



## LESSON PLAN

<b>Level:</b>	Grades 3 to 6
<b>About the Author:</b>	Matthew Johnson, Director of Education, MediaSmarts
<b>Duration:</b>	2 hours

*This lesson is based on research performed by Maya Götz, head of the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television.*

# Girls and Boys on Television

## Overview

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In this lesson, students discuss television programming aimed at children and how girls and boys are portrayed in it. Students illustrate what they dislike about portrayals of girls or boys and then create their own TV character who will counter the illustrated negative portrayals.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will demonstrate the ability to:

- 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
- consider how well media images of gender reflect their own opinions and experiences
- express opinions in writing
- express themselves creatively

## Preparation and Materials

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Read and photocopy the following handouts:

- *What I Hate About How Girls/Boys Are Shown On TV*
- *My TV Character*

Have on hand:

- Blank paper
- Pencils, crayons and/or coloured pencils

If you would like more background on the studies that inspired this lesson, read the 2008 issue of *Television*, titled “Girls and Boys and Television” ([http://www.br-online.de/jugend/izi/english/publication/television/21\\_2008\\_E/21\\_2008\\_E.htm](http://www.br-online.de/jugend/izi/english/publication/television/21_2008_E/21_2008_E.htm)).



To get more up-to-date information on gender representation in kids' TV, read the 2017 study *Watching Gender* (<https://wnywomensfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/08/16.-Watching-Gender-How-Stereotypes-in-Movies-and-on-TV-Impact-Kids-Development.pdf>).

## Procedure

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### TV characters

Begin by asking students which shows they watch that have main or important characters who are children. (Make sure that they include all kinds of shows – comedies, cartoons, reality shows, etc.) Ask which of the major characters are boys and which are girls, and make a list of a half-dozen to a dozen of each on the board, under the headings “Boys” and “Girls.” Keep extra space between the two columns so you can make annotations.

Ask students which of these characters they like the most, and which they like the least. (There may be some overlap, characters liked by some students but disliked by others.) Ask students to briefly explain their opinions: why do they like or dislike different characters? Make brief notes beside the relevant characters of what the students like and dislike about them.

### Boys and girls

Once you have recorded opinions on most of the characters, go through the lists and see if students can identify any trends tied to gender. Are there likes and dislikes that occur repeatedly for male characters? For female characters? Ask students to think about how their own gender is portrayed on TV: do they think it is accurate? Does it reflect how they feel about themselves?

Ask students if they have ever imitated or modeled themselves after a character on TV; is there anyone on TV whom they think of as a personal hero? What characteristics do these characters have?

### What I Hate About Girls or Boys on TV

Distribute the handout *What I Hate about How Girls/Boys Are Shown on TV*. Have students circle either “Girls” or “Boys” in the title to reflect their gender and then write at the bottom what they most dislike about how their gender is portrayed on TV. On a piece of blank or scrap paper, have students illustrate their point, showing a character that reflects the portrayal they dislike or disagree with. When the sketch is done, have students do a good copy of that drawing on the handout.

Have students share their opinions and drawings with the rest of the class. (This can be done either by having each student present their work or by gallery-style, putting students' work on the wall and letting them look at each others' work.)

Once students have seen each others' work, discuss as a class what they have written and drawn as a class. Are there certain negative portrayals that come up repeatedly? Are there any that some students strongly disagree with (seeing them as positive)? Are there any that were found in portrayals of both girls and boys?



## My TV Character

Tell students that they're now going to take the same idea and turn it around: what traits would they like to see in boys or girls on TV? Distribute the handout *My TV Character* and have students describe their ideal TV character (they may include more than one trait, for instance a character might be smart and strong.) Point out that this doesn't have to be the opposite of what they wrote in the last handout, though it may be. On a piece of blank or scrap paper, have students illustrate their point, showing a character that reflects the portrayal they would like to see. When the sketch is done, have students do a good copy of that drawing on the handout.

Have students share their opinions and drawings with the rest of the class. (This can be done either by having each student present their work or by gallery-style, putting students' work on the wall and letting them look at each others' work.)

Once students have seen each others' work, discuss as a class what they have written and drawn. Are there certain positive portrayals that came up repeatedly? How similar or different were the boys' and girls' characters? In either case, are there existing TV characters that resemble students' ideal characters? If so, are there more boy or girl characters that resemble the ideals?

Ask students to consider how well existing TV characters match their ideal portrayals. Why might the people who make TV shows not create characters that reflect how boys and girls would like to see themselves?

## Extension Activity: Boy and Girl TV

In groups, have students come up with ideas for TV shows featuring characters who reflect the portrayals of boys and girls they would like to see. (Make sure the groups have a mix of boys and girls in them.) What kinds of settings and situations lend themselves to positive portrayals of both boys and girls? What kinds of relationships might be found between characters who reflect how both boys and girls see themselves?



## What I Hate About How Girls/Boys Are Shown On TV

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## My TV Character

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