

HERstory

This lesson will explore women as artists and women as subjects. By analyzing works of art, students will learn about the changing roles and perspectives of women in society.

Grade Level

Grades 4–12

Common Core Academic State Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1](#)

National Visual Arts Standards

- Responding: understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning
- Connecting: relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context

C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards

- Dimension 2: History – Perspectives
- Dimension 2: History – Change, Continuity, and Context

Suggested Learning Goals

Students will be better able to:

- Discover how women’s lives and stories are reflected in artwork from different times and places
- Compare and contrast representations of women in a variety of artworks
- Analyze the influence of social and cultural norms on the representation of women in artwork
- Recognize and appreciate the work of women artists

Essential Questions

- What can artwork tell us about the lives of women across time and culture?
- How do artists from different time periods and cultures represent women differently, and why?
- Can we identify common ideas or themes in the work of women artists?

Suggested Vocabulary

Feminism

Gender



In the Loge, 1879
Mary Stevenson Cassatt, American
Pastel with gold metallic paint on canvas
Sheet: 25 5/8 x 32 inches (65.1 x 81.3 cm)
Gift of Mrs. Sargent McKean, 1950
1950-52-1

Lesson-Specific Activity

These activities are designed to prepare students for thinking and talking about artworks they may see during a “HERstory” lesson.

ACTIVITY 1

- Ask students to list five artists. Of those five, how many (if any) are women?
- Ask students if they can list five women artists. Explore the work of some of the women artists you were able to name. Who are they? What kind of artwork do they make? Is it different or distinct from the work of male artists?
- Wrap up this discussion by asking students to consider how their observations about art and artists might reflect our society’s construction of gender. Ask students if they think all types of art are valued equally. Why or why not?

ACTIVITY 2

- Have students look through old magazines or advertisements and compare how women and men were presented. What are they wearing and what are they doing? What words would describe the women? What words would describe the men? What does this reveal about society’s expectations of each gender?
- Contrast this with examples of contemporary advertisements or images from magazines. Have things changed? If so, how? If not, what does this reveal about how gender is constructed in society today?
- For homework, ask students to take notes when they watch an episode of a TV show. Tally how many actresses or actors there are, and compare how they are depicted in terms of characteristics or personality. Take a look at the credits as well. Who are the producers and directors? How well does this show pass the Bechdel Test?

Supplementary Materials

- About the [Bechdel Test](#)