



THE GENDER WAGE GAP

As we commemorate and celebrate women’s history and accomplishments in March during Women’s History Month, it is also an opportunity to reflect on the history of discrimination against women and the continued struggles for equity today. While we have made enormous strides in all aspects of society regarding equity for women, there are still injustices that remain. One is the gender wage gap. According to 2014 Census data, women earn 79% of what men earn and that number is even lower for black and Latino women. A variety of factors contribute to the disparity.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their own opinions about sexism, understand the gender pay gap and its various manifestations and consider ways that it can be overcome.

See these additional ADL resources: *Current Events Classroom* [Stereotypes of Girls and Women in the Media](#) and [Is Gaming a Boys' Club? Women, Video Games and Sexism](#), [Toward Communication Free of Gender Bias](#) and [Congress Must Follow President Obama’s Lead to Close The Wage Gap](#).

Grade Level: grades 9–12

Time: 45 minutes

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Speaking and Listening, Language

Learning Objectives:

- Students will explore their opinions of and experiences with sexism and gender stereotypes.
- Students will deepen their understanding of the gender wage gap, how it manifests in different states and the way it particularly impacts women of color.
- Students will reflect on ways to close the gender pay gap and explore one idea in depth.

Compelling Question: What is the gender pay gap and what can be done to change it?

Material:

- Pre-made signs that say: STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE, DISAGREE, STRONGLY DISAGREE (can be placed around room in advance)
- *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap* report (American Association of University Women, 2016, www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/), one copy for each student
- “How to Bridge That Stubborn Pay Gap” (*The New York Times*, January 15, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/upshot/how-to-bridge-that-stubborn-pay-gap.html), one copy for each student

- [Response to Gender Wage Gap Charts](#) (at least three copies for each student)

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL's "[Glossary of Education Terms](#).")

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| • aggregate | • institutional | • policy |
| • compensation | • median | • retaliate |
| • discrimination | • negotiate | • salaries |
| • disparity | • parental leave | • sexism |
| • flexibility | • personal | • stereotype |
| • implicit bias | • penalized | • wage |

HERE I STAND

1. Explain to students that we are going to start this lesson by having them listen to some statements about gender and equity and decide to what extent they agree or disagree with each statement. Instruct students to indicate their opinion about each statement by positioning themselves along an imaginary line, depending upon how strongly they agree or disagree with a statement.
2. Select a large open space and indicate the position of an imaginary line with the farthest right point representing a STRONGLY AGREE response and the farthest left point a STRONGLY DISAGREE response. In between, place AGREE, IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE, AND DISAGREE along the continuum. Hang up signs with these words on the wall (do in advance if possible).
3. Read each statement below, requesting that students take a few minutes to decide where they stand in the continuum and have them walk silently to that place and observe where others choose to stand. Explain that some are statements of opinion and some are statements that have factual information. Following each statement, after everyone has chosen their spot, have students spend 2–3 minutes talking amongst themselves (in the groups that formed after choosing where to stand) about why they are standing where they are.
 - Girls and boys in this school are treated equally.
 - Gender stereotypes mostly hurt girls and women.
 - Women and men who have the same level of education generally make the same amount of money.
 - Sexism is a thing of the past.
 - Women who have children make less money than women who don't have children.
 - There are not major differences in salary between women of different races.
4. After the activity, lead a whole group discussion using the following questions:
 - Were some statements easier for you to decide where to stand and some more difficult? How so?
 - Did you ever decide to change your position when you saw you did not agree with a majority of the group, or after hearing others' points of view?
 - What did you learn by doing this that made you either change your point of view or made you feel more strongly about your position?

INFORMATION SHARING

1. Ask students: *Do you know what the “gender wage gap” is?* If students don’t know, have them look at the three words separately to determine its meaning. Elicit/explain the definition of **gender wage gap** as the average difference between men’s and women’s aggregate salaries.
2. Then ask students: *What is sexism?* Define **sexism** as prejudice and/or discrimination against people based on their real or perceived sex. Sexism is based on a belief (conscious or unconscious) that there is a natural order based on sex. Ask for examples or share some of your own quickly. Then ask: *What is unconscious bias?*
3. Explain that **unconscious bias**—also known as “implicit bias”—is defined as the unconscious attitudes, stereotypes and unintentional actions (positive or negative) towards members of a group merely because of their membership in that group. These associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages. When people are acting out of their implicit bias, they are not even aware that their actions are biased. In fact, those biases may be in direct conflict with a person’s explicit beliefs and values.

If needed, share the following example of implicit bias: Researchers asked students to rate teachers of an online course (the students never saw the teachers). To some of the students, a male teacher claimed to be female and vice versa. When students took a class from someone they believed to be male, they rated the teacher more highly. The very same teacher, when believed to be female, was rated significantly lower (Source: [Online Students Give Instructors Higher Marks If They Think Instructors Are Men](#)).

Ask students: *Do you think the gender pay gap is a result of conscious or unconscious bias, or neither?*

4. Distribute a copy of [The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap](#) to each student. Explain to students that you are going to talk about some data from charts about the gender wage gap. Show the graph entitled: “The Big Number: 79 Percent” by projecting it on the board or smart board if possible. Tell students not to read anything but to just look at the graph. Ask students:
 - What are some facts about the chart?
 - If you were writing a newspaper article, what would be the headline?
 - What questions do you have?

Explain a little more about the graph by reading the blurb right under the title.

5. Have students get into pairs to discuss two more graphs on their own. You can decide which of the graphs to use; we recommend: “Location, Location, Location: Pay Gap by State,” “The Pay Gap is Worse for Women of Color” and/or “Age is More Than Just a Number.”
6. The pairs should spend 10 minutes reading the graphs together, discussing what they mean, and coming up with the following , using the [Response to Gender Wage Gap Charts](#) handout to record their thoughts.
 - 2–3 facts about the chart
 - 2–3 “headlines” about the chart
 - 2–3 questions they have

After the pairs have completed their work, engage students in a class discussion by going through each chart and asking students to share their some of their responses to charts. Then, ask:

- What did you learn that you didn’t know before?

- What surprised you the most?
 - What did you already know from experience or a gut feeling?
 - If you had to tell a friend or family member one thing about this issue, what would it be?
 - What do you think are some of the reasons that women earn less (record responses on board/smart board)?
7. Following up on the last discussion question, explain that the gender wage gap is due to a variety of causes including: discrimination in hiring, differences in education choices, differences in preferred job and industry, salary negotiation differences, the types of positions held by men and women, difference in length of work week and breaks in employment due to parenting.

READING ACTIVITY

1. Distribute a copy of the article "[How to Bridge That Stubborn Pay Gap](#)" to each student. Give students ten minutes to read the article silently.
2. Engage students in a discussion by asking:
 - According to the article, what are some of the reasons for the gender wage gap and what factors make it difficult to determine the exact reasons for the gap?
 - What are some of the suggested ideas to address the gender wage gap and what are your thoughts about them?
 - Which of these examples reflect conscious bias and which reflect unconscious bias and why?
 - Do you think the gender pay gap is an example of sexism? Why or why not?

NOTE: If students ask questions about what the federal government has done to address this problem, share the following:

In 2009, the first piece of legislation that President Obama signed was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, a bill that makes it easier for women to sue companies who pay women less than men for the same work. In June 2012, another bill would have banned companies from retaliating against women for seeking equal pay but it failed in the Senate. Then it failed twice more in the Senate in 2014. It is important to note that according to estimates from the National Organization of Women (NOW), over her lifetime, the wage gap will cost the average high school graduate \$700,000, the average college graduate \$1.2 million and the average advanced degree graduate \$2 million.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THE GENDER PAY GAP?

1. Before discussing what can be done about the gender pay gap, explain that bias can be personal and institutional and, similarly, the solutions can be personal or institutional. If your students need an explanation, see below:
 - **Personal** manifestations of prejudice or discrimination include individual acts of bias, meanness or exclusion.
 - **Institutional** manifestations of prejudice or discrimination include policies and practices that are supported and sanctioned by power and authority, and that benefit some and disadvantage others.

2. Ask students to reflect on everything they have discussed, read and learned and ask: *What are some ways the gender wage gap can be addressed—on both a personal and institutional level?* This can be a brainstorming session and all their responses should be recorded on the board/smart board.
3. Have students select one of the ideas generated from the brainstorming session and expand upon it in an essay that they write. Students can use class time to write the opening paragraph and then it can be assigned as a short essay or a longer research project assignment over the course of the next day or several weeks. In addition, and if time allows, students can also make a video, Power Point presentation or use social media to get their message across to a larger audience.

CLOSING

Do a go-round where all students share their first paragraph from their essays.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“As Women Take Over a Male-Dominated Field, the Pay Drops”](#) (*The New York Times*, March 18, 2016)
- [On Equal Pay Day, key facts about the gender pay gap](#) (Pew Research Center, April 14, 2015)
- [Pay Equity and Discrimination](#) (Institute for Women’s Policy Research)
- [The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap](#) (American Association of University Women, Spring 2016)
- [“These 25 Jobs Have the Worst Gender Pay Gap”](#) (*TIME*, February 16, 2016)
- [“What Women—and Men—Say About the Gender Wage Gap”](#) (*Wall Street Journal*, February 25, 2016)
- [“Why Are Women Paid Less?”](#) (*The Atlantic*, October 17, 2012)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Standard 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
Writing
Standard 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Standard 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

RESPONSE TO GENDER WAGE GAP CHARTS

Chart Name: _____

FACTS ABOUT THE CHART

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

HEADLINES

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

QUESTIONS WE HAVE

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.