

# WE CAN ALL BE HEROES

## Lesson plan on:

Gender

## Adaptation tips to suit different contexts and realities:



- Consider adapting the **Family** activity to suit the family environment of the children in your class. In some cases, open discussions about gender might be challenging if gender roles, stereotypes and inequalities are strongly rooted in the prevailing culture.
- Consider adapting the statements relating to stereotypes in the **Learn** activity using locally appropriate and widely known examples.
- Consider adapting the female heroes in the **Extension** activity using locally appropriate and commonly known examples.

## Learning objectives:



By the end of this lesson, the children should be able to:

- Reflect on and recognize that everyone is unique.
- Recognize and challenge gender stereotypes.
- Understand why stereotypes are harmful.

## How to use this lesson plan:



The lesson plan is divided in three parts: **Start**, **Learn** and **Reflect**. There are also **Guidance** boxes to help you deepen your knowledge of the specified topics. In addition, there are **Family** activity and **Extension** activity boxes that suggest optional activities and ways of further exploring the topics of the lesson.

## Lesson overview:



In this lesson, children will begin by reflecting on everyone's uniqueness, while at the same time acknowledging that they all have some characteristics in common.

Children will also be encouraged to reflect on how easy it is to fall into the trap of thinking about and referring to people with similar features and traits using stereotypes.

The second part of the lesson is focused more specifically on gender. Children will explore several gender stereotypes and consider the consequences of using stereotypes.

## Key question:

What are gender stereotypes and why are they harmful?

## Age:

6 -9

## Values:



## Skills:



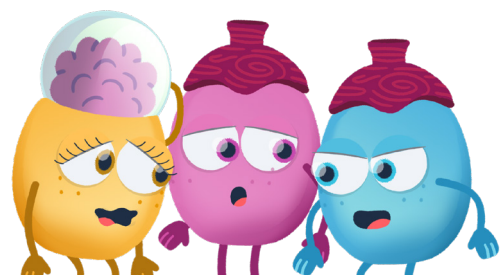
## Time:



## Preparation and materials:

- 5 poster sheets or sheets of A4 paper.
- Flipcharts.
- Markers.
- If possible, The Zorbs [video](#) *Teamwork Saves the Day* or the corresponding [comic book](#), both available on the [GRACE website](#).

In addition, check out the [colouring book](#) and [children's book](#), both available on the GRACE website.



**Start**

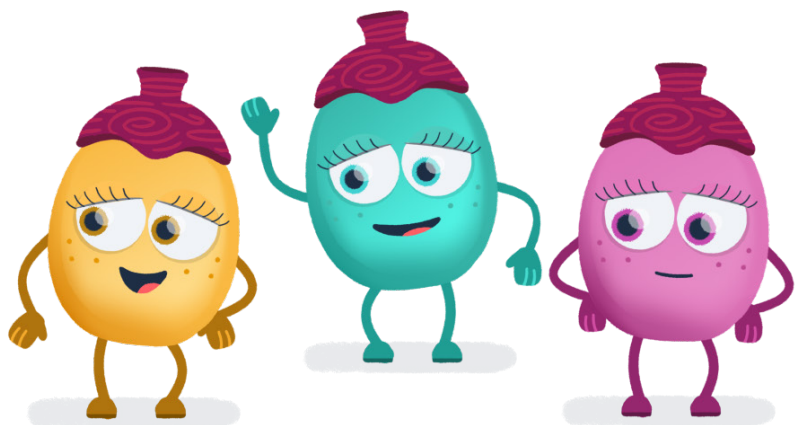


1. Explain to the children that they are going to explore their own uniqueness and differences, and talk about stereotypes.
2. Invite the children to sit on the floor in a circle.  
 Invite each child to take 2-3 minutes to reflect on the fact that we all have some characteristics in common. Ask the following question and invite the children to take 2-3 minutes to come up with an answer:  
**“What do you have in common with the person to your right?”**
3. Invite each child to give a hug, or any other locally appropriate greeting or expression of affection, to their classmate sitting on their right and share with them what they have in common.
4. Explain to the children that while we all have some things in common, each one of us is unique. We all have unique characteristics that make us different from other people.
5. Invite each child to take 2-3 minutes to come up with a unique way of greeting the classmate on their right, using a special hand shake, body movement or greeting. Each child should also think of one thing that makes them unique.
6. Finally, ask each child to share with the classroom their greeting and what makes them unique.

**Guidance box: addressing differences**

During the **Start** activity, the children might refer to differences that are sensitive, such as different abilities, race or religion.

If this happens, use it as an opportunity to emphasize that being different is never a negative thing. Emphasize how we should embrace and value all kinds of differences.



## Learn



**Note:** If it is possible to watch The Zorbs [video](#) *Teamwork Saves the Day* with the children or read the corresponding [comic book](#), you should follow all the steps below. If it is not feasible, skip step 7.

1. Ask the following question to the class. If needed, use the **Guidance** box on stereotypes and prejudices to initiate or further the discussion:  
 “What do you think stereotypes are?”
2. Guide the discussion by emphasizing that stereotypes are oversimplified beliefs about groups of people that are too general and too simplistic to be true. Explain that very often people identify certain characteristics as belonging only to boys or only to girls: these are gender stereotypes.
3. Invite the children to form small groups and come up with a series of statements that they think represent gender stereotypes. You can guide them by explaining that they can reflect on:
  - **Personality traits.** For example, women are often expected to be caring, accommodating and emotional, while men are usually expected to be self-confident, strong and assertive.
  - **Domestic behaviours.** For example, some people expect that women will take care of the children, cook and clean the home, while men take care of financial matters, enjoy working on their car and are responsible for carrying out home repairs.
  - **Occupations.** For example, some people assume that teachers, hairdressers and nurses are women while pilots, doctors and engineers are men.
  - **Physical appearance.** For example, women are often expected to be thin and graceful, while men are expected to be tall and muscular.
4. After 10 minutes, invite each group to share their statements.

### Guidance box: stereotypes and prejudices

Sometimes we assume that people with particular characteristics or who belong to a particular group are the same, share similar traits or behave similarly.

Stereotypes are generalized, fixed and oversimplified assumptions about groups of people or people with similar characteristics. For example: all girls like pink; all old people are fragile; or all Ethiopians are great at running marathons. These are stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are stereotypes associated with men or women.

We learn stereotypes through the people around us: our peers, adults and people on TV and in the media.

Stereotypes are harmful because they make incorrect assumptions about people; they foster differences between groups, making these differences much stronger and more evident; thereby ignoring people's uniqueness and individuality.



## Learn



5. Ask the following questions to the class:
  - "What are the consequences of these stereotypes?"
  - "Is it good or bad to use stereotypes? Why?"
6. Stress the importance of recognizing a person's uniqueness rather than judging someone based on preconceived assumptions about their culture or the characteristics they share with others, such as being a girl or a boy.

Explain that stereotypes are unfair because they lead to judgments about what we expect people to be or how we expect them to behave, which often does not correspond to reality.

7. If possible, invite the children to watch the Zorbs [video](#) Teamwork Saves the Day or read the corresponding [comic book](#). After watching the video or reading the comic book, use the following questions to start a discussion:

- "What do you think the story is trying to teach us?"
- "Why does Sven think Miriam is not strong enough to help lift the log and instead should try to reassure the cat?"
- "Do you agree with Sven?"
- "Do you think that Miriam is not strong enough to help lift the log?"
- "What makes you say that?"
- "Do you think that boys are stronger than girls? Why?"
- "Sven struggles to admit that he is afraid of heights. Why?"



## Reflect



1. Ask the children to write down the name of one of their heroes. It can be a real person or a fictional character.
2. After a few minutes, invite each child to share the identity of their hero. Capture the answers on a flipchart.
3. Invite the children to reflect on how many female characters there are on the list. It is likely that there will be more men than women on the list. If this is the case, ask the children to reflect on why most of their heroes are men. If there are many female heroes on your list, ask the children why they have chosen these female heroes and discuss how both men and women can be heroes.
4. Finally, invite the children to reflect on the fact that the stereotypes that are associated with girls and women often have consequences for the roles that they have in society.

For example, this activity shows that in society being a hero is generally seen as a male thing. This is a negative stereotype because it ignores the individuality and abilities of girls and women, and does not recognize their strengths (bravery, empathy, resilience, intelligence, etc.).

Explain that, while there are plenty of female heroes, very often they are not as prominent as male ones because they do not receive the same amount of attention.

**Guidance box: a family hero**

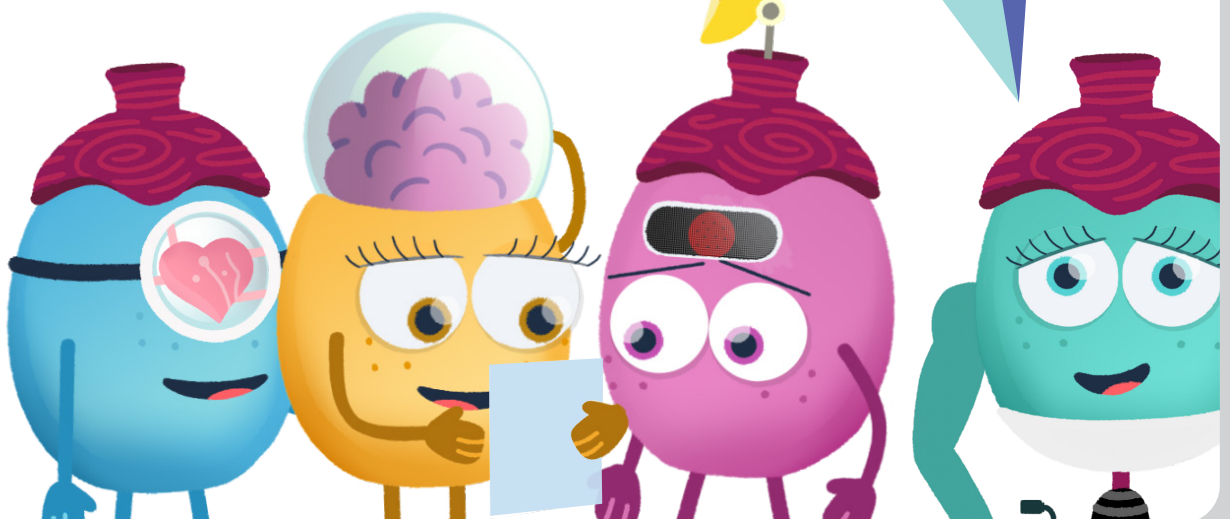
It is likely that children will mostly refer to male heroes when exposed to this activity. However, they may refer to a female family hero, such as a mother, a sister, a grandmother, etc.

If this happens, it is important to ask why they have chosen that person and which aspects of her character or what skills make her a hero.

It should be expected that the children will refer to female family heroes mostly because of their caring role: their warmth, reassuring presence, patience, love, etc.

You should be aware that when we only value female heroes for their caring roles, we are still applying a stereotype: mothers, sisters or grandmothers can be our heroes because they are strong, smart, intelligent, etc. and not only because they are caring, patient and loving.

If you need to emphasize this point, reflect on the different reasons that the children attribute to their choices for female or male heroes.





## Reflect

**Extension activity: discovering female heroes**

This lesson is a great opportunity to learn more about female heroes.

Invite the children to form groups. Provide each group with one of the four stories about female heroes that are listed below.

Give each group enough time to read and talk about their story.

Invite each group to present their stories and initiate a discussion using the following questions:

- Do you think this person is a hero? Why?
- Which characteristics does she have that make her a hero?

You can extend this activity by inviting each group to conduct a brief research on female heroes. They can learn new things about the hero they chose or discover new female heroes. Invite the children to present their findings to the class.

If the stories about heroes are too difficult for the children to read, you can read them to the class and discuss the women featured in the stories using the questions above.

**Hero 1: Rosa Parks (1913-2005)**

Rosa Parks is considered the first lady of civil rights and the mother of the freedom movement. She was given these titles because of her actions on 1 December 1955. At this point in time, persons of African descent were treated unfairly in the United States of America. For example, in Montgomery, where Rosa Parks lived, they had to sit in special areas on public buses; they could not sit in the areas reserved for white passengers.

On that December day in 1955, Rosa Parks boarded her bus after a long day at work and sat in an area reserved for white people. As the bus filled up, the driver asked her to move to let a white passenger sit down. Rosa Parks believed this was deeply unjust and refused to move. Her refusal caused a huge social protest and helped launch nationwide efforts to end segregation on public buses. As a result of her protest, the city of Montgomery abolished the law requiring segregation on public buses.



## Reflect

**Extension activity: discovering female heroes****Hero 2: Valentina Tereshkova (born 1937)**

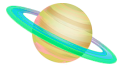
Valentina Tereshkova was born in Russia and from an early age she had a unique interest: she liked flying. She spent long hours lying on the grass and staring at the sky, wondering what it would be like to fly like a bird or, even better, to go beyond the clouds and into space.

Valentina Tereshkova was so fascinated by the idea of flying that she saved the wages from her first job, at a local textile factory, so that she could learn to skydive. She still remembers her first jump: the excitement of the helicopter taking off, the thrill of looking down and the jump itself, the parachute opening up and the quietness as she floated in the sky, looking at the houses, cars and fields getting bigger and bigger as she got closer to the ground. She knew then that her destiny was not the factory.

Valentina Tereshkova was so determined to pursue her dream that she enrolled in the first-ever programme for female cosmonauts. She was selected from 400 candidates to be the first women to go to space.

On 16 June 1963, at the age of 26, she boarded the Vostok 6 spacecraft and was launched into space. All alone, she spent almost three days travelling in her space capsule, orbiting the earth 48 times. She managed to record on one mission more flight time than all the American astronauts put together.

Valentina Tereshkova, whose codename on her historic journey was Seagull, is a national hero in Russia.



## Reflect



### Extension activity: discovering female heroes

#### Hero 3: Wangari Maathai (1940-2011)

Wangari Maathai believed that people and the environment should be treated fairly and with respect. She fought hard for this cause and was strongly committed to these values. As a result of her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace, she became the first African woman and the first environmentalist to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

How did she get there? She was born in a rural village in Kenya and she liked doing what many young girls and boys liked doing. Every day she would go with her parents to the local pastures: she loved taking long baths in the nearby river and playing hide and seek among the tall trees. She loved the smell of the fresh mangoes hanging from the trees and looking for crickets in the high grass.

At that time, it was not common for girls to go to school, especially in rural villages. But when Wangari Maathai was old enough, she started asking her parents why her brothers could go to school and she could not. Her parents realized that there was no good reason why she could not go and agreed to send her to school.

Wangari Maathai loved school and she was an excellent student. She was so good that her parents allowed her to go to high school and then on to university to study biology. No one in her village had ever seen a woman going to university. She did so well at university that she became the first woman in East Africa to get a PhD.

Wangari Maathai decided that she had to do more for her country, especially for the women, and she became the chairperson of the National Council of Women of Kenya. Wangari Maathai received lots of complaints from women about dried up rivers and a lack of vegetables and wood. She travelled back to her village and found that where there was once a forest, there were only dusty fields. She worked out that this was the reason for the lack of water, vegetables and wood. Without the trees, which capture and store water, the balance of the ecosystem had been disrupted and the land was dying.

Wangari Maathai realized that lots of trees had to be planted. She convinced other women to help her bring back the forest. It was a huge and seemingly impossible project, but the women planted and planted and planted. And they made it happen; they brought the forest back, and with it rivers, plants and mango trees.

Wangari Maathai did not stop there. She created the Green Belt Movement, which aims at taking care of the earth and the people who live on this planet.





## Reflect

**Extension activity: discovering female heroes****Hero 4: Zaha Hadid (1950-2016)**

Zaha Hadid was not an ordinary architect. She was a 'starchitect'. Why? Because her unique story is one filled with intellectual toughness, beauty and candour, and is one of success in a male-dominated field.

Zaha Hadid was born in Baghdad, Iraq. When she was a child, her parents took her to visit the ancient Sumer cities in the south of the country. These cities are the remains of one of the world's oldest civilizations. She was astonished by the beauty of the landscape. The way in which buildings, sand, water and people came together struck her so much that she decided to become an architect so that she could replicate this harmony in the modern world.

In 1977, five years after moving to the United Kingdom, she graduated from university and started developing her own radical and innovative projects. However, at first her ideas were considered unpractical by most: beautiful plans destined to remain on paper or fill the pages of architecture magazines. But Zaha Hadid never gave up. She fought hard and refused to compromise, which was not easy in a male-dominated field.

By the end of the 1990s, after receiving international acclaim for her design of the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, she was an international star and she went on to reshape the landscape of many cities around the world. In 2004, she was awarded her profession's highest honour, the Pritzker Architecture Prize. She was the first woman to receive the award.



## Reflect

**Family activity: talking about gender stereotypes at home**

Talking about gender stereotypes at home can be challenging. In some cultures, women are expected to take care of the children, manage the home and work long hours at a job. As a result, there is little gender equality to speak of. Therefore, rather than talking about personal experiences, it may be better to use historic figures to discuss and raise awareness of gender stereotypes and gender inequality.

You can invite the children to use the examples of female heroes provided in the **Extension activity**. They can share these examples at home and ask their parents if they know these people and, if not, why they think that they are not famous. You can also invite the children to ask their parents to share their female heroes and the reasons for their choices.

If the local culture allows, you can invite the children to conduct short interviews with their mothers or other female family members. They can ask them how their role as a woman has changed over time, both at home and in society. Are there things that they were not allowed to do that they can do today? Which jobs were uncommon for women? Which jobs were uncommon for men?

After the children conducted the interviews, invite them to share their findings with the class. Invite them to discuss how gender stereotypes and gender roles have changed over time and throughout history. You can try to discuss where they think stereotypes come from and why they change with time. If necessary, explain how stereotypes are a result of societal constructions and that they change and evolve with society.

