



Lesson Plan: ***Misunderstood***

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Time: 60 minutes

Instructional Goal: Students will create their own definitions of and examine their assumptions about masculinity.

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Describe and reflect on their definitions of masculinity.
- Identify their sources of information about masculinity.
- Identify non-stereotypical ideas about and images of masculinity.
- Compare and contrast different ideas about and images of masculinity.
- Discuss key elements and themes of a short film, ***Misunderstood***

Materials:

Scenarios USA film *Misunderstood*, flipchart, markers

Preparation:

Preview the film *Misunderstood* so you are familiar with the characters and storyline.

Procedure:

➤ **Activity 1 (10-15 minutes)**

The goal of this activity is to have students establish their definitions of masculinity. (Total time 7-10 minutes)

- This is a group activity- break students up into 3-5 mixed gender groups.
- Provide each group with flipchart and markers. Each group will assign a student to be a recorder.
- Instruct students to brainstorm and put down on paper the words/ ideas/images they associate with **masculinity** (or “what is a man”).

Notes for teacher:

Students may list some of the following ideas/images in some form: father, brother, being strong (physically), breadwinner, leader, heterosexual/ straight. The goal here is to allow a space for discussion and not to come up with a “correct” or single definition of masculinity. Masculinity can and is defined in multiple ways, but we are mostly exposed to stereotypical ideas about and images of masculinity that are associated with physical strength, (hetero) sexual prowess, and economic power, for example. Therefore, socially charged stereotypes may emerge during this discussion that could touch on issues of sexuality and sexual identity. However, you should establish clear guidelines

against using derogatory or sexually explicit language. (See Word Bank at the end of lesson for some examples of words).

- Instruct students to write their personal definition of masculinity in their journals or on a piece of paper. Tell them that they can include ideas/images/words they used in the group exercise as well as/ instead of their own ideas/images/words.
SUGGESTION: You can use the following prompts if necessary: Have students complete the sentence(s), “I think a man is...” or “I expect a man to ...”
- Direct an open question to class: Where do these ideas come from? (i.e. home, school, peers, community, T.V., books, magazines, etc.)
- Once someone has identified T.V. or movies as one of their sources, introduce the next activity (viewing the film *Misunderstood*).

➤ **Activity 2 (18 minutes)**

The goal of this activity is to introduce the film *Misunderstood*. Tell the class that *Misunderstood* is movie made by Scenarios USA, which is an organization that invites teens to write scripts. Some scripts are made professionally into films. *Misunderstood* was written by nine teens from New York City and is about twin brothers Devon and Keshon and their daily struggles and the decisions they make as they become men. Create a 3-column table on the board; write “Devon” and “Keshon” in 2 of the columns and “other” in the 3rd.

- Watch the DVD *Misunderstood* (16:58 minutes)

➤ **Activity 3 (10 minutes)**

The goal of this activity is to compare and contrast different representations of masculinity, using the film as a guide. Open question to class: What ideas/images about masculinity from your lists also were presented in the movie?

Notes for teacher:

Ask students to list the **masculinity-related** ideas or images that they associate with each character, taking notes in the table on the board. Since the male characters are very different, the lists in each column should be different although some ideas/images/words will appear in more than one column).

- Open question to class: What artistic choices do the film makers use, beyond the words in the script, to communicate ideas about the characters and masculinity?
(Notes for teachers: Students could list any or all of the following: characters’ clothing, hairstyles, behavior etc. For example, students could point out that the brothers have different hairstyles and clothing, the father is not wearing a tie, the teacher is wearing “professional” clothing etc).
- Open question to class: What masculinity-related themes from your lists and definitions are not represented in the movie?

(Notes for teachers: Some images that students listed earlier were not included in the movie – these could include – being athletic, being loyal to friends).

➤ **Activity 4 (5-10 minutes)**

The goal of this activity is to have students reflect on their ideas about masculinity.

- Teacher will write down 'thinking prompt' on the board, i.e. "I wish I could see men _____" or "I wish men could _____" and have students fill in the blank.

(Notes for teachers: The idea here is to have students reflect on and think more deeply about the images of masculinity they are accustomed to seeing and images that are less common (i.e. non-stereotypical images of masculinity)).

Wrap up

Teacher will then close the discussion by briefly reviewing the range of ideas and images discussed and emphasize the importance to examining what they think is masculine and where those ideas come from. Suggested language, "Masculinity can be defined in multiple ways – there is no one "correct" definition - it is also important to examine where and how you form your ideas about masculinity since too often our sources of information about masculinity (television, music, movies, celebrities) show a narrow definition of what it means to be masculine or to be a man, when in reality being masculine (or being a man) can mean many different things."

Assessment: (Total time 10-12 min)

The assessment gives students a chance to reflect more deeply on some of the ideas from the class discussion.

Journaling prompt: Who do you think Lana took to the prom and why? (no more than 1 page)

Extension activities:

Journaling assignment with class discussion: For one week, have the students record in their journals the various messages they get about masculinity from television shows/other films/ advertisements/magazines/books etc that they see or read.

Questions for follow-up class discussion: Are most of the messages about masculinity in the film positive/negative, stereotypical or unique? Do they differ for men of different ages, races or ethnicities? What (if anything) surprised students about what they found out doing this exercise?

Class discussion: Compare and contrast the choices that the two brothers (Keshon and Devon) make in the film. Discuss the choices that the two brothers' make in the film (e.g. what they do to earn money, their behavior and attitude towards school, who they

ask to the prom). What are the potential consequences of each brother's choice? Did one brother make better choice(s) than the other? Why?

Class discussion: Why is the film called *Misunderstood*? Who or what is misunderstood?

Why do you think the filmmakers left the end of the film open-ended?

Word Bank

The following are examples of words/ideas/images that may come up in discussion. Although students and adults alike may think of gender and gender identity as fixed, it is important to remember that our concepts of masculinity (and femininity) are not fixed or natural, but are socially constructed i.e. , we/society creates definitions. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers encourage students to explore the meanings and implications of words that they associate with masculinity.

Father, brother, parent, decision maker, caretaker, virility, macho, heterosexual, names of leaders or important male role models (John Wayne, Albert Einstein, etc.), strong, bully, calm, well-dressed, healthy, vitality, courageous, heroic, just, intelligent, independent, businessmen, plumber, doctor, 'does not cry', 'does not need help', 'is not afraid of a fight', 'loves cars, guns and women', 'can hold his liquor', etc.