

# THE PRONOUN FLIP

## ASSESSING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT GENDER

- Gender bias
- Gender
- Gender equality
- Bias
- Male
- Female
- Gender pronouns
- Woman
- Stereotypes
- Oppression
- Discrimination
- Violence
- Sex

- ✓ 1. To illustrate how subtle gender biases can influence social perceptions.
- ✓ 2. To help learners recognise their own assumptions about gender.
- ✓ 3. To explore the implications these biases may have for gender equality.

45 mins

TEXT 1 & TEXT 2 (provided)

## PROCEDURE

- 1 Divide learners into small groups. Give each group either Text 1 or Text 2. The only difference between the two texts is that the gender pronouns are reversed: the character that is depicted as a man in the first one is a woman in the second and vice versa. Do not tell the learners this.
- 2 Give learners 10 minutes to read the dialogue and discuss their impressions of the two characters. Ask all learners to write down their impressions of the characters. (This written record prevents learners from changing their impressions in response to their peers, during later class discussions.)
- 3 Ask each group to tell you something about the characters and their relationships in each text. This discussion typically reveals very different impressions depending on which of the two dialogues learners read.
- 4 Once a few learners have offered their impressions, reveal that the two dialogues are identical, except for the genders of the characters.
- 5 Now, ask learners to take another 10 minutes with their group to discuss whether their impressions of the characters would be different if the genders (previously encountered) were reversed. Why?
- 6 In the last phase of the activity, have a class discussion where you ask the class:
  - a. What are the differences in the way that you described the male and female versions of the same character? What characteristics were ascribed to each? Were they positive or negative characteristics?
  - b. How different are our ideas about men and women who do the same things? Where do these ideas come from?
  - c. How are these gendered associations or biases harmful - to the individual and to our society?

## TEACHER TIPS



### General

An exercise like this works best if it is carried out before learners are introduced to gender stereotypes and biases. It allows them to 'organically' identify and challenge their own biases.

By using an existing set work, instead of the texts provided, this exercise could fit into the existing academic curriculum. However, it would have to be done early enough in order that learners are not already familiar with the selected excerpt or characters.



### Making the Link with Gender & Violence

Learners should consider how the impressions we have about what men and women are like, and how they should behave, can make one group more vulnerable to **oppression, discrimination, and violence**. This exercise allows learners to begin understanding how **gender, social norms and values** combine to create gendered and unequal expectations in our society, and how these, in turn impact on perceptions and exposure to **violence**. For instance, if men are expected to be dominant and **women** are expected to be subservient, this can lead to unequal power dynamics in relationships, and the risk of **domestic violence** or **abuse**.

Learners should consider how women are often portrayed in society and in the **media**, as being powerless. They should understand how seeing, hearing and internalising that women are weak; are only valued if they are pretty; have value to men only when they are subservient or passive, might impact on the way that men treat women. Also it could impact on a young woman's self-image, and how she thinks she should behave in relationships. Similarly, you may ask how these ideas could shape boy's and men's thinking about sex, and what they can, and cannot, demand from girls and women.



### Assessment Ideas

This is not a good exercise for assessment as it is intended to solicit learners' ideas and opinions about gender, as the basis for further discussion.



# TEXT 1: FRIDAY NIGHT DANCE

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Read and discuss in class.

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**It had been a long week.** She'd worked hard and now she needed a change. Something fun.

The food had been cooked and eaten. The dishes washed. That part of the evening was done. All she wanted was a bit of free time. To share a few laughs. To get ready for all that Monday would bring, once more.

She checked her hair in the mirror and then stood up feeling good. Shoulders back, attitude on.

"Right, I'm off" she said as she crossed the small front room heading for the door, trying to ignore the worn furniture, the tired carpet. Her money rustling softly in her pocket.

The world held its breath for a moment. The clock ticked loudly. And it seemed as though even the dog paused in its scratching – alert to a change of mood in the room.

"I hope you don't think you're going out," he said. "Not dressed like that. Not at this time of night."

And so began the weekly Friday night dance that always began with an argument and ended in tears.

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# TEXT 2: FRIDAY NIGHT DANCE

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**Read and discuss in class.**

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**It had been a long week.** He'd worked hard and now he needed a change. Something fun.

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