A. Stereotypes

Because most television programs are quite short, the identities of characters must be established as quickly as possible. To do this, television writers often use stereotypes. A stereotype is a fixed or conventional image of a person or group of people. Stereotypes generally conform to a pattern of dress and behavior that is easily recognized and understood. Often, a judgment is made about the person or group being stereotyped. That judgment may be positive or negative.

Generally, stereotypes are less real, more perfect, (or imperfect) and more predictable than their real-life counterparts. A typical male stereotype, for example, is of a “real man” who is adventurous, masterful, intelligent, and unshakable. Such sex-role stereotypes are intended to present viewers with a character they can easily recognize and relate to. Their danger, however, is that, if seen often, they can affect the way a viewer perceives men in general. Male stereotyping can narrow one’s notion of what men can be and do; it can affect women’s and children’s expectations of men, it can even shape men’s and boys’ own views of themselves and of how they should behave.

While commercial television has improved in its portrayal of females, many of the women featured on TV continue to be depicted as someone’s wife (apron-clad) or girlfriend (barely-clad). Television children are generally cast in gender-related roles – the girls playing with dolls while the boys play at sports – and all are “cutesy” and talk as though they were insightful adults. Similarly, the characterization of mothers-in-law, the elderly, gays, police officers, and truck drivers tends toward the stereotypical.

Culture and class stereotypes are also prevalent in television. Traditionally, blacks were portrayed as either happy-go-lucky servants or dangerous criminals, and while these stereotypes linger, we are now seeing what might be described as upright, intelligent, middle-class black characters. Minorities are portrayed stereotypically and almost never as powerful or rich as the white majority.

Because stereotyping can lead children to form false impressions of various societal groups, it is important that students recognize stereotypes and understand the role they play in television’s portrayal of life. To become television-wise, then, students must tune in to the ways television treats people, recognize how they themselves relate to TV characters, and understand how these characters can influence their ideas about the real people in their communities.


What are stereotypes?

Collect the dangers of stereotyping out of the text

B. Definitions

A stereotype is a fixed idea, belief, conception or oversimplified generalisation that usually leads to negative beliefs about a person or a group of people. Stereotyping ignores the individuality of people and assigns a whole group a particular set of characteristics.

Prejudice means to pre-judge something. If you are prejudiced against something, it means that you have an unreasonable dislike of it without having found out about it or thought about it properly.

Bias is to have a preference or an inclination for something that affects your ability to see it clearly or to make an impartial judgement about it.

Discrimination is to treat some people differently from others. The South African Bill of Rights says that some kinds of discrimination are unfair, for example you cannot discriminate against people because of their skin colour or because they are women.
3. Text C – Write a personal comment on this quote

C. The uniqueness of people

Just because people know about each other does not mean that racism, sexism, ageism or any of the other "isms" will be eradicated. Embracing and celebrating difference does not come from the head. It comes from the heart. To be truly empathetic people who are able to accept and live with each other, we need to do more than just get to know about each other. We need to know each other as human beings. Tahar Ben Jelloun reminds us of this when he writes that "every face is unique, a miracle. No two faces are identical. Every face symbolises a life and every life deserves respect. No one has the right to humiliate another human being. Everyone has the right to dignity. By respecting others, we honour life in all its beauty, magic, diversity and unpredictability. Respecting others allows us to respect ourselves."

Jelloun T B, Racism Explained to my Daughter, p59, New York, 1999

4. Text D – Try to understand the issue of ‘perspectives’ (discuss with a neighbour)

D. Perspectives - Ask your neighbours, how old is the woman in the picture?

Even though people are looking at the same thing, they might see different sides of it and they may respond differently. If we are to understand each other, we need to learn to respect different ways of seeing and relating to the world (perspectives). People have different values which impact on their lifestyles. Being able to celebrate difference depends on recognition of these differences, an understanding of them and a willingness to accept them. In other words, learning to see others with more than just your eyes by walking in their shoes or developing empathy.

People don't "see" things in the same way. Sometimes these differences in perception might be minimal but often they are significant and cause confusion, misunderstanding and even conflict. Some reasons for these differences may be culture, life experience or language. It is important to recognize this and to find ways of seeking clarity when we are unsure of what people mean.

5. Read the following example and answer the questions

Your teacher divides the class into small groups to work on a project. One of the boys in your class, called Zhang, is bigger than everybody else. Many of the students at school call him names like, "fatty, dumbo, fat slob", and make fun of him. Nobody wants to be his friend. The teacher puts him in your group for the project. Everybody in the group is upset. They decide that they won't work with him or even talk to him so that he will go to another group.

Why do you think the group reacts in this way? Do you think they should behave in this way? Why?

Now decide, what you think is actually the problem?
How do you think it can be handled?

6. Gender stereotypes

Describe a typical ...... (enter culture here) woman

Describe a typical ...... (enter culture here) man

Now read your descriptions again, do you think there are any stereotypes in it? Why? Where do they come from?

7. Look at the following characterization


Can you find more? What do you think about this characterization?

Write down stereotypes about another foreign country (American, German...)

Country: ________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________
8. What do you think are common stereotypes about ... (enter culture here)? Make a list!

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9. What is bad about stereotypes? Look up the term “xenophobia”.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Punk

Goth

Scene

Gamer

Prep

Indie

Nerd

Hipster