Gender Roles, Gender Expectations

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

TARGET GRADE: Grade 6

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- White board or flipchart pad
- White board or flipchart markers, two of which should be different colors
- Pencils in case students do not have their own
- Homework: "Gender in the World Around Us," - one per student

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Name at least two characteristics that are stereotypically attached to boys, and two that are stereotypically attached to girls. [Knowledge]

2. Describe their own feelings about behaviors being ascribed to a particular gender. [Affect]

Note to the Teacher: *This lesson is designed to look at social roles and characteristics assigned to people based on their gender. It is intentionally set up to explore the gender binary, so the use of "boys" and "girls" is intentional.*

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him", using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Ask the students, "When a baby is born, what is the first question we tend to ask?" Probe for, "Is it a boy or a girl?" Once you have heard this response, ask, "And to answer this question, where do we look – at the baby's nose?" If students don't feel comfortable responding (they may giggle because they know the answer but may not feel like they can say it), feel free to say, "We look at their genitals. If we see a penis, people will say 'it's a boy!' and if we see a vulva, people will say, 'it's a girl!' That moment will probably determine how the people in that baby's life will interact with that child." *(2 minutes)*

STEP 2: Say to the class, "Imagine for a moment that an alien landed from outer space who's doing some research on different creatures on our planet. One of these creatures the alien is researching is called (write the word "Boys" on the board or on a sheet of flipchart paper) a 'boy'. How would we describe to someone who's never encountered a boy before what boys are like?"

Ask the class to shout out answers to your prompt, "Boys are…," telling them they shouldn't worry about how any of them sound. Write all of the responses on the board or flipchart sheet. As you write, repeat the phrase, "boys are…" to continue to prompt the students. Continue to write until you have filled the flipchart sheet or board.

Thank the students for creating the list. Then say, "The alien appreciates all of the data you have shared. It just needs a bit more data before it heads back home. The alien would also like to be able to describe what (write the word "Girls" on the board or on a sheet of flipchart paper) a 'girl' is like. How would we describe to someone who's never encountered a girl before what girls are like?" As before, ask the class to shout out answers to your prompt, "Girls are…," telling them they shouldn't worry about how any of them sound. Write all of the responses on the board or flipchart sheet. As you write, repeat the phrase, "girls are…" to continue to prompt the students. Continue to write until you have either filled the sheet of newsprint or have two columns filled with words that are as close to equal in length to what was generated by the class for the "boys are" list.

Thank them for their work, and let them know that the alien has left happy with all its data. *(20 minutes)*

STEP 3: Ask the students to look at both lists. Ask, "What do you notice about the two lists?"

Note to the Teacher: *Since these lists are generated by the students, what is shared can be different each time you do the activity. In some cases, there will be all positive things about one of the genders, and all negative things about the other. In other cases, it will be a mix.*

Possible responses depend on what is recorded on the sheets. For example, "There are a lot of negative things about girls and more positive things about boys," or "The stuff about boys seems to focus on _____, while the stuff about girls seems to focus on _____."

As the students identify themes they have noticed, ask, "Are there things on these lists that are stereotypes? That apply to some, but not all, boys or girls?" The students will acknowledge that, yes, this is the case.

Go to the boys list. Ask, "Are there things on this list that can apply to girls?" An example of this might be, "be athletic." Ask, "Is it okay if a girl is [athletic; funny; strong]?" The class is likely to say it is.

Then go to the girls list. Ask, "Are there things on this list that can apply to boys?" An example of this might be, "Be sensitive." Ask, "Is it okay if a boy is [sensitive; sweet; dramatic]?" The response to this will be mixed; girls will be more likely to say it is okay for guys to express themselves in different ways, while boys will be more likely to say certain things are not okay for boys to be or do. Lastly ask, "How does this impact students who are transgender or gender non-conforming?"

Note to the Teacher: *The most important question you can ask as you process these lists is, "Why do you think this is?" In asking them to reflect on what they generated on the lists, you help them to challenge the gender norms that have been taught to them from their earliest ages.*

In addition, learned homophobia is likely to come up – where boys in particular will say that doing something on the "girl" list means that a boy is "gay." Again, challenge this idea by asking, "Why?" and pointing out that they didn't say the same about girls doing something that was on the boy list. *(15 minutes)*

STEP 4: Ask the students to take out a sheet of paper. On the front board, write the phrase, "If I were a _____, one thing I'd do that I can't do now is…" Say, "We've talked a bit about how we act – or are supposed to act or be – based on our gender. This is only the beginning of what's a really complex topic. What I'd like you to do now is think about what you perceive would be different if you were a different gender."

Ask them to copy down this phrase, fill in the name of a gender they are not and think about how they'd finish that sentence. Once they have come up with some ideas, ask them to complete the sentence stem with three things they perceive they'd be able to do if they were a different gender.

Ask whether any of the students would volunteer to read one of the ideas. After a few students have gone, ask them to write their names at the top and hand in their sheets. *(8 minutes)*

STEP 5: Explain the homework assignment: that they are to go home and do a mini scavenger hunt to find at least one thing that fulfills a stereotype for a particular gender, and one that breaks a stereotype for a particular gender. Let them know they can use technology as they wish; for example, taking a photograph using a smart phone or tablet. Explain that if they only have one gender represented in their homes, they can provide an example from a favorite tv show, book or something they've seen online. Distribute the homework sheets and close the class. *(5 minutes)*

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The students' participation in the all-class brainstorm and discussion that follows will help the teacher fulfill the first learning objective. The homework assignment will measure the second learning objective.

HOMEWORK:

"Gender in the World Around Us," a worksheet they are to complete at home in which they provide examples of gender role stereotypes where they live.

Homework: Gender in the World Around Us

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Instructions: Go around your home and find examples of things or people that fulfill gender role stereotypes – for example, girls or women doing the kinds of things the class identified as being "for girls" or boys or men doing the kinds of things the class identified as being "for boys." You can take pictures of these and attach them to your homework sheet, or provide examples from tv shows, books, the internet or just people who live at home or visit you.

Example One: _____

_____

_____

Example Two: _____

_____

_____

Now, find two examples of girls or women doing things that would more likely be listed on the "boy" list. Again, you can take pictures of these and attach them to this sheet, or provide examples in the space provided.

Example One: _____

_____

_____

Example Two: _____

_____

_____

Now, find two examples where boys or men are doing things that would more likely be listed on the "girl" list. Again, you can take pictures of these and attach them to this sheet, or provide examples in the space provided.

Example One: _____

_____

_____

Example Two: _____

_____

_____

Who do you think has more flexibility around gender, boys or girls? _____

Why do you think that is? How do you feel about it? _____

_____

_____

_____