Summary

Roberta is trying to fit in in a new school. She moves from group to group, just trying to be herself, until it seems that she doesn’t fit in anywhere. Then Roberta discovers some kids just like her – everyone’s different and they like it that way!

In a society plagued by the need to fit in at all costs, *One of Us* features a plucky youngster with the courage to be who she is and the charisma to help others also assert their individuality.

*One of Us* could promote conversations about:

- Cliques
- Being "different," and being "the same"
- *Who* you are vs. *what* you are

Before You Read

- What is a clique?
- Have you ever felt excluded from a group?
- How does it feel to not be part of a group?
After You Read

Discussion Questions and Activities to Meet the Standards

- List the cliques in your school, on specific TV shows, etc.
- Why do kids want to be part of cliques?
- What are the pros and cons of cliques?
- What is the difference between a clique and an interest group?
- What does it mean to exclude? Why would you exclude someone?
- What does it mean to include? Why would you include someone?

Activity: Who Are You / What Are You?

To help your students differentiate between surface attributes and depth attributes, you could try this drawing activity. (For those daunted by drawing, encourage them to use a stick figure and be creative with the descriptive words they write.)

- Draw a self-portrait in the center of a piece of paper, leaving plenty of room on either side for words.
- Then draw a line straight through the middle of your picture length-wise.
- On one side write: "How people see me" and on the other side write: "Who I really am."
- Gather in a circle and allow each to share, as they feel comfortable.
- Discuss the differences between what people can see, and what they can understand only after they've gotten to know someone else.

Activity: Ideal Community

There is a poem that speaks to the power we each have to include others and build community:

He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in!
—Edwin Markham

Play a game with inner and outer circles. Have four students form an inner circle and the rest of your students surround them. Invite students one by one to try to enter the inner circle. Talk to the four privately before the game and tell them, no matter what, do not let anyone into their circle. They can just ignore a new person, or they can join hands without that new person, or they can keep turning their backs. You might want to give a reminder to keep the exclusion nonviolent and nonverbal. After six people are kept out, tell them to let the next ones in, until the inner and outer circle become one big circle. Discuss the feelings of all involved.

Activity: Rodney's Flowers
Is it okay for boys to like flowers and girls to like building things? If only girls can like "girl things" and only boys can like "boy things," life might get a little humdrum, and each of us would not be able to fully be ourselves. Here is an activity from Teaching Tolerance to help children counter teasing about gender: [www.tolerance.org/activity/teasing-about-gendered-activities-traits-or-possessions](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/teasing-about-gendered-activities-traits-or-possessions)

For older kids, in grades 6 and 7, here is a lesson plan about gender stereotypes (I really like the worksheet survey):


**Further Reading**

Tilbury House offers some books that promote thinking for yourself—and being yourself—while still being part of a community.

- **Muskrat Will be Swimming** by Cheryl Savageau, illustrated by Robert Hynes

This story is a quiet tale of a Native American girl who, with the guidance of her grandfather, learns to find strength, not fear, in her identity as a Native person living in an Anglo society. This book is a treasure for all who have dealt with the fear of being different.

- **Our Friendship Rules** by Peggy Moss and Dee Dee Tardif, illustrated by Alissa Imre Geis

When Alexandra joins the cool crowd by ditching her best friend, it takes some serious work to regain Jenny's trust. Writing "friendship rules" helps the girls understand what they each need for a good friendship.

- **Playing War** by Kathy Beckwith, illustrated by Lea Lyon

When the kids in the neighborhood want to play war, the new kid hesitates to join in. When they understand he has been in a real war, and what that war has cost him, they ditch the war games and modify their play to include him.

- **Say Something** by Peggy Moss, illustrated by Lea Lyon

You're not to blame for bullying if you don't join the bullies, are you? One girl finds out—and then asserts her ability to say something instead of just standing by.