

# CURRICULUM

## EXPANDING GENDER

### Exercise 2: Rare vs. Different (A Place in the Middle)

# A PLACE IN THE MIDDLE RARE VS. DIFFERENT

## Synopsis

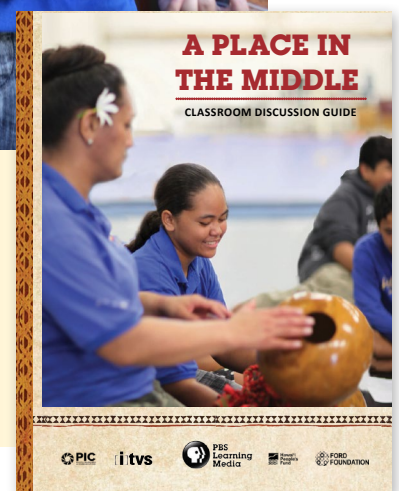
(from *A Place in the Middle: Classroom Discussion Guide*, page 4)

*A Place in the Middle* is the true story of Ho'onani, a remarkable 11-year-old who dreams of leading the hula troupe at her Honolulu school. The only trouble is that the group is just for boys. She's fortunate that her teacher understands firsthand what it's like to be "in the middle," the Hawaiian tradition of embracing both male and female spirit. As student and teacher prepare for a climactic end-of-year performance, together they set out to prove that what matters most is what's inside a person's heart and mind.



Several of the following activities refer to the film's *Classroom Discussion Guide*, downloadable at: [http://aplaceinthemiddle.org/uploads/websites/675/wysiwyg/A\\_Place\\_in\\_the\\_Middle\\_Guide\\_Classroom\\_Discussion\\_Guide.pdf](http://aplaceinthemiddle.org/uploads/websites/675/wysiwyg/A_Place_in_the_Middle_Guide_Classroom_Discussion_Guide.pdf)

The guide also offers educators tips for leading discussions about the documentary with their students: see page xx for tips on leading discussions.



## EXPANDING GENDER

### Exercise 2: Rare vs. Different (A Place in the Middle)

#### BEFORE VIEWING

#### Gender and Leadership Roles at Your School

Schools offer many opportunities for young people to take on leadership positions. There are team captains of sports, student government officers, first chairs in an orchestra, editor of school paper, etc. Examine the role, if any, that gender plays in these leadership positions.

#### DIRECTIONS

- Make a list of student leadership positions in your school. If you don't have student leadership positions in your school, think about leaders that you know of in other spaces—local politics, places of worship, or simply one who speaks up for a cause in class.
- Then, consider whether there is a tradition of more boys or more girls in each of these leadership roles.
- Finally, if there is such a tradition, what reasons do you think others might use to explain why some roles are more typically occupied by boys and others by girls.

Student Leadership Positions in Schools	Girls, Boys, Both	Why?

Share your chart with others.

Regardless of an individual's gender, they may possess some qualities or characteristics that are better suited for certain leadership positions. Some individuals might have excellent communication skills and be able to get people interested in important social issues. Others might be able to motivate people to physically exert themselves beyond what they thought was possible. Still others might be able to envision how a stage set should look and can lead a group in realizing this vision.

In the film you are about to view, an 11-year-old named Ho'onani will lead the all boys' hula troop at her school in Honolulu. According to her teacher, she has more "ku" (male energy) than all of the boys. In Hawaii, there is a concept of *māhū* — individuals "who embrace both the feminine and masculine traits that are embodied within each and every one of us." As with the tradition of *māhū* in Hawaii, Ho'onani's masculine and feminine traits are considered a rare and valuable gift.

**Note:** On page six of *A Place in the Middle: Classroom Discussion Guide*, there are questions that you might want to discuss, as well as some Hawaiian terms that are used in the film.

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#### DURING VIEWING

As you view the film, consider how Ho'onani's possession of both traditionally masculine and feminine traits allows her to successfully lead the boys' hula troop.

#### AFTER VIEWING

### A "Place In the Middle" Throughout History and Across Cultures: A Map of Gender Diverse Cultures

The following is excerpted from the PBS website at [http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits\\_map-html/](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/)

**"On nearly every continent, and for all of recorded history, thriving cultures have recognized, revered, and integrated more than two genders. Terms such as "transgender" and "gay" are strictly new constructs that assume three things: that there are only two sexes (male/female), as many as two sexualities (gay/straight), and only two genders (man/woman).**

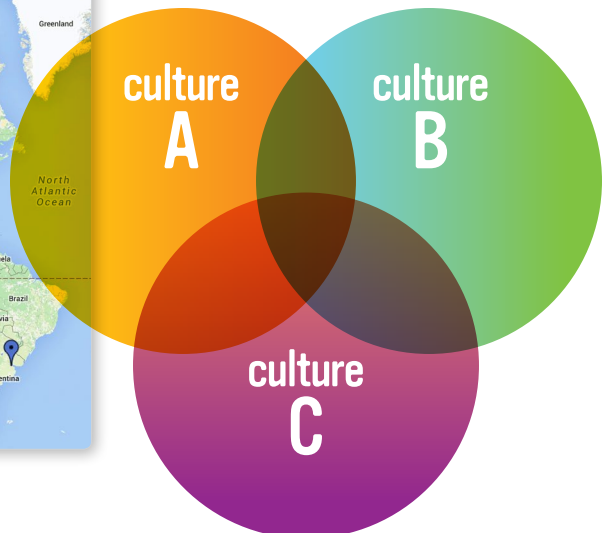
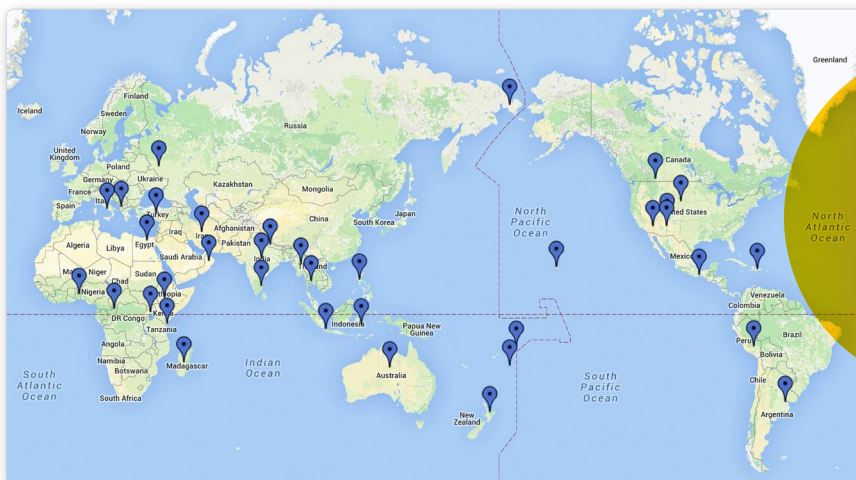
**Yet hundreds of distinct societies around the globe have their own long-established traditions for third, fourth, fifth, or more genders.**

**Most Western societies have no direct correlation for this tradition, or for the many other communities without strict either/or conceptions of sex, sexuality, and gender. Worldwide, the sheer variety of gender expression is almost limitless. Take a tour and learn how other cultures see gender diversity."**

Go to the website "A Map of Gender Diverse Cultures": [www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits\\_map-html/](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/)  
Click on the points on the map to learn more about traditions similar to *māhū* in Hawaii.

#### **ACTIVITY**

Using this map, choose three cultures from three different regions of the world and look for characteristics, roles, and challenges of gender expansive people. Create a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts these elements of each culture. You will need to conduct additional research on each of them.



## EXPANDING GENDER

### Exercise 3: Professional Development (A Place in the Middle)

# A PLACE IN THE MIDDLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(For educators, parents, and community members)

Sixth grader Ho'onani Kamai takes pride in her third-gender identity, even earning remarkable status among older high school boys in her hula troupe. She finds herself honored for possessing more "ku" (male energy) than anyone else in the previously all-boy troupe.

Ho'onani is guided by Kumu Hina, her mentor and teacher, who uses the history and native culture of Hawaii as a metaphor to teach students to respect diversity related to gender. Hina acknowledges that "some parents want girls encouraged to stand with girls and boys with boys," but nevertheless encourages Ho'onani to "tell the truth about being in the middle," insisting that the other students "Love anyone no matter what race, creed, gender."

Inspired by Ho'onani Kamai's story, educators (including teachers, administrators, counselors, and coaches) may want to ensure that trans and gender expansive students—and staff members—at their schools receive encouragement just to be themselves.

In addition to showing the documentary to students and using lesson plans found in the film's discussion guide, educators can use *A Place in the Middle* in professional development workshops to achieve several of the same learning goals they have for their students:

- Understanding the power that comes from understanding one's own culture and respecting the cultures of others
- Hawaiian polyculturalism as a model for a diverse world
- The benefits of diversity to individuals, schools, and the broader community
- Native Hawaiian approaches to gender, diversity, and inclusion
- The value of becoming more comfortable with and connected to all types of people, including those who are different from you
- The Hawaiian concept of *māhū* and how it relates to being "in the middle" in other cultures
- The ways in which our beliefs about what it means to be male, female, or "in the middle" are shaped by our culture
- Colonial attempts to suppress Native Hawaiian culture, contemporary attempts at revival and preservation, and the benefits of reclaiming one's heritage

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### Exercise 3: Professional Development (A Place in the Middle)

#### Professional Development: Discussion

Page 14 of the *Classroom Discussion Guide* for the film offers ten learning prompts for professional development among educators. These questions are intended, as the discussion guide says, to “help faculty, staff, and administrators think more deeply about school policy and what they can do in their own practice to create an environment in which all students can succeed.”

1. Ho'onani's school is designed to instill in its students a commitment to act in the true spirit of aloha, i.e., love, honor and respect for everyone. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your own school on living up to that standard? What could it (or you) do better? (see page xx for an activity on aloha in your school)

2. If it's true that children learn as much from their environment and observing the behavior of others as they do from any textbook or lecture, what do you think the students portrayed in the film, or watching the film, are learning from...

- Ho'onani?
- The girls in Ho'onani's class?
- The high school boys?
- Ho'onani's mother?
- Kumu Hina?
- Principal Laara?

3. When students are receiving leis according to gender (with different colors for girls and boys), Ho'onani declares, “I want to just wear both.” Why does Ho'onani want two leis? How do you think Ho'onani felt to receive and wear both leis? What message(s) did the staff convey, both to Ho'onani and to her classmates by allowing her to wear two leis? Would you have allowed Ho'onani to wear both colors? Why or why not? If not, how would you have responded to her request?



4. Kumu Hina says, “When I was in high school, I had a very rough time. I was teased and tormented for being too girlish.” Do you have any students like Hina in your school? How do you respond when they are teased? What do you think they would want you to do? How do you know?

5. What sorts of things do you do or say to proactively support students who are, as Ho'onani puts it, “rare”? What do you do to create a climate in which every student feels confident, safe, and respected?

6. What difference does it make for Ho'onani to have a teacher who understands—from personal history—the experience of being “in the middle”? Do your students have any teachers who are “like them” (e.g. the same race, religion, gender, etc.)? What difference does it make for the students? How about for the teachers? How can teachers who aren't like their students still connect or provide support?



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7. Principal Laara lectures her students about respecting Kumu Hina, Hawaiian traditions, and the true meaning of aloha. Have you ever lectured your students in a similar way? Was the tactic effective in inspiring students to improve? What other strategies might work to foster tolerance, respect, and kindness among students?
8. Ho'onani's mother, Jozie Kamai, says that she chose to send her daughters to a Hawaiian Charter School because she wanted them to learn about their culture, and that what they gain from the school is "the confidence to just stand up in front of other people and do your best." How does learning about one's own culture provide students with confidence? How does the school's emphasis on honoring and preserving students' indigenous culture contribute to the acceptance of people who are in the middle or *māhū*? What role do students' cultures play in your school's curriculum? In terms of honoring or integrating students' home cultures, what does your school do well and what could it do better?
9. Kumu Hina worries about the potential backfire from parents and families for her support of Ho'onani. If a teacher at your school experienced such backfire, what would you do? How could the teachers (or administrators) effectively address the family's concerns and also support the student? As an ally, what would you say to your colleague, the general student body and/or the school board?
10. Kumu Hina is concerned her encouragement of Ho'onani might be setting up her student for disappointment in a world that might not be so accepting. In your view, should Hina or the school do more to prepare Ho'onani for a "real world" that might not accept her, and if so, what should they do? How would/do you solve this conundrum?

