

History and Citizenship 3: History of Changing Body Ideals

Course

History and Citizenship Cycle 1

Unit/Social Phenomenon/Theme

A Social Phenomenon of the Present

Lesson and Focus

History of Changing Body Ideals

Trigger Warning

Discussions around body ideals and ableism

Aim/Rationale

Students will examine their conception of body ideals as well as those portrayed in art and advertising in the past and present. Students will learn that body ideals are constructed and differ in different cultural and historical moments. Students will analyse the effect of idealised body models and create strategies to combat the negative impacts of unrealistic body ideals.

Competencies

1. Examines social phenomena from a historical perspective.
2. Interprets social phenomena using the historical method.
3. Constructs their consciousness of citizenship through the study of history.

Materials

- Computer
- Projector/SMARTboard
- Mudd advertisement (see website)
- Historical Body Ideals Cards (see website, cards are printable or downloadable for distribution to students)
- Body Ideals throughout History handouts (see website)

Central Concepts

Society, Change, Continuity, Democracy, Diversity, Stakes, Territory

Hook

Create a class definition of the word *ideal*. Some key concepts to include are: perfection, a model to be imitated, exists only in the imagination.

Tell students to close their eyes and think of an ideal body. Once students have this image in their minds, ask students to volunteer what/whom they were thinking of. Was it someone famous? Are there common trends in what is considered ideal? Where do you get messages about what an ideal body looks like?

Development/Teaching Methods

- **Show students the Mudd ad from 2017**
 - Lead a class discussion about the image. Consider the following questions:
 - What kind of image is this? What is its purpose (art, advertising, etc.)?
 - What body ideals are presented in this ad? What specific characteristics are shown as beautiful? Consider aspects such as body type, body hair, sex characteristics, clothing, and hairstyles.
 - What does this image say about what people think is beautiful in 2017?
 - Are body ideals gendered in this image? Are there different standards for men and women?
 - Do you think these body ideals are attainable? Why or why not? Has this image been Photoshopped?
 - How do you think image makes people feel? Does it make people feel good or bad about themselves?
- **Divide the class into 6 expert groups. If you have a small class, consider adjusting the number of groups by removing some of the historical images cards.**
 - Assign each group one of the historical images. Give each student in the group a copy of their image card, or instruct them to download the Historical Body Ideals Cards on a tablet or smartphone from the Teacher's Sex Ed Toolkit website and to focus on a particular card. Distribute a Body Ideals throughout History handout to each student.
 - Tell students to work together to answer the questions in Part 1 of the Body Ideals throughout History handout. Inform students that they must **all** fill out Part 1 of the Body Ideals throughout History handout.
 - Inform students that they will share their image with some of their classmates. Give students a few minutes to select the most important information about their image and to prepare to present it to a small group.

- **Divide students into jigsaw groups**
 - Number each student in each of the expert groups. Tell students to form new groups based on their numbers. Ideally, there will be one representative from each of the expert groups in each jigsaw group.
 - Tell students that each person will have 2 minutes to share their image with the group. Experts must show their group the image and explain what body ideals are shown and how they are similar to/different than current Canadian body ideals.
 - Instruct students to complete the table in Body Ideals throughout History Part 2 as they listen to the experts.

Culmination

1. Ask a few students to share some of the interesting things they learned about what people considered an ideal body in different historical and cultural moments.
2. Ask a few students to share some of the impacts that these body ideals might have on people who lived in that time/place. Ask students whether people experience similar negative impacts today.
3. Lead a brainstorm about strategies students can use to combat any negative effects that representations of idealized bodies may have on themselves or on other teens. Some things to consider include:
 - Recognize that representations of bodies in the media and advertising do not reflect reality
 - Recognize that media images are manipulated to better meet ideals about what is considered beautiful
 - Recognize that images people post on social media are carefully constructed and chosen and do not usually represent how people look from day to day
 - Think of things you like about your body, including little details
 - Practice self-care by doing things that make you feel happy about your body (e.g. playing sports, wearing clothes you like, taking care of your hair and skin, pampering yourself, eating food that makes you feel good). Not everyone finds the same things make them feel happy!

Performance Objectives

By the end of this lesson:

- Students will be able to define the term *ideal* and provide concrete examples with relation to body ideals.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding that body ideals are different in different historical periods and in different cultures by analyzing images and completing a worksheet about them.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the negative impact that the representation of body ideals can have.
- Students will be able to express how body ideals are gendered.
- Students will be able to name strategies for developing a positive body image.

Assessment Ideas

- 1) Have students write a 5-paragraph comparison essay on historical and current beauty ideals. Students analyse what beauty ideals were acceptable at a specific time period, why, and how it contrasts to today.
 - 2) Have students create a poster or public service announcement about unrealistic body ideals in a specific historical and cultural moment.
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