



Instructor Guide

Unit 2: Lesson 3 The Importance of Representation in Pop Culture

Objectives:

- The learner will be able identify some of the benefits to individuals and society of having diverse heroes and characters represented in various forms of popular culture (movies, TV, and books) as well as the negative impacts to individuals and society of a lack of such representation.
- The learner will understand some of the harmful effects of stereotypical portrayals of girls, women, and various minorities in popular culture.

Time Needed: It is flexible. You can choose to do everything in this guide, or you might select just a few parts to do with the kids each day.

Materials, depending on which activities you choose:

- Whiteboard or screen on which to project videos
- Videos: *If She Can See It, She Can Be It* (1:22)
- 2-3-5 *Journal Reflection on Representation* handout – 1 per student (optional activity for older kids)
- For visual art activity, provide materials to make sock puppets:
 - Provide a variety of socks, ideally in shades of the following colors: black, brown, tan, pink, and white. You can invite kids to bring in socks from home in a variety of the same shades to represent different skin colors.
 - Craft glue, yarn, string and optional items such as pipe cleaners, googly eyes, buttons, and bits of fabric.
 - Markers for drawing on socks
- A copy of the following picture books to read aloud:
 - [The World Needs More Purple People by Kristen Bell and Benjamin Hart](#)
 - [I Am Every Good Thing by Derrick Barnes](#)
 - [Pink Is for Boys by Robb Pearlman](#)
- A copy of 2-3-4 *Sharing Circle Script for Importance of Representation*
- 2-3-6 *Why Representation Matters: A Collection of Articles* – 1 per student (optional – these can also be sent home as recommended reading for parents)
- 2-3-9 *Assessment: The Importance of Representation* – 1 per student

Fundamental Skills or Competencies: Self-Image; Self-Awareness; Self-efficacy, Social awareness, Appreciating diversity, Perspective-taking, Respect for others.

Part One: Watch Video on Importance of Representation

Start by watching the ***Importance of Representation Video for Kids***. If kids have trouble focusing, invite them to do 25 jumping jacks before you start the video. After watching the video, you can move into Part Two below.

Part Two: Discussions about Importance of Representation

Lesson Essential Questions: How does a lack of representation of girls, women, people of color, and other minority groups negatively impact all of us? Why is it important to individuals and society as a whole to have diverse representation of these populations in popular TV, movies, and books?

Introduction:

- Ask kids, “Who is shown most often as the hero or the main character on TV shows, movies, and books? What types of people?”
- Show the video from Seejane.org *If She Can See It, She Can Be It* video (1:22)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BumIt2pIRuw>
The video explains how women and girls, while making up roughly half the human population, are significantly underrepresented in the media and when they are in shows, the characters are often based on stereotypes. The video stresses the negative impact this has on girls, women, and society.
- After watching the video, ask kids:
 - Was there anything new you learned from the video? Did anything in the video surprise you?
 - In your favorite shows, how many of the main characters are girls?

Vocabulary: Discuss these terms with children to make sure they understand them.

- **marginalized** (adj.) – reduced to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group
- **stereotype:** false and oversimplified idea that all members of a group are the same and think and act in the same way (e.g., a racial/ethnic or gender stereotype).¹
- **bias:** a preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with fair judgment.
- **cisgender:** When your gender identity (how you feel) is the same as what doctors/midwives assigned to you when you were born (girl/boy or sex assigned at birth).

Key Concepts about Representation:

Key Concept One: There is a lack of diversity in entertainment media. The worlds that children and teens are exposed to in popular culture, through movies, TV, and books, can influence their self-concepts, self-esteem, and judgments about other people.

- Some types of people are easy to find in stories and books. For example, if you have white skin, and if you are a boy, there are many TV shows and movies where the heroes look like you. It feels good to see people that are the same as you! You can imagine growing up to be those heroes.
- Unfortunately, some people are not represented enough in tv, books, and movies, also known as the media. For example, there are not enough stories with characters that are Black, Brown, or Indigenous.
- There are not enough girls and women featured as main characters in stories. There are not enough Asian, Hispanic, and LGBTQ characters in the media. And how often do you see shows that feature people who use wheelchairs? Can you think of many movies that star characters who are blind or deaf?
- TV, movies, and shows largely have white cisgender male characters in lead roles.

- How do you think it feels to be underrepresented? It is hard to imagine you can be anything you want to be if you never see people that look like you in the books you read or in the shows you watch. This is why all different types of people need to be featured in stories.

Key Concept Two: Media images and stories exert a powerful influence in creating and perpetuating stereotypes and unconscious biases.

- Explain that since the 1960's, researchers have found that this lack of representation can be hurtful and very damaging to people who do not see themselves and their lives reflected in the books, movies, or TV programs available.
- Michael Morgan, a professor who has studied and authored dozens of reports on media effects on people, summarizes it this way. *"Stories affect how we live our lives, how we see other people, how we think about ourselves."*³
- Another researcher, Ana-Christina Ramon, adds: *"When you don't see people like yourself the message is: You're invisible. The message is: You don't count. And the message is: 'There's something wrong with me.'"*⁴

Key Concept Three: For all kids, on-screen representation serves as an important way to learn information about the world and other people. Stereotypical characters and cliched story lines can warp the viewer's perceptions of underrepresented groups.

- Over decades, researchers have found a correlation (or connection) between a range of topics as presented on TV – violence, integration, women's rights – and how people thought about those issues in real life. People who watch more TV embraced what researchers called the **'TV view of the world.'**⁵
- The people who write the stories also need to be careful not to rely on stereotypes when they DO include diverse representation. Stereotypes are labels and sets of beliefs about a whole group of people. Stereotypes can be harmful and can lead to bullying or mistreatment.
- TV and movies in particular reinforce people's conscious and unconscious biases against these underrepresented groups.⁵
- It is good for everyone to see many different types of people in the media. It helps people to learn about different cultures and ways of life.
 - Children with white skin need to see heroes with black and brown skin.
 - Cisgender boys need to see girls and transgender people in positions of leadership.
 - We all benefit from breaking free of stereotypes and increasing representation in the media.

Part Three: Activity Options

- *For a one-page brief summary of quick activity options, please see 2-3-3 *Quick Guide to Breakout Activity Options for Importance of Representation*

Activity Option 1: Representation Jump

- Have the kids for make a big circle. Explain to them that you are going to read different words and phrases out loud, and every time there is a word that represents them, they can jump towards the center. **Be sure to let them know that at any time, they can choose not to jump if they prefer to keep information private.** When they reach the center of the circle, they can start jumping in place each time there is a word that represents them.
- Here are the phrases you can read aloud, and feel free to add more to the list:
 - I take a bus to school.
 - I like ice cream.
 - We speak a language other than English at home.
 - I live with a single parent.
 - I have a pet.
 - I get sad sometimes.
 - Someone I care about has mental health struggles like anxiety or depression.
 - I wear glasses.
 - I play a sport.
 - I have brown or black skin.
 - I identify as female or nonbinary (which means neither girl nor boy).
 - Our family celebrates Hannukah.
 - I learn differently than other people.
 - I like spicy foods.
 - I live with grandparents or aunts and uncles in the same house or apartment.
 - I am adopted.
 - I am an only child.
 - I have allergies.
 - I have siblings.
 - I have two moms or two dads.
 - I get nervous or scared sometimes.
 - I don't like sticky foods or touching sticky things.
 - I get angry easily.
 - I like birthday parties.
 - I prefer quiet places to crowded places.
 - I feel like people know the real me.
- After the activity, ask children how it felt to jump when they identified with a phrase. Ask if there are other phrases they suggest adding to the activity.

Activity Option 2: Read and discuss 2-3-8 *How 12-Year-Old Marley Dias Is Changing the Face of Children’s Literature*. Then create a drawing using 2-3-7 Mirrors and Windows.

- Marley Dias uses imagery to describe the way representation works. She compares thoughtful representation to “mirrors and windows.” Like mirrors, stories can reflect back to you who you are, and like windows they allow you to see through into others’ lives.
- After reading the article, have children choose to draw either a Mirror (self portrait of how they view themselves) or a Window (a drawing of how they view the lives of others around them) using template 2-3-7 Mirrors or Windows.
- Time permitting, children can have two copies of the template and draw both a Mirror and a Window.

Activity Option 3: Reading Aloud activity: We recommend the following books that embody the themes of this lesson plan. After reading each book aloud, ask the children how it relates to the importance of representation in shows, movies, and books. Children may draw pictures of the story as they listen or afterwards.

- [The World Needs More Purple People by Kristen Bell and Benjamin Hart](#)
- [I Am Every Good Thing by Derrick Barnes](#)
- [Pink Is for Boys by Robb Pearlman](#)

Activity Option 4: Physical activity: Engage in activities that show how we all feel similar emotions, despite our differences, even if we don’t share the same skin color or gender or cultural background.

1. Emotional Charades: With the children’s help, compile a list of emotions (both positive and negative). One child will select an emotion from the list to act out, while the other children try to identify the emotion. Continue until all the emotions have been acted out.
2. Builders and Destroyers: Sort the children into “builders” and “destroyers” to represent heroes and villains. Builders are the heroes who will stack cones/frisbees/blocks. Destroyers are the villains who will topple the stacks. Switch groups so each child has an opportunity to do both. Ask children how it felt to be in each group.
3. Different Movements: Set out cones and arrange kids into teams. Each team has to come up with a different type of movement (i.e. skipping, crawling, jumping) for each child to get to the cone and back. No movement can be used twice on the same team.

Activity Option 5: Drama/Theater activity: Invite kids to form groups and create a skit about this week’s theme, which is *Importance of Representation*. Below are prompts:

- “You and your friends are creating a new team of superheroes, like *The Avengers*, or the *Jedis*, or the *Justice League*. Work together to create as many different characters as possible, paying attention to include heroes from different races, genders, cultures, religions, etc. Be sure to give each character a superhero name.” Allow the groups of kids to introduce their diverse superhero teams to each other.
- “You are a group of explorers looking for a treasure. You come across a couple kids who are lost in the woods, and they want to tell you what happened to them, but they speak a different

language than you. How will you communicate with each other? How will you help each other despite the language barrier?"

Activity Option 6: Visual Art activity: Each child will make sock puppet characters that represent a variety of races, genders, cultures and ethnicities.

- Provide a variety of socks in shades of the following colors: black, brown, tan, and white. Kids can bring in socks from home in a variety of the same shades to represent different skin colors. Kids can also use markers in skin tone shades to add pigment to white socks.
 - Encourage kids to make at least one puppet similar to themselves and one that is different. Provide craft glue, yarn, string and optional items such as pipe cleaners, googly eyes, buttons, and bits of fabric for hair, clothing, facial features, etc.
 - Time permitting, kids can create a puppet show with their puppets.

Activity option 7: Students write journal reflections.

- Using the 2-3-5 *Journal Reflection on Representation* handout, students will reflect on the short videos and other information shared in this lesson and describe how it has affected their thinking about the representation in popular culture of girls, women, and various minority groups.
- If time allows, students can also select and write a about one character they admire who does not share their cultural, ethnic, or gender identity.

Part Four: Assessment

If you want to do a formal assessment at the end, hand out one printed copy to each child of 2-3-9 *Assessment: Importance of Representation*. Read aloud the instructions on the top of the page and ask the children to do the written exercise. For primary students, you can talk through this assessment as a discussion or have them do it as a drawing.

Research Findings on Underrepresentation in Media: Please consider sharing these with parents and staff.

- A large-scale study titled, ["Inclusion or Invisibility? Comprehensive Annenberg Report on Diversity in Entertainment,"](#) found just one-third of speaking characters were female (33.5 percent), despite the fact that women represent just over half the population in America. Just 28.3 percent of characters with dialogue were from non-white racial/ethnic groups, though such groups are nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population.
- Researchers found that Asian, Hispanic, and LGBTQ characters were all significantly underrepresented and don't reflect their numbers in society.
- Just 3.4 percent of film directors were female, and only 7 percent of films had a cast whose balance of race and ethnicity reflected the country's diversity. In broadcast TV, 17 percent of directors were female and 19 percent of programs were ethnically balanced.
- ["The film industry still functions as a straight, White, boy's club," the study states.](#) Stacy L. Smith, one of the study's authors says, "I think we're seeing, across the landscape, an **erasure** of certain groups; women, people of color, the LGBT community ... this is really [an] epidemic of invisibility that points to a lack of inclusivity across [film and TV]."²

Additional Readings:

How "A Wrinkle in Time" inspired female scientists

<https://newsela.com/read/lib-wrinkle-time-women-scientists/id/40775/>

Article for parents and staff on benefits of watching shows with kids that include LGBTQ representation and racial representation:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/parenting/family-tv-during-pandemic.html>

Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on ... topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2

Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate ... each source.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Notes:

1. From Teaching Tolerance, <https://www.tolerance.org/>
2. E. Deggans, Hollywood Has a Major Diversity Problem, USC Study Finds, National Public Radio, February 22, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/02/22/467665890/hollywood-has-a-major-diversity-problem-usc-study-finds>.
- 3-5 S. Boboltz and K. Yam, *Why On-Screen Representation Actually Matters*, February 24, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-on-screen-representation-matters_us_58aeae96e4b01406012fe49d.