

Lesson Plan for the PBS Program “A Girl’s Life”

The lesson plan below is appropriate for students in grade 6+. For more information on “A Girl’s Life” and educator resources, please visit RachelSimmons.com.

Lesson Goals

- Discuss and debate current issues affecting American teen girls
- Explore how these issues affect students personally

Materials and Preparation

A Girl’s Life DVD; Agree/Disagree signs (optional)

Procedure

- Show the film (60 minutes)
- Post-Film Discussion (20 minutes)
- Agree/Disagree exercise for (10 minutes)

Time

If you are limited to a standard class period, show selected blocks of the film and use corresponding discussion questions and Agree/Disagree statements.

INTRODUCE & SHOW THE FILM

Explain this is a documentary film on American teen girls that premiered in December 2009 on PBS.

DISCUSSION – CHOOSE FROM THE QUESTIONS AS TIME PERMITS

Tell students that you will talk about the film and how it relates to their own lives. To keep personal storytelling respectful, ask students not to refer to incidents that others will recognize or to use other students’ names.

General Questions

- What did you think of the film?
- Did anything surprise you?
- This film covered important issues teen girls are facing. Are there any topics you think the film should have covered, but didn’t?
- If you were making a similar film about teen boys, what topics would you choose?

Questions About Annaluz

- Do you think the way Annaluz feels about her body is typical of most girls?
- Read these statistics about women and girls¹ and ask students to react:
 - More than 2/3 of American women ages 18-25 would rather be mean or stupid than be fat, and over 50% would rather be hit by a truck
 - According to an American survey, 60% of adolescent girls are currently trying to lose weight. More than 50% have engaged in unhealthy weight control behaviors such as fasting, skipping meals, vomiting or smoking in the past year.
 - 1 in 4 women have avoided engaging in a physical activity or sport because they feel badly about the way they look.
 - According to a national survey, 60% of adolescent girls are currently trying to lose weight and more than 50% have engaged in unhealthy weight control behaviors such as fasting, skipping meals, vomiting or smoking in the past year. Girls who use dangerous weight control behaviors like vomiting are more likely to attempt suicide.
- Do you agree that music videos and other media lead girls to think negatively about their bodies? Can you give some examples? How does this affect the way girls treat each other?
- What did you think of Annaluz's plan to be a plastic surgeon?

Questions About Libby

- How do girls use technology to hurt each other?
- Do you agree that girls are not likely to get help if they are cyberbullied? Why might that be?
- Does cyberbullying happen at this school? What have you seen or experienced?
- Do you think technology is healthy or harmful to friendship? Explain.

Questions About Carla

- Do you agree with the film that "the stigma" of girls fighting is largely gone?
- Carla says that at some point she forgot why she was even angry at the other girls. Have you ever had an experience like that? Why might this happen?
- One of the experts says that when boys fight, there are rules: you don't talk about someone's mother, and when an adult steps in to separate them, the fight is over. Not so for girls, she says; there are no rules. Do you agree? Explain.

¹ Source: <http://www.endfattalk.com/stats.html>

Questions About Sonia

- Do girls act differently when guys are around? What about guys – do they act differently when girls are around?
- Do you agree that girls do better in school when guys are not present? Would guys do better academically if girls weren't around? Explain.
- Why might an all-girls school be good for girls? Do you think there are any disadvantages to going to an all-girls school?

AGREE OR DISAGREE

- Post signs or verbally designate one side of the classroom as the “Agree” side and the other side as the “Disagree” side.
- Read the statements below and have students go and stand on the side of the room that reflects their opinion. If students want to stand in the middle – meaning they both agree and disagree – that’s okay. Allow 1-3 students on each side to explain their opinion. Please remind students not to refer to anyone by name.
 - *Girls have a harder time growing up than boys.*
 - *Popular people are much happier than other people.*
 - *Girls who are thin don't have to worry about how they look.*
 - *Having an argument with someone online is easier than doing it face-to-face.*
 - *Same sex schools are better for learning than co-ed ones.*
 - *Girls always act differently when guys are around.*
 - *Guys always act differently when girls are around.*
 - *No matter how bad your circumstances, anyone can turn their life around if they try hard enough.*

Wrap-Up

Ask students to share what they think needs to change in order for girls to:

- Feel safe online
- Have a healthier body image
- Stop the increase in physical violence and assault

Summarize themes discussed and thank students for their honesty, if it's been there.