

# Gender Roles

Grades 4-6, Lesson #4

## Time Needed

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15-25 minutes, plus library time

## Student Learning Objectives

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To be able to...

1. List several similarities and differences between the expectations of each gender.
2. Recognize that a person's beliefs about roles can influence his or her decisions.
3. Recognize sources of gender role beliefs.
4. List famous men and women throughout history who have filled a variety of roles, including health pioneers.

## Agenda

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1. Define "gender roles" and explain the lesson's purpose.
2. Brainstorm gender-specific roles and behaviors in America today.
3. Use case study to teach the concepts that (a) gender roles are learned and (b) roles can be limiting.
4. Answer "Anonymous Question Box" questions regarding gender roles.
5. Research historical figures (male and female) in the school library.
6. Summarize the lesson by discussing the library experience.

This lesson was most recently edited June 6, 2013.  
Alternate formats available on request.

## **Materials Needed**

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### **Student Materials: (for each student)**

- Gender Roles Worksheets #1 and #2

## Activity

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### 1. Define "gender roles" and explain the lesson's purpose.

Explain that roles are like rules by which we play games. The role of "student" involves being a good listener, coming to class on time, etc. Students who follow the rules, do well at the game. "Gender roles" are the rules people think they should follow because of their sex...ways they act because "boys and men are supposed to" or "girls and women ought to." This lesson will examine those roles/rules.

### 2. Brainstorm gender-specific roles and behaviors in America today.

Have students brainstorm, while you write on the blackboard, advantages of being male; then, the advantages of being female in mainstream U.S. culture today. Your lists may end up looking something like this:

#### Men and Boys

Can box, wrestle without being teased  
 Can grow beards, mustaches  
  
 Can play pro hockey

#### Women and Girls

Can have babies  
 Can wear skirts and dresses without being teased  
 Can wear makeup without being teased  
 Can paint the bedroom pink without being teased

If the class has trouble generating the lists, ask them what things a girl or woman can do that some boys or men might feel embarrassed doing, or find impossible to do...and vice versa. Once the lists are on the blackboard, help students to notice that some are biological impossibilities for the gender, while some are the result of our social learning. Point out that a few years ago the "women and girls" list might have contained "wearing earrings" or "dyeing your hair." Now many males feel comfortable doing these things. Point out that other societies, not just other time in history, have differing beliefs regarding roles. In some American Indian and African societies, *men* wear face-paint (makeup). In Scotland, men wear kilts (skirts).

Give students a chance to discuss the expectations of men and women in their ethnic communities – the ways their own cultures may differ from the standards promoted by the media.

### 3. Use case study to teach the concepts that (a) gender roles are learned and (b) roles can be limiting.

*"Ronald is three years old. His mother is a doctor and his father is a musician with a band. Since Dad works evenings, he takes care of Ronald during the day. Mom comes home from the hospital, eats dinner with her son and takes care of him while his father is at work.*

*"Ronald's best friend, Mary, lives next door. Dad overheard a conversation between Ronald and Mary one day. Mary said, 'Let's play house.' Ronald said, 'OK, you be the mommy and I'll be the daddy.' Mary told him to go to work, so she could fix lunch*

*for the baby, Ronald got angry. He yelled, 'Daddies fix lunch! I'm not playing with you anymore, Mary. You're stupid!'"*

Stop the case study long enough to ask the class why Ronald thinks that only dads can cook lunch.

*"Ronald's dad said, 'You guys don't have to fight. Why not play something else?' But when Ronald suggested playing hospital, and told Mary to be the doctor, she yelled, 'Only boys are doctors!'"*

Ask the class:

- Why might Mary think that only boys can be doctors? How could that stereotype limit her in life?
- If Ronald keeps on feeling that boys must do the cooking, how will he feel if he grows up and marries a woman who likes to cook?
- If Mary keeps believing that girls cannot be doctors, do you think she will do well in math and science classes in high school?
- If you were Ronald and Mary's baby sitter, how could you help them learn that women and men can cook and be doctors?

**4. Answer "Anonymous Question Box" questions about gender roles.**

**5. Research historical figures (male and female) in the school library.**

Assign students to find the name and story of one male and one female who have been each of the following professions (each student can look up one profession).

- |                               |                                       |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| - astronaut                   | - human rights or civil rights leader |
| - leader of a nation          | - athlete                             |
| - health pioneer or scientist | - musician                            |
| - religious leader            | - artist                              |
| - author                      | - explorer                            |

**6. Summarize the lesson by discussing the library experience.**

When you return to the class, have students share the names they found. Discuss whether they had a more difficult time finding men or women, and why that might be. Help them consider how a lack of role models in a field, whether the field is parenting or politics, can limit a person's imagination about what he or she can become.

If they had difficulty finding women, or if you notice a lack of people of color in the names they did find, you might offer extra-credit reports on persons from the list on the next page.

POC = Person of Color

F = Female

**Authors**

F,POC Ntozake Shange  
 F Ruth Bell  
 F,POC Ida Bell Wells-Barnett  
 POC Langston Hughes  
 POC Sherman Alexie  
 F, POC Maya Angelou

**Astronauts**

POC Guyon Bluford, Jr.  
 F Sally Ride  
 F Valentina Tershkova  
 F, POC Mae Jemison

**Health and Science Pioneers**

F Marie Curie  
 F Margaret Mead  
 F,POC Shi Mai-Yu (Dr. Mary Stone)  
 F,POC Lora Mangum Shields  
 F Florence Sabin  
 F Virginia Apgar

**Artists**

F, POC Toko Shinoda  
 F Anna Mary "Grandma Moses"  
 F Beatrix Potter  
 F Georgia O'Keefe  
 F,POC Lois Mailou Jones  
 F, POC Faith Ringgold  
 F, POC Frida Kahlo

**Leaders of Nations**

F,POC Indira Gandhi  
 F Golda Meir  
 F,POC Sirimavo Bandoranaikē  
 F,POC Maria Estela M. de Peron  
 POC Barack Obama

**Musicians**

F,POC Alicia de Larrocha  
 F,POC Mary Lou Williams  
 F Maybelle Addington Carter  
 F Maud Powell  
 F Alicia Keys

**Religious Leaders**

F,POC Mother Teresa (Agnes Bojoxhiu)  
 F Mary Baker Eddy  
 F,POC Luisa Gonzalez  
 F Elizabeth Ann Seton  
 F Aimee Semple McPherson  
 POC The Dalai Lama

**Athletes**

F,POC Wilma Rudolph  
 F Dorothy Hamill  
 F Cathy Rigby  
 F,POC Chi Cheng  
 F Babe Didrikson Zaharias

**Human Rights and Civil Rights Leaders**

F Malala Yousafzai  
 F Lucretia Mott  
 F Susan B. Anthony  
 F,POC Fannie Lou Hamer  
 F,POC Rosa Parks  
 F Betty Friedan  
 F,POC Alicia Escalante  
 F Margaret Kuhn  
 F Dinara Zhorobekova

**Explorers**

F,POC Sacajawea  
 F Amelia Earhart  
 F Harriet Chalmers Adams

**Related Activities For Integrated Learning**

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**A. Social Studies**

Have students write reports on the persons they identified in Activity 4, above.

**B. Music & Language Arts**

Students may write a song or a poem about the ways they believe boys and girls are alike and different.

## Homework

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Students' options:

- Use Worksheet #1 with an adult in their families.\*
- Complete Worksheet #2 by themselves.

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\*see "Preparing Parents", page 4-5

# Gender Roles Worksheet 1

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Directions

1. Find a watch or clock with a second hand, a stop watch, or a cell phone with a stopwatch.
2. Practice, with an adult, using the watch or stopwatch
3. Explain to the adult that you want him/her to fill out Section A, below, while you time him/her.
4. Explain that he/she should work as quickly as possible; skipping any he/she does not know. The people listed may be living or dead.

Section A, to be filled out by an adult.

Name a man, living or dead, in each of the following professions

1. Artist \_\_\_\_\_
2. Astronaut \_\_\_\_\_
3. Athlete \_\_\_\_\_
4. Author \_\_\_\_\_
5. Civil Rights Leader \_\_\_\_\_
6. Explorer \_\_\_\_\_
7. Health Pioneer or Scientist \_\_\_\_\_
8. Leader of a Nation \_\_\_\_\_
9. Musician \_\_\_\_\_
10. Religious Leader \_\_\_\_\_

(Time: \_\_\_\_\_ # Completed \_\_\_\_\_)

Section B, to be filled out by an adult.

Name a woman, living or dead, in each of the following professions

1. Artist

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Astronaut

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Athlete

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Author

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Civil Rights Leader

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Explorer

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Health Pioneer or Scientist

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Leader of a Nation

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Musician

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Religious Leader

\_\_\_\_\_

(Time: \_\_\_\_\_ # Completed \_\_\_\_\_)

5. Discuss which list was easier to complete, and why. When the adult was in school, how were social studies and health classes different from the way they are today?

6. Adult's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Child's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Gender Roles Worksheet 2

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Directions:

1. Watch television for 1 hour.
2. As you watch, list below the name of each character and the job he or she does (Example: "Phil Dunphy, real estate agent.") If you cannot tell what the person does, write "No job?"

Show:

\_\_\_\_\_

Male Character(s)

Female Character(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Show:

\_\_\_\_\_

Male Character(s)

Female Character(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Show:

\_\_\_\_\_

Male Character(s)

Female Character(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

On a separate sheet of paper, explain what you noticed or figured out or learned. What is your opinion about what you saw? Write at least two complete paragraphs.