Challenging stereotypes for jobs

A stereotype is an idea or belief many people have about a thing or group that is based upon how they look on the outside, which may be untrue or only partly true. Stereotyping people is a type of prejudice because what is on the outside is a small part of who a person is. Often, people are stereotyped because of their gender.

Throughout history, there are certain skills or ideas that people have linked more with a particular gender, for example, that men are strong, and women are sensitive. This has led to stereotyping in the different jobs that women and men do. Often, physical or manual job roles like firefighters, mechanics and plumbers are seen as ‘men’s jobs’. Nursing and other caring professions are often seen as ‘women’s jobs’.

Language is also an important part of stereotyping. Because some job roles have a gender in the title, like policeman or fireman, this can mean that when people think of that job role, they automatically think of a man.

In this week’s activities, you will get to read about some inspiring women and will see that men and women can do lots of different jobs and do them well!

Activity 1: Wonder Women Case studies
Read the 3 Wonder Women case studies and learn about the different jobs the women do.

Activity 2: The Firefighter
Read the firefighter story and complete the worksheet.

Activity 3: Conduct a career interview!
Write a set of interview questions to find out about the career of a woman that you know. It could be a family member, family friend or neighbour. If you can, conduct your interview either face to face or on the telephone.

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- What was your first job?
- What has been your favourite job?
- Did you have to do any special study for any jobs e.g. a University degree?
- Do you have to wear a uniform to do your job?
- What special skills do you need to do your job?

Activities 1 & 2 were adapted from resources found at internationalwomensday.com produced by Teach Starter: https://www.internationalwomensday.com/School-Resources
From 1983 to 1985, Mae volunteered in the United States Peace Corps. As a medical officer, she was in charge of everyone’s health. She also worked in the Centre for Disease Control, focusing on curing illness.

Mae the Dancer
At eleven years of age, Mae fell in love with dancing. Her interest continued through university. She even choreographed a musical and dance production.

Mae the Doctor
Mae studied to be a doctor at Cornell Medical College. While studying, she travelled to Thailand, Cuba and Kenya to help people there. She graduated and became a medical doctor in 1981.

Mae the Astronaut
Mae was inspired to join the astronaut program by Lieutenant Uhura on Star Trek (played by Nichelle Nichols) and the first female astronaut, Sally Ride. She was accepted in 1987. Five years later, she flew on the 50th shuttle flight as a mission specialist and spent eight days and nights in space.

Mae the Scientist
Science education is very important to Mae. During her life, she has been a professor at various universities. She is also a member of many science foundations and has even started her own research companies in many scientific fields.

Mae the TV Star
Star Trek was Mae’s favourite show about space, so she was amazed to be asked to appear on the show! She also hosted World of Wonder on the Discovery Channel and has made guest appearances on various documentaries.

Mae the Dancer

Mae the Doctor

Mae the Astronaut

Mae the Scientist

Mae the TV Star
J.K. Rowling is most famously known as the author of the *Harry Potter* series. Her creative genius not only made her the most highly paid author in 2017, but also made her an advocate of women and girls in need.

Joanne, or Jo (as she calls herself), uses a great deal of her money to fund charities in Scotland and to support aid work all around the world.

Jo began writing at the age of six. She wrote her first novel at age eleven. It was about seven cursed diamonds and those who owned them.

Before becoming a published author, Jo worked as a researcher at Amnesty International. During the seven years it took to write *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, Jo was faced with many ups and downs. She gave birth to her first daughter and, shortly after, divorced her first husband. As a single mother, she worked as a teacher in Edinburgh, finishing the manuscript for the first *Harry Potter* book in any spare time she could find.

**The Volant Charitable Trust**

The Volant Trust is Jo’s passion project. It is named after her mother, who passed away after suffering from the debilitating disease Multiple Sclerosis. Charities can apply for grants and funding through the Trust.

Jo is passionate about helping women and children out of poverty, assisting single-parent families, and contributing to Multiple Sclerosis research.

**Why a “Pen Name”?**

The publishers of her book doubted that young boys would want to buy and read the first *Harry Potter* book if they knew it was written by a woman. They asked for the book to be published with two initials, rather than her first name. The ‘K’ in her pen name, J.K. Rowling, is taken from her grandmother’s name – Kathleen.

**How Did Jo Become a Writer?**

Jo says:

“We do not need magic to transform our world. We carry all of the power we need inside ourselves already.”
Brooke Boney

Who is Brooke Boney?
Brooke Boney is a Gamilaroi woman who works in print, television and radio as a journalist. Brooke grew up in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia, on Woonaruah country, with her mother and five younger brothers and sisters.

Leaving School
Brooke left school before finishing Year 12, the final year of schooling in Australia. She was unsure, at first, of what she wanted to do. Brooke later worked at the Australian newspaper The Financial Review, before deciding to study journalism at university.

Diversity in the Media
Growing up, it was obvious to Brooke that images of and stories about Australia’s First Nations people on the television and in other media were limited and stereotypical. Brooke says she became a journalist to help tell positive stories about Indigenous Australians. She is committed to providing more positive role models for young Indigenous kids by increasing the visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the media.

Rising Up
Supported by Jumbunna, her Sydney university’s Indigenous Learning Centre, Brooke finished her studies. Upon graduating, she volunteered at Koori Radio, Sydney’s only First Nations radio station. Since then, Brooke has worked in commercial television news and for public broadcasters. She has been a political reporter in Canberra for NITV, Australia’s National Indigenous Television network.

Brooke has also worked as a mentor for AIME, a now global organisation that helps empower Indigenous high school-aged kids by ‘building bridges’ between their schools and local universities.

Brooke’s work in the Australian media shows young Indigenous girls that their voices are of value.
The Firefighter

The Story

The back of the house was already ablaze when the firefighting crew arrived on the scene. They jumped out of the fire truck and began to unravel the lengths of hose on the front lawn. Just as the crew turned on the first deluge stream, a man sprinted from behind the house and approached a firefighter, distraught with worry.

"Please help! My son is still in his room," he cried helplessly.

The father didn't even have to finish his plea. Already committed to entering the burning house, the firefighter snapped on a face mask and attached an oxygen tank.

"Okay, please remain calm. Step back with the others. I will get your son," the firefighter said through their muffling breathing apparatus.

The front door of the house was wide open, and smoke was billowing out into the sky above. With the goal of rescuing the boy, the firefighter entered the building.

After tactically assessing the situation in the hallway, the firefighter hurried to the kitchen to find it aflame. There wasn't much time before the rest of the house would ignite!

Suddenly, with an incredibly loud crash, the ceiling above the dining table collapsed. It was time to move. Through their foggy plastic visor, the firefighter carefully searched the nearby rooms. Two small feet could be seen popping out from under the bed. "It's getting a bit hot in here," the firefighter crouched down and said to the boy. "Should we go outside for some fresh air?"

The boy wriggled out from under the bed, and the firefighter scooped him up and held him tight. They rushed out of the house to a waiting ambulance and to the boy's thankful father.

As soon as the child was safe, the firefighter jumped on a hose and helped the rest of the crew extinguish the blaze. It was a tough fight to stop the fire spreading to the neighbouring houses, but, despite the challenges, the firefighter led their crew and safely completed the job.
The Firefighter: Questions

1. Draw a picture of the firefighter.

2. Did the firefighter do a good job in the story?

3. Did you draw a male or female firefighter?

4. Why do you think you drew a male/female firefighter?

When most people picture a firefighter, they probably picture a man. This is because of gender stereotypes, and can mean that girls may be less likely to think they can do that job. Only 5% of firefighters are women. However, there are lots of amazing and strong women firefighters, just like Sabrina Cohen-Hatton...
Dr Sabrina Cohen-Hatton is the Chief Fire Officer at West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, and is one of the most senior fire officers in the UK.

Sabrina is most definitely a Wonder Woman and has an inspiring life story. She was sadly homeless at the age of 15 because of problems at home. During this time, she sold the Big Issue magazine for 18 months. She then joined the fire service, and has climbed through the ranks to get to where she is today. She even found the time to study for a PHD – which means she is a ‘doctor of philosophy’ – not the medical kind!

Alongside her day job, Sabrina also visits schools to talk to young people about her career and to inspire young girls to overcome stereotypes and follow their dreams.

When asked how to overcome gender stereotyping in the fire service, Sabrina spoke about the importance of language and suggested that one small place to start could be renaming Fireman Sam to Firefighter Sam. Her daughter, who would like to be an astronaut firefighter, putting out fires in space, often shouts at the TV, “It’s not fireman, it’s firefighter!”