

# Early Years – Once Upon A Time<sup>1</sup>

## Grades: K - 4

### Overview

Students are introduced to the idea of stereotyping and to the role that gender stereotypes play in the stories and movies they enjoy. They become aware of the images presented to them from everyday items they find in their own lives, and from those that surround them daily at school. Students learn that stereotypes are not accurate and that they do not need to let stereotypes define who they are as girls and boys.

### Learning Outcomes

Through this learning experience (LE) students will achieve specific learning outcomes (SLOs) from various curricula. Consider the intent of this LE, and your choice of instructional and assessment strategies, to determine which SLOs students may achieve, in addition to those identified.

### English Language Arts

- 1.1.1 Express Ideas
- 1.1.2 Consider Others' Ideas
- 1.2.1 Develop Understanding
- 3.1.3 Contribute to Group Inquiry
- 5.1.3 Appreciate Diversity
- 5.2.3 Use Language to Show Respect

### Physical Education/Health

- K.4.K.A.1 Identify characteristics that describe self as special and unique
- K.4.1.A.1 Recognize positive attributes of self, family, and classmates (e.g., physical characteristics, abilities, qualities, culture, accomplishments, highlights...)
- K.4.2.A.1 Recognize that everyone is special, unique, and able to succeed (i.e., families, interests, talents, feelings, desires)
- K.4.3.A.1 Identify the importance of showing consideration for self and others, and for individual differences (i.e., language, ideas, abilities, physical characteristics)
- K.4.4.A.1 Demonstrate an awareness of factors (e.g., personal attitudes, supportive environment, accomplishments, positive thinking, genetics, media stereotyping...) that influence self-esteem and self-confidence

### Social Studies

- K-KI-008 Recognize that everyone has particular interests and abilities.
- K-VI-002 Value their own and others' interests and abilities.
- K-VI-002A Value the special talents or strengths that are given to them.
- 1-KE-028 Give examples of how media may influence their needs, wants, and choices. Include: advertising and television programming.
- 1-KP-023 Describe how other people may influence their lives and how they may influence the lives of others.
- 2-KE-039 Give examples of media influences on their choices and decisions.
- 3-KE-Identify media influences on their perceptions of people and places in Canada.
- 4-KE-049 Describe media influences on their perceptions of people and places in Canada.

### Literacy with ICT

- Consider the big ideas from the *Continuum for Literacy with ICT Across the Curriculum*.
  - Plan and Question
  - Gather and Make Sense
  - Produce to Show Understanding

- Communicate
- Ethics and Responsibility

### **Background for Teachers**

The Media Literacy Network has some background information for teachers about stereotypes: [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/teaching\\_backgrounders/stereotyping/stereotypes\\_backgrounder.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/teaching_backgrounders/stereotyping/stereotypes_backgrounder.cfm).

### **Activate**

#### **Idea #1**

Use Guided Discussion to introduce the concept of stereotyping. Ask students to brainstorm words to describe a *princess*. (She will most likely be portrayed as young, pretty, beautifully dressed, and wealthy.) Point out that they have created a stereotype princess. Together, define "stereotype."

<sup>2</sup>Using Disney films such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, *The Little Mermaid*, *The Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas* as examples, ask students to brainstorm words to describe the following:

- The handsome prince
- The step-mother
- The villain (male/female)
- The hero
- The heroine
- Mothers
- Fathers

Once you have created words to describe these characters, ask your class if they can think of any characters from these movies that *don't* fit into a stereotypical role. (For example, the wicked step-mother in *Snow White* is very beautiful, even though she is evil; Belle is smart, as well as beautiful.)

<sup>2</sup>Using films such as the *Shrek* series, ask students to think of characters from these movies that do not fit into a stereotypical role, and why they do not.

#### **Idea #2**

As a class, listen to the song "Blurred Images" written by Ryan Miller and his grade 4 and Grade 5 students at Brooklands School in Winnipeg, Manitoba. (Found at <http://blurredimages.wikispaces.com>). Discuss with your students what they think the song is about and have them brainstorm their own questions that they might ask adults and Media about the things they see and hear.

<sup>2</sup>In order to show feature films legally in a classroom, a school or school division must acquire a public performance rights license. For information about how to obtain a public performance rights license visit:  
[http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/iru/policies/public\\_performance.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/iru/policies/public_performance.html)

## Acquire

### Idea #1:

Use guided discussion to talk to students about stereotypes and gender roles. Review with students the list of words they created to describe a princess. Ask them “*what if*” questions based upon some of the brainstormed words. For example,

- What if a princess did not like to wear beautiful dresses and instead wanted to run around outside and play in the mud making mud pies? Is this okay? Is she still a princess?
- What if a princess had no prince to save her? What could she do?
- What if a princess was not beautiful? Does this matter, so what? What makes someone beautiful?

After each “*what if*” question, ask students “Would she still be a princess?” Follow-up with a discussion around such questions as: Is a real princess different than the stereotype? How? Is a stereotype a “real” person?

Read *The Paper Bag Princess*, by Robert Munsch, to your class. Possible discussion questions:

- How is Elizabeth different from the stereotype princesses that we talked about earlier?
- How is Prince Ronald different from the handsome princes in movies such as *Snow White* or *Cinderella*?
- Are *The Paper Bag* characters like anyone that you know? In what ways are they like real people?
- What do you think of these characters? Do you like them? Why? Or why not?

Now relate this back to your students’ lives. Present students with a variety of stereotypical statements (and/or images) about boys and girls, and then work with students to refute the “truth” of the stereotypes.

For example,

- Put a stereotypical statement up, such as “Boys like to play hockey and Girls like to dance”; possible questions to ask students
  - What do you think this statement means?
  - How does this statement make you feel?
  - Does this mean that girls cannot play hockey and boys cannot dance?
  - Is this statement true for everyone?
- Ask students if they can think of examples in their own lives that prove that this stereotype is not true for ALL boys and girls.
- You could also show the class a picture of the Women’s Olympic Hockey Team and pictures of men dancing (such as from the TV program “So You Think you Can Dance?” or “America’s Best Dance Crew”) and possibly ask:

- Is hockey only a “boy” thing? (No, it is something that both girls and boys (all humans/people) may or may not enjoy.)
- Is dancing only a “girl” thing? (No, dancing is something that both girls and boys (all humans/people) may or may not enjoy. )

Repeat by showing other examples of stereotypical statements and images about boys and girls, and then follow this up with examples in real life that demonstrate that the stereotype is not true for everyone. Involve students by asking them for examples from their own lives, family, or what they have seen on TV shows, movies, or read in stories, nursery rhymes, etc. that show stereotypical and non-stereotypical roles of girls and boys (men and women).

Guide the discussion to help students develop the realization that if we can recognize a stereotype for what it is (a stereotype) then we do NOT have to let it define us; it is “not the boss” of us. We are free to be whatever we want to be. Have students create a poster of themselves describing the “real” them, showing all the things that they like and dislike and gifts they have (or things that are special about them).

### **Idea #2:**

Students go on a Scavenger Hunt around their classroom looking for items that they classify as being a “boy” item or a “girl” item. Have them check out the classroom library for books; their own lunch kits, backpacks, shoes/boots, t-shirts etc. to find items. Afterwards, have the students, with their items, sit down together.

- As class look at and discuss each item found. Hold up an item and ask:
  - Is this item for a boy or a girl?
  - Why do we think it is for a boy/girl?
  - What does this image say about a girl/boy?
- Record under a BOYS or GIRLS heading the message the students think the image is saying about a boy/girl.
- For example, a shoe with an image of Spiderman is classified as a “boy” item by the class. Why? *Because boys like Spiderman. Why do boys like Spiderman? He is cool, he can do things like jump from building to building with a web, and he can capture bad guys with his web.* So what does this image on the side of a shoe say about boys? Record under a **Boys** heading – boys want to be like action heros. (brave, strong, etc.)
- Another example, hold up a lunch kit with a princess or a “Barbie” on it. Do you think this is a boy item or a girl item? Why is it a girl item? *It is pink, it has princesses, etc.* What does this say about girls? Record on a **Girls** heading: Girls favourite colour is pink, girls want to be like princesses, pretty, etc.
- Keep going through this process with other items. Periodically ask the students how this is making them feel seeing all of the stereotypical descriptions of boys and girls listed? Do they feel it is fair? (For example, are only boys supposed to be brave? What if you do not feel brave? Does that mean you are not “a proper man”? Are only girls supposed to be kind and caring?) After you have created the list, remind the students that what we are creating here is a stereotype of boys and girls.
- Now go through the list, and as a class pick words/phrases that could fit under both headings and write them under both. For example, we see on our list that hockey is written under the boys heading. Is hockey something that only boys enjoy? Ask students for examples in their own lives that show that both girls and boys may or may not enjoy hockey. Add hockey under the girl

heading. Continue to do this with different words/phases that are under each list.

- Finish by reminding students that the images on the items they found during their scavenger hunt create a stereotype about boys and girls. Possible discussion questions:
  - Are these stereotypes always true?
  - Can students think of other images that they could put on their personal items that represent their true selves?

### **Discussion and activity to follow either #1 or #2 above:**

Work with students to make the connection that is okay for us to be like the “stereotype”. There is nothing wrong with liking princesses and the color pink if you are a girl or sports and the color blue if you are a boy. Help them discover how a stereotype could be harmful. Possible questions to discuss:

- Do we like some of the same things that the stereotypical boys and girls like?
- Do we have some of the same qualities as the stereotypical boys and girls?
- Is this okay?
- YES! In many ways we are like the “stereotypical” boy or girl. But a stereotype is limited, in reality every one of us have so many more qualities and gifts than the stereotype. (A stereotype can be hurtful when we believe that its limited view is the only way we can act, or that we must live up to, or be like, the stereotype in order to be “real” girl or “boy”.)

Follow-up with connecting the genders by looking at how boys and girls are the same, how we are all human. Have students brainstorm and list all the things that are similar to boys and girls (all human beings). For example, we all want to be loved, respected, cared for, given attention, play outside, choose which sports we want to play, have the right to do or try anything we would like to try etc.

Have students create posters that represent the many ways all people are alike, whether they are girls or boys.

### **Apply**

Create a Class Book: Students draw or paint a picture of themselves and something they enjoy/like and/or are good at. Students write (or have someone scribe) a phrase or sentence to accompany their image. Compile all of the pages together to create a class book called “Meet the Real Kids of “Grade 2 B” Class”. (Extension: This book could also be made and shared electronically using software such as *Power Point*, *Kidspiration*, *Kid Pix*, *Photo Story*, etc.)

Write a Song: Have students create the words for a song about all the things they like to do, whether they are boys or girls, and/or ways they can feel good about themselves. Set the words to music from a well know song that your students enjoy. For example, “Row Row Row Your Boat”, “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” or “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” (Extension: The song could be recorded with software such as *Audacity* (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) or *GarageBand* and shared with others.)

Put on a Class Talent Show: Have students put on a talent show where they show off their strengths and talents. Invite other classes or parents/grandparents to attend.

Take Action and Teach Others: Have students create and put on a play/skit that teaches other kids about stereotypes in the media and about how to feel good about their own gifts/talents. Invite other children to think about how they are special.

Take Action and Teach Others: Have students create a game where the players have to look at an image or a description of a person and guess if the person is a boy or a girl. This could also be created as a book instead of a game format.

For older students: As a class, brainstorm stories where there are traditional or stereotypical portrayals of characters. Fairy tales such as *Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* are good examples. Divide class into groups. Each group is to choose a story from those that the class has brainstormed. Stories that are chosen should be relatively straightforward, with clearly-defined characters. Each group is to act out the story that they have chosen without using stereotypes. For example, they could perform Cinderella with Cinderella as a well-meaning, but somewhat flawed character and the wicked step-mother and step-sisters as victims. They could portray the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk as a nice guy minding his own business who is robbed by Jack, the juvenile delinquent.

Extensions for older students:

Spend some time discovering how animals are stereotyped in stories. Students research the actual habits of an animal that has been stereotyped and compare the stereotype image to the real animal in a presentation to the class.

Discuss perspective with older students. Have them think about how the story of the three little pigs changed when it was told from the perspective of the wolf. How might stories such as Cinderella or The Little Mermaid change if they were told from the perspective of a wicked step sister or Ursula? Invite students to create their own unique versions of popular stories from the perspective of a minor character, antagonist, or even an object.

**Blurred Images Challenge** - <http://blurredimages.wikispaces.com>

We would like to hear about and see what your students have been learning about gender and media. We invite you and your students to "share" your learning with us at the Blurred Images Challenge (<http://blurredimages.wikispaces.com>). We will post your entry in the online Gallery to share with other students and educators across the province! Please note that all entries need to meet the following criteria in order to be posted in the Gallery:

**1. Credit Your Sources**

- o Make sure that you credit any source of information or data that you have used to create your presentation or video.

**2. Is your work free of copyright violations?**

- o Where did you get the images/music for your work?
- o If you used someone else's work did you seek their permission and have that permission in writing?
- o The best way to avoid copyright issues is to create your own images/music or use Creative Commons (<http://creativecommons.ca>) to find images/video and sites like Jamendo (<http://www.jamendo.com>) to find Creative Commons licensed music.

- If you do use Creative Commons, please make sure you follow the conditions that are attached to the image or music
- 3. If submitting a **video**, it should be **no longer than 3 minutes**
- 4. Use **first names** only, when:
  - you list the names of students who created the work
  - you create a video and have other students "acting" in your video

<sup>1</sup> This learning experience is an adaptation and expansion of the ***Once Upon a Time Lesson Plan*** created by the **Media Awareness Network**. © 2010 Media Awareness Network, [www.media-awareness.ca](http://www.media-awareness.ca), adapted with permission. The original lesson plan can be found at: [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/lessons/elementary/gender\\_portrayal/once\\_upon\\_a\\_time.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/lessons/elementary/gender_portrayal/once_upon_a_time.cfm)