

Elementary 1: Identity, Gender Stereotypes and Social Norms

Lesson 1: Gendered Toys

Aim/Rationale

Students will reflect on gender stereotypes that divide toys into “boy” or “girl” toys.

Learning Content

Learning Content in Sexuality Education

- 1) Give examples of the gender roles associated with girls and boys
- 2) Become aware of the different ways that femininity and masculinity can be expressed

Cross-Curricular Competencies

- 1) To use information
- 2) To exercise critical judgement
- 3) To construct his/her identity

Purpose

“Children develop stereotypical preferences and behaviours based on gender, starting in early childhood. These stereotypes can be useful in helping children differentiate what is considered feminine or masculine. However, [stereotypes] can be divisive for students, who are actually more similar than different regardless of gender. In addition to limiting boys and girls in how they express themselves, repeated exposure to gender stereotypes perpetuates sexist attitudes and beliefs, which, in turn, hinder the establishment of harmonious relationships between boys and girls.” (QEP, *Learning Content in Sexuality Education*)

The purpose of this lesson is to break down any stereotyped barriers that stop students from playing with certain toys. It teaches them that, regardless of their colors or their usual gender associations, toys are for everyone, and can be played with just the same by everyone. Ultimately, this lesson will allow students to be able to play with a wider variety of toys, and will prevent them from judging a toy by its appearance.

Relevant to:

- Promoting egalitarian relationships
- Fighting homophobia
- Preventing violence
- Respecting sexual diversity

Lesson

Materials

- 20-30 post-its or small pieces of paper, one for every student
- 5+ toys, preferably ones that are stereotypically gendered: cars/trucks, action figures, science and construction kits, Barbies, household toys (kitchen/cleaning tools), construction blocks, etc.
 - These could be found in your personal environment (family, friends, colleagues, etc.), or be borrowed from your school (after-school programs, kindergarten classrooms, etc.)
- 3 large boxes of any type (recycling boxes, storage boxes or even delimited areas on the floor)

Essential Questions

- Are some toys for girls? Are some toys for boys?
- Why do I think some toys are “girl” toys and others are “boy” toys?
- What if I’m a *[boy/girl]*, does that mean I’m not allowed to play with a *[boy/girl]* toy?
- What if I see a *[boy/girl]* play with *[boy/girl]*? Do I have feelings that make me believe they should or shouldn’t be playing with it?

Using Gender Inclusive Language

This lesson challenges stereotypes about gender, and will probably force you to use the labels “boy” and “girl” often. However, know that this creates a ‘gender binary’, meaning that it reinforces two distinct and opposite categories of gender. Keep in mind that gender is a spectrum, and it is not limited to just two possibilities. Whenever possible:

- Avoid imposing these gender based labels on your students (for example, “[Student A], you are a girl, what do you think?”)
- Avoid making statements that reinforce gender stereotypes (for example, “girls are more caring, so they play with dolls.”)

Since speaking about gender from a very neutral standpoint is so challenging due to years of cultural influences, it’s important to check in with yourself to ensure that stereotypical beliefs about gender

do not come into play. This allows students to come up with their own responses, free of the pressure to ‘fit’ into any suggested or implied norm.

Terms

No new terms or concepts need to be introduced for this lesson. However, depending on the group, you might want to introduce the definition or notion of stereotypes.

Stereotype: an assumption about a person based on how they look or how they act.

Assumptions based on gender can seem harmless, but they can hurt people by making them feel left out or abnormal.

Development/Teaching Methods [35 minutes]

1. Have students sit in an informal classroom layout where whole-group discussions are encouraged and distractions are kept to a minimum. This could be sitting in a circle, in a u-shape, or all together in the front.
2. Start the class with an imaginative role-play.
 - a. Have students close their eyes and imagine that they are in a store that has every single toy possible. Tell them to pretend that they are walking around and to observe all the toys. Prompt them with questions about the colours, the shapes, and the different kinds of toys available. Tell them to think of a section of toys they really don’t like and to run past that. Tell them to slow down in a section of toys they really like. Ask them to pick any toy they want and then let them open their eyes.
 - b. Have students share their experiences.
3. Create a poll about the students’ favourite toys, and analyze overall class trends
 - a. Distribute a post-it or a piece of paper to each student. Have them anonymously write or draw their favourite toy, and then immediately cover it so that others can’t see what they drew.
 - b. Draw two columns on the board, or create two piles on the floor or your desk. Label them “Boy” and “Girl”. Have students place their post-it or paper *face down* in the category they feel most comfortable identifying the toy with. Remind students to keep their responses hidden, and that if they don’t know which pile to put theirs in, they can always put it in between.
 - c. Ask students to make predictions. Prompt students with questions such as: What will be the most popular toy overall? What do you think we’ll find in the “boy” category? In the “girl” category? How do you know? What makes you think that? Make sure to acknowledge all their ideas enthusiastically, and write them all down on the board.
 - d. Then, flip their post-its or papers one by one. Look for patterns. What toys come up most often? What are some similarities between both categories? What are some differences? What are some similarities within each category? Differences? Are there any overall comments that we can make about toys in each category?
 - Although the students’ responses should be the starting point of this discussion, you can look for the types of toys in each category (are all the trucks in the boys’ column? Is the girls’ column the only one that has Barbies?), the colors usually associated with the toys in each category (especially if your students drew their responses), and their types of activities (are all the boys’ toys things you can build with? Are all the girls’ toys associated with household activities?)
 - e. Have students compare the actual responses to the predictions they made beforehand. Do our real responses go with or against what we thought before?

4. Get students talking in pairs about their favourite toy and why they have so much fun with it.
 - a. Tell them to explain all the cool things they can do with it, and how they usually play with it. Before letting them talk in pairs, give them appropriate tricks on how to actively listen to others (your classroom expectations).
 - While students are engaging with each other, prep the materials for the next activity
 - b. Ask them to share some of their reasons.
5. Discuss some preconceptions that students might have about gendered toys [15 mins]
 - a. Pull out one of the real, physical toys you brought in. Generate interest by asking them if they like this toy, or if they've seen it before. Students might get really excited about the toy. Perhaps tell them that they will have time to play with it at the end of class, or maybe leave some time for the students to pass it around before starting the activity.
 - b. Facilitate a discussion about this toy. Ask students questions such as:
 - Who is this toy for? Boys or girls? Why do you think that is?
 - Is it only this type of person that can play with it? Is there a rule that says it?
 - What about the colours of the toy? Do the colours change the way you want to play with it?
 - What if I'm a [boy/girl], does that mean I'm not allowed to play with it?
 - What if I see a [boy/girl] play with it? Do I have feelings that make me feel like they should or shouldn't be playing with it?
 - What can I say to someone who tells me I'm not allowed to play with a certain type of toy?
 - c. Pull out more physical toys. Allow students to think, share, and challenge some stereotypes about these toys.
 - d. Connect the discussion back to their favourite toys and to the reasons they like playing with them, whenever possible.

Note: not all questions need to be covered for every toy. Rather, they should build onto one another, and allow students to reflect on general themes. Students should be leading the discussion as much as possible, all while you prompt them with guiding questions. Let the students ask each other questions as well.

Culmination [10 minutes]

1. Place three large boxes in the front of the classroom. Label them "girl box", "boy box" and an "anyone box".
2. Have students place each toy from the previous activity into one of these boxes. To do so, you can place it yourself and ask the class to raise their hand and tell you where to place it. Alternatively, if a student truly wants to volunteer, they can come up and place it.
3. For each toy, allow students to explain their decision. Dissect these decisions, and try to challenge the students with reflective questions. For example, if the students agree to put a pink car into the "girl" box, ask: why would girls be the only ones allowed to play with a car? Wouldn't everyone like to play with it? Does it matter what colour it is? Again, try to keep a neutral tone and allow students to come to their own conclusions. The ultimate goal is to have all the toys in the "anyone" box, and all students agreeing.

Performance Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Reflect on how they define “girl” or “boy” toys
- Avoid categorizing toys into stereotypes
- Conclude that everyone can play with any toy

Assessment Ideas

1. Repeat the sorting activity (“Culmination”) the next day with a different set of toys. This time, ask fewer reflective questions to help the students.
2. Give students hands-on experience with different toys. Separate students into small groups. Give each group a different toy and allow some time to play with it. When allocated time is over, have the group talk about their experience with the toy. Ask them if they liked it, why, what did they do with it, if they would play with it again, etc. Then, rotate toys and repeat the exercise. Preferably, choose toys that seem stereotypically gendered.
3. Have students keep a weekly toy journal. Have two or three toys for students to choose from. Allow students time to play with the toys in class, or let a few students bring a toy home every week. Have them draw about their experiences, or have their parents take pictures (if it’s homework). At the end of the week, have the students share their picture journal with the class. See “Toy Journal” handout.
4. Organize a show & tell. Get students to bring a new toy to the classroom, one that they never played with before. Note: the point is not for students to *buy* new toys. Instead, suggest that they ask around immediate family (siblings), extended family (cousins), or even a friend if they could borrow one.



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