the work of Elder Albert Marshall, of the Eskasoni community in Unama'ki – Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

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<sup>4</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*.

## Guiding Questions

- How inclusive is my curriculum of 2SLGBTQQIA+ people, history, and events?
- How can we dispel myths about gender identity?
- How can we make classrooms and schools safer for everyone?
- How can we reduce barriers?
- How can we respond in situations of bullying and harassment?
- How can we be a better ally?

## Learning Targets

*During this lesson, students will:*

- Learn about different gender identities and communities;
- Learn to respect differences;
- Learn to cooperate to accomplish good and protect each other from bullying;
- Embrace the idea that everyone has the right to exist as they are;
- Recognize the shame and hurt that can result from bias, prejudice, or stereotyping;
- Respect the lived experience of others.

## Skills Development

*After this lesson, students will have improved the following skills:*

- Being able to act in ways that are more consciously inclusive;
- Being more aware of the importance of acknowledging someone's pronouns;
- Taking action to reduce and end the stigma of 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals and communities;
- Being able to critically reflect on race, power, privilege, and the living legacies of history;
- Participating in activities that enhance their sense of belonging within their classroom, their school, and the greater community of 2SLGBTQQIA+ and their allies.

# **Suggested lessons, ideas, activities, and tasks for promoting learning and growth**

**Honouring  
Valuing  
Connecting  
Empowering  
Self-Actualizing**



## Honouring: to observe, to listen, to consider, to be aware

(Gr. K–9) Read-alouds. It is important to create a safe space throughout the year. Incorporating a diversity of 2SLGBTQQIA+ supportive materials in ALL areas of the curriculum contributes to an inclusive environment. Your school board and local teachers' union should have a list of suggested books for the classroom.

(Gr. 7–12) Gallery Walk: Divide students into small groups and give each group a set of markers. Chart paper is posted around the classroom and students rotate, writing their responses to the prompts. Suggested prompts: What do you think when you hear someone is masculine? What do you think when you hear someone is feminine? What do you think it means to be a girl? To be a boy? To be neither or both? After the exercise, discuss student responses. Responses may show the outside influences which shape attitudes and offer the opportunity to explore whether they see a diversity of individuals, relationships, and families in what they see on TV or in the media.

*Watch a selection of videos to become familiar with the terminology around gender expression, for example:*

- (Gr. 4–6) CBC Kids: Gender Explained  
[!\[\]\(f15d3c54be60b4fd0ce1da9fb3f67256\_img.jpg\) Gender – explained | CBC Kids News](#)
- (Gr. K–6) Queer Kid Stuff: He, she, and they  
[!\[\]\(7bf135d42c40a6430c927b2fd03d7659\_img.jpg\) HE, SHE, and THEY?!? – Gender: QUEER KID STUFF #2](#)

Notes:

## Valuing: to empathize, to acknowledge, to respect

(Gr. 7–12) The one-hour National Film Board (NFB) documentary, *My Prairie Home*, is about transgender singer Rae Spoon and their coming-of-age journey. Before viewing, post the question: What shapes one’s identity? Have students create a graphic organizer for notetaking while viewing. List the headings for the organizer to include the internal and environmental factors such as family, home, religion, country, geography, relationships, community, and school. After the viewing, discuss how music and writing has been an outlet for Rae. For more in-depth lesson plans on this film, please see content from the NFB:

 [Mini-Lesson for My Prairie Home – NFB Blog](#)

(Gr. 7–12) Watch the two-part performance by Ivan E. Coyote: *Hair Today* Part 1, Part 2 (available on YouTube), to explore the elements of gender expression. Discuss how it might feel to misgender someone.

(Gr. 7–12) Read excerpts from the book *Gender Failure*, co-written by Rae Spoon and Ivan E. Coyote, or show the CBC excerpt performance.

 [Gender Failure | CBC Books](#)

Notes:

## Connecting: to relate to, to work with, to support

(Gr. 10–12) Watch the 24-minute presentation which Fae delivered at the International Association of Youth Mental Health. Topics covered include resilience of queer and trans youth, mental health needs, and intersectionality.

▶ [Fae Johnstone - IAYMH 2017](#)

(Gr. 4–12) Language Arts: Apply learning about gender identity, gender expression, and attraction by creating examples of non-binary traits in a fictional character. This task can be part of a fairy tale unit, or short-story writing. Use this opportunity to practise using gender-neutral pronouns and adjectives such as they/them/their.

(Gr. 4–12) Use the spoken-word poem, book, or video from Canadian Shane Koyczan’s *To this Day* (available on YouTube), on the long-lasting effects of bullying. Discuss how Koyczan’s bullying impacts others. Promote anti-bullying through campaigns such as Pink Shirt Day.

(Gr. 7–12) Independent reflective activity: Students complete a social identity wheel (called “The Wheel of Privilege”) to explore the variety of identities which impact the ways others may perceive or treat them. This is a reflective activity that allows for a degree of privacy for students who do not want to share various aspects of their identity. However, should students so choose, their “Wheel” could be shared with the teacher or with other students to build awareness, understanding, and empathy. Please see the activity on the [Wheel of Privilege](#).

Notes:

## Empowering: to speak out about, to act upon, to defend, to influence

(Gr. K–12) Consult your Health Curriculum for a unit on stereotypes, prejudice, and bias, and include a discussion of gender roles within this.

(Gr. 7–12) To learn more about Bill C-16:

 [Trans rights legislation in Canada – Canadian AIDS Society](#)

(Gr. 4–12) School Inventory: To help students identify ways in which their environment either reinforces or challenges gender stereotypes, have the students walk about their school and observe signage. Have them respond to these guidelines: Do they see women and girls in roles where they are taking care of others more often than men and boys are pictured doing this? Are men and boys being projected as being more fit and active than women and girls? Are men/boys/women/girls/children/adults portrayed in a variety of roles? Are men/boys/women/girls/children/adults expressing a range of emotions? Did you have any other observations?

(Gr. 7–12) Watch the documentary How colonialism killed my culture’s gender fluidity (BBC Series). Have students complete the True and False Activity and the Gender Mind Maps which are available from the CTF/FCE resource *Affirming Gender Diversity – Elementary lesson plan*.

 [Gender identity: ‘How colonialism killed my culture’s gender fluidity’ – BBC World Service](#)

(Gr. 7–12) Watch the video Ma-Nee Chacaby talks about Two-Spirit Identities (Centennial College).

Discuss the roles two-spirit people played in their communities, the ways they were revered, and how Indigenous communities understood gender in non-binary ways. Use the Anticipation Guide for the video from the CTF/FCE resource *Affirming Gender Diversity – Elementary lesson plan* for a pre- and post-survey.

 [Ma-Nee Chacaby talks about Two Spirit identities](#)

Notes:



## Self-Actualizing: to create, to use resources, to envision, to become

(Gr. K–3) Foster play that is not gender specific. Support non-gender conforming ideas in discussions. Create an inclusive classroom environment so that children can see themselves and their families mirrored in the classroom.

(Gr. 4–9) Give people the space to explore what feels good to them. Have students learn about self-expression by considering ways they express or show their gender. Explore how this might change on a different day or in a different setting.

(Gr. 10–12) Learn about the actions of others for inspiration. Incorporate media literacy into a lesson about young Canadian activists or Canadian activist organizations, which are active on social media. Some suggestions are: Wisdom2Action, Egale Canada, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Plan International Canada, etc. See the document on the use of social media in the classroom provided in the Complementary Resources section.

(Gr. 4–12) Reflective activity to consider supports available to youth:

Write one or more names for each role:

Role Model: A person who can give me advice or direction

Helper: A person I can go to if I am in crisis

Confidant: A person I can confide in who will not judge me

Friend: A person I can go to who I can laugh with and be silly

Advisor: A person I can go to for their opinion or solutions

Advocate: A person who could connect me with resources or assistance

Challenger: A person who could recommend a new way of looking at an issue

Knowledge Holder: A person I can talk to about my culture

Loved One: A person who will make me feel loved and valued

Notes:

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## COMMUNITY DEFENDERS

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### Rae Spoon

Rae Spoon is a non-binary performer, composer, music producer, visual content producer/director, and author based on the territory of the Lekwungen speaking peoples in Victoria, British Columbia. Over their 20-year career, they have made themselves vulnerable, exploring mental health, love and acceptance, particularly for all the queer, transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming folx struggling to cope with the complexity of society.



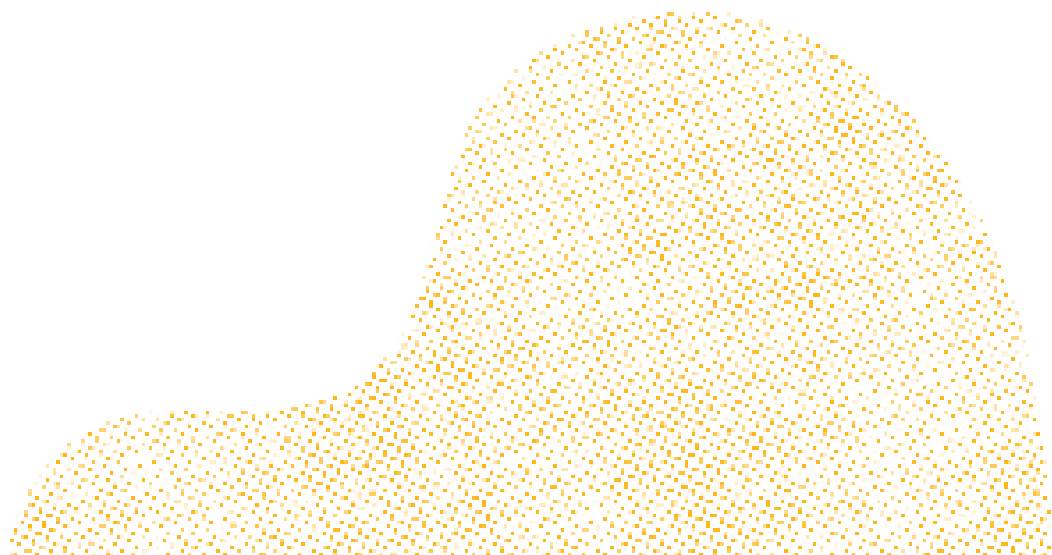
### Ivan E. Coyote

Ivan Coyote is the award-winning author of thirteen books, the creator of four short films, and they have released three albums that combine storytelling with music. Ivan often grapples with the complex and intensely personal issues of gender identity in their work, as well as topics such as family, class, social justice, and queer liberation, but always with a generous heart, a quick wit, and the nuanced and finely-honed timing of a gifted storyteller. Ivan's stories remind us of our own fallible and imperfect humanity while at the same time inspiring us to change the world.



### Kimmortal

Kimmortal uses they/them pronouns and was born and raised in Canada, a second generation Filipino Canadian. Kimmortal melds hip hop, soul, spoken word, and pop to talk about racism, colonialism, queerness, and misogyny. Kimmortal's message is a demand for equity, beauty, and the fullness of life for every marginalized, oppressed person.



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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### English or Bilingual Resources

- [Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity](#)
- [Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc.](#)
- [Enchanté Network](#)
- [egale.ca](#)
- [ACCESS Open Minds](#)
- CTF/FCE Student Voice booklet: [Affirming Gender Diversity](#), and the accompanying lesson plans.

### French Resources

- [Collectif LGBTQ\\* du Manitoba](#)
- [Comité FrancoQueer de l'Ouest](#)
- [GRIS](#)

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## FOR SUPPORT

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- **Kids Help Line:** 1-800-668-6868
- **KUU-US Crisis Line Society:** 1-800-588-8717
- **National Indian Residential School:** 1-866-925-4419
- **Mental Health Resources for Indigenous Peoples:**  
<https://firelight.ca/news/mental-health-resources-for-indigenous-peoples>
- **Talk 4 Healing** is a helpline that provides culturally sensitive counselling, advice, and support to Indigenous women. Services are available in English and in a number of Indigenous languages: 1-855-554-4325 (24/7) or online at [www.talk4healing.com](http://www.talk4healing.com).