

# Heroines and heroes

*If lions could talk, hunters would never be heroes*

<b>Themes</b>	Gender equality, Discrimination and Xenophobia, Citizenship
<b>Complexity</b>	Level 2
<b>Group size</b>	Any
<b>Time</b>	60 minutes
<b>Overview</b>	This activity involves individual, small and whole group work, brainstorming and discussion about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ heroines and heroes as symbols of socialisation and culture</li> <li>▪ stereotyped images of heroines and heroes</li> </ul>
<b>Related rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Equality in dignity and rights</li> <li>▪ The right to freedoms without distinction of gender</li> </ul>
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To reflect on history teaching and to appreciate different perspectives on shared historical events and the heroes and heroines associated with them.</li> <li>▪ To critically analyse the significance of heroes and heroines as role models and how gender stereotypes take their roots in our history, culture and everyday life.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Paper and pens. (One blue and one red pen per participant; optional but preferable)</li> <li>▪ Flipchart paper and markers</li> </ul>

## Instructions

1. Give people five minutes to think about which national heroines and heroes (historical or living) they particularly admire.
2. Hand out the paper and pens and ask each person to draw two columns. In the first column they should (using the red pen) write the names of three or four heroines plus a brief description of who they are and what they did for their country. At the bottom of the paper they should write key words to describe the heroines' personal characteristics.
3. Repeat the process (using the blue pen) for three or four heroes. Write this information in the second column.
4. Now ask the participants to get into small groups of between five and seven people to share their choices of heroines and heroes. Ask the groups to come to a consensus on the four most worthy heroines and four most worthy heroes.
5. Now come into plenary and write the names of each group's heroines and heroes in two columns on the flipchart. Add the key words that describe the personal characteristics.
6. Discuss the list of characteristics and the use of heroines and heroes as role models and the extent to which they are gender stereotypes. Then move on to the debriefing.

### THEMES



GENDER EQUALITY



DISCRIMINATION



CITIZENSHIP

### COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 2

### GROUP SIZE



ANY

### TIME



60 MINUTES

The following is an example of what a group in Ukraine produced at step 2.

Heroines	Heroes
Princess Olha, first Christian in Kyiv Rus	Prince Volodymyr Kyiv Rus (old name of Ukraine) was baptised.
Young woman, Roksalana, captured by the Turks. She lived in the khan's harem. She used her position to influence politics.	Hetman Mazepa, independence fighter
Poetess Lesya Ukrainka wrote about Ukrainian identity and women's emancipation	Poet Shevchenko, glorified freedom
strong cunning soft womanly powerful beautiful	strong powerful brave courageous adamant obstinate

### Debriefing and evaluation

Start by reviewing the activity and what people learnt about heroes and heroines and then go on to talk about stereotypes in general and how they influence people's perceptions and actions.

- What kinds of people are heroines and heroes? (Ordinary men and women? Kings?) What did they do? (Fight? Write poems?) How did the participants learn about them?
- What were the differences and similarities between the two lists of characteristics?
- What values do the heroines and heroes stand for? Are these values the same for both, or are there differences?
- What do people understand by the word, "stereotype"? How true are stereotypes? Are stereotypes always negative?
- Do you personally, and people in your society in general, have general stereotypes and expectations of men and women?
- Do participants feel limited by these expectations? How?
- Does the list of characteristics produced in this activity reflect traits that some might describe as national characteristics?
- To what extent are social and cultural barriers in general the result of stereotyped thinking?
- In what ways does gender stereotyping deny people their human rights?
- Stereotyped expectations often act as barriers to both men and women limiting life choices and options. What gender-related barriers have participants experienced? In the home, school, club or work place?
- What can participants do about these barriers? Can they identify strategies to break away from cultural norms and values related to masculinity and femininity?

### Tips for facilitators

This is a very good activity to do in a multicultural setting because the cultural element may become more apparent.

**Key dates****8 March**International  
Women's Day**3 November**

World Men's Day

At point 5 in the instructions you should accept all contributions from the small groups and write everything onto the flip chart. If someone suggests terms like “feminine” or “masculine” you should accept them at this stage and return to them in the debriefing when you should discuss the meanings of these words.

**Variations**

When working in youth groups it is likely that you will want to work with other types of heroines and heroes, for example, characters in comic books and films, pop, film and sports stars. You could start the session reading comics and then brainstorm the characteristics of the characters. Alternatively, you could put up posters of pop or sports stars and ask people to write speech bubbles or add drawings. If you leave the question, “who are your heroines and heroes?” completely open, you may find some interesting surprises that make for fruitful discussion.

**Suggestions for follow-up**

If the group would like to look at human rights heroines and heroes, then do the activity “Fighters for rights”, on page 130.

**Ideas for action**

Make a personal pledge to be more aware of stereotyping in your daily life, especially that which leads to prejudice, both by others and (inadvertently!) by yourself.

**Further information**

A *stereotype* is a generalisation in which characteristics possessed by a part of the group are extended to the group as a whole. For example, Italians love opera, Russians love ballet, young people who wear black leather gear and ride motor bikes are dangerous and people who are black come from Africa.

There may be confusion about the words, sex and gender. *Sex* refers to the *biological* differences between men and women, which are universal and do not change. *Gender* refers to *social* attributes that are learned or acquired during socialisation as a member of a given community.

*Gender* therefore refers to the socially given attributes, roles, activities, responsibilities and needs connected with being men (masculine) and women (feminine) in a given society at a given time, and as a member of a specific community within that society.

Source: United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Gender in development programme, learning and Information pack, gender mainstreaming programme and project entry points*. January, 2001