

# The Rights of Women in the United States

## Lesson Plan

### Beyond Pink and Blue: The Impact of Gender Stereotypes

Grade Level: 3-7



Copyright © 2010  
The Advocates for Human Rights  
330 Second Avenue South, Suite 800  
Minneapolis, MN 55401, USA

For further information, visit  
[www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org](http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org)



# BEYOND PINK AND BLUE: The Impact of Gender Stereotypes

**Goal:** To identify gender stereotypes and examine their effects

**Objectives:**

- Students will identify and critically examine gender stereotypes
- Students will explore the relationship between stereotypes and discrimination

**Essential Question:** How do gender stereotypes impact me?

**Time:** 1-2 class periods

**Grade Level:** 3-7

**Materials:**

- Children's fairy tale
- Chalkboard/whiteboard/flip chart and markers, paper and pencil
- Various forms of media (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.)

**Procedure:**

## ACTIVITY 1: DEFINING GENDER STEREOTYPES

1. **Model.** Take a familiar story (e.g. from a novel, film, television series or folk tale) and retell it in whole or in part with the gender of the characters switched. (Download the sample reversed fairy tale Cinderella at [www.eycb.coe.int/compasito/chapter\\_4/4\\_19.asp](http://www.eycb.coe.int/compasito/chapter_4/4_19.asp).) Ask children what was unusual about this story.
2. **Define and Discuss.** Define the word stereotype and give examples. Have students brainstorm stereotypical characteristics and activities of women and men and compare that list to the original folk tale. Can they think of other folktales or children's stories that reinforce these stereotypes? Then ask them to list those characteristics and activities in the revised story that are non-stereotypical. Ask them if they can think of stories that have non-stereotypical characters.

## ACTIVITY 2: IDENTIFYING STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA

1. **Research.** Explain to students that their mission will be to research gender stereotypes in the media. Based on available resources, any of the following forms of media could be used: textbooks, children's books, anthologies of fables and fairy tales, magazine articles, movies, cartoons, commercials, or television clips.
2. **Analyze.** Ask students to consider the following questions for the material they are working with:
  - Did you notice any stereotypes about women and men/boys and girls?
  - Are female characters shown as brave decision-makers, physically capable, adventurous, creative and interested in a wide range of careers?
  - Are male characters shown as humane, caring people, who can be helpful, who express their emotions, who are free of the fear that others might not think them "manly"?
  - Do the men and women respect each other as equals?
  - Do the men take an active part in parenting and housekeeping tasks?
  - Do the women take an active role outside the home and, if so, in other than traditionally female occupations (e.g. teachers, nurses, secretaries) or unpaid or poorly paid jobs?



# BEYOND PINK AND BLUE: The Impact of Gender Stereotypes

## ACTIVITY 2: IDENTIFYING STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA (continued)

- 3. Create.** Ask the students to select one of the stories or media pieces they read or saw and rewrite it to make it more gender-equal. This activity may be done with individuals or small groups. Students may choose to switch the gender roles of the characters involved or they may choose to change the professions and activities that the characters engage in throughout the story.
- 4. Share.** Give the students the opportunity to share their stories in pairs or small groups.

## ACTIVITY 3: DEBRIEF AND TAKE ACTION

- 1. Discuss.** As a group discuss the following questions: 1) How does limiting what boys and girls can do affect them individually? How could it affect a family? A society? 2) Do you think gender roles/stereotypes are changing and if so, how? 3) Have you ever tried to challenge gender roles? What happened? 4) Why do gender roles/stereotypes limit a person's human rights? 5) What can you do to challenge gender roles? What can we do in the future so that boys and girls can act more freely the way they want to?
- 2. Action:** Develop a contract for gender equity in the classroom. Ask students for specific examples of what can be done to ensure that boys and girls are treated equally in the classroom. For further research and ideas, direct students to the youth-friendly websites below.

To learn more about how you can create a safe and respectful classroom that ensures gender equity please go to [www.safeandrespectful.org/](http://www.safeandrespectful.org/).

## RECOMMENDED YOUTH WEBSITES:

### Gender Public Advocacy Coalition Gender Youth

<http://www.gpac.org/youth/>

The place to go to connect with other people who believe this world is bigger than masculine and feminine boundaries!

### Tolerance.org “Mix it Up” Program

<http://www.tolerance.org/teens/>

The mix it up program encourages students to “mix up” social boundaries in schools. On this website find out how to “Mix it Up” in your school.

### The JUST for Youth Coalition

<http://www.justforyouthde.org/>

The JUST for Youth Coalition is committed to increasing awareness, reducing risky behaviors, and providing support for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth.

### The Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League

<http://www.smyal.org/>

The Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL) is a Washington D.C.-based agency dedicated to supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth.

*Sources: Adapted from ABC: Teaching Human Rights: Practical activities for primary and secondary schools. United Nations: New York and Geneva, 2003. pg. 55 (b, c, d). Available online: [www.unhcr.ch/html/menu6/2/abc\\_text.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu6/2/abc_text.pdf) and Compasito: Manual on Human Rights Education for Children. Council of Europe: Hungary, 2007. pgs. 83, 125, 186.*



## CREATING GENDER EQUITY IN THE CLASSROOM

With all that teachers have to juggle in the classroom, why worry about gender? Gender has a big impact on each young person who sits in your classroom. Students are unconsciously pushed and pulled into different gender categories, being forced to “act like a girl” or “act like a boy”. We put children in these gender categories when we place expectations on their behavior and give them messages about how a girl or boy “should” act. Without knowing it, teachers and the classroom environment may send these messages to students. As children become teens they receive even more messages about gender. For example, girls are traditionally pointed toward subjects in school such as English or history while boys are encouraged to excel in math and science. Boys are often told to ‘man up’ and play sports while girls are often pushed to be caretakers and sensitive. By supporting these gender stereotypes, we are putting youth into categories that are harder to break out of the older they get. Teachers can send healthy gender messages to their students. Here are some suggestions to help you get started.

### HOW TO MAKE YOUR CLASSROOM GENDER NEUTRAL:

- Display pictures of both girls and boys doing non-stereotypical activities.
- Have open discussions on gender stereotypes and work them into whatever subject you teach.
- Talk about gender stereotypes in the books students read or talk about male and female scientists.
- Encourage boys and girls equally to succeed. Show them that gender will not dictate who they become.
- Refrain from promoting unhealthy gender messages in and out of the classroom. For example, if you’re a coach, don’t use gender terms in a derogatory manner to discipline male athletes, such as “You throw like a girl!” or “Don’t be such a sissy!”
- Examine your gender choices. Do you put all the girls in a group? Are boys given different projects than the girls? Do you call on more girls than boys?
- Encourage both girls and boys to explore what makes them happy, whether that is sports, music, science or video games.
- Use language that is not gender restricted. Talk about professions in a non-gendered way. For example, use the term police officers instead of policemen and the term flight attendant instead of stewardess.
- Educate yourself on gender. There are many layers to it and knowing some basic definitions will help you be better prepared.

### DEFINITIONS TO KNOW WHEN TALKING ABOUT GENDER:

- **Biological Sex** refers to being categorized as either male or female based on anatomical parts.
- **Gender** is a psychosocial construct most people use to classify a person as male, female, both, or neither.
- **Gender Identity** is a person’s sense of their own gender. Since most people conform to societal gender norms, they have a Gender Identity congruent with their Biological Sex. However, gender, like sexuality, is fluid and can change over time, in individuals and in society. For some people, Gender Identity, Biological Sex and how they outwardly communicate their gender to others do not correspond with each other.
- **Transgender** is an umbrella term used to describe people who have gender identities, expressions or behaviors not traditionally associated with their Biological Sex. Transgender also can mean anyone who transcends the conventional definitions of “man” and “woman”.



To learn more about how you can create a safe and respectful classroom please go to [www.safeandrespectful.org/](http://www.safeandrespectful.org/).

Source: Reprinted with permission of Safe and Respectful Relationships for All. [http://www.safeandrespectful.org/teachers/gender\\_home.html](http://www.safeandrespectful.org/teachers/gender_home.html)