

Lesson Plan: Examining Novels for Gender Bias
 (from *the Gender Spectrum: What Educators Need to Know*)

Curriculum Connections

ELA 8/9 - Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens.

- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts

Rationale

This is a checklist of questions which will help students to think critically and discuss the gender stereotypes and bias presented in various novels.

Guiding Questions

This is a checklist that can be used by students during novel studies or literature circles. It will help students examine the novel for gender bias and stereotyping. Note: This checklist is written at a high school level, but it can be easily adapted for intermediate students by modifying a few of the items and simplifying the language.

1. If there are illustrations either on the cover or throughout the book, are the illustrations of the characters stereotypical or over-generalized for either traditional male or female characteristics and activities? In other words, is the female shown as demure, domesticated, or social? Is a male shown as adventurous, rugged, or athletic?
2. Within the novel, how are characters described? Is everyone white, slim, middle class and able-bodied or is there diversity with respect to race, body type, class, and ability?
3. In the novel, is it mostly the males who are participating in the action of the novel while the females are observers or supports? Who solves the main conflict and how? Is it solved by a female through social maneuvering? Or is it solved by a male through courage and action?
4. How important are the gender roles of the characters in the development of the novel? What would happen to the novel if the gender of each character was changed?
5. Examine the relationships among the characters in the story. Who is dominant? Who is sub-servient?
6. Are all the romantic relationships in the novel heterosexual?
7. Examining all the characters and considering the variety of people who make up a community, city, country, etc., what groups of people are not represented in this novel?
8. What kind of role models are the characters in this story? Are there a variety of role models with whom students of either gender could identify? Are there characters with both traditional and non-traditional gender roles?
9. Stories and novels can be a way for society to reinforce societal norms. What societal norms are being reinforced by this novel? Examples of societal norms might include ideas such as: work hard at school, be loyal to your friends, or men should not cry. To what extent do you agree with the social norms reinforced by your novel?
10. Check the author's background and perspective. Most authors write from their perspective or cultural background. Is the perspective patriarchal or feminist? What can you conclude about the author's perspective in terms of race, class, age, ability, sexuality, religion, etc.