



Lesson Plan: Neurodiversity, Leadership, and Belonging

www.gng.org/youth-courses/

Overview

This course invites youth to explore the meaning and power of neurodiversity through real stories, everyday examples, and meaningful ways to create change. Designed and written by a neurodiverse group of young people from around the world, the course explores how the world often leaves some people out—and how we can all help make it more inclusive. Students will learn how different ways of thinking and being can strengthen leadership, build understanding, and help everyone feel like they belong. Through reflection and storytelling, youth will discover that there's no one right way to be, and that every perspective matters.

These activities are starting points for exploration, discussion, and reflection in your classroom. You are welcome to implement this lesson plan as is, but we encourage you to adapt it in any way that best supports your students and learning environment. Please feel free to pick and choose the activities related to the content that you would like to highlight. Every classroom will approach these ideas differently — and that's exactly the point.

About Global Nomads

For over 25 years Global Nomads has served global youth by uniting them across boundaries and borders. Through our programs, young people come together to collaborate, share stories, foster understanding, and break down barriers. More than ever we are betting big on youth – not as a nod to their potential but as recognition of their inherent capacity. We believe in the power of youth to shape the future, and we're here to support their journey. By providing connection, skill building, and support, we help them turn their ideas into action and inspire them to promote our shared humanity in their personal, civic, and professional lives.

Module 1 – Understanding Neurodiversity

Module Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Explore the terms neurodiversity, neurotypical, and neurodivergent.
2. Discover how different ways of thinking and being can help us better understand ourselves and one another.
3. Challenge common myths and assumptions about neurodivergence.

Introduction: Activity – Raise your card if... Game

Instructions: Provide each student a colored card. Educator will read different statements and instruct students to raise their colored card if they agree with the statement. Ask students to look around after each statement.

Educator reads statements like the ones below, or come up with their own statements:

- “Raise your card if you prefer quiet over noise.”
- “Raise your card if you learn best by doing.”
- “Raise your card if you have ever felt misunderstood.”
- “Raise your card if you concentrate best on a task by taking constant breaks”

Core Content & Activities

Activity 1 – G’s Story

Instructions: Play the full video (or read the complete transcript aloud if video isn’t available). After the video, give participants a quiet minute to reflect or jot down a thought.

Discussion questions (whole class):

- “What part of G’s story resonated with you most?”
- “What words would you use to describe G’s experience?”
- “How did G’s perspective change over time?”

Encourage brief, open discussion—aim for empathy and connection more than correctness.

Activity 2 – “Define It Together” Chalk Talk

Materials: whiteboard or large paper, markers

Instructions:

1. Write the three terms on the board:
 - **Neurodiversity**
 - **Neurotypical**
 - **Neurodivergent**
2. Ask: Based on what we’ve heard so far, what do you think each of these words might mean?
3. Invite participants to call out ideas while you jot them down next to each term.
 - Allow clarifying or follow-up comments from peers (“I think that means...” “Or maybe it’s more like...”).
4. After collecting ideas, share or read the actual definitions from the course.
 - Compare them with what the group brainstormed: What’s similar? What’s different?

Optional extension: Ask: Which of these ideas connects most to G’s story? Why do you think it’s important to have words like these?

Activity 3 – G’s Story Continued

Instructions: Read or play G’s second video transcript and discuss the questions below. Educator can have students work together in pairs before leading a whole class discussion.

Discussion Questions:

- What strengths does G mention?
- Why do you think it’s important to talk about strengths as well as challenges?

Reflection Activity

Activity – Myth or Truth Corners

1. After students have completed the module, ask students to prepare four cards with the labels: **Strongly Agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree**.
2. Read each statement (based on Sarah and Lois’s video):

- “Neurodiversity is made up.”
 - “You can tell if someone is neurodivergent by looking at them.”
 - “Neurodivergence should be cured.”
 - “Neurodivergent people have unique strengths.”
3. After each statement, students lift the card that matches their view.
 4. Ask students: Why did you choose that card? What changed your mind? Be sure to emphasize respect and that opinions can evolve as we learn.

Conclusion & Summary

Activity – Reflection Circle

Instructions: Form a seated circle. Invite volunteers to share responses to one or more of the questions below.

Discussion Questions:

- Which story or idea stood out most to you today?
- How can hearing stories like G’s, Sarah’s, or Lois’s change how we treat others?
- What can schools, families, or friends do to make all ways of “being” feel valued?

Alternative option: Give each student sticky notes to write one thought anonymously and post them on a wall or board.

Recap: Definitions of neurotypical, neurodivergent, neurodiversity, the benefits of different ways of thinking, and disrupting common myths and assumptions about neurodivergence.

Optional closing line: “The more we understand and value different ways of thinking, the stronger and more creative our communities become.”

Explore

- Show students the map in the Explore section of the platform and guide them through the stories, articles, and videos shared by their global peers. Invite each student to choose their top three stories and then share their selections with classmates.

Share

The Share activity below comes from our course platform. Students can prepare their responses in class but should share their responses on the platform so that future participants can explore them.

Instructions: Educator can write the platform question below on the board or project it and ask students to jot down an initial thought. Students will need to enter the platform, explore stories from peers, and then write their own story responding to the question:

★ How do people in your family or school understand neurodiversity?

Invite participants to share one *word or phrase* that captures what they're taking away from today (e.g., *difference, belonging, empathy, curiosity*).

Module 2 – Facing Adversity

Module Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Identify common barriers that neurodivergent people face in schools, healthcare, and other systems.
2. Reflect on the emotional and social impact of masking and exclusion.
3. Explore ways individuals and communities can help make systems more inclusive.

Introduction: Activity – Invisible Barriers Simulation

Instructions: Inform participants that they'll be doing a few short "thinking and doing" challenges — but that they won't all have the same instructions.

Distribute tasks cards to individuals or small groups with one of the actions below, allowing them 1-2 minutes to complete them. Then, :

- Write your name backward.
- Draw a simple shape (like a star) using your non-dominant hand.
- Explain what you ate for breakfast without using the letter "E."
- Describe your favorite hobby using only gestures.
- Count to 30, but skip every number that has a 3 in it.

Discussion question:

- How did that feel?
- What made it hard or confusing?
- Did anyone feel frustrated, embarrassed, or misunderstood?
- How might this activity relate to what neurodivergent people experience when systems (like schools) aren't designed to include their ways of learning or thinking?

Core Content & Activities

Activity 1: Scenario-Based Exploration of Obstacles

Instructions: Divide participants into small groups. Assign each group one of the **four** obstacles:

1. Schools are built for neurotypical brains
2. Healthcare barriers

3. Lack of supportive laws and policies
4. Community judgment and the pressure to mask

Each group chooses a youth-told story or youth-written quote featured in Module 2 (either Lily's, Israel's, Shelly's, Nava's, Chess's or Thee's) and discusses the questions below:

Discussion questions:

- What challenges does the youth face in their story or quote?
- Are the barriers they face personal, structural, or societal?
- How could systems or communities better support these young people?

Whole-class share: Each group presents one key insight from their small group discussion.

Activity 2: Monotropism Deep Dive

Instructions: Write “What makes learning easier?” and “What makes learning harder?” on the board. Invite students to call out examples. Write them under each column.

Briefly explain monotropism and feel free to use Israel's story to exemplify it:

Sample explanation: “Some neurodivergent people have a *monotropic* way of thinking — this means their attention narrows deeply into one topic at a time. It's not about distraction or obsession — it's about deep focus and flow.”

Task: Ask participants to reflect quietly or jot notes. Invite one or two participants to share insights aloud.

- When have you been so focused on something that you lost track of time? How can that kind of focus be a strength?
- How might a monotropic thinker experience school differently?
- What could schools do differently to help all students succeed?

Activity 3: Kinetic Cognitive Style Movement Reflection

Instructions: Briefly recap the Kinetic Cognitive Style. Allow participants to stretch, fidget, or gesture while thinking about a problem to illustrate the concept.

Sample recap: Kinetic learners often process information through movement, touch, or physical

activity. This is sometimes called a *Kinetic Cognitive Style*. For example, someone might need to walk around while thinking, use their hands to understand a concept, or tap a rhythm to stay focused.

Task: Invite participants to notice their own thinking patterns or physical habits while working or learning. In small groups or pairs, participants discuss the questions below.

Discussion questions:

- How does movement help some people focus or process ideas?
- What might happen if people are told to “sit still” when their brain works differently?

Activity 4: Neurodivergence in a Global Context

Instructions: Share examples from the Module 2 content about cultural differences in understanding neurodivergence.

Suggested examples:

- Israel, Nigeria: “I never knew I had dyslexia or ADHD for a very long time. I thought I was cursed, to be very honest. ... I thought maybe things were going to get better. But even when I knew the answers, writing them down was a very serious issue. After one exam, I was furious with myself.”
- Nava, Mexico: “Since I was little, I was recognized as the hyperactive and ‘naughty’ daughter and student... It’s been hard to grow up with ADHD since a lot of people think that it’s the same as being irresponsible.”
- Thee, South Africa: “The most difficult part of being neurodivergent is when no one believes my symptoms. I can tell someone that I’m neurodivergent, but they are slow to believe me until they see my disorganisation and monotropism in action.”
- **Task:** After re-reading the examples above, place participants in small groups or pairs to discuss the questions below.

Discussion questions:

- Which quote stood out most to you? Why?
- What similarities or differences do you notice between these stories?
- How do community beliefs or systems affect how neurodivergent people are treated?

Educator: Emphasize that inclusion strategies need to consider both individual needs and community context.

Activity 5: Masking and Belonging Reflection

Instructions: Play or read excerpts of Lily and Israel's stories on **masking** and learning about their neurodivergence. Ask participants to do an individual reflection or paired discussion using the questions below.

Discussion questions:

- When do people feel pressure to mask?
- What emotional or social impacts does masking create?
- How can communities help reduce the need for masking?

Whole-class share: Invite one or two participants to share insights.

Reflection Activity

Barrier Breakers Brainstorm

Instructions: In pairs or small groups, ask participants to brainstorm one way their school, club, or community could reduce barriers for neurodivergent people. Share aloud or write ideas on sticky notes to post on a "Barrier Breakers Wall."

Educator: Highlight that small changes can lead to greater inclusion.

Conclusion & Summary

Activity: Reflection Circle

Instructions: Form a seated circle. Invite volunteers to share one response to the questions below:

Discussion questions:

- What stood out most from today's stories and activities?
- How can students contribute to making systems more inclusive?

Alternative: Students write one takeaway on a sticky note and post on the Barrier Breakers Wall.

Recap: Barriers often come from structures and expectations, not from individuals. Inclusion requires awareness, empathy, and changes that help everyone belong.

Optional closing line: “When we understand how systems can exclude, we can start building ones that welcome everyone.”

Explore

- Show students the map in the Explore section of the platform and guide them through stories, articles, and videos shared by global peers. Invite each student to choose their top three stories and share with classmates.

Share

The Share activity below comes from our course platform. Students can prepare their responses in class but should share their responses on the platform so that future participants can explore them.

Story Prompt: Whether neurotypical or neurodivergent, we all feel the pressure to mask sometimes—in other words, to hide our true self in order to fit in. Imagine a situation where you or someone your age might feel pressure to mask. What could cause this pressure?

Instructions:

1. Educator writes the prompt on the board or projects it for students to see.
2. Students take a few minutes to jot down initial thoughts or reflections in class.
3. Students enter the platform and write their own story responding to the prompt.
4. Invite participants to share **one word or phrase** that captures what they’re taking away from today (e.g., pressure, belonging, empathy, courage).

Module 3 - Neurodiversifying Leadership

Module Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Explore what neurodiverse leadership looks like and the strengths neurodivergent leaders bring to teams and communities.
2. Reflect on how inclusive leadership practices foster belonging and collaboration.
3. Recognize ways they can demonstrate leadership qualities in everyday life.

Introduction: Warm-up

Activity – The Leadership Web

Instructions: Provide each student with a short piece of string or yarn. Have everyone stand or sit in a circle. The educator begins by holding one end of the string and saying,

“One quality I value in a leader is...” (e.g., empathy, creativity, patience).

Then toss the yarn to another student across the circle while holding the end. Continue until everyone has contributed at least once, forming a web.

Optional closing line: “Look at our web — each person added something unique, but we’re all connected. Leadership, like neurodiversity, works best when everyone’s strengths come together.”

Core Content & Activities

Activity 1 – What Does Neurodiverse Leadership Mean?

Instructions: Play the opening portion of the video featuring **Simin, Mosa, Sarah, Rainy, and Yahia**, or read excerpts aloud. After watching or listening, ask students to reflect quietly for one minute before discussing the questions below in pairs or small groups.

Discussion Questions:

- What ideas about leadership stood out to you from the video?
- How is neurodiverse leadership different from traditional leadership?
- What qualities do good leaders share, regardless of neurotype?

Educator: Emphasize that neurodiverse leadership values collaboration, flexibility, and inclusion of different communication and thinking styles.

Activity 2 – Nimet’s Story: Leadership Through Hyperfixation

Instructions: Read or play **Nimet’s story** aloud. Encourage participants to listen for ways her neurodivergence influences her leadership. Then, in small groups or pairs, have students discuss the following:

Discussion Questions:

- What strengths does Nimet attribute to her neurodivergence?
- How does her experience challenge stereotypes about focus and productivity?
- In what ways does Nimet show inclusive leadership through her actions?

Whole-class reflection: Invite volunteers to share one insight about how “thinking differently” can be an advantage in leadership.

Activity 3 – Strengths Map: Building a Neurodiverse Team

Materials: Chart paper or whiteboard, markers, sticky notes.

Instructions: Draw a large outline of a “machine” or “team web” on the board (referencing the opening metaphor). Label it “**Our Neurodiverse Leadership Machine.**”

Ask participants to think about what kinds of strengths help a team succeed (e.g., creativity, attention to detail, empathy, persistence, communication).

Students write one personal strength on a sticky note and place it somewhere on the diagram.

Then discuss as a group:

- How do all these different strengths work together like parts of a machine?
- What happens if one part is missing or ignored?
- How can leaders make sure everyone’s strengths are recognized?

Optional Extension: Invite students to connect their strengths with those mentioned in the videos — pattern recognition (Thee), empathy (Sarah), openness (Yahia), communication (Rainy).

Activity 4 – Leading with Inclusion

Instructions: Divide participants into small groups. Assign each group one short excerpt from the leadership video (e.g., Mosa on supporting others, Rainy on communication, Yahia on openness).

Each group answers the questions below and shares their ideas with the class.

- What leadership quality does this person emphasize?
- How could that quality help a neurodiverse team succeed?
- What might this look like in a school, club, or community setting?

Optional closing line: “Leadership isn’t about control; it’s about creating conditions for others to thrive.”

Reflection Activity

Activity – “Belonging Board”

Instructions: Post a large sheet on the wall or board labeled, “**Leadership That Builds Belonging.**” Invite participants to write short notes answering:

- “What does inclusive leadership look or feel like to you?”
- Encourage examples from their own lives or from Nimet, Simin, or Mosa’s stories. Once all notes are posted, read a few aloud and discuss patterns or recurring themes.
- **Optional Variation:** Students draw symbols or doodles representing inclusive leadership qualities (e.g., open door, web, bridge, lightbulb).

Conclusion & Summary

Activity – Reflection Circle

Instructions: Participants form a seated circle. Invite volunteers to share one insight from today’s session.

Discussion Questions:

- What stood out most about the stories of leadership we explored today?
- How can leaders help every kind of mind feel valued and included?

- What kind of leader do you hope to be?

Recap: Neurodiverse leadership means valuing all ways of thinking and creating spaces where everyone can thrive. Leadership is not about perfection—it's about belonging, empathy, and collaboration.

Optional closing line: “There’s no one kind of mind that makes someone a leader. When we lead with openness and care, we all help the team work better—like every part of the machine.”

Explore

- Show students the map in the Explore section of the platform. Guide them through stories, articles, and videos shared by global peers. Invite students to choose their top three stories about leadership and inclusion, and then share one takeaway with the class.

Share

The Share activity below comes directly from the course platform. Students can prepare their responses in class and then post them online so future participants can explore them.

Story Prompt: Belonging Through Leadership

- Neurodiversifying leadership is about creating teams and spaces where everyone feels like they belong and can contribute. Write about a time when someone made you feel like you belonged and like your perspective was valued. What leadership qualities does this person have?

Instructions:

1. Educator writes or projects the prompt.
2. Students jot down initial thoughts in class.
3. Students enter the platform to post their stories.

Closing Activity: Invite each student to share one word that captures their takeaway from the session (e.g., belonging, inclusion, empathy, courage, growth).

Module 4 - Forging Belonging

Module Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the difference between inclusion and belonging.
2. Identify ways to forge belonging through intentional design and empathy.
3. Explore the concepts of *double empathy*, *designing for the margins*, and *universal design*.
4. Create a personal SMARTIE goal that promotes belonging in their community.

Introduction: Activity – Inclusion vs. Belonging Scenario

Instructions:

1. Read aloud the two cafeteria scenarios from the module.
2. After both are read, ask students to close their eyes and imagine walking into each cafeteria.
3. Then discuss as a group:

Discussion questions:

- How did each situation make you feel?
- Which one describes *inclusion* and which one describes *belonging*?
- What made the difference?

Educator note: Emphasize that belonging doesn't happen by accident—it's built intentionally. Use the phrase from the module:

"Inclusion is when someone says, 'You can come too.' Belonging is when you arrive and feel, 'This was made with me in mind.'"

Optional extension: Ask participants to pair up and brainstorm one example from their school or community that feels inclusive, and one that feels like belonging.

Core Content & Activities

Activity 1 – Aydin's Story: Finding Strength Through Belonging

Instructions: Before carrying out the activity, play the full video: *Aydin's Story*, for participants or ask them to read the video transcript. Afterwards, give participants one minute to jot down a phrase or sentence that stood out. Then, ask participants to discuss the questions below in small groups or in pairs.

Discussion questions:

- How did Aydin's experiences with speech delay shape his sense of self?
- What helped Aydin begin to feel belonging and self-acceptance?
- What role did his community play in helping him grow stronger?

Educator: Highlight that Aydin's story shows how belonging empowers people to overcome internal and external challenges.

Activity 2 – Understanding the Double Empathy Problem

Instructions:

1. Write the phrase **"Double Empathy Problem"** on the board.
2. Ask: "What do you think this might mean?" Collect 2–3 guesses.
3. Then explain using the text:

Sample explanation: "The Double Empathy Problem describes what happens when neurodivergent and neurotypical people misunderstand each other. It's not that one group lacks empathy—it's that both experience the world differently, so communication can break down."

Ask participants to discuss the questions below with a pair or in small groups.

Discussion questions:

- Have you ever had a misunderstanding because you and another person saw things differently?
- What could curiosity or asking questions do to help build understanding?
- How does this idea connect to belonging?

Activity 3 – Design for the Margins Challenge

Materials: Large paper, markers, sticky notes.

Instructions:

1. Divide the group into small teams.
2. Assign each team a context (e.g., classroom, playground, cafeteria, club, community center).
3. Task: Design a version of this space that ensures everyone feels like they belong—especially people who are often excluded.
 - Encourage teams to use ideas from *Universal Design* and *Designing for the Margins* (e.g., quiet zones, flexible participation, multiple ways to share ideas).
4. Teams draw or list their ideas and post them around the room.

Gallery Walk: Invite everyone to walk around, view each design, and leave a sticky note with one word of positive feedback or a question.

Educator: Reinforce that designing for those at the margins helps everyone. Use the quote:

“When we design for people at the edges, we end up creating something better for everyone.”

Activity 4 – Facing Resistance: Change Can Be Hard**Instructions:**

1. Write these phrases on the board:
 - “That’s just how things are.”
 - “It works fine for most people.”
 - “We don’t need to change.”
2. In pairs, ask students to discuss:
 - Why might people say these things?
 - What could you say in response that encourages positive change?
 - What small action could you take if you heard someone resist inclusion?
3. Invite volunteers to share their ideas aloud. Record responses on the board under a heading: **“Ways to Encourage Change.”**

Educator: Remind participants that everyone can play a role in change—especially by using privilege or voice to advocate for others.

Reflection Activity

Activity – Belonging in Action

Instructions:

1. Post four signs around the room labeled:
 - *Safety*
 - *Respect*
 - *Connection*
 - *Support*
2. Read the following prompt aloud:

“Think about a time when you truly felt like you belonged. What was happening? What made that space or moment feel right for you?”
3. Participants move to the sign that best represents what made them feel they belonged in that moment.
4. Once grouped, give them 2–3 minutes to discuss:
 - What made that element (safety, respect, connection, or support) so powerful?
 - How can we intentionally create more of that in our communities?
5. Invite a few volunteers to share one short insight with the larger group.

Educator Note: Emphasize that belonging doesn’t happen by chance—it’s built through daily actions that cultivate safety, respect, connection, and support.

Conclusion & Summary

Activity – Reflection Circle

Instructions: Form a seated circle. Invite volunteers to share their reflections on the following questions:

Discussion questions:

- What does belonging mean to you now?
- What is one thing you can do to help others feel that they belong?
- How does understanding difference help create stronger communities?

Recap key ideas:

- Belonging is intentional.
- The *Double Empathy Problem* reminds us that connection is a two-way effort.
- *Designing for the Margins* benefits everyone.
- Each of us has a role in creating inclusive spaces.
- Small, SMARTIE-shaped actions can lead to big change.

Optional closing line: “Belonging isn’t something we find—it’s something we forge together.”

Explore

- Show students the map in the Explore section of the platform and guide them through stories, articles, and videos shared by global peers. Invite each student to choose their top three stories related to *belonging* and share one key takeaway with the class.

Share

The Share activity below comes from the course platform. Students can prepare their responses in class and then post them online so future participants can explore them.

Story Prompt:

What is something you can do in your community to make sure everyone feels welcome and like they belong? Write your response as a SMARTIE goal using the template provided.

Instructions:

1. Educator writes or projects the prompt.
2. Students jot down initial thoughts in class.
3. Students enter the platform and post their SMARTIE goals.

Closing Activity: Invite each participant to share one word that captures their takeaway from the session (e.g., *intentionality, empathy, design, courage, belonging*).