

No Place for Hate[®] Back to School Kickoff with Laurie Hernandez

These activities are for elementary, middle and high school students. They can be used in preparation for and as a follow-up to the No Place for Hate Back to School Kickoff with Laurie Hernandez on October 13, 2022.

Get To Know Laurie Hernandez

Share with students some or all of the following biographical information about Laurie Hernandez.

Laurie Hernandez is a U.S. gymnast, an Olympic gold medalist, a New York Times bestselling author, and the youngest-ever champion of Dancing with the Stars.

Lauren ("Laurie") Zoe Hernandez was born in 2000, grew up in New Jersey and started gymnastics at the age of five. During her debut year as a senior gymnast in 2016, she competed as a member of the U.S. women's gymnastics team dubbed the "Final Five" at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. At the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio, Laurie won silver in the individual balance beam competition and secured gold in the team all-around competition.

In 2016, Laurie won the honored Mirror ball trophy on ABC's "Dancing with the Stars" as the Season 23 winner with partner Valentin Chmerkovskiy.

Laurie published her first New York Times bestselling book titled, I Got This: To Gold and Beyond in 2017. In 2018, she released a children's picture book She's Got This, also a New York Times bestseller. During this time Laurie served as KPMG's Literacy Champion to promote readership as a path to leadership and the toy company, Mattel, created a Laurie Hernandez "Shero" Barbie to honor her.

Laurie's family is from Puerto Rico, making her the first U.S. born Latina to make the U.S. gymnastics team since 1984. Beginning in the Fall of 2022, Laurie will be studying at NYU Tisch School of the Arts and continuing as a Gymnastics analyst for NBC. Acting is one of her biggest passions and she has done cameos, voiceovers, and co-hosted American Ninja Warrior Junior, and plans to pursue an acting/screenwriting degree.

Laurie travels across the country speaking to the next generation about following your dreams. She is also a fierce advocate for the importance of mental health and has partnered with multiple campaigns and initiatives to encourage support and awareness.

If you want students to learn more about Laurie, you can read aloud or have students read her book, conduct online research about her and read her posts on social media.

Laurie's social media:

Twitter: [@lauriehernandez](#)

Instagram: [@lauriehernandez](#)

Facebook: [Laurie Hernandez](#)

TikTok: [@lauriehernandez_](#)

Laurie Hernandez Quotes For Discussion

Reading and reflecting on some of Laurie's important and impactful quotes from her books and interviews can help students learn more about her. You can share the following quotes with students and invite them to reflect on one or more of the quotes, exploring what they think Laurie is conveying, what the quote means to them, and how they might use the quote or idea in their own lives.

You can do this in a variety of ways: (1) print each quote on separate large pieces of paper and post them around the room, inviting students to select a quote they want to discuss, move to it and have them discuss it with other students in that group, (2) print the quotes on small pieces of paper (multiples of quotes to have enough for each student), put them in a bag/hat and invite students to choose one to reflect on and discuss in small groups or (3) print out a page with all the quotes, distribute to all students and have each student choose one quote they would like to discuss, have them reflect on the quote in writing and then join with others who chose the same quote and discuss as a group.

These quotes cover a range of topics and themes such as identity, diversity, representation, culture, being a role model, etc.

- "I'm also incredibly proud of my Puerto Rican heritage, but at first I wasn't sure why everyone was talking about it. Then I realized that as I was growing up, there hadn't been any Latina role models in gymnastics! I asked my parents if they could think of any, and we ended up researching some together."

- “I am fully Puerto Rican. I read somewhere that less than 4 percent of girls participating in gymnastics in the United States are Hispanic.”
- “I think it’s amazing that I can go out there and be myself, and the fact that I’m carrying Puerto Rico on my back a little bit is such an honor.”
- “People have seen me at my best, but I don’t think most of them know everything that it took to get me to where I am today.”
- “Growing up, there wasn’t an exact Hispanic role model that I had. I didn’t realize how big a difference I was making, going to the Olympics and being Hispanic, until I would be in an autograph session, and parents would come up to me and say, ‘You know, our family is so proud of you, you’re really doing Hispanics proud.’”
- “Meeting kids who feel inspired by my story, it means so much to me.”
- “No matter what race or color you are, you can aspire to do something great.”
- “I definitely take it as a really big responsibility on my shoulders to make sure I’m motivating my generation and the people around me and, hopefully, inspire people to try something new.”
- “Puerto Rico is home to me. It’s my home, it’s my culture. There’s a lot of love in the community. You go visit that island and it’s like walking into Thanksgiving dinner with your cousins. It’s in the culture to be welcoming and loving.”
- “I would find girls with curly hair like me, and that was my version of representation. I would see that other girls didn’t look like me, but I didn’t think twice about it.”
- “The Final Five will be remembered for many things, but one of the greatest attributes is that we are an incredibly diverse team. I’m so glad to be a role model for young Latinas everywhere, especially now that I know there have been so few of us.”

Reflection questions for individual quotes:

- In this quote, what is Laurie saying? Why do you think she said it?
- What does the quote mean to you?
- Is this quote helpful, impactful or meaningful to you in your life? Please explain why or why not.
- If you were to expand upon the quote, what more would you add to it?

Reflection questions for quotes as a whole:

- What did you learn about Laurie Hernandez by reading and reflecting on these quotes?
 - What is she saying about the importance of her identity? What are your thoughts on that?
 - In what ways is Laurie a role model for others who share parts of her identity? Why does this matter?
 - What does Laurie say about the importance of her Latina/Puerto Rican culture? In what ways is culture important to you?
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Pre-Event Discussion Questions

Before attending the No Place for Hate Back to School event on October 13, share with students the biographical information about Laurie Hernandez and her quotes (see above). Then engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions. Depending on the age of the students, this discussion can take place in a large or small group. They can also serve as writing prompts.

- What did you learn about Laurie Hernandez that you didn't know before?
 - What is your biggest takeaway from what you learned about Laurie Hernandez?
 - What is interesting, inspiring or memorable about her? What more do you want to know about her?
 - Why is diversity and representation important in helping others realize their goals and dreams?
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Post-Event Discussion Questions

After watching the No Place for Hate Back to School event, engage students in a discussion (either in small groups or the whole class) by asking some or all of the following questions:

- What thoughts and feelings came up for you as you watched the event?
- What more did you learn about Laurie Hernandez?
- What did you learn from the students asking questions?
- What questions do you still have?
- What's your biggest takeaway from the event?
- How can you help to make your school No Place for Hate this year?

Art Activity

As a follow-up to the discussion, have students choose one of the following themes and create an art project around it. As an alternative, you can select a theme for the class to all create.

- Visibility and Representation
- My Identity
- The Importance of Role Models
- Who Inspires Me?
- Diversity is a Strength

The art projects can be drawings, paintings, collages, poetry or other creative writing, sculpture, photographs, slogans/messages with drawing, videos or another idea. After all the art projects are completed, create an art gallery for all in the class or school to view and consider posting an online gallery of the students' creations.

Additional Resources For Educators And Families

- [7 Awesome Back-to-School Picture Books for Elementary Students](#)
- [On-Screen Diversity: Why Visibility in Media Matters](#) (Lesson Plan/Elementary and Middle School)
- [The Identity Iceberg and Me](#) (No Place for Hate Activity Library)
- [Why We Need Diverse Books](#) (Table Talk Family Discussion Guide)