



Portrayals of Women on Television

Pre-Visit Activity:

Through the following exercise, you and your students can explore the qualities you admire in women and why.

Vocabulary

Begin by asking students to define and discuss the following words. Students should become familiar with these words and concepts as they will be referenced in the class.

Conservative: tending or disposed to maintain existing views, conditions, or institutions.

Feminism: the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes; organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.

Tradition: an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom); cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions.

Think

Ask students to create a list of women they admire or find heroic. Students should consider both historical and contemporary women, as well as women in their own lives.

Ask them to answer the following questions about each woman on the list:

1. What do you admire about her?
2. What are her accomplishments?
3. What adjectives best describe her?

Write

As a class, create a list of the admirable qualities your students have mentioned.

Discuss

Are these characteristics unique to women or would you value them equally in men? Where are the differences? Circle them. Why do you think that is?

Please either post this list in the classroom during the videoconferencing program or bring it with you to the Center; it will be used as a point of reference during the discussion.



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Post-Visit Activity:

Watch

Ask students to watch one television program at home and take notes as they view it, focusing on the portrayal of the female characters. Students should bring their notes to class for a group discussion.

For each female character, students should consider her:

- occupation
- interaction with others
- behavior
- appearance
- place in the family structure (if applicable)
- admirable qualities and characteristics
- negative qualities and characteristics

and provide a word or phrase that describes her.

Students should also record the following information about the program:

- title
- genre
- length
- time slot
- network on which it appears



Review

Ask students to draw from the Center class and the show they watched for their answers to the following questions:

1. Which television shows did you watch?
2. Which female television characters did you admire? Why?
3. What genre of programming did you watch?
4. How do the portrayals of women vary from genre to genre? (For example, compare the image of women in music videos to the image of women in action shows.)
5. Are there noticeable patterns to the portrayal of women in each genre?

Discuss

1. How does the contemporary portrayal of women on television compare to what we viewed in the Center program?
2. Think back to the list you created before the class. Do women on television today embody any of the qualities you admired?
3. If you were going to create a television character who represents the “ideal woman,” what would she be like?
4. Compare her to the Donna Reed character in the 1959 episode “The Ideal Wife.”

Extend

Read literature with female protagonists such as Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* or Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*, and discuss the portrayal of women in the novels. Compare the literary characters to their counterparts on television.

1. What are their similarities and differences? How do you account for this?
2. How are these portrayals reflective of the time period and culture in which they were created?