

Lesson Plan: Questioning Gender Stereotypes

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

Overview

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.

Teachers should be familiar with the terms **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).

This lesson can be followed by a lesson on gender identity, entitled "Gender Identity, Media, and Stereotypes" which is also available on the [TEACH BC website](#).

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

Lesson Plan – Part One: Gender Stereotypes

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 talk in small groups about things they are good at or like to do. These can be things they like to do at school, after-school or at home. They should write 3 things each on 3 separate post-it notes (or small pieces of paper). Now ask for their help to place these activities (with words and picture icons) in a large Venn diagram on the board (or using string on the carpet). Use the headings of "Only for Girls", "For Anyone" or "Only for Boys". What about colours? Are some only for boys, or only for girls? Engage students in discussion about the items. Hopefully they should all eventually land under, "For Anyone".

Next ask if there are activities that are more popular among boys or girls. Sometimes when something is popular for many boys, people begin to think that it's ONLY for boys, or if it's popular with many girls they think it's ONLY for girls. Is this true? These ideas are called stereotypes.

- Who gets to decide what a person should like?
- Are there certain jobs that are only for men or only for women?
- What if someone likes something that people don't think is right for them based on their gender? How might they be treated by other kids and sometimes even adults?
- How might this make them feel? Could this feeling affect their interests and even choice of job in the future?

Next read two stories about kids who felt like this.

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

Ask students to talk about how the main characters challenged or handled the pressure to follow gender stereotypes. Have they ever felt this pressure? How did they handle it?

When people follow their true passions, abilities and strengths they are happier and the world gets their best.

Activity

- Letter Writing – Ask students to write a letter to one of the characters from the stories to tell the character what they think about their decision to be true to themselves. Have them include what they will do if they see this happening to a friend in future and whom they could seek help from if they were teased because of what they like or who they are.

Lesson Plan - Part Two: Celebrating Gender Freedom

Tell the students that you are going to read a book, and when they hear a gender stereotype, they can say “What?” and give a thumbs down to show how limiting gender stereotypes can be. Ex. “Blue is only for boys.” Read the book “Of Course They Do” by Marie-Sabine Roger

Activities

- Learn “The Rainbow Song” – by Lora Bird (VSB Primary Teacher)
This song teaches children about gender diversity, kindness and acceptance of differences.
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1U48ZmZawuApOgoBquDL8142a7EPvViFE/view>
- How can we as friends support and encourage each other to do the things we really enjoy, regardless of gender?
- Ask students to imagine a world where there are no expectations of what they should like based on their gender. Is there anything that they would like to do or try? Do they have an idea of what they’d like to be when they grow up? Draw a picture and possibly write about themselves doing something they really like doing, would like to try or would like to be when they grow up. It doesn’t matter if this idea challenges gender expectations or not, just that it reflects their true passions and interests.

Useful Videos

Creating Gender Inclusive Schools - 2016 (Trailer 2min, Film 21 min) - Professional

This short film shows how elementary schools can talk about gender diversity and stereotypes in an inclusive, fun and age-appropriate way. Ideal for teachers, administrators, staff and parents, but can also be used to promote discussion among students. Brainstorm what actions you can take to make your school more gender inclusive. The full film (21 min) can be purchased at [New Day films](#).

<https://vimeo.com/154811690>

Tomboy - 2010 (11:48) - Prim/Int *Canadian

Animated short film about a girl who is teased because she doesn’t follow gender stereotypes.

<https://vimeo.com/10772672>

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=XjQBJWYDTs>

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=VhB3I1gCz2E>

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

- This lesson can easily be a part of a unit on diversity, respect and equality and could include lessons on family diversity (see SOGleducation.org/sogi3), ethnic and cultural diversity, levels of ability, etc. By understanding and rejecting stereotypes, students can help to create a world where everyone feels respected and able to be authentic and proud of themselves. By knowing about diversity and the importance of equality, they are better able to speak up, keep themselves safe and to seek help when required.
- A natural progression from this lesson could be a lesson on Gender Identity where students learn that everyone has their own idea of their own gender and this may not be the same as others, and that's OK and needs to be respected.
- 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 - Talk with students about how people are sometimes called homophobic names if they are perceived to be gay/lesbian because of their appearance or types of activities they participate in. The words "gay" and "lesbian" are OK words to use when talking about who someone loves, but never in a teasing or mean way. You can also mention that a person can't be gay or lesbian (our sexual orientation) until their body starts changing into an adult and they develop romantic attractions for others.
- Questions for students:
 - Ask if they can tell who might be gay/lesbian by their appearance or activities they enjoy.
 - How might an older student who says they are gay/lesbian be treated by classmates?
 - How can we make our school a more welcoming and inclusive place for people who may be different because they don't follow gender stereotypes?
 - 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

Use their contributions to assess their knowledge of self, identity, respect for differences, gender stereotypes, understanding of the harm caused by teasing, and ways to care for each other.