



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 5-7
About the Author: Adapted with permission from *Snakes and Snails*, by the Toronto Board of Education

Comic Book Characters

Overview

In this lesson, students look at how male and female characters are depicted in comic books. Using a Comic Book Analysis sheet, students will record the attributes of male and female comic book characters. As a class, students will record common attributes on a master sheet and discuss what messages about men and women are reinforced. In groups, students will be asked to design and create a non-stereotypical comic book character.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- recognize that the media construct reality
- understand that the representations made by the media are not always accurate
- understand how their own gender perceptions are affected by the media

Preparation and Materials

- Have students bring in an assortment of comic books. (Make sure there is at least one comic for every two students.)
- Photocopy *Comic Book Analysis Sheet*. Make an overhead master-sheet
- Read the Teaching Background: *Stereotypes*

The Lesson

- Have students read a comic with a partner and jot down answers to the questions on the *Comic Book Analysis Sheet*.
- Mount your *Comic Book Analysis Sheet* master sheet on the overhead and have students choose a male and a female character from their sheets to add to it.

As a class, share and discuss ideas and observations. Referring to the overhead, ask:

- Are there any similarities shared by female characters? (e.g., are many of them 'victims' who need saving? are many of them described or drawn as 'sexy'?)



- Are there any similarities shared by male characters? (e.g., are many of them involved in 'heroic' activities? Are many of them described as 'tough' or 'strong'?)
- What is *missing* in the portrayal of men and women in these comic books? (Strong, heroic women? Peaceful, sensitive men?)
- What is the *message* about men and women that you get from these comic books?
- Speaking as a boy or a girl, how do these comic books make you feel?

Activity

Divide class into groups of boys and girls. Ask the groups of girls to create a non-stereotypical female comic book character and the boys to create a non-stereotypical male comic book character.

- Draw or paint a picture of your character
- Identify what your character does
- List the words that you would use to describe your character
- Have students present their new character to the class.

Evaluation

- Analysis Sheets
- Comic Book Character Presentation



Comic Book Analysis Sheet

1. What is the title of your comic book?
2. What type of comic is it? (Examples: war, fantasy, science fiction, superhero, horror, funny.)
3. As you and your partner read the comic together, jot down the names of the main characters on the charts below. Beside each name, list the main activities the character engages in and give one word to describe that character.

Men or Boy Characters

Name	Activities	Describing Word



Stereotypes

Because most television programs are quite short, the identities of characters must be established as quickly as possible. To do this, television writers often use stereotypes. A stereotype is a fixed or conventional image of a person or group of people. Stereotypes generally conform to a pattern of dress and behaviour that is easily recognized and understood. Often, a judgment is made about the person or group being stereotyped. That judgment may be positive or negative.

Generally, stereotypes are less real, more perfect, (or imperfect) and more predictable than their real-life counterparts. A typical male stereotype, for example, is of a "real man" who is adventurous, masterful, intelligent, and unshakable. Such sex-role stereotypes are intended to present viewers with a character they can easily recognize and relate to. Their danger, however, is that, if seen often, they can affect the way a viewer perceives men in general. Male stereotyping can narrow one's notion of what men can be and do; it can affect women's and children's expectations of men; it can even shape men's and boys' own views of themselves and of how they should behave.

While commercial television has improved in its portrayal of females, many of the women featured on TV continue to be depicted as someone's wife (apron-clad) or girlfriend (barely-clad). Television children are generally cast in gender-related roles – the girls playing with dolls while the boys play at sports – and all are "cutesy" and talk as though they were insightful adults. Similarly, the characterization of mothers-in-law, the elderly, gays, police officers, and truck drivers tends toward the stereotypical.

Culture and class stereotypes are also prevalent in television. Traditionally, blacks were portrayed as either happy-go-lucky servants or dangerous criminals, and while these stereotypes linger, we are now seeing what might be described as upright, intelligent, middle-class black characters. Similarly, North American native peoples are now being portrayed as something other than buckskin-wearing teepee dwellers. Too often, however, minorities are portrayed stereotypically and almost never as powerful or rich as the white majority.

Because stereotyping can lead children to form false impressions of various societal groups, it is important that students recognize stereotypes and understand the role they play in television's portrayal of life. To become television-wise, then, students must tune in to the ways television treats people, recognize how they themselves relate to TV characters, and understand how these characters can influence their ideas about the real people in their communities.

Source: TVOntario, Let's Play TV: Resource Kit For Television Literacy, © 1995.

