

## LESSON PLAN

### Media Kids

This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.



**LEVEL:** Grades 4 to 7

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## 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 [Common Sense Media Report: Watching Gender](https://www.common sense media.org/research/watching-gender) (<https://www.common sense media.org/research/watching-gender>).

- Find clips on YouTube of television shows that feature girls and boys, some examples are:
  - Representation of girls: The Babysitter's Club (2020): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vivBx21jYCO>
  - Representation of boys: The Last Kids on Earth (2019): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvB7VwapZ68>

- 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*. Explain to students that a stereotype is a way of seeing people that assumes they are all the same. Ask students:
  - Have you ever heard someone you know use a stereotype to describe a person or a gender?
  - Do people sometimes assume that everyone in a particular group (all boys or all girls, all kids, everyone of a particular race or ethnicity) acts or looks the same way?
  - Do you think TV or other media sometimes show girls and boys in stereotyped ways? What are some examples? What might be some examples of boy or girl characters that go against stereotypes?
  - Do people sometimes feel like they have to fit themselves into stereotypes, either in daily life or in media they make (like videos or social media)?
  - How does it (or would it) feel for people to expect you to act a certain way because of stereotypes? How does it feel to see a character who is like you in media shown in a stereotyped way?

- Why might people who make media use stereotypes? (Point out that media *makers* are not always media literate: they may use stereotypes because it makes a character immediately familiar to an audience, or because they're thinking of an existing character, without realizing that they're contributing to a stereotype or that it can be harmful.)
- Why might ads be especially likely to include stereotypes? (Point out that ads have to get your attention in a short amount of time, and that because the people who make products want to be sure their advertising money is well-spent they want ads that will appeal to a very specific group of people.)

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 other media?
- What can we do to avoid stereotypical images?

### **ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION**

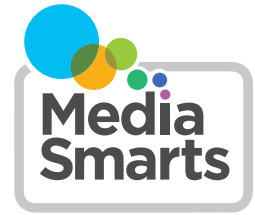
Have students create their own parody advertisements that mock the stereotypical images of boys or girls. These could be print/display ads or TV/video ads (filmed or performed live.) See the MediaSmarts sourcebook *Resources for Making Media in Your Classroom* ([https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/guides/media\\_making\\_resources\\_sourcebook.pdf](https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/guides/media_making_resources_sourcebook.pdf)) for background and handouts on different media.

Tell them to consider:

- What stereotypes are you making fun of in the ad?
- How has your ad changed to make fun of those stereotypes?
- How do you want people to feel when they see your ad?

Assess students on:

- Their understanding of stereotyping
- Their ability to use the advertising medium to communicate their understanding
- Their success in creating a media text aimed at a particular audience



## Stereotypes – Teaching Backgrounder

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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, Black people 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.