

LESSON PLAN

IS GAMING A BOY'S CLUB? WOMEN, VIDEO GAMES AND SEXISM

Compelling Question: How does sexism and misogyny show up in the gaming world?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-1	2-5	60 minutes	Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language
6-10	11-12		



Web Related Connections

Lesson Plans

[Addressing Hate Online: Countering Cyberhate with Counterspeech](#)

[Don't Let Hate Ruin the Fun: Youth and Online Games](#)

[Stereotypes of Girls and Women in the Media](#)

Other Resources:

[Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2022](#)

[League of Lessons: Why Gaming Matters](#)

Key Words

abuse
allegations
critical mass
doxing
gaslight
harassment
inappropriate
#MeToo
misconduct
misogyny
nonconsensual
receptive

LESSON OVERVIEW

Video games are played and enjoyed by many kinds of people. However, women and girls face hate, harassment and sexism as they play games, which makes their experience negative and fraught. In the games themselves, female characters are often portrayed in negative, stereotypical and one-dimensional ways. The lack of female characters, the over-sexualization of them and the violence directed against women are just a few of the problems. Women media critics have called attention to the sexism and misogyny within the gaming world and, in resulting backlash, over the years, many have become victims of violent threats themselves. Gamergate, which emerged in 2014, was a loosely organized online harassment campaign of women and backlash against feminism and diversity in video game culture which involved harassing, heckling, threatening, and doxing several outspoken feminist women.

This advanced high school lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the world of video games, understand how sexism and misogyny are perpetuated in gaming and express their own thoughts about the topic.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn some background facts and information about the current state of video games.
- Students will reflect upon their own experience with gaming.
- Students will understand the role of women in video games and the specific ways in which sexism is perpetuated in the gaming world.
- Students will express their thoughts by writing a letter to a video game company.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

- [Our Experience with Gaming Statements](#)
- *Post-it® Notes* or round stickers (at least 7 per student)
- [The Need for Change in Online Gaming](#) (Video, 1 min., 28 sec.)

- [Dozens of Women in Gaming Speak Out About Sexism and Harassment](#) (one copy for each student)
- [Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2022](#) (copies of some pages for each student)

Key Words (cont.)

sexism
sexual assault
status quo
structural
top-down
wellspring

? What is Gaming?

1. Ask students some or all of the following questions to begin the lesson:

- What are video games?
- Where and how do you play video games?
- What different kinds of games are there?
- What is your favorite game and why?
- What else do you know about gaming?

Record their responses on the board. Explain that we are going to discuss video games, women and sexism.

2. Share the following information about the state of video games in 2022, according to the [Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry](#) report. Do this by taking each statistic and turning it into a question (e.g., What percentage of Americans do you think play video games?), allowing some guesses and then telling students the correct answer.

- 66% of Americans play video games.
- The average age of video game players is 33 years old.
- Of all game players, 52% identify as male and 48% as female (this is up from 40% female in 2010).
- 71% of young people (under 18) play video games.
- 77% of parents play video games with their children at least weekly.
- 83% of gamers play games with others online or in-person (this is up from 65% in 2020).
- 97% of Americans view games as beneficial in some way (e.g., bring joy, provide inspiration, provide mental stimulation, provide stress relief, teach kids how to win in healthy manner).
- 76% of women have disguised their gender while playing online (from [Most Women Disguise Their Gender When Gaming Online To Avoid Sexual Harassment](#))
- Engage students in a brief discussion by asking: *Do any of these statistics surprise you? Not surprise you? How so? Do you think these statistics have changed over time and if so, how?*

🎮 Our Experiences with Video Games

1. First, define the words sexism and misogyny, which will be used throughout the rest of the lesson. Elicit/explain that sexism is: "the marginalization and/or oppression of women, based on the belief in a natural order based on sex that privileges men. Elicit/explain that misogyny is: "contempt or hatred of women."
2. Post the statements written below around the classroom, using print-outs of [Our Experience with Gaming Statements](#):
 - I have watched other people play video games.
 - I have played video games.
 - I play video games on a regular basis (at least a few times per week).
 - I have witnessed sexism in video games.
 - People have said or done sexist things to me through video game interaction.
 - I believe video games can have a negative effect on attitudes and perspectives in general.
 - I believe video games can perpetuate sexism.

3. Distribute at least seven sheets of *Post-it® Notes* to each student. Give students five minutes to walk around the room and place a post-it or round sticker on or near all of the statements that are true for them or if they agree. If you have a large class, you may want to call them up in smaller groups. As an alternative, use [Mentimeter](#) or another digital polling platform.
4. After placing their *Post-it® Notes* on the statements, instruct students to move to the statement they are most interested in talking about with others. Give students 5–7 minutes to discuss the statements with each other. Have them talk about why they decided to stand where they are and what the statement means to them.
5. Reconvene the class and engage them in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Where are the most post-its or stickers? The least? Why do you think that is?
 - How did you decide which statement to talk about with others?
 - As a class, do we watch video games often?
 - What do you like about video games?
 - What don't you like about gaming?
 - Have many of us witnessed or experienced sexism in video games?
6. Ask students: *In what ways does sexism exist in video games? Can you share an example of sexism?* Record their responses on the board/smartboard. Tell them that as we learn more about sexism in gaming, we will add to the list.

(Note to Teacher: Save this list to be used for an activity later in the lesson.)

Reading Activity

1. Distribute a copy of the article [Dozens of Women in Gaming Speak Out About Sexism and Harassment](#) to each student. Give students 10-15 minutes to read the article silently or, you can give them the article in advance for homework to read the night before.
2. After reading, engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
 - What's meant by the gaming industry being described as "the industry's male-dominated, sexist culture?" What are some examples of that culture?
 - In what ways is it helpful for the women who have been subjected to this behavior to share what happened?
 - When faced with allegations of sexism and harassment, what can others, including the gaming companies, do about it?
 - What does this quote mean to you? "When it's one call-out, it's a problem with a person. When there's a ton of call-outs, it's a problem with the industry."
 - What questions do you still have?
 - What is your biggest takeaway from reading this article?

Watch Video: Turn and Talk

1. Play this short video [The Need for Change in Online Gaming](#).

(Note to Teacher: Preview the video in advance to make sure it is appropriate for your students.)

2. After watching the video together, have students turn and talk with a person sitting nearby to share their initial thoughts and feelings after watching the video. Allow each person one minute per share.

3. Engage the students in a large group discussion by asking the following questions:

- What kinds of abuse, harassment and hate do the women face?
- What feelings about this do the women express/share in the video?
- Why do you think Sky Broadband came up with this idea?
- What did you learn from watching the video?

Small Groups: How Sexism Shows Up and is Perpetuated in Gaming

1. Explain to students that now that they have more information after watching the video and reading the article, they are going to get more specific about how sexism and misogyny show up and are perpetuated in the gaming world. Ask: *How does sexism or misogyny show up or take place in video games?*
2. Divide students into small groups of 4-5 and have them review the list developed earlier indicating ways sexism exist in video games. Give small groups 5–7 minutes to come up with a list of additional ways that sexism is perpetuated in gaming. When the small groups are finished talking, have each share one or two items from their list and add it to your overall list which was created earlier. If the list does not include all the items below, share these as well:
 - Lack of female characters (Collected data shows that only 15% of games had a girl/woman in a protagonist role or an active character.).
 - Women as victims of violence and abuse against women.
 - Negative portrayals of women.
 - Over-sexualization of female characters.
 - Traditional gender marketing strategies (Video games are marketed to boys and men.).
 - “Women as background decoration” (These are largely insignificant non-playable female characters (NPC).
 - “NPC” (These are secondary players—the figures are not directly controlled by players and use automated scripts. They tend to be sexually objectified which dehumanizes the women and conveys the message that women’s primary role is to satisfy men.)
 - “Damsel in Distress” (A female character placed in a perilous situation from which she cannot escape on her own and must be rescued by a male character; she tends to be portrayed as frail, fragile and vulnerable.).
3. Read the entire list out loud and engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - How does this list make you feel?
 - Do you see this same type of sexism perpetuated in other media forms? How so?
 - Do you think these portrayals of women impact how all people view women and girls in the real world?
 - What can we do about it?

Reading and Discussion: Online Harassment Report

1. Distribute a copy of pages 4-5 of ADL’s [Online Hate and Harassment: The American Experience 2022](#) to each student, or if you allow digital devices in your classroom, have students read it online.

Explain that this summary is an annual nationally representative survey of hate and harassment online to find out how many people in the U.S. experience incidents of hate and abuse on social media. The study looks at different marginalized identity groups. Point students’ attention to page 5 (“Key Findings”), bullet point 4 where the issue of gender-based harassment is addressed. If time permits, you can also invite students to look at some of the other graphs in the report, the ones that address women and gender and others.

2. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:

- How would you summarize women's experiences online with online hate and harassment?
- What is the difference between the ways in which men, women and the general population experience online harassment?
- How can you explain these differences?
- Why do you think there are such disparities between how women and men experience online harassment?
- How is the report helpful or not helpful? Please explain.
- What are your thoughts about what can be done to address the hate and harassment—of women and in general?



Writing Activity (in class or for homework)

As a culmination of what they have learned, give students a homework assignment to write a letter to a video game company which outlines how they see women portrayed in their video game(s). Students will first identify a video game company that produces a game they want to address in their letter. If some students have never watched or played a video game, they should do so before writing their letter. Engage students in the writing, revision and feedback process so that the letters are high quality and able to be published and sent to the video companies.

Closing

Have students share what company (and why) they plan to write to about how women are portrayed in a specific video game.

Additional Reading and Resources

- [2022 Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry](#) (Entertainment Software Association, 2022)
- [Is the video games industry finally reckoning with sexism?](#) (The Guardian, July 22, 2020)
- [Most Women Disguise Their Gender When Gaming Online To Avoid Sexual Harassment](#) (The Gamer, March 15, 2022)
- [The State of Online Harassment](#) (Pew Research Internet Project, January 13, 2021)
- [Sexism, Lies and Video Games: The Culture War Nobody Is Winning](#) (Time, September 5, 2014)
- [What we still haven't learned from Gamergate](#) (Vox, January 7, 2021)
- [Why Does Sexism Persist in the Video Games Industry?](#) (BBC News, June 13, 2014)

Common Core Anchor Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
<p>R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</p> <p>R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</p> <p>R7: Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue</p>
Writing
<p>W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</p> <p>W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p> <p>W5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach</p>
Speaking and Listening
<p>SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> <p>SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.</p> <p>SL3: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.</p>
Language
<p>L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.</p> <p>L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p> <p>L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.</p>

CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Our Experience with Gaming Statements

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