

The Reality of Digital Drama

Essential Question

Does the way we think about digital drama have anything to do with gender?

Lesson Overview


Students discuss their impressions of peer drama, both online and as depicted on reality TV. They compare and contrast two videos — one featuring a candid discussion between middle school students about online drama and the other featuring clips from *The Real Housewives* reality TV series. Students are encouraged to analyze generalizations about men and women in both videos, and to think critically about the ways that gender stereotypes can play out in mass media, as well as in their own lives online.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- reflect on their own impressions of digital drama.
- compare underlying messages about drama on reality TV with “real world” digital drama among young teens.
- think critically about the gender stereotypes associated with drama.

Materials and Preparation

- Review the **Gender and Digital Life Teacher Backounder (Middle School)**.
-  Preview the videos “**Discussing Digital Drama**” and “**The Real Housewives Series Video Clips**,” and prepare to show them to students.
- Copy the **Dissecting Drama Student Handout**, one for each student.

Family Resources

- Send home the **Dealing with Digital Drama Family Tip Sheet (Middle & High School)**.

Note: *Digital drama* describes the everyday tiffs and disputes that occur between friends or acquaintances online or via text. For example, a teen may post a comment about someone else online knowing that people will see it, that friends may chime in, and that people will talk about it. Unlike cyberbullying, which involves repeated digital harassment towards someone, drama is broader and more nuanced. That being said, teens sometimes use the term *drama* to distance themselves from emotionally difficult behavior. Digital drama can still feel very real to students, lead to hurt feelings, and even damage friendships. In some cases, digital drama can escalate into an offline fight — either verbal or physical.

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Standards Alignment –

Common Core:

grade 6: RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, W.4, W.7, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.4, SL.6, L.6

grade 7: RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, W.4, W.7, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.4, SL.6, L.6

grade 8: RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, W.4, W.7, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.4, SL.6, L.6

NETS-S: 1a-d, 2a-b, 2d, 3a-d, 4a-d, 5a-d, 6a-b, 6d

Key Vocabulary –

generalization: an assumption made about a whole group of people based upon your experiences with a few

stereotype: a widespread belief about a group of people — often negative — that influences how members of that group are perceived and treated

introduction

Warm-up (5 minutes)

PREPARE students for a two-minute free-write exercise.

INSTRUCT students to reflect on the word *drama*. How would they define it? What does it mean to them?

INVITE student volunteers to share their responses with the rest of the class.

Sample responses:

- A type of fighting, or a tiff, that happens between friends or groups of friends
- Gossip or rumors, breakups or falling outs
- Jealousy, or people excluding one another on purpose
- Making comments about people online without actually using their names

DISCUSS the double meaning of the word *drama*. In the context of theater, drama refers to a play or performance. In a social context, drama often refers to an emotional conflict between or among people.

ENCOURAGE students to describe how *online drama* fits both of these definitions. (Guide them to consider that online drama is displayed, or performed, for an audience of peers online. For example, someone may initiate a fight on a friend's Facebook wall, knowing that other people will see the comments and possibly get involved.)

ASK:

Do you feel that people enjoy online drama? Why or why not?

Students may discuss how people sometimes bond over drama and gossip online. It can be entertaining to be involved in it, or to observe it from afar. Students may also point out that online gossip and fights can damage people's friendships or reputations.

teach 1

Discussing Online Drama Video (15 minutes)

DIVIDE students into groups of three or four.

DISTRIBUTE the **Dissecting Drama Student Handout**, one for each student, and have students review the instructions.

TELL students that they are going to watch a video of middle school children having an open discussion about digital drama, and whether girls and boys experience it differently.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **generalization**.

ENCOURAGE students to take notes during the video. Instruct them to be on the lookout for generalizations about boys and girls.

 **SHOW** students the video "**Discussing Digital Drama**."

INSTRUCT students to fill out column A on their handout in their small groups. Allow them about five minutes to do so. Then bring students back together for a class discussion.

ASK:

Did you notice any generalizations about girls in this video? If so, what were they?

Sample video quotes:

- “Girls are more sensitive in how they look and how they act because they want to be popular.”
- “Girls are, like, so sensitive about everything.”
- “Girls, I find, are the drama queens.”

Did you notice any generalizations about boys in this video?

Sample video quotes:

- “Guys can be dragged into drama.”
- “They aren’t usually the ones that start it.”
- “They can’t talk as openly with each other as girls do, offline.”

What do you think about these generalizations? Are they true of you and your friends? Are they true for some, or all, teens?

Encourage students to recognize that while these generalizations may apply to some teens, they don’t apply to all — that’s what makes them generalizations.

teach 2

The (Un)Reality of Reality TV Drama (20 minutes)

ASK:

Do you watch reality television shows? If so, do the shows ever feature drama?

Students’ answers will vary.

How “real” do you think reality TV drama actually is?

Encourage students to probe deeper by asking them whether their favorite reality TV shows might be scripted to encourage drama, or edited to make their cast members seem more dramatic.

Can you think of examples from your own lives where you and your friends have dealt with conflict in nondramatic ways? Do you think those stories would be a hit on a reality TV show? Why or why not?

Guide students to recognize that drama is often considered entertaining, so these shows are less likely to depict quick and positive resolutions to conflicts.

 **SHOW** students the video “**The Real Housewives Series Clips**,” encouraging them to take notes as they did during the previous video.

ALLOW students five minutes to fill out column B of their handouts in small groups. Then have them discuss their findings as a class.

ASK:

Were there any generalizations about women in this video? If so, what were they?

Women are commonly portrayed on reality TV as dramatic, catty, competitive, and jealous. They are often shown as “frenemies” – friends who are also considered enemies, or potential enemies.

Were there any generalizations about men in this video? If so, what were they?

Men are commonly depicted as watching the drama from the sidelines, or serving as mediators. Sometimes they dismiss female drama as stupid and unnecessary. Other times men fuel the drama indirectly.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **stereotype**.

ASK:

Do you think reality TV might lead to stereotypes about girls and boys, women and men?

Encourage students to recognize that when people see these same kinds of behaviors depicted again and again on reality TV, it may encourage them to make assumptions about entire groups of people. For example, people may think of women as “naturally” more inclined to drama than men. Or reality TV might reinforce the stereotype that it’s “unmanly” for guys to talk about their emotions.

INVITE students to share connections that they’ve made between the boxes on their handouts. Students should recognize that the middle schoolers in the video made generalizations about girls, boys, and drama similar to the stereotypes encouraged by reality TV. For example, have students analyze their reactions to *The Real Housewives* clips with their reaction to Jessie’s comment: “I feel like girls aren’t taken seriously online.” Or have students analyze the way men were portrayed in the *The Real Housewives* clips with Robbie’s comment: “I feel like boys sometimes get dragged into drama by girls.”

HAVE students reflect on the extent to which drama can actually hurt people’s feelings and damage friendships. If we view drama on TV and online as silly, or even “girly,” does it make it seem less serious? Why or why not? Is that a problem?

closing

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students’ understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

ASK:

Have your impressions of online drama changed since the beginning of this lesson? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.

Do you think that teens' perceptions of drama can be influenced by what we see on reality TV? Why or why not?

Students should acknowledge that media messages can be powerful and can shape our ideas and our behavior, but we can make choices about how much we allow these messages to influence us.

What factors do you think shape the way girls and boys act online? Can online drama encourage certain stereotypes about gender?

Students should realize that a variety of factors shape our online behavior — media messages, social expectations, pressure from peers — and that they can be different for boys and girls. When girls and boys act accordingly, their behavior can reinforce stereotypes.

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Directions

Step 1: Watch the video “**Discussing Digital Drama.**” Select ideas and quotes from the video that you think reflect **generalizations** about the ways girls and boys act, and write them down in column A, Online Drama, of the chart below.

Wait for instruction from your teacher to continue to Step 2.

Step 2: Now watch the “**The Real Housewives Series Clips,**” and write your notes in column B, Reality Television, of the chart.

A **generalization** is an assumption about a whole group of people. But it’s based on your experiences with only a few.

For example:

It’s a **generalization** that all girls love the color pink.

	A	B
	Online Drama	Reality Television
Girls		
Boys		

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1. Which of the following is an example of a *generalization*?

- a) One of my friends is on the football team.
- b) All boys like football.
- c) Few women have ever played football professionally.

2. True or false: A lot of drama on reality TV is “real” (not acted or edited).

- a) True
- b) False

Explain your answer:

3. All of the following statements are true about both online drama and reality TV drama EXCEPT for:

- a) People “perform” or engage in drama with an audience in mind
- b) The drama is often edited or scripted before people see it
- c) Many people’s ideas about drama are based on stereotypes about girls and boys

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1. Which of the following is an example of a *generalization*?

- a) One of my friends is on the football team.
- b) All boys like football.**
- c) Few women have played football professionally.

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**. A generalization is an assumption made about a whole group of people based upon one's experiences with only a few people. Whereas few women historically have had the opportunity to play football professionally, not all boys like football; that's a blanket statement.

2. True or false: A lot of drama on reality TV is “real” (not acted or edited).

- a) True
- b) False**

Answer feedback

The answer is **b**, False. Reality TV doesn't necessarily capture candid moments in real time. Much of the drama that we see on TV is staged or has been reworked in some way.

3. All of the following statements are true about both online drama and reality TV drama EXCEPT for:

- a) People “perform” or engage in drama with an audience in mind
- b) The drama is often edited or scripted before people see it**
- c) Many people's ideas about drama are based on stereotypes about girls and boys

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**. People engage in online drama with an audience in mind. So do the actors and producers of reality TV shows. But unlike digital drama, which can play out in real time, reality TV shows are often edited and scripted before people see it. Additionally, many people stereotype drama as a “girl” thing, rather than a “boy” thing. When these stereotypes play out online and on reality TV, both of which involve real people, it can be hard to convince people to not adopt the same, stereotyped ideas.