

Why aren't there more women in science?

Topic

Women in Science

Aims

- To raise awareness of the relative lack of women in science, and encourage students to consider why this might be so.
- To develop the skill of identifying the main ideas in a semi academic text.
- To help students understand how reference words are used to link the ideas of a text together.

Age / level

Older teens and adults (B2-C1)

Time

45 minutes + 15 minutes final discussion (optional)

Materials

1. Worksheet 1 (double-sided)

Introduction

This lesson will help raise awareness of some of the reasons why women are relatively poorly represented in science. The lesson begins by challenging some stereotypes and asking students to consider why there aren't more women in science. They then read a text which provides some possible reasons, and discuss how these relate to their own opinions.

The lesson then focuses on reference words, and how they link a text together, before a final speaking tasks about different jobs and gender.

Procedure

1. Lead-in (5 mins)

- Start the class by asking students to solve the following logic problem. (ask any students who have heard it before not to say anything.)

A father and his son are in a car accident. The father dies instantly, and the son is taken to the nearest hospital for surgery. The surgeon comes in and exclaims "I can't operate on this boy."

"Why not?" the nurse asks.

"Because he's my son," the surgeon responds.

	<p>How is this possible?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is likely that at least some students will find this difficult to solve because they will assume that the surgeon is a man. Use this to lead into the idea of women in science.
2. (5 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give out worksheet 1 and ask students to read just the first paragraph (A) and find 4 facts about women in science. Either let students discuss what they found, and what they found surprising in small groups, or as a class. Answers: Only 12.8% of STEM jobs in the UK are held by women/ 78% of students studying physics at school leaving age are boys/52% of make undergraduates are studying science, compared with 40% of females. In the USA only 1/5 of physics degrees are awarded to women.
3. (5 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In pairs or small groups, ask students to make a list of possible reasons (ex 2). Monitor, but don't take feedback at this stage.
4. (10-15 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to now read the rest of the article (paragraphs B-E) and identify the main idea in each paragraph. They should then compare the ideas with the ideas they had at the previous stage. <p>Suggested answers: B: stereotypes that women don't do science, or if they do, the emphasis is still on their looks. C: women undervaluing themselves D bias against women- paid less and seen as less capable E: difficulties with childcare or career breaks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Then allow students to discuss the content of the article, using the questions in exercise 4. Depending on the group, this could be in groups, or whole class.
5. (15 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to read the grammar box and answer any questions. Then ask students to look back at the beginning of the article and discuss what each highlighted word refers to. Go through the answers. Make sure that students understand that a reference word can refer back to another specific word or phrase, or to an idea within the text. <p>Answers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The proportion of boys studying science at school leaving age. The proportion of boys studying science being much higher than girls. University The fact that scientists in films and TV are usually men. Female scientists' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students then work through exercise 7 individually, checking their answers against the text. <p>Answers: 1 this. 2. their. 3. one. 4. They. 5. their.</p>

6.
(10-15 mins)

- In small groups, students discuss question 8. These are all jobs which are statistically primarily done by men (car mechanics, roofers, painters and decorators) or women (dental hygienists, child care workers, primary school teachers, hairdressers, receptionists). Students can consider why this might be (Aptitude? Physical strength? Tradition?) and if there are any reasons why the jobs couldn't be done by the opposite gender.

Contributed by

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For more ideas related to this theme, go to the following pages on our [LearnEnglish Teens](#) website:

International Women's Day. Reading text that explains the origins of IWD and how it's celebrated.

<https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/uk-now/read-uk/international-womens-day>

Women and tech. A video from Facebook that encourages women and girls to get into the tech industry.

<https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/study-break/video-zone/women-and-tech>

Google Science Fair. Google Science Fair winner from Turkey, Elif Bilgin, explains her project about bioplastics.

<https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/study-break/video-zone/google-science-fair>