

Blue Is for Boys, Pink Is for Girls ... or Are They?

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

NSES ALIGNMENT:

Students will be able to:

ID.8.INF.1 – Analyze external influences that have an impact on one's attitudes about gender, sexual orientation and gender identity.

TARGET GRADE: Middle School – Lesson 1

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- *3Rs Teacher's Guide* (pages 14-15 and 23-24)
- Projector and screen
- Computer with PowerPoint
- PowerPoint: "Boys or Girls"
- White board and markers
- Blank sheets of paper (one per student)
- **Homework:** "Martin and Tia" (one per student)

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

Review the section in the *3Rs Teacher's Guide* on "Using Ground Rules with this Curriculum" (pages 14-15). Establish ground rules, group agreements, or classroom norms with your students prior to instruction and refer to them as often as needed.

Read through the *3Rs Teacher's Guide* on teaching about gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation (pages 23-24).

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Name at least two stereotypes associated with why many people value the gender binary of "boys" and "girls."
[Knowledge]
2. Analyze at least two sources of gendered messages and expectations that exist within their culture. [Knowledge, Skill]
3. Describe at least one connection between gender expectations and discomfort around non-heterosexual orientations.
[Knowledge]

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him," using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom and should make adjustments accordingly.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Tell the students, "**We're going to be talking today about gender – how we understand our maleness, our femaleness or a combination of that – who we are and how we express that to others. Let's start with a quiz. I'm going to show you a series of pictures, and I'd like you to tell me whether, stereotypically, what you see is made for boys or girls. Now, notice I said 'stereotypically.'** So I'm asking you to think of which gender comes to your mind first when you see these."

On the white board, write the word "Boys" and underline it. About three

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feet to the right, write, "Girls" and underline it. As the students react to the PowerPoint, you will record their responses on this list.

Begin to show the PowerPoint "*Boys or Girls?*" At each slide, pause and ask the class whether they feel each of the images has to do more with boys or girls. As they assign a gender or genders to a particular image, record the name of the image under the appropriate header you wrote on the board (such as writing "truck" under "boys").

Once you have gone through Slide 9, ask the students to look at what's listed on the board. Ask, "**How did you know whether to name a particular thing as a 'girl' thing or a 'boy' thing?**" You will likely hear things like, "that's just the way things are," or "I know what I like and chose that way." (10 minutes)

STEP 2: Tell the class that you are going to ask them to come up with examples of messages they have received about gender so far in their lives. Explain that these messages don't necessarily need to be about their own gender, but they have to be about gender.

Provide an example from your own life growing up – or, if you do not wish to disclose, you may say, "**Sometimes, when there is more than one gender of child growing up in a family, they will be treated differently because of their parents' or caregivers' feelings about gender. For example, a boy in a family is allowed to stay out later with friends or have more independence than his sister, regardless of their ages. For this activity, using that case, I would write down 'it's more okay for boys to stay out late than it is for girls,' as well as 'parents/ caregivers' as the source of that message.**"

Break the class into pairs and distribute the blank paper. Then ask them to write down at least 5 messages as well as the source or sources of those messages. Tell them they have about 5 minutes in which to do this. (8 minutes)

STEP 3: After about 5 minutes, ask students to provide some of their responses. Write several of the messages on the board, and next to them, the source(s) of those messages. Ask other students whether they came up with similar messages and add check marks to show common experiences.

As students identify their sources of messages, feel free to ask whether other parts of the culture provide messages about gender, too. For example, if no one mentions religious institutions, ask whether they can think of any examples. If they can't, ask whether anyone is Catholic, and then whether women can be priests. If the media is not mentioned, ask what kinds of gender images they notice on TV, in movies, and in music videos.

Although each class may come up with different examples based on individual students' life experiences, some examples you may hear or probe for include but are not limited to:

MESSAGE

SOURCE(S)

- | | |
|--|--|
| • In male-female relationships, the guy should be the one to ask the girl out. | Parents, media |
| • Boys are supposed to be tough and not show emotion | Family, friends, media |
| • Boys are supposed to always want to have sex, and girls are supposed to not want to have sex and fight them off. | Family, culture, media, religious groups |

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(10 minutes)

STEP 4: Continue the PowerPoint to Slide 10. As you click through the slides, pausing briefly on each one, say, **"We talked earlier about certain things that people often associate with a particular gender. These pictures show some examples of people breaking those stereotypes. As you look at them, I'd like you to think about what your reaction is. How does seeing these make you feel?"**

Continue through Slides 11-18. After the last slide, ask the students for reactions. Be sure to notice any audible reactions you heard to the pictures; if there was a particularly strong reaction to any, return to that picture and ask about it.

Go back to the "Boys" and "Girls" list on the white board that you generated earlier in the lesson. Go through the "Boys" list one by one and ask whether each is something girls could do. Put a check mark by the ones the class feels girls can do as well.

Then go to the "Girls" list. Go through each one and ask whether each is something boys could do. Put a check mark by the ones the class feels boys can do as well.

Compare the two lists and ask the students what they notice. While every discussion will be different, more often than not, there will be more things on the boys list that are checked off as also being what girls can do than there will be things on the girls list that boys can do.

Notice this for the students, and ask them why. Ask, **"If a girl does any of the things on the boys list, what are the consequences for her?"** Most of these consequences identified will be positive – such as, "boys are funny – if girls are funny, they'll have more friends." Some may be negative – such as, "boys are smart – if girls are too smart, they won't get a boyfriend because boys don't want to be made to feel dumb."

Once you discuss the girls list, and ask, **"If a boy does any of the things on the girls list, what are the consequences for him?"** you will hear things like, "he'll be called a punk," "people might think he's gay," etc. After each reaction, ask, **"Why do you think that is? Why is it that people are impressed by a girl who's a good athlete, but wonder whether a boy who's a strong ballet dancer is gay?"**

Allow the students some time to wrestle with these concepts, both among themselves and with you. Say, **"We've been talking during class about messages people get on how they should act as boys and girls—but as many of you know, there are also people who don't identify as boys or girls, but rather as transgender or gender queer. This means that even if they were called a boy or a girl at birth and may have body parts that are typically associated with being a boy or a girl, on the inside, they feel differently. Continue the powerpoint through slides 19-21."**

Think, for a moment, about the experience of hearing these gendered messages and feeling like you were a different gender? If you felt on the inside like you were a girl, but everyone perceived you as a boy and pushed you to be really masculine; or you felt on the inside that you were a boy and people pushed you to be more feminine. Or if you felt like you were both boy and girl, or somewhere in between boy and girl. What do you think that would be like?" (20 minutes)

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Note to the Teacher: *If you have a student in class who is openly transgender, this could be a wonderful opportunity for that student to share first-hand experience of how they have been responding to gender messages. If you were to ask this student to speak to their experience, be sure to talk with them ahead of class, don't put them on the spot without asking for their permission first.*

STEP 5: Say, "We've talked about some really complicated issues today! Keep thinking about this stuff as you go through your own lives. The most important thing to keep in mind is that every person has a right to express their gender as it makes most sense to them. No one has the right to make fun of someone else for how they express their gender." Distribute the homework assignment "Martin and Tia" and ask them to complete and return it during the next class. (2 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The large group brainstorm and paired activity will achieve Learning Objectives 1 and 2. The discussion that follows, as well as the homework assignment will reinforce these and also address Learning Objective 3.

HOMEWORK:

Have students complete the "Martin and Tia" homework sheet, which provides two versions of the same story in which gender roles are flipped and asks students to react to them.

Martin and Tia
Homework (Lesson 8-1)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions:

- Read the following story about Martin and Tia.
- There are two versions of the story. Please read both, and then respond to the questions at the end.

VERSION ONE:

Martin and Tia go to the same school. One of Tia's friends tells her that she heard from her boyfriend's best friend that Martin likes Tia. Tia likes Martin too, but she would never say anything. She asks her friend to tell her boyfriend to say something to Martin, and that if Martin asked her out she'd say yes.

Martin hears from his friend that Tia is interested in him. He finds her outside of school at the end of the day and asks her if she wants to hang out during the coming weekend, and Tia says yes. When he asks her what she wants to do, Tia says, "I don't know, whatever you want."

Martin picks out a movie he's been wanting to see – the new Avengers movie. He texts Tia to meet him at the movie theater. When she gets there, he's already bought the tickets, then holds the door open for her. Tia is really not interested in seeing the Avengers movie but goes along with it because Martin has already bought the tickets. He buys them both popcorn, and when they sit down in the theater and the lights go down, Martin puts his arm around Tia. Tia really wants Martin to kiss her, but she doesn't say anything.

VERSION TWO:

Martin and Tia go to the same school. One of Martin's friends tells him that he heard from his girlfriend's best friend that Tia likes Martin. Martin likes Tia too, but he would never say anything. He asks his friend to tell his girlfriend to say something to Tia, and that if Tia asked him out he'd say yes.

Tia hears from her friend that Martin is interested in her. She finds him outside of school at the end of the day and asks him if he wants to hang out during the coming weekend, and Martin says yes. When she asks him what he wants to do, Martin says, "I don't know, whatever you want."

Tia picks out a movie she's been wanting to see – a love story that all her friends have said will make her cry like a baby. She texts Martin to meet her at the movie theater. When he gets there, she's already bought the tickets, then holds the door open for him. Martin is really not interested in seeing a romantic movie, but goes along with it because Tia has already bought the tickets. She buys them both popcorn, and when they sit down in the theater and the lights go down, Tia puts her arm around Martin. Martin really wants Tia to kiss him, but he doesn't say anything.

QUESTIONS:

1. Which of the versions feels more familiar or realistic? _____

2. Could Version Two ever happen in a relationship between a guy and a girl? Why or why not?

3. If you were to create your own version of this story, how would you combine the two? What would you change or keep? Why would you make these changes?
