



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 2 to 6

About the Author: MediaSmarts

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TV Stereotypes

Overview

This lesson familiarises students with stereotypes and helps them understand the role that stereotypes play in television's portrayal of life. The lesson begins with a discussion about the types of stereotypes that are common on television, why stereotypes are used on TV, and the possible negative influences of stereotyping. To further increase their awareness of television stereotypes, students will participate in a number of writing, drawing and viewing activities that include deconstructing segments from television programs, drawing stereotypical and non-stereotypical figures, and writing a poem about stereotypes.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- recognize that the media construct reality
- understand that the representations made by the media are not always realistic
- understand the various types of stereotypes that exist in the media
- identify their own perceptions of various stereotypes

Preparation and Materials

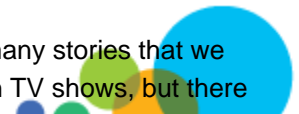
- Tape three or four programs in which actors portray stereotypical roles.
- Photocopy *Spotting Stereotypes* and *No Stereotypes* worksheets.
- Photocopy *Putting Stereotypes to Poetry* worksheet.
- Read the teaching backgrounder: *Stereotypes*.

The Lesson

Guided Discussion

Ask students who remembers the definition of a stereotype from the lesson *Once Upon A Time* (<http://mediasmarts.ca/lessonplan/once-upon-time-lesson>).

In our last lesson, we looked at stereotypes from traditional stories and fairy tales. Nowadays, many stories that we enjoy are told to us through television and movies. You don't see many princesses or princes on TV shows, but there



are still many characters who are stereotyped on TV. How would you describe the following TV characters?

- A grandmother (*is old-looking, wears her hair in a bun, wears glasses, is a homebody, lives with relatives*)
- A bully (*is big and tough looking, is always mean, most often is male*)
- A villain (*looks funny, or scary, or ugly; is always outwitted by the hero, nobody likes him or her*)
- A cop (*is most likely male, always chasing criminals, involved in lots of car chases and shoot-outs*)
- Kids (*are usually cute, smarter than their parents, sassy to their parents and teachers*)

Ask the students to suggest other stereotypes which exist on television.

People on TV are stereotyped in many different ways. They are stereotyped because of their:

- age (*old people, young people, teenagers*)
- sex (*women and men, boys and girls*)
- job (*teacher, model, truck driver, doctor, lawyer*)
- culture (*Arab, French, Newfoundland, Irish, Italian*)
- race (*black, white, Chinese, Hispanic*)
- looks (*beautiful, ugly, 'nerdy'*)
- position in a family (*mother, father, sister, brother, grandmother, grandfather*)

All of these categories lead to pre-conceived notions about how people behave.

Ask your students, "Why do they use stereotypes on TV?" (*Television stereotypes are used because they enable a viewer to understand a character's role quickly and easily. In a half hour show, you only have about twenty-three minutes of the actual program, so there isn't much time to develop a character in a more well-rounded manner. Stereotypes are a kind of television "shorthand" with stock characters creating easily understood plots.*)

Activities

Stereotype Search: Show segments from three or four programs in which actors play stereotypical roles. After each segment ask these questions:

- What type of character did you see? (*e.g. villain*)
- What words or phrases best describe him or her? (*e.g. evil, sinister-looking, tough-talking*)
- Did the character's actions tell you something about him or her?
- How was the character dressed? Did the clothing help to suggest what kind of person this might be?
- Is the character unrealistic or true to life?
- Is the character a stereotype?

Distribute *Spotting Stereotypes* and *No Stereotypes* worksheets. Have students complete their stereotype sheet first, and their no-stereotype sheet second.



Stereotyping can be dangerous!

- Have volunteers role-play these popular television stereotypes: scientist, teenage girl, detective, burglar, hero.
- Ask students to consider why stereotypes like these might be called dangerous.
- With older students, divide the class into groups, have each group list the dangers of stereotyping, then have a spokesperson for each group share their ideas with the class.

Be sure to point out that television tends to be dominated by white talent, despite the fact that we live in a society made up of many ethnic groups and cultures. Explain that, although television uses stereotypes to present viewers with easily recognizable characters, stereotypes often present a one-sided and negative image. All viewers, then, must be careful about forming opinions about groups or individuals based on what they see on TV.

A Word of Warning

- Cigarette packages warn people of the dangers of smoking.
- Write a warning to tell people of the dangers of believing everything they see on TV.
- List five programs that you think should give this warning.

Wanted: TV Stereotype

- Make a WANTED poster for a TV stereotype.
- Explain why this character is wanted. Describe how he or she looks and behaves.
- List places where this person might be found.
- Draw a picture for your poster.

Grandmothers

- Fold a sheet of paper in half.
- On one half, draw a picture of a television or storybook grandma.
- On the other half, draw a picture of your own grandmother.
- Print words to describe each grandmother below her picture.
- Are the pictures or the words the same?

You Play The Part

- In a small group, role-play a scene from a TV program that relies on stereotypes.
- Use costumes, props, and makeup to help create the characters.

Cinquain A Stereotype

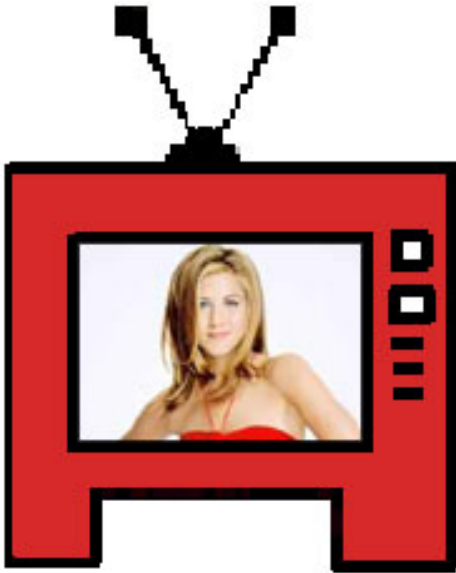
- Using the sheet *Putting Stereotypes to Poetry*, create your own stereotype cinquain.



Spotting Stereotypes

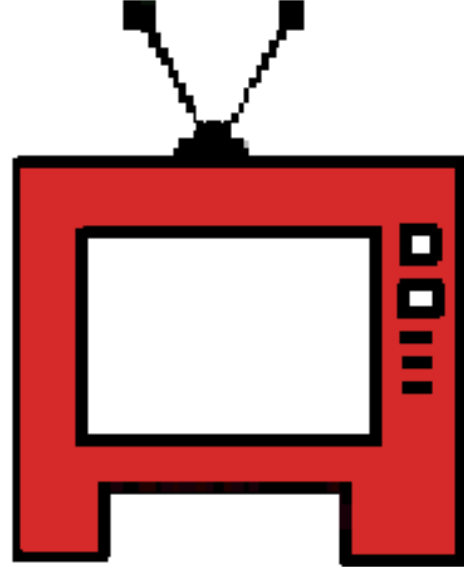
Have you seen these television stereotypes? Draw and describe each one. The first is done for you.

Name: _____

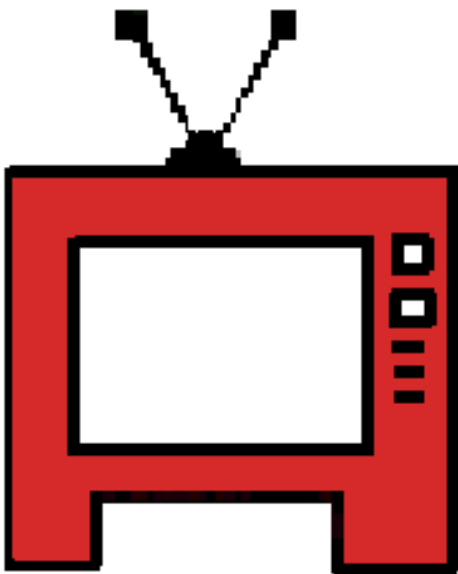


Movie Star

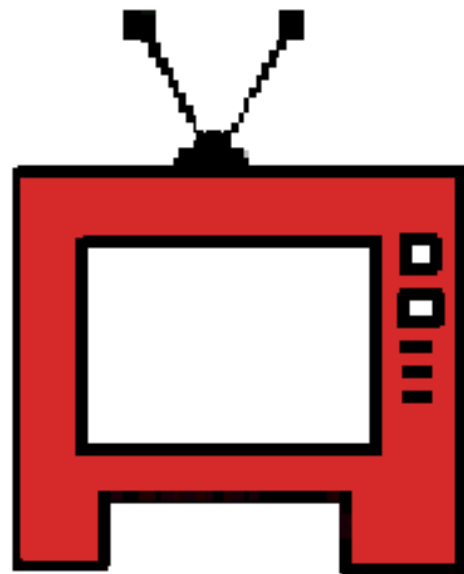
Beautiful, Rich, Young



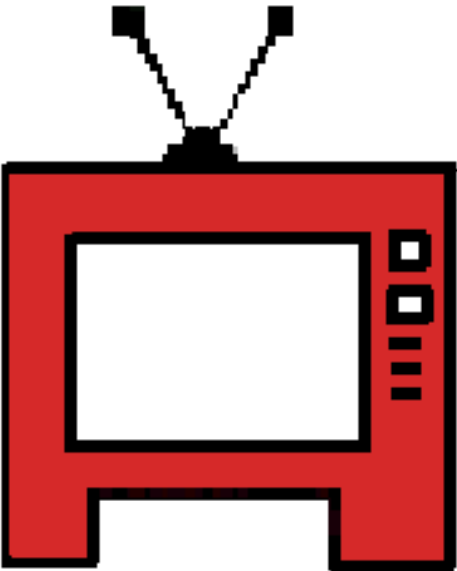
Hero



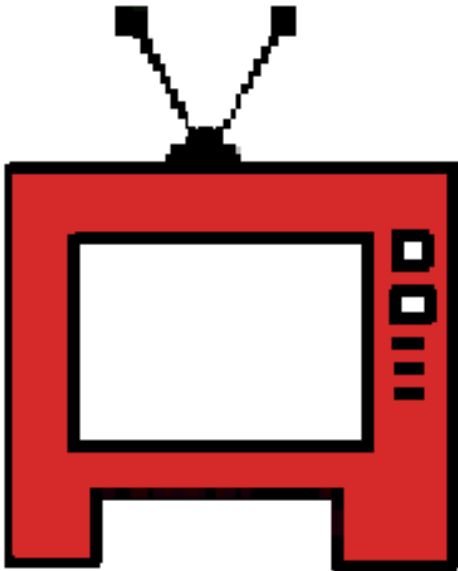
Villain



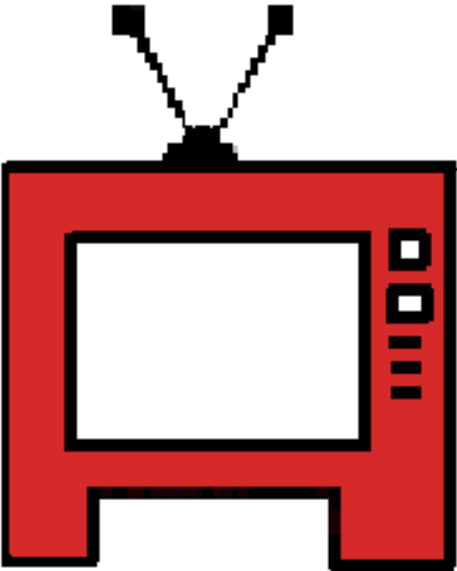
Teacher



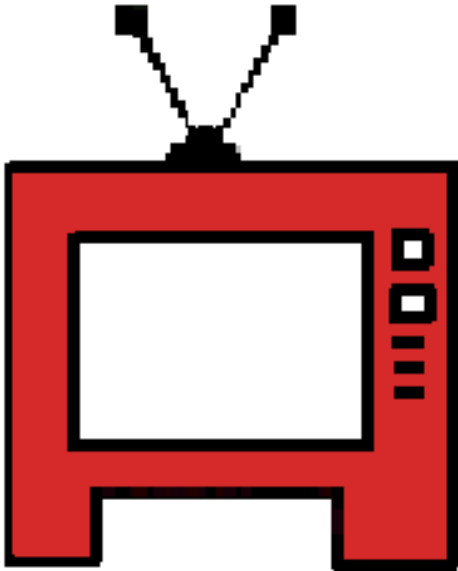
TV Kid



Nerd



A Grandparent



Rock Star

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No Stereotypes!

Draw and describe some real-life characters in the boxes below.....No STEREOTYPES, please!

Name: _____

Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life

Movie Star

Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life

Hero

Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life

Villain

Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life

Teacher

Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life

TV Kid

Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life

Nerd

Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life

A Grandparent

Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life
Real Life Real Life Real Life

Rock Star



Putting Stereotypes to Poetry

A cinquain is a five-line poem.

To write a cinquain, you must follow this pattern:

| Line | Syllables | Description | Poem |
|------|-----------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | subject | Police |
| 2 | 4 | subject description | Men and Women |
| 3 | 6 | action words | Helping, Guiding, Smiling |
| 4 | 8 | your feelings on the subject | Making us feel safe and secure |
| 5 | 2 | another word for the subject | Our Cops |

Write a cinquain about a television character or group of characters that is a stereotype.

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Stereotypes

Because most television programs are quite short, the identities of characters must be established as quickly as possible. To do this, television writers often use stereotypes. A stereotype is a fixed or conventional image of a person or group of people. Stereotypes generally conform to a pattern of dress and behavior that is easily recognized and understood. Often, a judgement is made about the person or group being stereotyped. That judgement may be positive or negative.

Generally, stereotypes are less real, more perfect, (or imperfect) and more predictable than their real-life counterparts. A typical male stereotype, for example, is of a "real man" who is adventurous, masterful, intelligent, and unshakable. Such sex-role stereotypes are intended to present viewers with a character they can easily recognize and relate to. Their danger, however, is that, if seen often, they can affect the way a viewer perceives men in general. Male stereotyping can narrow one's notion of what men can be and do; it can affect women's and children's expectations of men; it can even shape men's and boys' own views of themselves and of how they should behave.

While commercial television has improved in its portrayal of females, many of the women featured on TV continue to be depicted as someone's wife (apron-clad) or girlfriend (barely-clad). Television children are generally cast in gender-related roles – the girls playing with dolls while the boys play at sports – and all are "cutesy" and talk as though they were insightful adults. Similarly, the characterization of mothers-in-law, the elderly, gays, police officers, and truck drivers tends toward the stereotypical.

Culture and class stereotypes are also prevalent in television. Traditionally, blacks were portrayed as either happy-go-lucky servants or dangerous criminals, and while these stereotypes linger, we are now seeing what might be described as upright, intelligent, middle-class black characters. Similarly, North American native peoples are now being portrayed as something other than buckskin-wearing teepee dwellers. Too often, however, minorities are portrayed stereotypically and almost never as powerful or rich as the white majority.

Because stereotyping can lead children to form false impressions of various societal groups, it is important that students recognize stereotypes and understand the role they play in television's portrayal of life. To become television-wise, then, students must tune in to the ways television treats people, recognize how they themselves relate to TV characters, and understand how these characters can influence their ideas about the real people in their communities.

Source: TVOntario, Let's Play TV: Resource Kit For Television Literacy, © 1995.

