



PERSUASIVE LETTERS: EXAMINING GENDER MARKETING BY TOY COMPANIES

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 3 – 5

LENGTH OF TIME: Four to Five 40-minute sessions

GOALS

- To develop students' critical thinking skills to examine and question gender stereotyping in advertising by toy companies.
- To develop students' media literacy around gender messaging.
- To help students grow as writers by forming and expressing opinions and developing the capacity to provide creative solutions for change.



OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore media to examine gender stereotyping by toy manufacturers.
- Students will gain an understanding of how media messaging shapes our culture around gender norms.
- Students will learn the meaning and impact of gender stereotypes and gender norms.
- Students will craft persuasive letters that propose solutions to stereotypical gender marketing.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. Also SL 3.1 and SL.5.1.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information. Also W.3.1 and W.5.1.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1.a: Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose. Also W.3.1.a and W.5.1.a.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1.b: Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details. Also W.3.1.b and W.5.1.b.

EDUCATORS' NOTES

Persuasive letters allow students to form opinions and become change-makers. Examining an issue, forming an opinion and generating solutions are all skills that students gain when they craft persuasive letters. In this lesson, students will choose a favorite toy of theirs or

of a younger child who they care about and examine the gender marketing used to sell that product.

This activity provides an opportunity for students to think critically about the issues of gender stereotypes and gender-based discrimination in toy marketing. Students will also consider the limitations that traditional gender roles and expectations place on individuals of all gender identities.

This lesson will also provide an opportunity for students to propose solutions to toy marketers and manufacturers that counter restrictive gender messaging.

To see an example of this lesson in an elementary school in Wisconsin, check out the website [The Lego Project, What It Is Is Beautiful.](#)

MATERIALS

- Chart paper, markers
- Paper, pencil or computer
- Magazines/catalogs, access to internet for toy marketing research
- [Riley on Marketing](#) (1:11 minutes)
- [Lego and Gender Part 1](#) (10:30 minutes) (optional)
- [Lego and Gender Part 2](#) (13:42 minutes) (optional)
- [Toy marketing data collection sheet](#)

INTRODUCTION

- On a piece of chart paper, write “Favorite Toys” at the top. Ask your students to think about and share a favorite toy of theirs or a younger sibling or child that they care about (for example, a kindergarten reading buddy). Write the names of the toys on the chart paper.
- Show the video [Riley on Marketing](#) to your students. Let your students know that Riley is a 4-year-old girl who uses the pronouns she, her and hers. After the video, ask your students these questions:
 - What does Riley say about the colors pink and blue?
 - What does Riley say about toy companies and marketing?
 - Do you agree with Riley?
 - Can you give me some examples?
- Skip to the Activity section if you are not going to show the Lego video.



Top left: Lego Ad from 1981. All others: Students from Shorewood Hills Elementary School, Madison, WI.

OPTIONAL: LEGO AND GENDER VIDEO

Watch one or both of the videos on Lego and Gender. [Part 1](#) (10:30 min.) looks at an attempt by Lego to market to girls. [Part 2](#) (13:42 min.) looks at marketing to boys. These videos provide an outstanding analysis of the history of gender marketing by the Lego Group.

- On a piece of chart paper, write out the following questions and ask your students to think about them as they watch the video(s):
 - What messages is Lego giving to girls?
 - What messages is Lego giving to boys?
 - How are those messages the same or different?
 - Has Lego always advertised differently to girls and boys? Was there ever a time Legos were for all kids? Why did that change?
 - How do you think those messages affect children? Is it positive, negative or both?
 - What changes would you suggest for Lego to make their sets welcoming for all genders?
- Show your students Lego and Gender [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).
- After the video, discuss the above questions with your students.



ACTIVITY

- Have your students look through the list of “Favorite Toys” and choose 5 toys to research for this activity. (You may want students to work in groups of 2-3 for this activity).
- Give each student a [toy marketing data collection sheet](#).
- Have students google ads for toys, look through print advertisements or do this as homework and watch commercials on TV and/or a home computer.

IN CLASS AFTER THE DATA HAS BEEN GATHERED

- Tally the results by category on a large piece of chart paper. (See below for a tally of student data collection.)
 - What was the toy?
 - Where did students find the ads?
 - Was the message positive, negative or neutral?
 - Was the marketing to girls, boys, both or neither?
 - What was the message?
 - Was the message a stereotype?

PERSUASIVE LETTERS

- Ask your students to each choose a toy from the class research and think about a way to make that toy welcoming for children of all genders. Maybe your whole class will want to pick one toy, or students can work in pairs or teams if they want to do the same toy, so that they can brainstorm solutions together.
- Let your students know that they are going to be writing a persuasive essay to the toy company with their suggestions. (There are many sample letters to show your students on this website: www.whatitisbeautiful.com.)
- Outline for persuasive letters: A fun way to frame this for students is the sandwich. They start the letter with something positive (the bread), give suggestions for change (ingredients in the sandwich) and end with something positive (the other slice of bread).
 - Introduce yourself
 - Tell why you like the toy
 - Outline the problem with the marketing of the toy (examples: gender stereotypes, not marketed to all kids, etc.)
 - Offer one or two suggestions or solutions to the problem
 - Put a positive closing on the letter
 - Signature
- If you plan to have your students mail the letters to the toy company or email them, you will want to have students locate the toy company website and contact information. This is recommended because students may hear back from the toy company, which will be motivating for them in this learning experience. Sometimes if educators also reach out to the toy companies, they will be more inclined to respond to students.
- Have your students read their letters to the class or to each other in small groups.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

- This lesson pairs well with Welcoming Schools' lesson, [Media Sleuths: Examining Gender Role Stereotyping in Advertising](#).
- Have your students design a marketing ad for a toy that is welcoming to all genders.
- Have your students create a commercial for their toy and act it out for the class.

MODIFICATIONS

- This lesson can be adapted to look at stereotypical images based on race and ethnicity. Students could look at racial, cultural and gender stereotypes together.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- Educators may want to use Teaching Tolerance's [Persuasive Letters Assessment Rubric](#). (see attached)
- Ongoing teacher observation of how students are making choices and whether or not they accept student choices outside of gender norms.

- While the students are working with each other, are they using vocabulary and showing comprehension of the concept of gender? Are they welcoming and inclusive of all genders?
- Are students having respectful conversations about toy advertising and listening to their peers' input on changes and solutions to gender stereotyping?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS

[Lessons to Understand Gender](#)

[Books that Look at Gender and Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#)

[Resources for Gender Inclusive Schools](#)

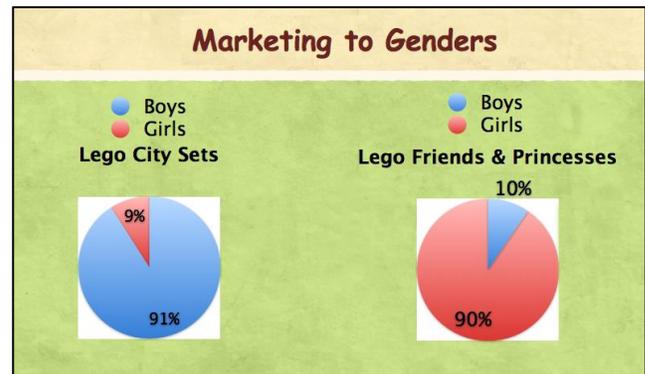
[Be Prepared For Questions and Put-Downs Around Gender](#)

[Defining LGBTQ Words for Elementary School Students](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

Raw Data Compiled by our Team

Theme of sets	Number of sets	Boys	Girls	Animals	Robots/Aliens
City Police	23	68	4	5	0
City Town	2	10	1	0	0
City Space	4	7	0	0	0
City Airport	4	11	2	0	0
City Fire	4	19	2	0	0
City, Great Vehicles	16	24	4	0	0
City Mining	4	9	0	0	0
City Trains	3	9	2	0	0
City Coast Guard	5	14	2	5	0
Marvel Super Heroes	11	36	2	0	0
DC Comic Super Heroes	7	22	1	0	0
Castle	4	12	1	4	0
The Hobbit	10	49	1	4	0
Lego The Movie	13	30	11	5	5
Dino	7	10	1	6	0
Creator Expert	9	31	22	5	0
Creator	6	6	1	2	0
Star Wars	59	162	14	0	59
Galaxy Squad	9	7	1	0	11
Monster Fighters	8	24	4	1	1
Lone Ranger	6	27	2	8	0
Ninjago	13	38	0	0	0
Spongebob	5	15	2	1	0
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	6	21	1	1	0
Minifigures	158	98	36	6	2
Total	396	759	117	53	78
<i>Lego Friends</i>	47	3	51	43	0
<i>Lego Princess</i>	6	3	6	7	0
Totals	53	6	57	50	0



Credit: Written by Michele Hatchell, Phillip Edmonds and the students at Shorewood Hills Elementary School, Madison, WI. www.whatitisisbeautiful.com

