



Portrayals of Women on Television

Pre-Visit Activity

Goal:

Gender stereotypes are so prevalent in our society today that many go unnoticed or unrecognized. This activity will help students begin to look at these stereotypes with a critical eye, bringing to light some of society's expectations, ideals, and hopes for women. It will also give students a chance to think of what characteristics they personally admire in women, and how it compares to society's perceptions.

Materials:

- A variety of magazines, one for each student
- Classroom Space

Procedure:

Hand out a magazine to each student and have them comb through, pulling out any advertisements that highlight one particular gender. After several are collected (with representations of both men and women), post these advertisements on the board or put them in a collection in the middle of the room where students can easily look closely at them. After giving them time to independently observe the collection of advertisements, ask them what they notice. Use the following questions to guide the conversation:

- What do you notice about the representations of women versus men?
- How would you describe the women in the ads? The men?
- What character traits or descriptive words could you use to explain these women?
- What traits do you think society values most in women?
- Who are these advertisements targeted to? How can you tell?
- What products/services are the women's advertisements selling? How about the men's advertisements?
- What is the significance of what each gender is used to sell?

After fully discussing, ask the students to think of a woman they admire. What are traits or characteristics they would use to describe these women they are thinking of? How is this different from the women in the advertisements?

Evaluation:

This discussion-based activity should help students develop a critical eye towards media images, as they look closely and think analytically about the advertisements. By talking about it as a group, the class should be able to use each other to stimulate deeper conversation, with everyone's ideas building on top of each other. This activity will help prepare students for their Paley Center class, as they open themselves up to media analysis and questioning of norms and expectations for women.

Going Further:

Ask students to bring in an image of a woman they admire, and another print advertisement featuring a woman. Have them put the images side by side and note similarities and differences in how the women are represented. What descriptive words come to mind? What qualities does each woman seem to possess? Have the students split into pairs and share their two images with each other, further discussing any other ideas they have.



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Post-Visit Activity

Goal:

After their class at The Paley Center, students will have a better understanding of how to analyze characters on television, specifically looking at how women are portrayed in certain roles. Students will now have the chance to use their new skills to take a deeper look into one of their own favorite shows. This activity will further develop their critical viewing skills, as they approach something familiar with a new lens.

Materials:

Worksheet | Writing Implement | Television (at home)

Procedure:

In class, ask students to name some of the shows they love to watch on a regular basis. After generating a list of popular shows, have students name the female roles on these programs. Ask students to pick one show from the list, and to look at it with a critical eye. If they are able to, watching parts of it more than once could be very helpful. Using the skills they learned at The Paley Center, have students critique one of the female characters on the show. Students should use the worksheet associated with this activity to help guide their analysis and inspire them to look closer at this character.

Have students bring their worksheets to class the next day and see which shows/characters they chose to analyze. Separate the class into smaller groups, grouping together those who watched similar genres (i.e., reality, dramas, comedy, sci-fi). Students should share their worksheet findings and additional thoughts within these groups.

Some questions they should consider:

- Did they have similar findings?
- What differentiated these shows/characters from each other?
- Overall, were the representations of women positive or negative? What makes them say this?

After discussing, bring the class back together and have each group report their findings. As a class, discuss how the portrayals of women vary from genre to genre.

Evaluation:

After this activity, students should be comfortable assessing television programming with an analytical eye. By applying what they learned at The Paley Center for Media to their own personal viewing experience at home, this process should become more natural. By developing this new lens, students will become more active, critical viewers, rather than passive observers of media representations.

Going Further:

This process can be continued with a variety of topics and representations in media. Beyond portrayals of women, students may also look at how race or culture is represented in mainstream media outlets, using the critical viewing skills they have honed in these activities and experiences. The worksheet and activity can be adapted to apply to several different topics. The more chances students have to practice and develop these analytical skills, the more informed, skeptical viewers they will become.



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Name _____

Date _____

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN TELEVISION

Watching one of your favorite television programs, choose one of the female characters to watch more closely. Try to approach the show with the analytical eye you began to develop at The Paley Center and use your analysis skills to critique the character. Use the below questions to guide your analysis.

Which television show and character did you choose? Briefly describe what happens in the episode.

What is this character's main role on the show? _____

List five adjectives or character traits you would use to describe this female character.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What does the woman look like? Is she pretty, ugly, skinny, large, busty? _____

Are any of her physical features or characteristics exaggerated? _____



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The Paley Center for Media

CLASS PROGRAM

Do you like this character? Why or why not? _____

Is this woman an admirable character? Why or why not?

If you could make any changes to improve this character, what would you change?

Research the creative team behind the television show, such as writers, producers and directors (note: websites like IMDB.com can be helpful for this task). Are most of the people behind the show women or men? How do you think this influences the show's character development? How would it be different if the opposite gender were in charge?
