unique and united

DESIGNED BY ME, DESIGNED FOR US

students REBUILD | CREATIVE VISIONS

High School Learning Activity Guide | Grades 9-12

Why Unique and United?

The Students Rebuild: Unique and United project helps students explore what makes them unique while celebrating how everyone is different in meaningful ways. Through innovative design and collaboration, students will learn that being unique is something to be valued and that differences drive innovation and create solutions that benefit everyone.

Educational Goals

Through this activity, students will:

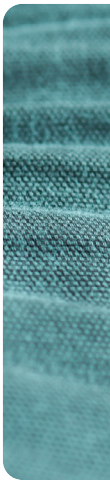
- Reflect on what makes them unique.
- Recognize shared humanity between individuals, cultures, and communities.
- Use creativity to spark dialogue, challenge assumptions, foster connection, and ignite bold ideas that can change the world.

Creating a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment

- **Establish clear ground rules** before beginning any discussions about identity, differences, or challenges.
- **Model inclusive language** and correct exclusionary language when it occurs.
- **Be prepared to facilitate** sensitive conversations about disability, identity, and belonging.
- **Create multiple ways for students to participate** (verbal, written, artistic) to accommodate different comfort levels.
- **Have a plan** for supporting students who may feel vulnerable sharing personal experiences.
- **Know your resources** - have counseling services and support contacts readily available.
- **Practice active listening** and validate all student experiences while maintaining educational focus.

Student Guidelines for Being Kind and Respectful:

- **Listen with curiosity and respect** - everyone's experience is valid.
- **Use "I" statements** when sharing personal experiences.
- **Ask questions to learn, not to judge** - approach differences with genuine interest.
- **Respect privacy** - don't pressure anyone to share more than they're comfortable with.
- **Challenge ideas, not people** - focus on concepts rather than individuals.
- **Step up, step back** - make sure everyone has space to participate.



DESIGNED BY ME, DESIGNED FOR US

Grade Level:

Grades 9-12

Estimated Time:

Total: 3-4 class periods (40-50 minutes each) *Note: All timings are suggestions and can be adjusted based on your class needs and available time.*

Sections:

- Introduction & "Designed by Me": 30-40 minutes
- Video & Discussion: 20-30 minutes
- "Designed for Us" Exercise: 40-50 minutes
- Sharing & Reflection: 20-30 minutes

To shorten the activity:

- Skip the "Designed by Me" section and go directly to partner shoe design after the introduction
- Have students share their designs in pairs or small groups instead of whole-class presentations

Overview:

This activity explores individuality, innovation, and shared humanity using a video about adaptive shoes. Students reflect on how differences shape needs and how inclusive design helps everyone belong. It also explores the idea that our unique qualities are actually the things that bring us together in our shared humanity.

Students create their own designs that celebrate uniqueness and promote unity. Through discussion and creation, students develop empathy and see how thoughtful innovation connects us all.

Objectives:

During this activity, students will:

- Recognize and celebrate individual differences and needs.
- Understand innovation as a way to create solutions that reflect and respect individual needs.
- Explore shared humanity by examining how inclusive design helps everyone feel seen, valued, and connected.

Materials Needed:

- Device to watch the video (TV, projector, computer, or tablet)
- New Adaptive Shoes from Adidas video
- Art supplies, varying depending on the medium used by the students

1 INTRODUCTION | EXPLORING UNIQUENESS | 15 MINUTES

Before beginning the video portion, set the stage with a brief activity that helps students reflect on their own uniqueness. This will strengthen their connection to the themes in the activity.

Prompt: Have students conduct a brief brainstorming session. Students can share their ideas through discussion, writing, or drawings.

"Everyone is unique in some way. Think about how you look, what you can do, what you like to learn, and where you come from. Think about the people and things you love, what you're really good at, and even the things that are hard for you sometimes."

Next, ask students to consider their needs. What do they need to survive in the world? Brainstorm as a class.

Examples: food, shelter, air, etc.

Ask students to consider their more specific needs. What are the things that each of them needs to thrive?

Examples: a phone, a computer, friends, a bus pass, etc.

Now, ask students to think very, very specifically about themselves. What objects in their lives are specifically needed just by them? What unique needs do these objects serve?

Examples: eyeglasses, hearing aids, soccer cleats, art supplies, religious texts.

2 DESIGNED BY ME | 30 MINUTES

Ask students to recall the unique qualities they just brainstormed, and then imagine a brand-new product that only they could use and that is completely modeled toward their unique qualities and needs.

- What would this product be?
- What would it look like?
- What would it do?
- Why would this work for them?
- How does the product complement their unique needs or strengths?
- How would owning this product make them feel?

After they are done with their designs, ask them to share their object with the class or in small groups.

Optional prompt: "What does this say about who I am and what I need? How does my need reflect the needs of others?"

3 WATCHING THE VIDEO | 15 MINUTES

Before watching the video, ask students about the unique challenges they or someone they know may face, and whether they might benefit from the help of others.

Watch the New Adaptive Shoes by Adidas video as a class. This shared viewing sets the stage for the activity by introducing the topic of adaptive design and highlighting the theme of individuality and inclusion.

Supporting Engagement

Set the tone:

- Ask students to watch with curiosity.
- Encourage them to notice the details about the people and the product.
- What is Chris and Jessica's challenge?
- How do regular shoes affect their physical and mental well-being?
- How do the new shoes work?

Active watching: Pause at key moments to ask:

- What do you notice?
- What emotions are you observing in the video?
- How does that make you feel?

4 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS | 30 MINUTES

Focus: Inclusion through innovation.

- "What made regular shoes hard for Chris and Jessica to use?"
- "How do these adaptive shoes help with more than just movement?"
- "What does this tell us about how design can help everyone feel included?"

Focus: Ethics, empathy, and design for humanity.

- "How does inclusive design reflect our values as a society?"
- "What is the responsibility of designers and companies in building a more inclusive world?"
- "How does innovation help connect us through our differences?"

5 CREATIVE ACTIVITY: "DESIGNED FOR US" | 90-120 MINUTES

Before beginning their design work, suggest students look at how young innovators like themselves have already made a difference. The inspiration stories at the end of this guide will allow them to learn how Heman Bekele and Xóchitl Guadalupe Cruz López used their personal experiences to create solutions that help their communities and beyond.

Have students conduct research about other real-world challenges encountered by members of their community. These issues may relate to accessibility, identity, or inclusion.

Examples you may want to share with the class to inspire thought:

- Disability Awareness Film
- Things People With Disabilities Wish You Knew

Place students in groups and have them brainstorm an innovative new product or service that solves or reduces a challenge they researched. The innovation should honor the uniqueness of the community they are addressing and promote collective dignity and shared humanity.

Each group will create a visual prototype and presentation for their innovation—possible media: drawings, slideshows, 3D models, digital mockups.

6 PRESENTATIONS & REFLECTION | 40 MINUTES

After completion, each group will present to the class or the larger school community. Their presentations must include the following:

- Explanation of the inspiration
- Explanation of the need for their innovation
- Intended target community, i.e., who is this innovation for
- Explanation of how this honors the dignity of the target community
- Explanation of how this supports belonging
- Explanation of how this supports the shared human experience i.e., humanity as a whole

After presenting, students will reflect on the following questions:

- "What did you learn about the importance of inclusive design?"
- "What is the role of creative expression in support of building a more united world?"
- "Do all people have a moral obligation to care about other communities and attempt to meet their needs?"

Take a photo of what your students created and share it at Studentsrebuild.org. Creative Visions will donate $5, up to $1 million for each submission or student engaged. The project is open from September 15, 2025 - June 1, 2026.

optional extensions

Theater/Performance Extension: Have each group write and perform a short skit that shows a day in the life of someone from the community they designed for. The skit should highlight both everyday challenges and how their innovation improves life for that person. Record the skits to create a short class film festival focused on empathy and innovation.

Visual Art Extension: Invite students to create art pieces (posters, visual poems, comic strips, zines) that illustrate the concept of inclusive design and shared humanity. Display all designs alongside student prototypes in a class or school-wide gallery walk, with QR codes linking to audio explanations or digital presentations.

ELA/Journalism Extension: Encourage students to conduct short interviews with individuals from the community they're designing for (e.g., a family member, neighbor, teacher, or school staff member) and write a short article, blog post, or podcast episode sharing that person's story and needs. These can be included in a class publication or showcase.

Digital Media Extension: Have students script and produce a short advertisement or public service announcement (video, animation, or slideshow) promoting their innovation and its social impact. This helps students practice persuasive communication and multimedia design.

Civic Action Extension: Invite local leaders, school board members, or community organization representatives to a showcase where students present their ideas. Students can prepare brochures or "pitch decks" and receive feedback from guests. Write letters or proposals to local businesses or non-profits encouraging them to consider real-world implementation or collaboration.

inspiration section

Inspiration: Dream Big, Design Boldly

Inspired by his early experiences in Ethiopia and motivated by a desire to make cancer treatment more affordable and accessible, at just 14 years old, Heman Bekele came up with a groundbreaking idea: a soap that could help treat skin cancer. This innovative concept earned him the top prize in the 3M Young Scientist Challenge (2023), which gave him the opportunity to team up with researchers to turn his idea into reality. His story shows the power of curiosity, empathy, and perseverance. It also reminds us that innovation starts with asking bold questions, dreaming big, and designing solutions that benefit our needs and the needs of others. Heman's journey is proof that our unique innovations can meet universal challenges and unite us in our shared humanity.

Something to think about: How does Heman Bekele's story show the importance of using personal experiences to design solutions for others?

Video: Teenager Wants to Cure Skin Cancer with Soap

Solar Powered: Xóchitl's Breakthrough

At just 8 years old, Xóchitl Guadalupe Cruz López from Mexico designed a solar-powered water heater using recycled materials like plastic bottles and old glass. Her invention helps families in her community heat water without cutting down trees or inhaling harmful smoke from burning wood. This clean, affordable, and sustainable solution earned her a national science prize from Mexico's National Autonomous University's Institute of Nuclear Sciences and shows how even the youngest inventors can solve real problems.

Xóchitl's innovation demonstrates how addressing our own unique challenges can lead to solutions that benefit many others. By designing with her community's needs in mind, she created an idea that naturally fits others facing the same issues. Her story reminds us that when we design from personal experience and care for people and the planet, our ideas, no matter how small, can make a big difference and connect us through shared solutions.

Something to think about: Xóchitl built a working solar water heater using just recycled bottles, cardboard, and hoses—things most of us throw away. What 'trash' around your house or school could actually be the building blocks for solving a problem you care about?

Article: 8-Year-Old Girl From Mexico Wins Nuclear Sciences Prize For Her Invention