gender
media
education

eMERGE

VIDEO GAMES AND VIRTUAL WORLDS: CREATE YOUR AVATAR AGAINST GENDER STEREOTYPES

Media Education Toolkit on Gender Issues in Media and Pop Cultures

Authors / Contributors:

Gianna Cappello, Paola Macaluso, Daniela Sortino, Tiziana Schiavo (ITA)

Erasmus+

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations,
roles and stereotypes in online games,
cultural conditioning, # gender and media

This Learning Scenario takes the challenge of gender representations into virtual worlds. Students explore the characteristics of the virtual characters, learn to identify problematic representations of gender in digital life and video games, reflect on the management of identity between real and virtual, then experience the creation of different avatars to raise awareness on fairer and more respectful representations. The peer- and self-evaluation follows.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- to understand the characteristics of the virtual worlds

- to explore the relationship between real and virtual identity in the video games

- to acquire the meaning of avatar in a digital environment

- to observe and distinguish the characteristics of a virtual character (avatar)

- to consider and discuss the influence of avatars on identity and body image in the real world

- to identify gender stereotypes in the media

- to create a media product that communicates one's perception of the self and the desired representation

- to activate self-reflection on the topic

- to evaluate the multimedia products created

Relevant subject(s)
Language and literature, English language, Civic Education, History, and other Social sciences and Humanities subjects, Media literacy

Context/educational level or students
Secondary school - 7th to 11th grades

Time 9 hours at school or in a blended setting

STUDENT SKILLS & COMPETENCIES

- collaborative media analysis

- documenting and informing themselves about products of media culture that reflect stereotypical representations of gender

- creating media products

- motivate their choices

- (self-)reflection

- self-evaluation and peer-evaluation

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations, # roles and stereotypes in online games, # cultural conditioning, # gender and media

LEARNING METHODOLOGIES

- participatory lesson
- brainstorming
- presentation
- project-based learning
- collaborative learning
- learning by doing

- case-study
- textual analysis
- comparative analysis
- teamwork
- peer-review
- public speaking

PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Knowledge:

- various languages in communication: verbal language and non-verbal language (visual, sound…)
- elements of text analysis

Skills:

- recognize the factors of communication
- differentiating denotative from connotative meaning
- contextualization
- multimedia editing
- basic digital skills

STUDENT ROLES

What is expected of students in terms of involvement? What are the activities that require they play an active role in the scenario?

- By watching a film about a future where the physical and virtual worlds intertwine, students practice alienating the familiar and discuss the relationship between real and virtual identity.
- By analyzing and creating different types of avatars, students learn to identify stereotyped gender characteristics and focus on models that are more respectful of diversity and more inclusive.

RESOURCES	TECHNICAL SUPPORT
Movie Trailer and Analysis: • *Ready Player One* Movie's Incipit • Analysis sheet • The 6-dimensions of media education model of analysis Shared Workspace: Jamboard, Padlet Web apps for creative production: • Avatar Maker, Avatar Sizer, Canva; • https://www.canva.com/it_it/creare/flashcards/ • https://www.adobe.com/it/express/create/flashcard • Software for taking screenshots • Avatars' collection • Avatars' media production examples Apps for presentation and sharing: • Padlet, Linoit, Wakelet, Prezi, PowerPoint Evaluation tools: • Rubistar 4 teachers • Student's Auto Evaluation tool	• Digital Board or whiteboard and projector, notebooks or personal devices as tablets, or smartphones, internet

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

 # Relationship, # identity, # gender representations, # roles and stereotypes in online games, # cultural conditioning, # gender and media

SUMMARY OF THE LEARNING SCENARIO

In the social life of adolescents, it is now customary to create a profile, true or false, and to connect in the most varied virtual contexts. The use of avatars is consolidated thanks to the spread of increasingly complex and structured video games in which boys and girls are transported to a virtual universe where anyone can apparently do and be what they want.

The movie Ready player one (Spielberg, USA, 2018) is the starting point of this exploration of the possibilities offered by experiences in virtual worlds and online games to personal development and to fight against stereotypes and prejudices on gender.

The process of creating various avatars to identify with allows students to reflect on gender stereotypes and to develop critical thinking on the topic against discrimination.

KEY CONCEPTS USED IN THE LEARNING SCENARIO

Relationship between real and virtual identity, avatar and body image (physical characteristics, gender markers, attributes), gender representations, roles and stereotypes in online games, cultural conditioning, gender and media, popular culture, media education

FOCUSING OF ATTENTION / TRIGGERING EVENT

A guided vision of the incipit (10 min) of the movie *Ready Player One*.

Set in the year 2045, it shows an unlivable real world, where poverty, overpopulation, and pollution have forced most people to live massed in dull slums, and reduced to a state of affliction - physical and mental - which inhibits their hopes and will to change. The only solution is to take refuge in a virtual world, a video game, in which everyone takes refuge, creating a parallel existence. Already in the initial sequences, it is possible to establish an analysis that creates a comparison on the credibility of an entirely virtual world in which each character knows only the avatars of the other components of that world, establishing emotional relationships such as solidarity, friendship and love.

LEARNING SCENARIO STRUCTURE

Introduction:

A vision of the movie Ready Player One

Activities:

1. exploration and focus on the languages and contents of the movie

2. exploring students' favorite video games and virtual worlds and their knowledge of the virtual characters

3. analysis of existing avatars considering any issues in their gender representation

4. creative production of different examples of avatars, restitution, evaluation

Solution / Conclusion/Reflection

REFLECTION :

- Online apps to collect opinions such as Padlet, Jamboard, Wakelet
- Student Self-Evaluation templates
- Classification, guided analysis, media production

EVALUATION :

Open-ended analysis sheets and data collection from brainstorming
Collaborative work observation grid
Rubric shared at the beginning of the activities for the evaluation of the productions
Final self- and peer-assessment of the processes and the media products (rubrics, online form, Jamboard, discussions,…)

DISSEMINATION OF STUDENTS' MEDIA PRODUCTIONS THROUGH:

- school exhibitions or contests
- school's website
- school social media
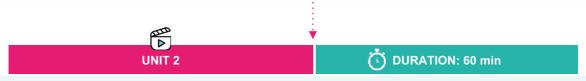- labels with QRCode for feedback

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations,
roles and stereotypes in online games,
cultural conditioning, # gender and media

Structure of the learning scenario

UNIT 1	⏱ DURATION: 240 min

MOVIE TIME

Main activities

- The guided vision of the movie Ready player one's incipit and exploration of the relationship between real and virtual worlds (20 min)
- presentation of the 6-dimensions model of critical analysis (10 min)
- the vision of the movie Ready player one (140 min)
- movie analysis based on the model (20 min)
- focus on the relationship between real and virtual identity and representations of gender (30 min)
- reflection (20 min)

UNIT 2	⏱ DURATION: 60 min

EXPLORING AVATARS' CHARACTERISTICS

Main activities

- exploration of students' experiences in virtual worlds and video games (10 min)
- brainstorming on the term "avatar" (10 min)
- sharing of a collection of Avatars and association with the virtual environment (10 min)
- description of the characteristics (physical, gender markers, attributes) of an existing avatar by each student's choice (25 min)
- sharing of avatar flashcards created by the students (5 min)

UNIT 3	⏱ DURATION: 60 min

ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMATIC GENDER REPRESENTATIONS OF AVATARS IN VIDEO GAMES

Main activities

- identification of characteristics to analyze
- exploration of the representations of gender of avatars in the video games
- identification of any stereotypes
- reflection

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

 # Relationship, # identity, # gender representations, # roles and stereotypes in online games, # cultural conditioning, # gender and media

Structure of the learning scenario

UNIT 4	⏱ DURATION: 120 min

CREATE YOUR AVATARS

- introduction to the Avatar Maker app (©MediaSmart.ca)
- A. creation of an avatar of their gender and reflection
- B. creation of an avatar of the opposite sex and reflection
- C. creation of an avatar of any gender and reflection
- D. creation of two avatars, one realistic according to his/her body perception and one fantasy which represents his/her desired representation online, and reflection

UNIT 5	⏱ DURATION: 60 min

RESTITUTION AND PEER EVALUATION

Main activities
- Dissemination of the media products
- Presentation of the media products
- Peer review of the media products
- Self-evaluation

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations, # roles and stereotypes in online games, # cultural conditioning, # gender and media

UNIT N° 1 Movie Time

DURATION: 240 min

Description:

Students are guided to watch a very significant movie on the world of video games. The analysis of the incipit of the movie will serve to focus on the role of games in the social life of young people. The analysis of the entire movie *Ready Player One* by S. Spielberg, based on the six-dimensions model of critical analysis of media education, will serve to reflect on its possible problematic gender representations.

Specific objectives:

•to approach critically a media through a model of analysis
•to identify the languages used in the movie
•to identify the topic of the movie
•to understand the characteristics of virtual worlds and video games
•to reflect on the management of the identity between the real and the virtual
•to identify the key concepts of gender representation and potential stereotypes in virtual worlds and video games

Evaluation:

Formative assessment: discussion and reflection. Students are asked to identify any problematic gender representations in the movie, share them and reflect.

Technical support:

Digital Board or whiteboard and projector, online workspace and repository, notebooks or personal devices.

INTRODUCTION

Duration: 15 min

Pedagogical methods: Participatory lesson, Project-based learning, Case study

Instructions to students: The teacher proposes a guided vision of the incipit of the movie *Ready Player One*, then invites the students to discuss the relationship between real and virtual worlds and collect their answers on a shared workspace.

Teaching resources: video of the incipit of the movie: https://youtu.be/okFwCivgHnc

ACTIVITY

Duration: 170 min *Guided critical analysis of the movie*

Pedagogical methods: Participatory lesson, Project-based learning, Collaborative learning, Learning by doing, Critical thinking

Instructions for students: The teacher briefly introduces and shares the 6-dimensions model of critical analysis of media education (10 min) and invites students to watch the movie (140 min) paying attention to its narrative, visual and sound characteristics. Then students are guided by the teacher to analyze the movie according to the model of 6-dimensions, working together on a shared Jamboard or Padlet or Linoit (20 min).

Teaching resources:
•   the 6-dimensions of media education model of analysis, Digital Board

Duration: 30 min *Topic analysis: identity and gender representations in the virtual worlds*

Pedagogical methods: Participative lesson, Brainstorming, Project-based learning, Collaborative learning

Instructions for students: the teacher introduces the key concepts of gender, representation, stereotype, prejudice and asks students to focus on the relationship between real and virtual identity and representations of gender as shown in the movie characters and narrative. The teacher collects their answers in a shared workspace.

Teaching resources:
•   shared workspace (Jamboard, Padlet)

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations,
roles and stereotypes in online games,
cultural conditioning, # gender and media

UNIT N° 1

CONCLUSION

Duration: 20 min

Pedagogical methods: Teamwork, Reflection

Instructions to students: The teacher invite the students to read their collected answers and to reflect on gender issues

Teaching resources: Analysis sheet

APPENDICES

- Synoptic card of the movie
- Movie's incipit (10m) https://youtu.be/okFwCivgHnc
- Analysis sheet

    Ready Player One - incipit analysis

    Step 1 *- (minutes 00:00 to 04:30)*

    Narrative features

    1. *Where is the film's story set and in what period does it take place? (max 3 rows)*
    2. *What does the future imagined in the film look like? (max 3 rows)*
    3. *Who is the protagonist?*

    Visual features

    1. *From a visual point of view, especially in the use of tones in photography, try to describe the difference between the OASIS and the real world. (max 3 rows)*
    2. *Try to describe the neighborhood of the stacks where our protagonist lives. (max 3 rows)*

    Sound characteristics

    1. *Can you explain the meaning of voice over and what is its function in the film? (max 3 rows)*

    Step 2 *- (Minutes 04:31 to 11:04)*

    Narrative features

    1. *Why is this crazy vehicle race happening in OASIS? (max 3 rows)*
    2. *Which avatar did Wade choose for himself?*
    3. *How does Parzival manage to win the terrible race?*

    Visual features

    1. *How would you define the dynamics of this sequence? What were the technical choices used to create it? Type of shooting, editing, camera movements, angles…*

- The 6-dimensions model of critical analysis of media education

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations,
roles and stereotypes in online games,
cultural conditioning, # gender and media

UNIT N° 2 Exploring avatars' characteristics

DURATION: 60 min

Description:

Students are invited to explore the world of avatars and popular video games in the social life of their peers. From the exploration of the roles and functions of the avatars they will make a comparison between the various video games and virtual worlds.

Specific objectives:

•to reflect on every student's gaming experience
•to individuate the characteristics of a virtual character (avatar)
•to understand the role of an avatar in a digital environment
•to select, describe and share an existing avatar

Evaluation:

Formative assessment: reflection on different avatars' characteristics and infographic of any gender issues in avatar

Technical support

Digital Board or whiteboard and projector, shared workspace, notebooks or personal devices

INTRODUCTION

Duration: 10 min

Learning method:
• Brainstorming

Instructions for students: the teacher asks students to talk about their experiences with video games and virtual worlds in a shared workspace:
• do you play video games?
• what is your favorite video game?
• what do you like about this video game?
• what are the features of your avatar in that game?

Resources, equipement:
• online shared workspace (Jamboard or Padlet)

ACTIVITY

Exploring the world of avatars

Duration: 20 min

Learning method: Brainstorming

Instructions to students: The teacher asks students if they know the term avatar and make sure they understand the following key points:
• an avatar is a character they control in a game
• not all games have avatars (puzzle games don't), but many do
• not all avatars are human or humanoid, but most are
• many games and virtual worlds allow you to change your avatar, either at the beginning or later in the game or both

Then the teacher shows a presentation of examples of avatars (the collection here or one created by the teacher him/herself) and asks them to identify the game or virtual world they belong to.

Resources, equipement:
• online shared workspace (Jamboard or Padlet), the Avatar collection here

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations, # roles and stereotypes in online games, # cultural conditioning, # gender and media

UNIT N° 2

ACTIVITY

Presenting an existing avatar
Duration: 25 min

Pedagogical methods: Learning by doing, Reflection

Instructions to students: the teacher asks students to choose an avatar of an online game or virtual world they play on and to create a flashcard with the description of its characteristics (physical, gender markers, attributes)

Teaching resources: Canva flash card template

CONCLUSION

Duration: 5 min

Pedagogical methods: Learning by doing

Instructions to students: students are asked to collect their individual avatar's flashcards on a shared repository

Teaching resources: shared repository (Jamboard, Padlet, Wakelet), software for taking screenshots
https://www.take-a-screenshot.org/

APPENDICES

Avatars collection (the © MediaSmart.ca collection or a collection made by the teacher)

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

 # Relationship, # identity, # gender representations, # roles and stereotypes in online games, # cultural conditioning, # gender and media

UNIT N° 3 Avatars and stereotypes in video games

DURATION: 60 min

Description:

Students are invited to analyze the representations of gender issues and to observe where stereotypes persist or are overcome in video games and virtual worlds through the observation of examples of avatars taken from different virtual environments.

Specific objectives:

- identification of characteristics to analyze
- exploration of the representations of the gender of avatars in the video games
- identification of any stereotypes

Assessment :
Discussion and peer review of key concepts

Technical support

Digital Board or whiteboard and projector, shared workspace, notebooks or personal devices

INTRODUCTION

Duration: 10 min *(in class or at home)*

Pedagogical methods: Participative lesson, Collaborative learning, Learning by doing

Instructions to students: students are asked to list the avatars' features to analyze to highlight gender issues or any stereotypes

Teaching resources: shared repository or whiteboard

ACTIVITY

Duration: 25 min

Pedagogical methods: Case study, Analysis

Instructions to students: students analyze the existing avatar already chosen to identify any stereotypes or prejudices or problematic gender representations, then work on the existing flashcard to add these gender-issues-related features

Teaching resources: features list, Canva or Genial.ly flashcard templates

Duration: 5 min

Pedagogical methods: Learning by doing

Instructions to students: students share their flashcards in a common workspace

Teaching resources: shared workspace

CONCLUSION

Duration: 20 min *(in class or at home)*

Pedagogical methods: Public speaking, Peer-review, Reflection

Instructions to students: comparing the avatar flashcard, students discuss whether do stereotypes prevail or are they outdated in video games and virtual worlds

Teaching Resources: a shared repository

APPENDICES

https://www.canva.com/it_it/creare/flashcards/

https://www.adobe.com/it/express/create/flashcard

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PALERMO

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations, # roles and stereotypes in online games, # cultural conditioning, # gender and media

UNIT N° 4 Create your avatars

DURATION: 120 min

Description:

The last unit represents the final phase in which students give more space to creativity. They are invited to create different avatars, according to different gender perspectives from time to time. Subsequently, from reflection on identity issues, they will be able to give space to creativity, overcoming the gender limits between real and virtual.

Specific objectives:

- knowingly use software to create an avatar
- to manage gender identity when creating an avatar
- to create a media product that communicates one's self-perception and desired representation
- to reflect on the relationship between identity and its online representation
- to identify any stereotypes

Assessment :

- Answer sharing, reflection and peer-review

Technical support

- Digital Board or whiteboard and projector, shared workspace, notebooks or personal devices

INTRODUCTION

Duration: 10 minutes

Pedagogical methods: Learning by doing, Reflection

Instructions to students: the teacher introduces students to the Avatar Maker app. Students create an avatar of their gender and share the image on a common workspace with a text answering these questions:

- *Was it fun?*
- *Was it frustrating?*
- *How different was it from creating avatars in games and the virtual worlds you play in?*

Teaching resources: Avatar Maker app http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/games/avatar-maker/ © MediaSmart.ca, a shared workspace such as Padlet

ACTIVITY - *Creating an avatar of the opposite gender*

Duration: 80 minutes

Pedagogical methods: brainstorming, case study, learning by doing, reflection

Instructions to students: to focus on gender identity students **create an avatar of the opposite gender** and upload it in the shared repository with answers to these questions:
- *Was it fun? (Yes / No)*
- *Why?*
- *How were the experiences of the girls and boys different?*

Then the teacher collects student's answers to the following questions *(Questionnaire 1):*
- *Are the gender differences in the avatars in your favorite games and virtual worlds similar to those in the app you just used?*
- *How are characters who stray from these standard genre types treated in online games and other media?*
- *Are characters who don't meet genre standards made fun of or unpopular? Are they more frequently criminals or victims than heroes or heroines?*
- *Brainstorm from the answers on the digital / whiteboard*

Teaching resources: Avatar Maker app, a shared workspace such as Padlet

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations,
roles and stereotypes in online games,
cultural conditioning, # gender and media

UNIT N° 4

ACTIVITY - *Creating an avatar of fantasy*

Duration: 30 min

Pedagogical methods: case study, learning by doing, reflection

Instructions to students: the teacher asks students to go back to the Avatar Maker, **Level 2, code: 9999** to **create the third avatar, choosing what they want**, both gender, body shape, skin color, any mix of clothing and accessories, then to upload to the shared repository with answers to the following questions:
- *How different was it from Level 1?*
- *Did you like it better?*
- *What is the difference between the three avatars you created?*
- *More fantastic, more like them?*

Teaching resources: Avatar Maker app, a shared workspace such as Padlet

Duration: 30 min

Pedagogical methods: reflection

Instructions to students: the teacher asks students to answer the following questions *(Questionnaire 2)*:
- *How can having only these choices make girls and boys feel?*
- *How different was it to use the freely created avatar, without bias of gender, compared to the existing avatars in your favorite online games?*
- *What would you rather do differently in online games?*

Teaching resources: a shared workspace such as Padlet

CONCLUSION

Duration: 30 min

Pedagogical methods: Peer evaluation, Reflection

Instructions to students: students discuss and reflect on answers to Questionnaire 2 collected in the Padlet

Teaching resources: answers repository

APPENDICES

Avatar creation

http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/games/avatar-maker/

https://www.creaavatar.it/

https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/avatar-generator/fdeiknmicpbkcndpndbnjbepkplpjfpi?hl=it

https://personas.draftbit.com/

Videogames and virtual worlds: create your Avatar against Gender stereotypes

Relationship, # identity, # gender representations, # roles and stereotypes in online games, # cultural conditioning, # gender and media

UNIT N° 5 Restitution and peer evaluation

Description:

Students are invited to share all their products, presenting them to the class and justifying their choices. Subsequently, an exchange of reflections and peer evaluation takes place.

Specific objectives:

- to present the media products they have created
- to evaluate the multimedia products they have created
- to self-evaluate

Assessment :

- peer-review

Technical support

- Digital Board or whiteboard and projector, shared workspace, notebooks or personal devices

INTRODUCTION

Duration: 5 min

Pedagogical methods: Dissemination, Peer-review, Reflection

Instructions to students: students post their fantasy avatar with their captions on Padlet, a blog or the school website, so that teachers and students from other classes can comment

Teaching resources: Padlet

ACTIVITY

Duration: 40 min

Pedagogical methods: Presentation, Public speaking, Peer-review

Instructions to students: students present their fantasy avatar. The teacher and the classmates comment and review each media product. Common reflection on key concepts

Teaching resources: shared workspace, rubrics

CONCLUSION

Duration: 15 min

Pedagogical methods: self-evaluation

Instructions to students: students answer a self-evaluation template

Teacher Resources: self-evaluation templates

APPENDICES

Free tool to help teachers create quality rubrics http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php
Student's Self-Evaluation templates examples http://www.communication4all.co.uk/AFL/Think%20About.pdf
https://edtech4beginnerscom.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/lesson-reflection-questions.pdf

Media production examples: https://padlet.com/animatoredigitale53/avatar