

# What **dyslexia** feels like: Lesson plan with interactive simulation



## Description

This lesson plan is part of [Through My Eyes](#), an interactive experience created by Understood.org. This free set of resources features three simulations based on the real-life experiences of students with ADHD, dyslexia, and dyscalculia.

## Goals

- Build empathy and understanding of dyslexia and how it impacts reading and learning.
- Promote self-awareness, empowerment, and understanding of neurodivergence.

## Time

- 30–45 minutes of teacher prep
- 30-minute class lesson
- Optional extensions/at-home activities

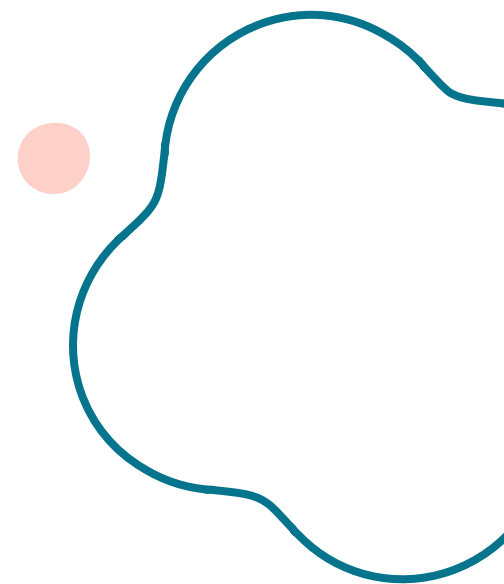
## Target audience

Grades 5–8

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# Teacher preparation (before the lesson)

## 1. Review resources

Familiarize yourself with these lesson materials:

- [Through My Eyes](#)
  - Caris' dyslexia simulation
  - Caris' "day in the life" video
  - Dyslexia fact sheet
  - Kid resources (available as interactive activities on the main landing page or as handouts in the Educators section):
    - How to be an ally
    - Strengths and challenges
    - Self-advocacy sentences
- [Reading poll](#)
- [Discussion questions](#)

## 2. Use the readiness checklist

To be sure you and your class are ready for this lesson, review the readiness checklist in the Educators section of [Through My Eyes](#). Make sure you've considered all necessary accommodations and supports for your students, including norms, mindsets, and examples.

## 3. Check technology

- Test the simulation for audio, video, and keyboard functionality on available devices.
- Supply headphones for the simulation, if possible. If headphones are limited, consider how best to run the simulation, such as playing it for the whole class with speakers.
- If using technology for the warm-up activity, set up and test those platforms.

## 4. Prep materials

Print necessary handouts. Gather any materials needed for the optional extension activities, such as paper and coloring materials for the bookmark.

## 5. Set up the classroom

Arrange the space for whole class viewing, small group or partner discussions, and whole class sharing.

# Lesson procedure

## 1. At-home pre-lesson activity (or post-lesson extension)

Before the lesson, assign the class to watch Caris' "day in the life" video in [Through My Eyes](#). Have students answer the following questions and be ready to discuss them in class:

- What surprised you?
- What is one of Caris' challenges?
- What is one of Caris' strengths?
- What is one question you'd want to ask Caris?

## 2. Lesson warm-up: Poll activity (3 minutes)

**Teacher script:** "Before we dive into today's lesson, I want you to think about your own experiences with reading and learning. I'm going to ask a few questions, and there are no right or wrong answers. Then we'll discuss our thoughts."

- Distribute/display the [reading poll](#). Consider using a platform like Kahoot!, Blooket, or Google Forms. Or have students write answers on a printed copy or whiteboard.
- Discuss the poll. (This can be done in a think-pair-share or whole group.)
  - How did the questions make you feel?
  - What kinds of thoughts or feelings come up when reading feels hard?
- Key points to highlight with the whole class:
  - Struggling to sound out or decode words, especially unfamiliar ones, can make reading slow, tiring, and frustrating.
  - Dyslexia affects how the brain processes written language. It's not about intelligence or effort.

## 3. Framing the experience (2 minutes)

**Teacher script:** "Before we learn more about Caris and her experience with dyslexia, I want to talk about why this lesson is important. Some kinds of learning differences can be hard to notice. A student might be working really hard to read, write, or keep up in class, even if we can't see any differences from the outside. And even with that hard work, things can still be a struggle."

### Teacher script, continued:

Today is a chance to better understand what it might feel like to have dyslexia and how it affects reading and learning.

One of our goals is to build empathy, which means imagining what someone else might be feeling or experiencing. When we practice empathy, we become more thoughtful classmates and people. So as we learn about Caris today, let's try to pay attention to what things might feel like through her eyes."

## 4. Introduction to dyslexia (5 minutes)

Display or pass out the [dyslexia fact sheet](#). Talk about the following points:

- Dyslexia is a common learning difference that affects how the brain works with letters and sounds.
- People with dyslexia often struggle with sounding out words, reading at a good pace without mistakes, understanding what they read, and spelling.
- With dyslexia, it can take more time and effort to read, even when someone fully understands the topic.
- It's important to remember that people with dyslexia are smart and capable. With the right instruction and support (like audiobooks, extra time, and reading tools), people with dyslexia can do really well in school and in life.

## 5. Simulation experience (10 minutes)

**Teacher script:** "Now we're going to step into the shoes of Caris, a real student with dyslexia. We're going to watch an interactive simulation of what it's like for Caris to move through a school day with reading challenges. Caris narrates the simulation, and you'll play it like a game."

- Provide clear instructions on how students will access and view the simulation (projector, small groups, or individual computers). Suggest that students use headphones, if available.
- Play the simulation for the whole class, in small groups, or individually, depending on computer availability.

## 6. Discussion and reflection (5 minutes)

**Teacher script:** “Now that you’ve experienced what reading might feel like for someone with dyslexia, let’s take a few minutes to reflect and talk about it. We want to explore what you noticed, felt, and learned.”

- Take time to review classroom norms. Set up the discussion to support students and reduce stigma. (For more details, see the readiness checklist in the Educators section of [Through My Eyes](#).)
- For the discussion, students can work in pairs or small groups. Use printed [discussion questions](#) to guide the conversation. Give options for students to write responses on paper, chart paper, or an electronic tool.
- Write key points from the discussion on the board.

## 7. Wrap-up and empowerment (5 minutes)

- Students can complete more simulations in [Through My Eyes](#) to wrap up their learning, if time is available.
- When ready, wrap up the conversation with takeaways such as:
  - We all have different strengths and challenges when it comes to learning.
  - Just like Caris, we can all learn strategies to help us succeed.
  - It’s important to remember that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.
  - We’re all in this together, and we can support each other to succeed in school.
- Additional resources for empowerment: Choose one or more of the following activities in [Through My Eyes](#) for students to explore and discuss. Each activity is available as an interactive activity in the Kids section and as a handout in the Educators section.
  - Strengths and challenges
  - Self-advocacy sentences
  - How to be an ally

## Optional extension activities: In class or at home

- **Expand on today's learning:** Have students create a personal affirmation bookmark inspired by Caris' positive messages notebook from the simulation. Provide blank bookmark templates or card stock. Have students write or illustrate encouraging messages that remind them of their strengths. Students can decorate their bookmarks and use them whenever they need a boost. Students who prefer to work digitally can use an online template or a creative tool like Canva.
- **Assistive tools exploration:** Try out color-coding techniques, highlighters, or text-to-speech tools to see how they support reading. Invite a reading specialist or a special education teacher to demonstrate how these tools can help students with dyslexia.
- **Self-advocacy spotlight:** Have students write self-advocacy statements from their own perspective. For example: "I learn best when..." or "It helps me when..." This activity pairs well with the advocacy resources and activities available with [Through My Eyes](#).
- **Pop culture:** Have students explore an article about [famous people with learning and thinking differences](#) or the [pop culture quiz](#).

## Notes about the lesson

### Lesson format

Teacher-led with whole class viewing of the simulation and then individual, partner, or small groups for the decoding activity. Small group viewing and/or discussion is optional based on your classroom and preferences.

### Engagement recommendations

- Encourage students to express their reflections in multiple ways: writing, drawing, voice recordings, or digital storytelling.
- Use pairs or small groups during discussion activities to promote collaboration and sharing ideas.

- Allow movement breaks before or after the simulation to help students reset and maintain focus.
- Incorporate visuals, timers, and checklists to support students' executive function during the lesson.

## Assessment suggestions

- Observe participation in the poll and discussion activity.
- Optional exit slip: "One thing I learned about people with dyslexia is..."

## Watch-outs

- Don't skip reviewing classroom norms before group or whole class discussions.
- Some students may share stereotypes or misunderstandings. Try to use these moments to guide conversations toward empathy and accurate information.
- Avoid generalizing dyslexia. Remind students that it looks different for everyone.
- Emphasize that dyslexia is a brain-based difference, not related to intelligence or effort.
- Some students may identify with the simulation and say aloud that they have or think they might have dyslexia. If this happens, be affirming and supportive without pressuring anyone to share personal stories.
- Watch for signs of frustration or anxiety during decoding activities, and offer breaks or alternatives as needed.

## Acknowledgments

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# Resources for the lesson

## Reading poll

1. Have you ever had trouble reading something quickly enough to keep up with a group activity?
2. Have you ever read a sentence that was so long that it was hard for you to remember what the first part said?
3. Have you ever been surprised that a word you've heard many times isn't spelled the way you would have guessed?
4. Have you ever had trouble remembering how to spell a word?
5. Have you ever misspelled the same word in different ways?
6. Have you ever come across a written word you weren't sure how to pronounce?
7. Have you ever felt nervous about reading out loud in class?

## Discussion questions

1. What part of the simulation stood out to you the most?
2. What feelings came up for you as the simulation continued? Frustration? Confusion? Curiosity? Anxiety? What else?
3. Were there tools or supports Caris used to support her reading? What supports do you wish you could have used during the simulation?
4. What is one thing you can do to be more understanding when someone is having a hard time with reading?
5. What can we do to make reading more fun in our class?
6. Optional addition: Complete this reflection sentence: "After experiencing the simulation, I now understand that dyslexia is not about \_\_\_\_\_ but about \_\_\_\_\_."