

“The Boy Who Wanted To Be A Dancer”

Grades 3 and 4

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Learning Outcomes

- to gain awareness of how rigid gender role expectations limit children’s ability to express themselves
- to understand how and why boys are teased if they want to be dancers, singers, artists, etc.
- to become more aware of how “boy culture” limits the artistic expression of boys



Context

The intent of this lesson is to teach students that boys can be whoever they want to be and can choose to be involved in whatever interests they wish to be involved in. This lesson provides an excellent opportunity to segue into the topics of sexism and homophobia and how these forms of oppression negatively impact boy’s lives. Students will gain an understanding of how boys are sometimes pressured by their peers not to be involved in school based or extra-curricular activities which may typically be the domain of “girl culture”.

Lesson

Read part of the story, The Boy Who Wanted to be a Dancer to your class. At an appropriate place, stop reading and ask students to work in small groups. Have them brainstorm some of the ways that a boy who is artistic might be treated by his peers if he wanted to be a dancer, singer or performer. Encourage students to talk about this with each other as part of a class discussion.

- Ask students to talk about their experiences when they do activities that others perceive as “girl activities” or “boy activities”. How are they similar to the main character in the story?
- Ask students to work in small groups to make a list of the kinds of hobbies or extra-curricular activities they participate in. Once they have created a list, ask them to make a T-chart and begin to divide the activities into categories which would fall under the headings of “Boy Culture” or “Girl Culture”. Encourage discussion and respectful debate. Have each group report their decisions to the whole class.
- Ask students if all of the activities they listed always fall into these two distinct categories. “Is every hobby or activity unique to boy culture or girl culture?” Introduce the concept of sexism to the class. For example, girls are sometimes excluded from activities perceived to be the domain of boy culture (i.e. hockey, soccer, etc.). Also,

boys are sometimes teased and girls sometimes are targeted with sexist language....
“You throw like a girl!”

Possible Extensions:

- Ask students “What would be some of the names a boy would be called if he was passionate about dancing and wanted to be a dancer?” Depending on the responses of the students, this might be a good segue into discussion of the topic of homophobia. Talk with students about how boys are sometimes targeted by homophobic slurs since they are perceived to be gay because of the types of activities they participate in. Ask students a) if they can tell who might be gay simply by the activities they enjoy; and b) how someone who calls himself gay might be treated by his classmates.
- Discuss with students how homophobia and sexism sometimes limit girls and boys’ choices because of the pressure their family and friends sometimes place upon them. Ask if this is fair or not.
- Talk about equality with your students and have them discuss how boys and girls should be treated fairly, irrespective of the activities they enjoy and want to be involved in.
- Show a short You Tube clip to your class from the TV series “Glee”. Ask students to comment on the young men’s ability to dance.
- Teach your students how to dance.
- Go on a fieldtrip to a local dance or ballet performance.

Assessment:

Have students write paragraphs on sexism, homophobia and/ fairness or equality. Ask them to include a definition of the term in their own words as well as an example of what it looks or sounds like. Have them include what they would do to protect themselves from this harm and whom they would seek help from if they were targeted or teased because of their hobbies.

Ask students to write a letter to the main character of the story. Tell him what they think about his decision to be a dancer and his bravery in ignoring the negative comments of other students at school.

Assess their knowledge of different forms of oppression, based upon their writing and discussions in class.

Note: The possible conversations arising from this lesson may be extended over a number of days or weeks. You can easily use this book (and others – see the Recommended Resources section) as a springboard into topics of sexism and homophobia. If students or parents question why you are talking about these topics, explain the importance of treating everyone fairly (equality) and how it is important that students know the terms racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. By knowing about different forms of oppression, they are better able to keep themselves safe and to seek help from adults when it is required.