

Developing a Healthy Relationship with Food and Body Image

Grades 8-12

Language Arts & Physical and Health Education

Purpose of the Lesson

From a young age, adolescents are bombarded with messages from the media about ideal body image and dieting. Diet culture is toxic for all genders and reinforces unrealistic expectations that cause body image issues and eating disorders. Developing a healthy, balanced relationship with food is important to all young people. In this lesson, students will learn about mindful eating and discuss balanced eating vs. restricted eating. They will then link this concept to body image in the media and mental health. The last activity will be for the students to find a piece of media to then analyze what messages it sends to young people, the effect on mental health, and how to watch out for negative examples of body image in the media.

Curriculum Competencies:

Physical and Health Education

- ◇ Develop strategies for promoting healthy eating choices in different settings (Grade 8)
- ◇ Propose healthy choices that support lifelong health and well-being (Grade 9)
- ◇ Identify factors that influence health messages from a variety of sources, and analyze their influence on behaviour (Grade 8/9)
- ◇ Identify factors that influence health messages from a variety of sources, and analyze their influence on behaviour (Grade 8/9)

After Grade 9, Physical and Health Education becomes an elective. However, this lesson plan can still be used in classrooms for Grades 10-12.

English Language Arts

- ◇ Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts (Grade 8/9)
- ◇ Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world (Grade 8/9)

After Grade 9, Language Arts divides into different, more specific courses. This lesson plan is suitable for New Media and English Studies 10/11/12.

First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning requires exploration of one's identity
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions

Video

[Body Image in the Media](#)

Guiding Questions:

- ◇ What are some examples of body image representation in the media?
- ◇ How does body image have an effect on our mental health?
- ◇ What is the link between body image and our relationship with food?
- ◇ What is the difference between eating healthy and dieting?
- ◇ What is the link between food and mental health?

Step-by Step Lesson

1. Start by getting students to pull out a piece of paper and write down as many items as they can that describe what they like about their body and what they do not. Let them know they can keep their answers a secret. When they are done, ask them: (They do not have to respond out loud, but they can reflect in their heads)
 - *Do you have more items in the category of what you like about your body or what you don't like?*
 - *Was it easier to come up with answers for what you like or for what you don't like?*
2. Most likely, it will be easier to think of what they do not like. Before showing the video below, ask them why they think it is easier to judge and critique ourselves than to find what we like.
3. Show this video about [Body Image in the Media](#).
4. **Pause the video and use the Guiding Questions to spark discussion.**
5. **Discuss the curricular objectives for this lesson with your class.** Ask them what strategies they can use to make healthy choices. Share this with your students: The difference between eating healthy and dieting is the goal behind them. We eat healthy or in a balanced way to take care of our mental and physical health. We diet in order to achieve a goal that changes our body. For example, we diet to lose weight or look a certain way.
6. Ask students to write down what they believe is the healthiest way to eat for both your mental health and your physical health. Let them share their ideas. Then, share with them that eating healthy means doing our best, but it is okay to have a treat now and again. If we restrict our eating in an extreme way, this can lead to body image issues and eating disorders.

7. **Lesson Closure:** So why is body image so related to teens' relationship with food? The media's representation of picture-perfect bodies and the constant advertisements for the new fad diet shows teens that they need to change their body. These young people are led to believe that they need to diet in order to achieve a certain body image. This can lead to mental health issues including eating disorders.
8. **Follow-Up Activity:** Students will find a representation in the media that reinforces body image issues. (See examples below.) This can be a picture, a video, an advertisement, a magazine, etc. They will then write a short essay of 500 words, analyzing this representation and answering the following questions:
- *What message does it send?*
 - *What is the purpose of it?*
 - *What is dangerous about this representation?*
 - *How is it linked to body image and food relationships?*
 - *Is it realistic and why?*

Additional Resources for Students:

- ◇ [Teen Talk Body Image](#)

Examples of Media that Reinforces Body Image Issues

