Sexism and the Presidential Election

ADL®

Compelling Question: How does gender bias factor into the presidential election?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45–60 Minutes	Reading: R1, R2 Writing: W1, W4 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2, SL3 Language: L4, L6
MS	HS		

Web Related Connections

Lessons
Is Olympic Coverage Sexist?
Moving Beyond Gender Barriers in Our Lives
Representing the People: Diversity and Elections
Stereotypes of Girls and Women in the Media

Other Resources
How Sexist Name-Calling Hurts All of Us
Toward Communication Free of Gender Bias
Women's History Month Resources

LESSON OVERVIEW

The 2020 presidential election is unique in that six of the Democratic candidates who ran or are running for President are women. This unprecedented number of women candidates has led to a heightened awareness of how they are perceived, treated and scrutinized as viable candidates. The 2020 presidential election provides an opportunity to explore and understand how sexism has manifested in presidential elections.

This lesson enables students to learn more about the history of women and the presidency, analyze how sexism surfaces during campaigns and explore their own points of view about these issues.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will gain knowledge in the history of women and the presidency.
- Students will reflect on gender bias in presidential elections.
- Students will explore their opinions about women, sexism and the presidency by writing an argumentative essay.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- "How sexism will influence the 2020 election" YouTube video (2019, 5:16 min., Think Progress, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeuxSIpJn8o)
- Signs prepared in advance: (1) STRONGLY AGREE, (2) AGREE, (3) IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE, (4) DISAGREE, (5) STRONGLY DISAGREE
- "Are most women who run for president unlikable? Asking is sexist, yet many voters agree" (*USA Today,* November 12, 2019, www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/11/12/most-women-2020-race-unlikable-sexist-question-ask-about-men-column/2558691001/, one copy for each student)
- Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer (one for each student)

PROCEDURES

Information Sharing: Gender and Elections

1. Begin the lesson by asking students to describe what they know about the 2020 presidential election. Allow a few minutes for students to share what they know.

Key Words

ambitious
assertive
blatantly
centennial
empathetic
implicit
infuriating
institutional
internalized
likable
misogyny
nomination
overqualified
personal
plethora
preposterous
sexist
shrill

2. Then ask: *Is there anything unique or different about the 2020 presidential election?*

3. Explain that a total of six women have been or still are candidates, the most in history. They are: Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard of Hawai'i, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, Senator Kamala Harris of California, Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Marianne Williamson, author, politician and activist. Point out that four of these women are white (Gillibrand, Klobuchar, Warren and Williamson) and two are women of color (Harris and Gabbard).

4. Ask: *How is the race different with women in it? How do you think the experience of running for president may be different for the women of color?*

5. Share some or all of the following information:

   ○ During the 2016 presidential election, Hillary Clinton was the first female candidate ever at the top of a major party ticket. Hillary Clinton served as a U.S. Senator from 2001-2009 from New York State. In 2007, she ran for president on the Democratic Party ticket but lost the nomination to Barack Obama. When he was elected President, Hillary Clinton served in President Obama's administration as Secretary of State from 2009-2013.

   ○ The first woman to run for President was Victoria Woodhull in 1872 as a candidate in the Equal Rights Party. She was a suffragette and an advocate for equal rights. Margaret Chase Smith ran on the Republican ticket in 1964 and became the first woman to receive more than one vote at a major party convention. Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to Congress, ran for President in the Democratic Party primary in 1972; she won 152 delegate votes. Several other women have run over the years and two women have been on major party tickets as Vice Presidential candidates: Geraldine Ferraro, Democrat, in 1984 and Sarah Palin, Republican, in 2008.

   ○ More than 70 countries, many in Europe and Asia, have had a woman hold the position of President or Prime Minister. In a parliamentary system of government, citizens do not vote for individual candidates. They usually vote for political parties who then appoint party leaders.

   ○ A 2018 Pew research poll found that 45% of people in the U.S. said they personally hoped a woman would be elected president in their lifetime. About half of all women (51%) said they personally hoped this would happen, compared with 38% of men. The general public believes there are barriers for women who seek top leadership positions in politics. A different Pew Research Center survey reveals that two-thirds of Americans said it's easier for men to get elected to high political offices.

▶ Video Viewing

1. Show the video "How sexism will influence the 2020 election." Instruct students to take notes as they watch the video, noting common themes and important points to remember.

2. After watching the video, engage students in a discussion by asking students the following questions:

   ○ What did you notice about the women running for President?

   ○ How are they treated?

   ○ In what ways does the video show how women are being viewed and regarded in comparison to men?

3. Make a list of some common themes outlined in the video, as follows:

   ○ "Likability" is crucial for women.

   ○ Women are held to higher standard.

   ○ Public perceptions of what it means to be "presidential" have an impact on how voters perceive women candidates.

   ○ There is a double standard for how women are covered in the media.

   ○ Intense coverage of personality for women candidates takes the emphasis off their policy positions.

   ○ Women are placed on a higher pedestal when it comes to ethics, which makes it more difficult for a woman candidate to get past issues that involve being unethical.

Engage students in a brief discussion by asking: *Does this list resonate with you? What do you notice about the list? What impact do these points have on these women's candidacies?*

What is Sexism?

1. Ask students: *What is sexism?* Elicit a definition as follows:

   Sexism is the marginalization and/or oppression of women based on the belief in a natural order based on sex that privileges men.

2. Give students four minutes (two minutes per person) to turn and talk with someone sitting near them. In pairs, ask them to share with each other examples of sexism that they have seen (in person or online), heard about or experienced in school and society.

3. Reconvene students and ask them to share some of their examples aloud. Make a list on the board/smart board that could look something like this:

   - Women being paid less than men for same work.
   - Girls and women are portrayed in stereotypical ways in the media that marginalizes and objectifies them.
   - Thinking women can only perform certain kinds of jobs.
   - Thinking girls aren't good at math and science.
   - Women athletes being paid less than men athletes.
   - Being excluded from a school club or sport because of one's gender.
   - Having to deal with double standards.
   - Stereotypical ideas and thoughts about masculinity.
   - School dress codes that have more rules for girls than boys and promote the idea that girls "distract" boys with their clothes.
   - Sexist "jokes," slurs and other sexist language.
   - Sexual harassment in school, on the street and in the workplace.
   - Not allowing girls to play certain sports or not taking them seriously.
   - Expecting women and girls to always smile.

4. Talk briefly about the difference between *individual* and *systemic* prejudice or discrimination. Elicit and define as follows:

   Individual form of prejudice or discrimination includes individual acts of bias, meanness or exclusion.

   Systemic form of prejudice or discrimination includes policies and practices that are supported by power and authority and that benefit some and disadvantage others.

5. Elaborate by sharing examples of how sexism can be expressed individually and systemically:

   Sexism is individual when someone tells a joke or makes a comment that is demeaning to women because the interaction is happening between people and individuals.

   Sexism is systemic when women are being paid less than men for doing the same or comparable job because the bias takes place and is perpetuated within a societal institution and reflects systems of injustice.

6. Ask students to use some of the examples brainstormed on the board/smart board and categorize them as either individual or systemic. Put an "I" (individual) or "S" (systemic) next to each one. If there is disagreement, spend a little time to come to an understanding.

Here I Stand Activity

1. Explain to students that they will listen to statements about gender and the presidential election and then decide to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement. They will indicate their opinion about each topic 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.

   Note: If space is not available to move around the room, have students indicate their position by raising hands or holding up cards with the words of the signs above.

3. Read each statement below—one at a time—requesting students to take some time to decide where they stand in the continuum, walk silently to that place and observe where others choose to stand. Following each statement, after everyone has chosen their spot, have one or two students from each group share their reasons for standing where they are. Allow students to move upon hearing the reasons.

   - A woman is capable of being president of the United States.
   - There will be a woman president in our lifetime.
   - There hasn't been a woman president because there haven't been any qualified candidates in the past.
   - Men are more qualified to be president than women.
   - There is a "double standard" (favoring one group over another) for female and male candidates.
   - The women candidates for the 2020 presidential election are more qualified than the men candidates.
   - There hasn't been a woman president because of sexism.
   - There hasn't been a woman president because the presidency is better suited for men.
   - Women of color and other women who are marginalized (women who are LGBTQ+, have a disability, etc.) face greater challenges than white women who are part of majority identity groups.

4. After the activity, engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:

   - Was it easy or difficult to decide where to stand?
   - Were some statements easier to decide and some more difficult?
   - Did you decide where to stand based on knowledge, opinion or something else?
   - How did it feel when most people had the same response as you?
   - How about when most people were standing somewhere else?
   - Did you ever feel you needed to explain where you chose to stand but you didn't feel you had the opportunity to do so? If so, why did you feel this way?
   - What did you learn from this activity?

Reading Activity

1. Distribute a copy of the article "Are most women who run for president unlikable? Asking is sexist, yet many voters agree." Give students 10–15 minutes to read the article silently.

2. Engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:

   - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
   - Why do you think so many voters (almost 40%) say most of the women running for president are "unlikable?"

- How do you think voters determine whether a candidate is likable?
- What does the article mean when it says women are "held to different standards than men?" Have you seen examples of this from campaigns?
- Why do you think, as the article and survey suggest, that women are tougher on women?
- Has this article shifted your thinking and if so, how?

Writing Activity

1. Explain to students that they will now write argumentative essays about an opinion of belief on women, sexism and the presidential election. Explain to students that in argumentative essays, they will take a position and provide evidence to support their position, similar to an op-ed or editorial. The writing can begin in class and be assigned for homework. Students may need to do additional research which should factor into the decision of how much time you will give them to complete their writing.

2. As the main topic for their essays, they can use one of the statements in the "Here I Stand Activity" and choose one with which they strongly agreed. If none of those work, they can develop a new position statement.

3. Have students begin their essay in class by working on the Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer. Explain that they will complete the rest of the organizer and their essay for homework over the next days or weeks. They can use articles and data shared in class (also see articles below) as well as additional research they conduct themselves. The overall steps in the process should include:

   a. Decide on your position statement.

   b. Consider 2–3 reasons for your position.

   c. Gather evidence such as examples, statistics, quotes, polls, facts, etc.

   d. Organize opinion and evidence using the Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer.

   e. Write your essay and include the following:

      - Description of the issue or controversy and your opinion statement (You may also include the counter-argument)
      - 2–3 reasons for your opinion with supporting evidence (examples, historical information, statistics, polls, quote and facts).
      - Restate your opinion, summarize your reasons and state your call to action or summary position.

Closing

Related to the lesson's topic, do a go-round where each student completes this sentence: I used to think _____ but now I think _____.

ADDITIONAL READING

- "'A Woman, Just Not That Woman': How Sexism Plays Out on the Trail" (*The New York Times,* February 11, 2019)
- "All the countries that had a woman leader before the U.S." (CNN, June 9, 2016)
- "How outdated notions about gender and leadership are shaping the 2020 presidential race" survey (Lean In)
- "Number of women leaders around the world has grown, but they're still a small group" (Pew Research Center, July 30, 2015)
- "Sexism Is Out in The Open in The 2016 Campaign. That May Have Been Inevitable" (NPR, October 23, 2016)

- "Who's Actually Electable In 2020?" (*The New York Times'* The Daily podcast, November 5, 2019)
- "Women and Leadership" (Pew Research Center, January 14, 2015)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: 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.
R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Speaking & Listening
SL1: 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.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
SL3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer

Paragraph 1: INTRODUCTION

Attention-grabbing opening:

Background of Issue:

My position (May include counter-argument):

Paragraph 2: Reason #1	**Paragraph 3: Reason #2**	**Paragraph 4: Reason #3**
Supporting Evidence: ✓ ✓ ✓	Supporting Evidence: ✓ ✓ ✓	Supporting Evidence: ✓ ✓ ✓

Paragraph 5: CONCLUSION

Restate opinion:

Summarize your three reasons:

State your "call to action" or summary position: