



2/3/4/5 ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS & PHE

## QUESTIONING GENDER EXPECTATIONS

### RATIONALE

This lesson will explore the expectations we have around gender, and reinforce the notion that no one should feel confined by these expectations or teased /put down because of them.

### CURRICULUM REFERENCES

#### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, 2/3

- **Big Ideas:** Stories and other texts help us learn about ourselves, our families, and our communities.
- **Curricular Competencies:** Demonstrate awareness/explain the role that story plays in personal, family, and community identity.
- **Content:** Elements of story, metacognitive strategies.

#### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, 4/5

- **Big Ideas:** Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world.
- **Curricular Competencies:** Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and deepen understanding of self, community, and world.
- **Content:** Literary elements, metacognitive strategies.

#### PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION, 2/3

- **Big Ideas:** Our physical, emotional, and mental health are interconnected.
- **Curricular Competencies:** Identify personal skills, interests, and preferences and describe how they influence self-identity.
- **Content:** Factors that influence self-identity.

#### PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION, 4/5

- **Big Ideas:** Understanding ourselves and the various aspects of health helps us develop a balanced lifestyle.
- **Curricular Competencies:** Describe and assess strategies for responding to discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying. Describe factors that positively influence mental well-being and self-identity.
- **Content:** Factors that influence self-identity, including body image and social media.

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**(THE BELOW IS COPIED FROM ABOVE FOR EASY-TO-READ VERSION)**

## RATIONALE

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[www.SOGIeducation.org](http://www.SOGIeducation.org)

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### ***Lesson Plan: Questioning Gender Expectations***

*(Based on content from *The Gender Spectrum: What Educators Need to Know*)*

#### **Curricular Connections**

- **ELA 2/3** - The role that story plays in personal, family, and community identity

- **ELA 4/5** - Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and deepen understanding of self, community, and world
- **PHE 2/3** - Identify personal skills, interests, and preferences and describe how they influence self-identity
- **PHE 4/5** - Describe factors that positively influence mental well-being and self-identity

### Rationale

This lesson will explore identity, the societal stereotypes often held about gender, how these affect us, and how we can encourage one another to be authentic to our passions and interests.

The lesson notes use the term **biological sex** (which is assigned at birth based on external characteristics) and is sometimes different from **gender identity** (which is someone’s personal sense of being a girl/woman, a boy/man, or somewhere in between along the gender spectrum).

A more advanced lesson on gender identity, entitled “Gender Identity, Media, and Stereotypes” is also available on the [TEACH BC website](#).

### Lesson Plan

Introduce the lesson by telling students that you will be talking about identity, in other words, what makes a person who they are. Part of a person’s identity is defined by their interests, what they’re good at, and often the things they like to do.

Ask students to work in small groups to make a list of the things they are good at or like to do. These can be things like do at school, after-school or at home. Once they have created a list, ask them to make a three-column chart and begin to divide the activities into categories which would fall under the headings of “Only for Girls”, “Can Be Both” or “Only for Boys”.

The teacher can then create a master class list or just ask what they discovered (hopefully that activities are for anyone who enjoys them regardless of their biological sex).

Next ask if there are activities that are more popular among boys or girls.

- Do they think there’s ever pressure from others to like/do activities that are expected for one’s biological sex? Can they think of examples? Are there also different expectations for adults?
- These expectations or ideas about what people should do or like based on their biological sex are called gender stereotypes, and they don’t fit for many people. Have these expectations changed over time? How?
- What if a person likes to do things that aren’t expected? How might they be treated by other kids? Adults? How might this make them feel? How could this feeling affect their choices? Could it affect their future?

Next read two stories about kids who challenged these gender stereotypes.

- Boy stereotypes: *Henry Holton Takes the Ice* by Sandra Bradley, *The Only Boy in Ballet Class* by Denise Gruska, or *Oliver Button is a Sissy* by Tomie dePaola.
- Girl stereotypes: *A Fire Engine for Ruthie* by Leslea Newman, *Allie’s Basketball Dream* by Barbara E. Barber or *The Worst Princess* by Anna Kemp.

Ask students to talk about how the main characters handled the pressure to follow gender stereotypes. Have they ever felt this pressure? How did they handle it? How can they support those who might encounter this pressure? How can we encourage everyone to be authentic or true to their passions, abilities and strengths?

These short videos can be used to extend the conversation:

**#Like a Girl** - 2014 (3:18) - Prim/Int/Sec

This “Always” ad compares our stereotypical ideas about the term “Like A Girl” to the ideas of young girls themselves.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjIQBjWYDTs>

**#Like a Girl** – Unstoppable 2015 (2:44) - Prim/Int/Sec

This “Always” ad continues the discussion about the messages society gives to girls which reduces confidence and often results in them quitting certain activities.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhB311gCz2E>

**Inspire Her Mind** - 2014 (1:02) - Int/Sec

This “Verizon” ad movingly demonstrates the negative impact of gender stereotypes on girls.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XP3cyRRAfX0>

**If We Used Childhood Gender Stereotypes on Adults** - 2014 (1:47) - Int/Sec

This comical BuzzFeed video imagines what the workplace would look like if we subjected adults to the same gender messages we regularly send to children.

<https://youtu.be/381belOZreA>

**Possible Extensions**

- Sexism - Ask students if they think it’s harder for boys who cross into “girl culture” or for girls who cross into “boy culture”? Why do they think one is harder? Introduce the concept of sexism to the class. For example, boys are often harshly teased for engaging in activities perceived to be part of girl culture (ie. dance, figure skating) because these pursuits are seen as lesser. Similarly, girls are sometimes excluded from activities perceived to be the domain of boy culture (i.e. hockey, football, etc.). Also, boys and girls are sometimes teased and targeted with sexist language.... “You throw like a girl!” What effect does this have on these kids? What effect does it have on other kids?
- Homophobia - What about the ways people dress? Are there certain colours that are more acceptable for boys/girls? Are there certain names that people might be called for dressing or acting in a more boyish way or girlish way? Depending on the responses of the students, this might be a good segue into the topic of homophobia. Talk with students about how people are sometimes targeted by homophobic names since they are perceived to be gay/lesbian because of their appearance or types of activities they participate in. The words “gay” and “lesbian” are fine words to use when talking about who someone loves, but never in a teasing or mean way.
- Questions for students:
  - Ask if they can tell who might be gay/lesbian simply by their appearance or activities they enjoy; b) how someone who says they are gay/lesbian might be treated by classmates.
  - Discuss with students how homophobia and sexism sometimes limit girls’ and boys’ choices because of the pressure their family and friends sometimes place upon them. Ask if this is fair or not. Talk about equality with your students and have them discuss how boys and girls should be treated fairly, irrespective of the activities they enjoy and want to be involved in.
  - To follow through on this topic, teach all students how to dance, how to bake and to throw a football. When you go skating, remind students that they can ask for hockey skates or figure skates based on what they’d like to do or try out that day.

**Assessment**

Depending on grade level/ability, ask students to write a letter to the main character of one of the stories. Tell the character what they think about their decision to be true to themselves. Have them include what they could do to protect themselves from this harm in future, and whom they could seek help from if they were targeted or teased because of their hobbies or interests.

Assess their knowledge of gender stereotypes, understanding of the harm caused by gender based name-calling, and ways of handling such a situation.

**Note:** The possible conversations arising from this lesson may be extended over a number of days or weeks, and can emphasize the importance of treating everyone fairly (equality). You can easily use these books and others as a springboard into topics of racism, sexism and homophobia. By understanding and rejecting stereotypes, students can help to create a world where everyone feels respected and able to be authentic and proud of their passions, skills, ethnicity and heritage. By knowing about different forms of oppression, they are better able to speak up, keep themselves safe and to seek help from adults when it is required.