

Activity: Cracking Eggs

Key Stage: KS3–5

Time Required: 30 minutes

Aims

- To explore common gender stereotypes
- To examine the relationship between gender stereotypes and common words and phrases
- To examine the relationship between gender stereotypes and compliments, terms of endearment and insults

Themes

- Gender stereotypes
- Gendered language
- Impact of stereotypes

Online Resources: Cracking Eggs worksheet

Delivery

Participants should be familiar with what a stereotype is prior to this activity.

Explain to the young people that today's activity is all about everyday language and gender stereotypes. Ask the young people to brainstorm, in their pairs, any words and phrases they can think of that are gender specific. 'Gender specific' means words and phrases that would generally only be said to either boys or girls, not to both boys and girls.

Put a few of the examples below on the board to show what is meant and to get the class started. Give the class one or two minutes to brainstorm.

Examples

- Man up
- Throw/run like a girl
- Bossy
- Boys will be boys
- Whipped
- Career-woman

Bring the class together and add appropriate examples to the board. Choose one example and draw a circle around it. Explain that, for the purposes of this activity, the class must now imagine that the chosen word or phrase is an egg. Hidden inside it are stereotypical ideas about how boys and girls should behave. By asking a series of simple questions, together the class will crack open the egg to reveal the gender stereotypes hiding inside.

Focussing on your chosen word or phrase, go through the following questions (in order) with the class.

- What situation might this phrase be used in?
- Is this phrase positive or negative? Does it praise or condemn the person it's aimed at?
- Can we rewrite it in our own words?
- What is it saying about boys and girls in general?
- What gender stereotypes is it hiding?

If 'man up' were the phrase being interrogated, answers to the above questions might go as follows:

- 'Man up' might be said to boy who is visibly upset.
- It is being said to condemn the fact that the boy is visibly upset.
- "You are not allowed to be upset—you are a boy!"
- Boys are supposed to be strong. Being strong means not feeling (or at least not showing) emotions like sadness.
- "Boys are strong, fearless, and emotionless." And, as gender stereotypes typically come in opposites, we can infer that "girls are emotional and therefore weak."

Write the stereotypes on the board. Using the Cracking Eggs worksheet, below, the young people should now repeat this exercise with two more examples of their own choosing. After five minutes, write on the board examples of more stereotypes that the young people unearthed.

Facilitate a discussion on the impact of stereotypes: what harms might stereotypes lead to? How might somebody believed to be 'weak' or 'passive' be treated?

Conclude by making it clear that one way in which we can challenge stereotypes and avoid the harms they can lead to is to think critically about the everyday language we use.

Key Learning Points

- Everyday language can promote unfair, stereotypical ideas about boys and girls
- We should think twice about how we speak to one another and take care to remember that gender stereotypes can have harmful impacts on people

Key Stage 4 and 5 Adaptation

Cracking Eggs can be a very effective activity to run with KS4 or KS5 classes. To make the activity more relevant for older audiences, provide young people with flipcharts on which to brainstorm gender specific insults, compliments and terms of endearment (as well as gender specific everyday language). Set up a safe space at the start of the activity by stressing that offensive words and phrases will be permitted in this lesson only for the purposes of discussion. No-one has permission to direct offensive sayings towards a member of the class. Stress also that this activity is not designed to find out who can write the most offensive thing. Only suggestions that are gender specific are valid.

Cracking Eggs worksheet

When would this word or phrase be used?

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.....
.....

Is it negative or positive?

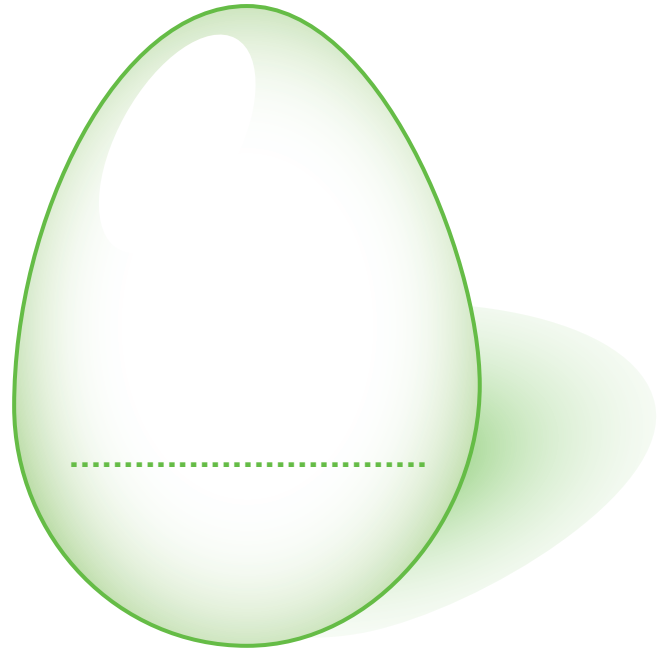
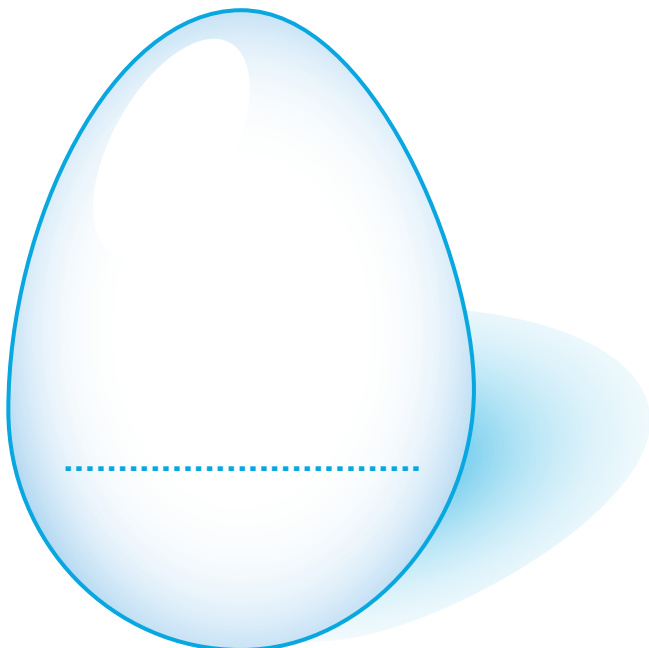
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What is it saying? Re-write it in your own words.

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What is it saying about girls/boys in general?

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.....
.....



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.....
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.....

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