The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom. In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

**Core Skill Sets:** These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at [www.we.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/](http://www.we.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/).

**NOTE TO EDUCATORS**

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**KEY TERMS**

**Autism (or autism spectrum disorder)**—General terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders impact individuals very differently, but generally lead to difficulties in social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication and repetitive behaviours.

**Spectrum**—The range of severity of impairment, highlighting that autism is not one condition but an entire group.

**Neurodiversity**—The idea that differences in peoples' brains should be recognized and respected as any other human variation. These differences include those labelled with autism, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and others.
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

• **Themes:** Education, Local Issues, Health, Community
• **Course Connections:** English, Social Sciences and the Humanities

MATERIALS

• Front board
• Paper and writing utensils

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

• Explore ways to create inclusive environments for people with autism
• Understand that every individual is unique and has something to offer society
• Create connections between how people interact with each other, with spaces and how these interactions can be made more inclusive to the needs of people with autism

DISCUSS

1. What do you know about autism? (It is ok if your students don’t know a lot about autism or if they are speaking from personal experience, this discussion is to raise awareness.)
2. The article states that in 1 in 68 children have autism? What does spectrum mean? How does it apply to autism?
3. How does the hub, described in the *Global Voices* article “Beyond a cure for autism,” serve people with autism as well as their families?
4. Describe the shift David Patchell-Evans saw in the medical and research community. What would Patchell-Evans like people to do? (Focus on services and support, to keep the needs of people with autism in mind.)
5. Who plays a role in supporting people with autism? (Students may use examples from the article or from prior knowledge.)

DIVE DEEPER

Review inclusive language. If students are not already aware of how to properly refer to someone who has autism discuss how language can be inclusive or how it can leave someone feeling excluded. As with any condition or label, remind students that autism does not define the person who has it, therefore when referring to someone with autism refer to them first, not the autism. For example, do not say “I have an autistic friend,” say “I have a friend who has autism.”

Just like every student in the classroom is unique, every person with autism has unique symptoms and experiences. There are some common traits many people with autism experience including challenges forming relationships, sensory sensitivity and extremely repetitive behaviour. In many other ways they share many common traits with everyone else.

Reread the following excerpt from the article to the class that explains how the GoodLife Fitness Family Autism Hub addresses some of these common traits: “The hub limits sound and light and serves as an oasis for people with autism and their families—a place where they can visit a doctor, get a haircut, learn new skills in the kitchen or socialize in a specially designed playground to increase interactivity.”

Ask students to describe the benefits of having such a hub in the community. In small groups, ask students to consider how their community serves people with autism and their families. Have students perform research to find out what is available, how it is used, how it could be improved and what is missing in their community? Ask students to answer the following type of questions:

a. What types of services and spaces are available that serve the needs of people with autism?

b. What are some ways spaces and services can be made more inclusive?

c. What would it take to create more or enhanced resources for someone who has autism and their families? (For example, writing to the mayor or local member of parliament to for more or better services, raising awareness of autism and the services for people with autism and their families, fundraising for more or better services.)

Use the information and ideas collected by students to create and implement a plan to improve the services available in the community for people with autism and their families.

To enrich the learning, have a local expert or someone who works with people with autism visit the class to better help students understand what people with autism may experience and how they can create more inclusive spaces and interactions and provide better services as a community.

RESOURCES


WE Schools WE Are One campaign helps focuses on diverse and inclusive spaces, experiences and interactions. Check out classroom resources and lesson plans [www.WE.org/weareone](http://www.WE.org/weareone)

For more information about the GoodLife Fitness Autism Family Hub check out [pacificautismfamily.com/2014/01/goodlife-fitness-autism-family-hub/](http://pacificautismfamily.com/2014/01/goodlife-fitness-autism-family-hub/)


Diversity in autism [www.ted.com/talks/rozie_king_how_autism_freed_me_to_be_myself](http://www.ted.com/talks/rozie_king_how_autism_freed_me_to_be_myself)