



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 5 to 7  
**About the Author:** MediaSmarts

# What's in a Word?

## Overview

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In this lesson, students become sensitized to the ways in which the use of language in the media can imply inequality between men and women. The class begins with the teacher presenting a mock news story in which students must identify the gender-specific language. Using the CBC's gender guidelines as a basis, students will discuss how gender-specific language can create negative gender stereotypes. As a homework assignment, students will complete a word search where they have to replace gender specific terms with gender neutral terms.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will:

- understanding understand the way the media's use of language can marginalize women.
- reflect on their own use of gender-specific language.
- use gender neutral terms when writing and speaking.

## Preparation and Materials

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Photocopy

- *CBC Gender Guidelines*
- *Mind Your Language!* worksheet
- *Mind Your Language!* master sheet

## The Lesson

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### Discussion

Welcome your students to the Channel 8 Evening News and read the following:

Hi! I'm your anchorman, (your name).

In our top story tonight, Mr. John Smith and his wife Mary have an amazing escape.

It seems that John Smith's little lady was baking some cookies, when the stove exploded, trapping them both in a back room.



Luckily, a delivery boy saw the tray of cookies come flying out the window and called the firemen, who quickly extinguished the blaze and saved the Smiths.

Mrs. Smith, a plucky gal, says that next time, she won't use self-rising flour.

### Ask your students:

What is wrong with this newscast? (The language used in this newscast is sexist and gender-specific.)

- Re-read the newscast to your students, line by line, and ask them to spot the gender-specific language. (Explain to your students that sexist language is not always as obvious as 'plucky gal' and 'little lady;' gender-specific terms such as anchorman, fireman and delivery boy also contain a gender bias.)
- What words could they use to replace the gender-specific language?
- In the original newscast, what was the message that we were being given about Mary Smith? (That she is not her husband's equal and is treated like a possession: 'John Smith's little lady,' 'John Smith and his wife.' That she is not capable or mature: 'gal,' 'little.' That it is the men who are in control: the delivery *boy* gets help and the fire*men* come to the rescue. And it is the anchor*man*, who delivers the news to us... even if the anchor*man* is really an anchor*woman*!)
- Some of you might say to yourselves, 'but these are only words.' What are some problems with our hearing these terms over and over again in the media? (Terms like these become acceptable; people unconsciously absorb the underlying message and begin to think that women aren't equal; young kids learn these attitudes from the hearing these words.)

The broadcasting industry takes this problem very seriously. In response to public concern and demand, the CBC (the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) has created a list of Gender Guidelines for its on-air personnel to follow.

### Activity

- Distribute *Gender Guidelines* and review these guidelines with students.
- Distribute *Mind Your Language!* to students.

### Extensions

- Have students write their own news stories using gender-specific language, and then have them trade with classmates to see who can spot the errors.
- Have students go through newspapers and try to find examples of gender-specific language. (Smaller, local papers sometimes make better hunting grounds for this kind of exercise.)

### Evaluation

- *Mind Your Language!*
- Student's News Stories
- Student's newspaper language searches



## CBC Gender Guidelines

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To make sure that the language used by on-air personnel treats men and women equally, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has developed these guidelines:

### When referring to men and women, make sure that they are addressed in the same manner.

- For example, instead of saying "Mr. Smith and Mary Jones" refer to these people as "John Smith and Mary Jones" (using both of their first names) or "Mr. Smith and Ms./Mrs./Miss Jones" (using titles, rather than names).

### Describe a woman as her own person, and not in relationship to someone else.

- Instead of saying "Mary Smith, who is married to John Smith," say "Mary Smith, who is a writer."

### Use parallel language to refer to men and women.

- Don't say "Men and *ladies*" or "Men and *girls*." Instead, say "Men and *Women*" or "*Ladies* and gentlemen."

### Avoid patronizing terms.

- Don't use terms like "the little lady" or "better half" when you are referring to someone's *spouse*, or *wife*.
- Use the word Feminist, instead of "women's libber."

### Use terms that can include both sexes.

- The Chair, Chairperson, rather than the Chairman
- Humanity, rather than mankind
- Human achievements rather than man's achievements

### Use plural forms or neutral words to avoid assumptions about a person's sex.

- Doctors bill their patients, instead of a doctor bills *his* patients.
- People like their comfort, instead of a *man* likes *his* comfort.



**Replace gender-specific words with gender-neutral words.**

- (However, some people are more comfortable with traditional titles, so if a woman wishes to be called Chairman, rather than Chairperson, use the term that she prefers.)

Anchorman = Anchor

Businessman = Business person or executive

Businessmen = Business community

Cameraman = Camera operator

Cleaning Lady = Cleaner, housekeeper

Craftsman = Craftsperson/Craftspeople

Delivery boy = Messenger

Draftsman = Drafting technician, drafter

Fireman = Firefighter

Gentleman's agreement = Honorable agreement

Housewife = Homemaker

Lady Doctor = Doctor

Maid = Houseworker or housekeeper

Mailman = Mail carrier or letter carrier

Man-hours = Person-hours or work-hours

Manpower = Workforce

Male Nurse = Nurse

Newsman = Reporter or journalist

Policeman = Constable or police officer

Salesman = Sales clerk or sales representative

Spokesman = Representative or spokesperson

Steward or Stewardess = Flight attendant

Waiter or Waitress = Server

Watchman = Security Guard

Woman Engineer = Engineer

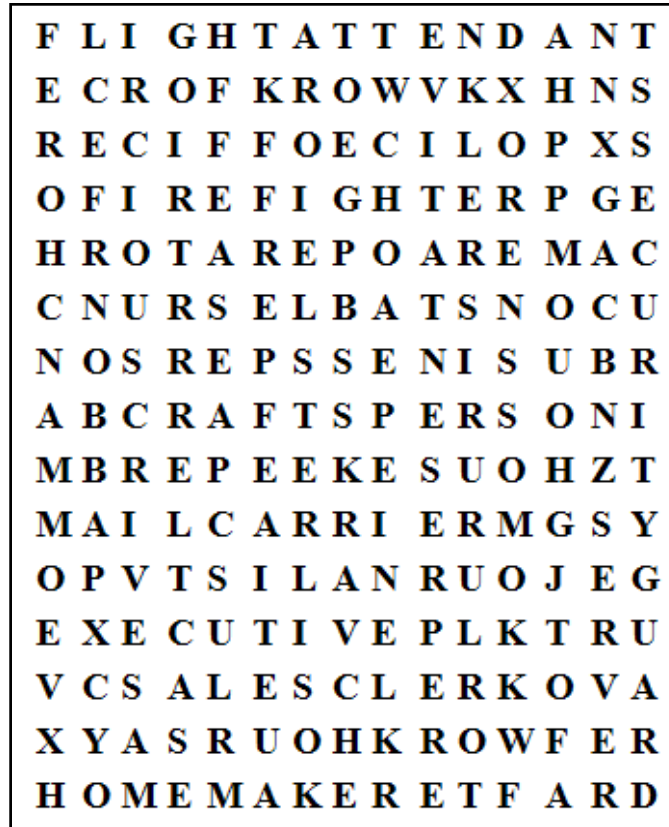
Workmen's Compensation = Worker's Compensation

Adapted by MediaSmarts from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *Gender Guidelines*.



## Mind Your Language

Using your CBC Gender Guidelines, can you find **neutral** words in this puzzle to replace the gender-specific terms underneath.



### Gender-Specific

When you have found the neutral terms for these gender-specific names, write them beside each one.

Anchorman

Cameraman

Craftsman

Businessman (Term 1)

Stewardess or Steward

Newsman

Mailman

Policeman (Term 1)

Watchman

Waitress or Waiter

Man-hours

Businessman (Term 2)

Policeman (Term 2)

Draftsman

Fireman

Cleaning Lady

Housewife

Male Nurse

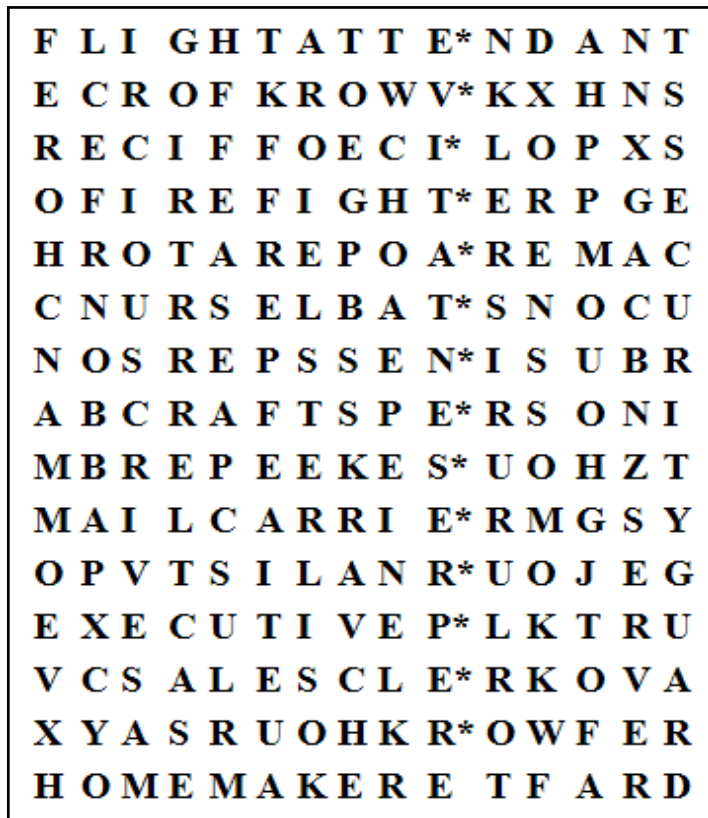
Salesman

Spokesman

Manpower



## Mind Your Language: Teacher Master Sheet



### Gender-Specific

When you have found the neutral terms for these gender-specific names, write them beside each one.

Anchorman = Anchor

Cameraman = Camera Operator

Craftsman = Craftsperson

Businessman (Term 1) = Business Person

Stewardess/Steward = Flight Attendant

Newsman = Journalist

Mailman = Mail Carrier

Policeman (Term 1) = Police Officer

Watchman = Security Guard

Waitress or Waiter = Server

Man-hours = Work-hours

Businessman (Term 2) = Executive

Policeman (Term 2) = Constable

Draftsman = Drafter

Fireman = Firefighter

Cleaning Lady = Housekeeper

Housewife = Homemaker

Male Nurse = Nurse

Salesman = Sales Clerk

Spokesman = Representative (marked with an \*)

Manpower = Workforce

