Lesson Plan: Gender in Short Stories and Poetry

(From The Gender Spectrum: What Educators Need to Know)

Curricular Connections

ELA 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 - Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts

Rationale

This lesson will use short stories and poetry to explore how gender roles and identity can be shaped by culture and change over time. Students will consider how gender identity and expression is influenced by societal expectations. They will also explain and support personal responses to a text. Students will respond to ideas on gender presented in song lyric format.
Students will analyze content for explicit and implicit meaning.

Lesson Plan

1. Have students discuss the following pre-reading questions:
   How important is gender to children?
   Does it become more or less important as children grow up?
   What comes to mind when you hear the words "sex change"?
   Are some kinds of spaces more gendered than others? For example, a swimming pool com- pared to a grocery store?

2. Hand out the story *No Bikini* by Ivan E. Coyote and have the class read it out loud. p45-46 of The Gender Spectrum teaching guide. http://pridenet.ca/wp-content/uploads/GenderSpectrum2018online.pdf

3. Discussion Questions:
   In what ways is this story funny? In what ways is it serious?
   How did the main character feel when she was thought to be a boy during the swimming lessons?
   How difficult was it for the main character to be thought of as a boy by the swimming teacher? What does this imply about gender?

4. In the story, the main character had more confidence while being thought of as a boy. This comes from societal stereotypes that expect boys to be brave and strong and girls to be timid and in need of protection.
Have students work with a partner to create two columns on a sheet of paper. On one column, they will make point form notes on how this hinders girls from reaching their potential. On the other column, they will make point-form notes on how this is also limiting to boys.

6. Read Boys and Girls by Alice Munro.

7. Discuss the difference between sex and gender. Brainstorm personal characteristics, behaviours, occupations, physical appearances, etc. that are generally expected of each gender in students' cultures.

8. Read the lyrics and listen to *When I Was a Boy* by Dar Williams.

9. Discuss student reactions to the song. Sample prompts might include:
   - What did the singer mean when she talks about having been a boy?
   - What changed for her? Why?

- What are the dominant emotions in the early part of the song when she's describing herself as a "boy"?
- What is the dominant emotion at the end of the song? What message does this send?
- What does the line that starts, "They got pills to sell" combined with the line about the clothing store imply about what helps drive the construction of gender roles in society?

Assessment

Assess students' discussions and work for understanding of how gender identity and expression is influenced by societal expectations. Also assess students' ability to explain and support person- al responses to the text by: making connections with prior knowledge and experiences, describing reactions and emotions, and developing opinions using evidence.

Possible Extensions

- Students create a split half gender collage of what society believes is acceptable for men and women
- Students compose a fictional story about someone with a non-traditional gender role (e.g. a male daycare teacher or a female truck driver)
- Students write a persuasive speech on a gender-related topic such as whether high school sports teams should be divided by ability rather than gender or whether clothing stores should end the practice of dividing clothes into sections by gender
- Have students read a novel about a transgender character and do a book talk with the class