

GENDER ROLES

Why do some roles seem to be tied to gender? Why do people think some jobs fit women better, or some fields fit men? Why do people think that certain household chores fall to women or men, respectively? Most people have ideas about what sort of roles are just for women, and what sort of roles are just for men. The activities on this page look at how these roles evolved, and what perpetuates them.

1. Stereotypes*

Ask the students to define a stereotype. What do stereotypes accomplish? Can stereotypes be good? Do stereotypes perpetuate unfair images of what it means to be a girl or a boy? Then have students examine advertising in today's newspaper for examples of positive or negative stereotypes with regard to gender. Ask them to make a list of five stereotypes that they find in ads, TV shows, or photos. For each, have them write whether it is a positive or negative stereotype and what it says about a person when used.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Investigating through written and visual texts various examples of distortion and stereotypes, including those of gender; demonstrating awareness that characters and communities in texts reflect life by portraying both positive and negative images.

2. Future Movie Critics

What do images of popular culture say about our society? Have students pretend that they are archaeologists from 100 years in the future. The only source they have for understanding life at the start of the 21st Century are movie advertisements. Have students examine the illustrations that go along with the ads, and come up with a list of 10 characteristics of women today, and 10 characteristics of men today. Discuss whether the students think the ads accurately portray men and women in real life.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Developing and applying individual and shared standards; developing critical standards based on aesthetic qualities; responding to a variety of visual, written and electronic texts by making connections to personal lives.

3. The Plot Thickens

Encourage students to follow a leading story for five days or more about a prominent woman in the news. She may be a politician, a scientist, sports figure or even a criminal. Have students record the development of the story, and keep a journal of his

or her observations. At the end of five days, have students make three predictions about the outcome of the story.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Acquiring information from multiple sources, organizing it and evaluating it; generating questions about important issues; creating a thesis or hypothesis.

4. Gender Bender

The role of gender is ever shifting. Information about this can be found in various parts of the newspaper, especially in advertisements. Have your students find four examples of a gender role in today's paper that they think have changed in the last 20 years. Have them write a sentence for each stating how they think it has changed. Then have them write a sentence for each on how they think each role will change in the next 20 years.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Describing and comparing characteristics of world cultures, including gender roles and traditions; identifying disparities between American ideals and realities.

5. Science Discoverers

Many great scientific discoveries of the 20th Century were made by women. But women once were discouraged from entering science. Have your students search the news for discoveries made by women scientists in fields like genetics, biology, medicine or astronomy. Finish by having them write out five ways one of the discoveries in the news might change daily life.

STANDARDS/SKILLS: Describing how social and scientific changes have consequences; using written or visual texts to research issues of importance.

*Includes activity sheet for students.