

TITLE WOMEN & MEDIA

GRADES 9-12

SUBJECT AREAS

English

History

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students examine the role of women in the media; critique and discuss different portrayals of women in popular culture and focus on how these reflect larger societal and cultural values; engage in small group discussions that focus on the way women are judged; examine their own values; write a letter expressing their viewpoints; and critically examine different catalysts for changes in the way women are portrayed in different eras. Two versions of the fairy tale Cinderella depicting different perspectives of women's roles are explored.

MEDIA COMPONENTS

People's Century: Half the People videotape. In order to most effectively use this lesson, the videotape should be previewed by the teacher, then shown to the class. The film may be viewed in its entirety, or specific segments may be chosen to complement the specific themes addressed in this lesson.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Students will collect data which portrays women in the media.
2. Students will discuss the values underlying the portrayal of women in media.
3. Students will conduct Internet research.
4. Students will critique varied media portrayals of women.
5. Students will write a letter expressing their viewpoints.
6. Students will complete a survey.
7. Students will create a mock television commercial.
8. Students will read two versions of the fairy tale Cinderella and discuss the cultural assumptions about women that are evident in each.
9. Students will research, discuss and critique the role of toys in popular culture.

STANDARDS

LANGUAGE ARTS: GRADE 9

READING

- Analyze reading.

WRITTEN and ORAL COMMUNICATION

- Identify and correctly use the mechanics of punctuation, spelling, sentence construction and grammar to produce legible, appropriate manuscripts.

LANGUAGE ARTS: GRADE 11

READING

- Analyze the features and rhetorical devices of different types of public documents.
- Analyze an author's beliefs about a subject.
- Critique the validity of arguments in public documents.

WRITTEN and ORAL CONVENTIONS

- Demonstrate control of spelling, grammar, diction, paragraph and sentence structure, and an understanding of English usage.

WRITING

- Demonstrate an understanding of the elements of discourse in narrative, expository, persuasive, or descriptive writing assignments.

HISTORY: GRADE 11

SOCIAL SCIENCE

- Federal civil rights and voting rights developments.

HISTORY: GRADE 12

SOCIAL SCIENCE

- Evaluate, take and defend positions on the fundamental values and principles of civil society.

PREP FOR TEACHERS

1. Preview the videotape **Half the People**.
2. Bookmark the following Web sites:

<http://www.about-face.org/>
<http://www.about-face.org/gallery/index.html>
<http://www.missamerica.org/>
<http://www.hiyah.com/library/cinderella.html>
<http://women3rdworld.miningco.com/newsissues/women3rdworld/cs/marriagecustoms/index.htm>
<http://www.barbie.com/>
<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~tsawyer/barbie/barb2.html>
<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~tsawyer/barbie/barb3.html>
<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~tsawyer/barbie/barb4.html>
<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~tsawyer/barbie/barb5.html>

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY: SETTING THE STAGE

ACTIVITY ONE

1. Ask each student to bring in five advertisements that contain images of women. Divide the class into small groups to share and discuss the ads. Have each group find commonalities and differences among the ads.
2. Have each group share what they found with the larger class.
3. Discuss the following questions with the students:
 - What are some of advertisers' motives for the way they portray women in advertisements?
 - How are men and women portrayed differently in advertisements?
 - How can people become more aware of how women are used in advertising?

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY ONE: A CRITICAL LOOK

This activity centers on a Web site that focuses on how women are portrayed in advertisements. It contains a gallery of advertisements and what the authors find objectionable about each.

1. Share the following Web site with the class: <http://www.about-face.org/>. Click on <http://www.about-face.org/gallery/index.html> and discuss the ads.

2. Divide the class into small discussion groups. Have the groups review each using the following questions as guides:

- Are women portrayed in a positive manner?
- Does the advertisement contain an overt or underlying threat of violence?
- Is there a realistic connection between the actual product and the woman in the ad? (e.g., a scantily clad woman selling a software program).
- Many advertisements fail to show women looking directly into the camera. What do you think some of the reasons for this might be? Are the women in your ads looking into the camera?
- What are the larger cultural values that each advertisement represents?

3. Have each group present the content of their discussion to the whole class.

4. Ask each student to choose one advertisement (either from the Web site or from the class collection) and complete one of these writing tasks.

- Write a letter about the ad to a fourth- or fifth- grade girl, explaining your view of what it says about women.
- Write a letter to one of the advertisers expressing your views of their advertisement.

ACTIVITY TWO: HOW MUCH HAVE THINGS CHANGED?

Many students hold the perception that things have changed dramatically for women since the beginning of the 1900s. In this activity, students are encouraged to think critically about the idea that in today's world women are judged solely on their accomplishments.

1. Show the segment from **Half the People** that contains the Maxwell House coffee advertisement (about seven minutes into the film). Ask the students the following questions:

- What do you think these advertisements say about women?
- How are women's roles different today?

2. Ask the students if they agree or disagree with the following statement:

- In today's world women are judged solely on the basis of their accomplishments.

3. a) Write the following statements on the board and have the students copy them.

I dress to please _____.

If a friend criticizes my looks, I _____.

I think beauty pageants are _____.

I think fashion magazines are _____.

People who pay attention to their looks are _____.

I am attracted to people who _____.

b) Divide the class into pairs to share their answers with each other.

4. Rewrite the Maxwell House ad.
5. Divide the class into small groups. Ask each group to create a list of factors by which people can measure their performance as employees. (e.g., attitude, motivation, punctuality, knowledge, etc.).
6. Create a class list based on the individual groups' categories.
7. Visit the Web site of the Miss America Pageant at <http://www.missamerica.org/>. Review the categories in which contestants are judged. Compare this list with the list generated in number 6 above.
8. Discuss the differences between the lists. Ask the class what role they think gender plays in how people are judged.
9. Revisit the advertisements that students brought to class and discuss students' views as to whether advertisements have substantially or fundamentally changed since the 1950s based on their viewing of **Half the People**.
10. Have students write and act out a current version of the Maxwell House commercial that reflects their understanding of women's roles today.

ACTIVITY THREE: EXPECTATIONS AND FAIRY TALES

1. Students should respond to the following question in their writing journals:
 - What are your expectations for the division of gender roles in relationships?

Divide the class into pairs and have them share their responses.

2. Read and listen to a traditional version of **Cinderella** from the Web site <http://www.hiyah.com/library/cinderella.html>.
3. Share with the class Ellen Jackson's book **Cinder Edna**, which compares the traditional story of Cinderella with the nontraditional story of Cinder Edna, who takes a more active role in her own happiness.
4. Create a class chart comparing the two tales.
5. Discuss the underlying assumptions about gender expectations that each tale represents.
6. Small groups should share what they have learned with the larger class.

CROSS-CURRICULAR EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY ONE: SPORTSWOMEN

1. Visit the Web site Sports Illustrated for Women at <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/siforwomen/> and write a critique of how women are portrayed.
2. Find an advertisement or Web site that shows a different portrayal of women than the Sports Illustrated for Women site. Present your findings to the whole class.

ACTIVITY TWO: INFLUENTIAL WOMEN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

1. Have students read a biography of an influential woman and prepare a Women's Hall of Fame display for the class. Amelie Welden's **Girls Who Rocked the World** is a good source to begin with.

ACTIVITY THREE: EXPANDING THE DREAM

1. Read the book **Fanny's Dream**, by Caralyn Buehner, which is a modern twist on the fairy tale **Cinderella**. Create an artistic response that represents your interpretation of the book.