Middle Years – An Exploration of Gender Portrayal and Media

Grades: 5 - 8

Overview
Students are encouraged to develop their awareness and critical thinking about the hidden messages that are often found within popular media. They will examine the media with which they come into contact, and learn to recognise values or points of view that may be embedded in the messages. They will discuss whether or not they agree with the message they uncover. They will think about their own perception of gender stereotypes: those learned as children and those presented by the media – film and television, music, the Internet, and magazines.

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
- 1.2.4 Extend Understanding
- 3.1.3 Contribute to Group Inquiry
- 5.1.2 Relate Texts to Culture
- 5.1.3 Appreciate Diversity
- 5.2.3 Use Language to Show Respect

Physical Education/Health
- K.5.5.E.3a
  Identify influences (e.g., family, friends, role models, religion, culture, media, advertising and videos, social trends, fashion…) on sexuality and gender roles.
- K.5.5.E.3b
  Identify how social and cultural influences affect sexuality and gender roles (i.e., similarities and differences, such as cultural rituals and traditions).
- K.4.6.A.1
  Describe individual characteristics (e.g., gender, race, family, religion, community, appearance, interests, hobbies, preferred learning approaches…) that contribute to the development of personal identity, self-confidence, and self-efficacy.
- K.4.6.B.1a
  Identify the influences (e.g., family beliefs/values, role models, peers, advertising, television, movies…) that help or hinder responsible, social decision making (e.g., choosing friends, choosing activities, communicating with others…).
- K.5.7.E.3b
  Identify the effects of social influences (e.g., styles related to dress, hair, make-up, jewellery; cultural rituals; gender equity; harassment, nudity; violence against women…) on sexuality and gender roles.
- K.4.8.A.1
  Examine the effects of stereotyping based on a variety of factors (e.g., gender, age, race, roles, media influences, body type, sexual orientation, source of income…), and ways (e.g., set/review personal and group norms, standards…) to promote acceptance of self and others.
- K.5.8.C.1b
  Explain influences (i.e., healthy eating, regular activity, media, healthy body image) on growth and development during adolescence.

Social Studies
- S-105 Recognize bias and discrimination and propose solutions.
- S-303 Evaluate personal assumptions based on new information and ideas.
- S-311 Analyze prejudice, racism, stereotyping, or other forms of bias in media and other information sources.
- S-405 Articulate their beliefs and perspectives on issues.
- 7-KI-008 Describe the influence of various factors on personal identity.

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
    - Social Implications
    - Collaboration

Teacher Tip for Teaching about Media Literacy:
Please read "Essential Questions for Teachers", pg. 10, from Literacy for the 21st Century: An Orientation and Overview found at:
http://www.medialit.org/sites/default/files/01_MLKorientation.pdf.

Activate

Idea #1
As a class, watch (WITHOUT AUDIO) the Media Monkey public service announcement from Concerned Children's Advertisers (http://longlivekids.ca/hello.html or http://play.longlivekids.ca/posts/10-media-monkey-play-video). (You may need to watch the video a few times together as it is only 30 seconds long.)
Follow-up by asking your students to make predictions about what they think the video is about. Possible questions to ask:
- What is the girl doing?
- What is the monkey doing?
- What do you think the video is about?
- What point do you think the video is trying to make? (What is the message?)
- Who made the video and why?
- Why do think this video is called "Media Monkey"? What is a "Media Monkey"?

Now watch the video with the AUDIO ON. Return to the students' predictions and ask students if they want to make any changes, now that they have heard the audio along with viewing the video. Continue the discussion to focus on some of the details of the video. Possible questions to discuss:
- What images was the monkey trying to hide?
- Why would the monkey be trying to hide these images?
- What are the images telling the girl she should be like?
- Imagine that you remake this video featuring a boy. What images might the monkey try to hide from a boy?
- If you were a "media monkey" for someone else (or yourself) from what sort of images would you try to protect someone by hiding them from their view?
- What is the purpose of this public service announcement?

- What is meant by the phrase "think for yourself"?
- How can you be your own "media monkey", and think for yourself about images you see, things you hear, etc.?

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. Brainstorm with them questions they might ask adults and Media about the messages they see and hear.

Acquire

Idea #1
As a follow-up to idea #1 (under the Activate heading), start a discussion with your students about how they are constantly bombarded by messages from the media, and about how those messages affect them. A possible discussion sequence could be:
1. Have students list examples of all of the different types of media with which they come in contact in their own lives. (TV shows they watch; music they listen to; movies they have seen or know about, websites they frequent, video games they play, print advertisements they have seen, signs at the mall, posters in clothing stores. flyers that come to their house, magazines at check out stands, billboards on the street, etc.)
2. Discuss whether media sends a message about what is important or should be valued by the viewer of the media. Are there embedded messages (values or points of view) in everything we see and hear in the media? Using the list of media the students created in the step above, and/or using examples you have provided (Possible resource: consult you school or public library for copies of popular magazines.), have them think about any messages that are embedded within the media. Think Aloud and model how to search for the hidden message within a media. Ask students to share examples from their own experience, of the hidden messages (the values or points of view) they feel the media is sending.
3. Discuss why there are hidden messages in the media. Talk about whether these messages say anything about gender roles. Are the messages the same for young women and young men? Have students analyse different examples of media, for the message each sends about young women and young men.
4. Create two lists. One list contains messages we receive about young men and the other a list of messages we receive about young women. Explain that often the messages we receive are stereotypical. And that the lists represent stereotypes about boys and girls.
5. Work as a whole class to define "stereotype". Possible discussion questions:
   o Is there some truth to the stereotypes about girls and boys?
   o Is the stereotype the whole truth?
   o Is it possible to attain the characteristics of the stereotype? Explain.
   o How might someone feel if they thought that the stereotype was the "ideal" and they did not measure up?
   o What is a realistic depiction of girls and boys (or people in general?)

- o How are boys and girls the same? What are their common needs, goals, likes and dislikes?
- o Can you think of examples in your own lives (people you know, examples you have seen or heard) of where the stereotypes do not apply (are refuted)? How about people you look up to, or who are role models in your lives, what characteristics do they have that you would like to model?
- o Can you think of examples in the media where the messages portray more realistic depictions of girls and boys?
6. As a follow-up, ask students to find and collect examples of media in their own lives that show stereotypical depictions of young women and young men and examples that show realistic depictions of both. Have students share and explain their choices.

Idea #2
As a class, watch the video "Evolution" from the Dove Real Beauty Campaign (time: 1:15). (http://www.dove.us/#/features/videos/default.aspx[cp-documentid=7049579]) Discuss with students their reactions to the video. Other possible discussion questions:
- ▪ Ask your students to share examples that they have seen of how beauty is depicted in the media. What impact did those depictions have on them? Ask for examples of positive depictions of beauty if only negative ones are provided.
- ▪ Ask students to identify potential outcomes for both girls and boys if they believe the depictions of beauty, they listed above, are "ideal". (For example, low self-esteem, eating disorders, taking steroids, etc. for the stereotypical depictions.)
- ▪ Have students work in groups to brainstorm and create depictions of what "real" beauty means to them (or what they wish "real beauty" meant in their world). Have students share their creations and describe them. (Extension: have students consider the definition of beauty in other cultures and throughout history.)
- ▪ Create a T-Chart with your students (an example shown below) where they list some stereotypical definitions of beauty on one side, and their own definitions of beauty on the other. Then discuss as a class the "distortions" that occur between the two (represented by the grey dotted line), as the definitions "blur" together. Ask why they think these distortions are even an issue. List these distortions in the dotted gray cloud. Possible discussion prompts:
  - o Is there a grain of truth in the stereotypical definition(s)? Please explain your answer.
  - o Is there a grain of falsehood (or exaggeration) that distorts the truth? Please explain your answer.

Example

Stereotypical Definition of Beauty	Our Definition of Beauty
1. you must "look" a certain way to be beautiful	1. beauty comes from within

What distortions occur?
Why is this even an issue?

1. Beauty has been linked **only** to "looks". Many of the "looks" are unattainable. "Looks" are dependent upon genetics and are "fleeting", as people age and their "looks" change. Aging is a normal human process. "Looks" are not the **only** form of beauty. We can also expand our definition of what "looks" we think are "beautiful".

(Another option is to use the ideas from Media Literacy Network's **Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty** *Teachable Moment* at http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/teachable_moments/campaignrealbeauty.cfm for a discussion about body images and "real" beauty.)

Optional follow-up to either of the ideas listed above:
As a class, visit and analyse how men and women are portrayed on the AXE website. (Only do this if you feel it is appropriate with your particular class and situation, as many images and videos on the website contain adult content. **Preview the website ahead of time** to decide what you will and will not show.) Or, just ask your students to tell you about the AXE commercials they have seen and talk about the portrayal of men and women in those advertisements. Possible follow-ups:

- Have a discussion with your students about the marketing campaign for this product. Why is it so powerful?
- Do an experiment with the class: get some AXE and spray a little on a stuffed animal or doll (or a boy if you have a willing volunteer) and have the girls and boys sniff the subject to get their reactions. Did anyone go "crazy"? Then spray on a lot, does it make a difference? (Warning, only do the previously mentioned experiment if you and your students do not have any allergies to scents.)
- Look at the "responsible use" section of the AXE website. Ask your students, why it is even there if no one pays any attention to it?

Apply
Have students watch the "We are Girls" video by Concerned Children's Advertisers (http://play.longlivekids.ca/posts/45-we-are-girls-psa). Students then create their own "We are Girls", "We are Boys", or "We are Kids" videos.
View some of the other videos available (http://play.longlivekids.ca/webinar) for alternative videos to model. (Students could use software such as *Photo Story*, *Movie Maker*, or *iMovie* to create their videos.)

Students create comparative collages of images and words. One side of the collage contains stereotypical messages about boys or girls, and the other side contains messages with realistic expectations (or messages that refute the stereotypes) about themselves. (One side of the collage could be the "Who they say I should be" side and the other side could be the "Who I want to be" side.) (Students could use *Glogster EDU* (http://edu.glogster.com/) if they wanted to create a digital poster.)

Brainstorm with students ways that they can "Take Action" to help themselves and other kids to not buy into the stereotypical messages about gender, beauty, body image, etc. and/or ways to influence positive changes in the way girls and boys are depicted in the media. Possible ideas might include:

- Students create a public service announcement designed to help their peers, or younger children, to stop, think and act appropriately when confronted with potentially damaging gender portrayals. (Students could use *Photo Story*, *Movie Maker*, or *iMovie* to create their videos.)

- Students create a school hallway bulletin board where they post positive messages and realistic images of girls and boys and people in general.

- Students create affirmations or motivational posters with messages about accepting yourself as you are and feeling good about yourself. (They could use *Wordle* (http://www.wordle.net/) to create an affirmation or *Big Huge Labs – Motivator* (http://bighugelabs.com/) to create motivational posters.)

- Students create a song or rap about the issues that they would like to share with other kids. (They could use *Audacity* (http://audacity.sourceforge.net/) or *GarageBand* to record their song.)

- Students develop and implement an ongoing (over a short period of time, maybe a week) school-wide positive PR campaign about media awareness and gender issues. Students could have a different activity for all students to participate in for each day of the week, make daily announcements over the PA system, present their songs, plays or other items at a school assembly, etc.

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.
   o 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:
   o you list the names of students who created the work
   o you create a video and have other students "acting" in your video