



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 4 to 7

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Media Kids

Overview

In this lesson, students deconstruct gender portrayal and depictions of boys and girls in the media. They begin by looking at the appearance and mannerisms of boys and girls in TV, movies, ads and comic books and identify any stereotypes that are used. In a series of group activities, students explore gender stereotypes and representation in greater depth, as well as compare these representations to their own life experiences.

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
- become aware of how their own lives compare to how kids' are portrayed in the media

Preparation

For teaching background on the portrayal of children on television, read the Children Now Report: [The Reflection on the Screen: Television's Image of Children](#).

- Tape excerpts of television shows that feature girls and boys.
- Collect, or have students bring in:
 - Cartoon strips featuring girls and boys.
 - Magazine ads featuring girls and boys.

The Lesson

- Divide the class into two groups – one of boys, the other of girls.
- Begin by showing your taped film and TV excerpts, then have students look at comics and magazine ads.
- From these materials, have the boys list the female characteristics and interests that they see and have the girls do the same for male characters.



- As they watch the excerpts and analyze the ads and comics, ask students to note the following:
 - What do these kids look like?
 - What are they doing?
 - In advertisements, what kind of products are they associated with?
 - How do they speak, and what do they talk about?
- As a class, discuss the findings of each group. Introduce, and discuss, the concept of [Stereotypes](#).

Ask students:

- What is artificial about these portrayals?
- Are any of these portrayals realistic?
- What is the problem with using gender stereotypes in television, advertising, movies or comic books?
- What can we do to avoid stereotypical images?

Activities

Activity 1

- Tell students that they are judges in an advertising contest.
- For homework, boys select one ad or comic that features a realistic male image, and a second ad or comic that features a stereotypical male image of boys or teens. Girls have the same assignment, with female images.
- Next class, students will present their ads to the class and students can vote on the advertisements or comics that they consider the most realistic and the most stereotypical.
- Create a "rogues" gallery of the worst offenders, and a "winners" gallery of the least stereotypical ads or comics.

Activity 2

- In groups of boys and groups of girls, have students' role-play a conversation or activity in which they would participate in real life, and then role-play the same activity as it might appear on TV.
- **Or** have students take an excerpt from a television show and re-enact the scene as it would occur in real life. (This exercise lends itself particularly well to interactions between TV kids and authority figures such as parents and teachers – if your students talked to their own parents or teachers the way that TV kids do, would the reactions be the same?)

Activity 3

- Have students create their own parody advertisements that mock the stereotypical images of boys and girls. (Perhaps a new perfume or cologne that instantly attracts the opposite sex, because that's all teenagers on TV seem to be interested in; or a book on "cutesy" sayings by TV kids that regular kids can incorporate into their own lives... "Amaze your friends!")



Activity 4

Have students draw or act out their interpretation of the ultimate "Media Kid." What would this kid wear? What would this kid say? How would this kid act?

Activity 5

Using the following table as an example, ask students to compare their lives to that of characters shown on a TV sitcom of their choice. Make up your own appropriate categories.

My real life

Homework and taking care of six brothers and sisters, band, basketball, watching television

TV life

Dates and skiing trips, Wasting your allowance, blasting the stereo, being sassy

My after-school life

Very busy with homework and studying

TV after-school life

Joking around, going out, playing games

My friends

All different races

TV friends

All white or all black.

Divorce in real life

Alone with Mom

TV divorce

Lots of kids, pets and noise

My real Mom

Works real hard, strict

TV Mom

Don't deal with real problems. Always live in nice homes without having to work

- Have the students create a proposal for a sitcom that they would like to watch. One which would reflect their reality. See example below.
 - **My TV show:**
The narrator would be a 13-year-old girl of mixed race, whose best friend is a boy. Like in *The Wonder Years* you would hear her inner voice, her conscience talking. She would hang out with lots of different kids, from different races and backgrounds. She deals with peer pressure, conflicts with friends and jealousy because she gets good grades at school. At home, her mother is strict, she has a lot of brothers and sisters and lots of chores. Her best friend is a boy and they talk about their dreams, their goals and their problems. They also learn a lot about other ethnic groups from the other kids in the neighborhood.

This activity is from the Children Now report: Children, Values & The Entertainment Media, 1995.



Stereotypes – Teaching Backgrounder

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 behavior 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.

