The Rights of Women and Girls

A resource to support the exploration of the Rights of Women and Girls
These resources provide a broad introduction to a range of ideas around the position of women and girls in a number of societies and cultures around the world. Students will be encouraged to reflect upon the positive roles of women in their own lives as well as barriers that prevent women from having more power and influence in their families, communities and in public life. Students will also undertake research into the status of women elsewhere in the world, before going on to explore the roles and influence of women in different faith traditions. These resources also prepare the students for videoconference or online dialogue on these issues. As always we encourage teachers to approach these materials creatively, and to use them to enhance existing curriculum materials. The basic materials here can be covered in about four to six hours, although a number of extension and enrichment materials are also provided.

Table of Contents

1. Actions Speak Louder that Words  
   Page 3
2. The Women in my Life  
   Page 8
3. The Women in my Society  
   Page 11
4. Roles & Influence of Women  
   Page 15
5. Dialogue in Practice  
   Page 25
Although it may be argued that the 20th century saw enormous strides being made in terms of the recognition of women’s rights, and their codification in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the U.N. Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, for many women and girls around the world this does not feel like a task that has been completed. An enormous disparity between genders exists in many countries, and this lesson is designed to help students begin to explore that.

We’ve provided a range of resources here for students to use, but be aware that the best resources may be your student’s own experiences of inequality; creating a safe space for them to share those may be challenging, but in the long term provide the most impact.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The worksheets that accompany the activities below can be found at the end of the lesson.

1. ACTIVITIES

   INTERNATIONAL TIMELINE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS

   PURPOSE

   Use the Worksheet 1: International Timeline of Women’s Rights to introduce to students some of the major achievements and recognition that have been gained by women and girls in the last 100 years. Particularly worth emphasising the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which guarantees gender equality, and is backed up by the CEDAW.

   Key questions to discuss with students:
   • What do these milestones imply about the development of Women’s rights?
   • Has the job been finished – do women have full equality?

   RESOURCES

   Worksheet 1.1: International Timeline of Women’s Rights

   Students should discuss these ideas in pairs or small groups first, before participating in whole class discussion. Two excellent activities from the Essentials of Dialogue to support this are ‘Listen To Me’ and ‘Sharing our ideas’.

2. WORKSHEETS

   1.1 INTERNATIONAL TIMELINE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS
   1.2 THE GLOBAL VOICES

3. MAIN ACTIVITY 1

   THE GLOBAL VOICES

   PURPOSE

   Watch the video Global Voices. This is packed with a range of statistics, all of which combine to suggest that Women and Girls around the world continue to face serious challenges. As in studying any other big issue, the statistical information only gives a very rough outline; a top-level objective exploration, but one that sets the scene for the rest of this period of study.

   You can use Worksheet 1.2: The Global Voices - Women’s Rights to record this information, rather than having students take notes.

   RESOURCES

   Worksheet 1.1: The Global Voices - Women’s Rights
   Video: The Global Voices - Women’s Rights https://youtu.be/SS7i0izxW8U

   Following the video, ask students to work in groups in order to
discuss the statistics that they found most shocking, and reasons why. The latter part is critically important.

**MAIN ACTIVITY 2**

**FOUR VIDEO TOPICS, FOUR DISCUSSIONS**

**PURPOSE**

We’ve suggested a number of videos here, which students should watch in order to explore some of these ideas in greater detail. We would suggest asking groups of students to focus on different videos, and then feedback to their peers.

Alternatively, you can flip your classroom – ask the students to watch the videos for homework, and then present the key ideas to their classmates.

**RESOURCES**

Online Resources: Sheryl Wu Dun Global Oppression of Women  
https://youtu.be/nvdUgLFoNEk

Laura Bates, Everyday Sexism  
https://youtu.be/LhjsRjC6B8U

Chimamamde Ngozi Adeche, We should all be feminists  
https://youtu.be/hg3umXU_qWc

Gender Equality & Development – globally  
https://youtu.be/4viXOGvvy0Y

**REFLECTION ACTIVITY 1**

**POSTER REFLECTION**

A great way of doing the feedback on this is to ask each group to collaborate together to produce a simple poster that sums up the key ideas of the video that they’ve watched. This should be drawn in 5 minutes. One person from each group remains with the poster, and explains it, as the others circle round the room visiting one poster at a time to learn from each group.

**REFLECTION ACTIVITY 2**

**REFLECTIVE WRITING**

While students will have learned a great deal from today’s work, one of the important elements in the reflection task is to ground this within their own experiences. We suggest some reflective writing on how they feel about these issues is an excellent approach.

You can also encourage students to prepare for the next lesson by talking to their family members about their experiences of these issues.
**INTERNATIONAL TIMELINE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS (PART 1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Bertha von Suttner becomes the first woman to win a Nobel Peace Prize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>First ever International Women’s Day celebrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>Women from the U.S. and Europe gather in The Hague in the Netherlands for the first International Congress of Women later known as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Women gain the right to vote in the UK (although with property qualifications, and limited to aged over 30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Alexandra Kollontai is appointed ambassador from the Soviet Union to Sweden. She is considered the first woman ambassador in modern history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Eleanor Roosevelt becomes the American delegate for the recently formed United Nations. In 1946 she is elected as the head of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. She is instrumental in drafting the Declaration of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Women gain the right to vote in France, Italy, Japan and Yugoslavia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>UN Commission on the Status of Women established with mandate to set standards of women’s rights, encourage governments to bring their laws into line with international convention and to encourage global awareness of women’s rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Adoption of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which forms the basis for action for promoting equal rights and freedoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Covenant on Political Rights of Women enacted by the United Nations, calling for women’s right to vote and right to stand for elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Swedish diplomat Agda Rössel is the first woman to head a permanent delegation to the United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Helga Pederson becomes the first female judge on the European Court of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Isabel Martínez de Perón becomes President of Argentina and the first female president in America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>First International Women’s Year, first global United Nations’ Women’s Conference held in Mexico City and beginning of the UN Decade for Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>The UN General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Eliminations of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. It defines what counts as discrimination against women and creates an agenda for nations to adopt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Margaret Thatcher is elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, becoming Europe’s first female elected head of state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Maria Corazon Aquino becomes the first female President of the Philippines and the first female president in Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women; women successfully promote the message that women’s rights are human rights at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Women secure another major step forward for women’s and girl’s right to control their own lives and bodies at International Conference on Population &amp; Development in Cairo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### INTERNATIONAL TIMELINE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS (PART 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>The 4th World Conference on Women is held in Beijing, China and results in a global Platform for Action for women’s equality, empowerment, and justice</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>15-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Jenny Shipley is elected Prime Minister of New Zealand and becomes the first female head of state in Australasia</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>The Secretary-General appoints a Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are developed and include a goal to promote gender equality</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>UN Women is formed out of a number of existing UN organizations to further the empowerment of women and girls and to advocate for gender equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security adopted, recognising the impact of conflict on women and girls and calling for UN member states to involve women in peacebuilding</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence adopted as the second legally binding regional instrument on violence against women and girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmental activist, is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She is the first black African woman to win a Nobel Prize</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>United Nations passes a historic resolution outlawing Female Genital Mutilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Women defend their gains at the ten year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and successfully defeat a proposal led by the U.S government for an anti-abortion amendment to the declaration</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Nkosazana Dlamini-Zumah is appointed the first woman head of the African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Ellen Johnson Sirleaf becomes President of Liberia, the first female elected head of state in Africa</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>UN Day of the Girl celebrated for the first time on 11 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>The first all-female UN Peacekeeping unit is deployed. It is made up of over 100 policewomen from India and it is sent to Liberia</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Malala Yousafzai became the youngest person ever to be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>UN Security Council Resolution 1820 adopted, recognizing that sexual violence can be categorized as a war crime; calling</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals launched, including a gender equality goal and targets about ending violence against women and ensuring equal participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for protection from violence in refugee and displaced person camps; and affirming the need for women’s full participation in peacebuilding processes</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia grants women the right to vote,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WORKSHEET 1.2
THE GLOBAL VOICES


Ask students to work in groups in order to discuss the statistics that they found most shocking in the video and why. The latter part is critically important.

NOTES:
Students map the influence of women in their lives from immediate family members to friends, wider family, school, wider community, historical figures, and public female figures.

Students consider the extent of the influence, the positive roles of women in their lives and also the barriers that prevent women from having more power and influence in their families, communities, and in public life.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The worksheets that accompany the activities below can be found at the end of the lesson.

**STARTER ACTIVITY 1**

**THE WOMEN IN MY LIFE**

**PURPOSE**

Using the Worksheet 2.1: The Women in My Life students reflect on the women who influence them and where they encounter these women. They should note who these women are, their roles and how they influence them.

**RESOURCES**

Worksheet 2.1: The Women in My Life

Students share their reflections with one another through dialogue practice. Students share their influences using the 'Listen to Me' or 'Sharing our Ideas' activities which ensure that all students take part and that all have their voices heard. You can carousel the activity, thereby widening the sharing by doing this activity more than once.1

**MAIN ACTIVITY 1**

**REFLECT BACK UPON THE ‘INFLUENCES’ LESSON IN THE ESSENTIALS OF DIALOGUE**

**PURPOSE**

Students should select one woman who has been particularly influential on their own life. This can be either an historical or current person; someone famous or a family member. Students should prepare a brief presentation for their peers about this person. This should include some biographical detail, but the key focus should be upon why they are inspirational, and how they have been an influence. Students can use the ‘Inspiration’ prompt sheet. This reflection is useful preparation for the videoconference and online dialogue as well.

You can extend this task through using ICT asking students to prepare ppts, prezis or short movies on their inspirations.

**REFLECTION ACTIVITY 1**

**SHARE WITH ONE OTHER**

Having completed this task, students should share with one another; either in small groups or as a whole class. They should attempt to draw out similarities and differences, and then consider if they can draw any conclusions about the role of women in their society.

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You should work individually to prepare a presentation on a woman who has inspired you. This is a woman who has taken a stand for what she believes in, and has inspired others (particularly you). The example that you pick could be really famous, or someone you know personally who others will never have heard of; they could be someone contemporary, or someone who lived a long time ago; someone who is obviously part of a faith tradition, or someone who stood up for non-religious beliefs.

Remember that your presentation should include this information:

• Some basic biographical background.
• Why does that person inspire you?
• What did she do?
• Why did she do it?
• How did she do it?
• Do you aspire to be like her, if so, how can you do it?

You can prepare a presentation on your inspiration, put it up in class, and share on the on-line community. These presentations need not just be posters, but powerpoints, or even movies (You can use Photostory 3 to prepare outstanding presentations).
WORKSHEET 2.2
THE WOMEN IN MY LIFE

- FAMILY
- FRIENDS
- COMMUNITY
- SCHOOL
- FAMOUS WOMEN
- OTHERS
This is potentially a difficult lesson – students often want to emphasise that ‘their’ society is equal, but other societies less so. It is important to encourage them to explore the realisation that all societies present a mixed picture, and that justice and equality can only come through people acknowledging this, and committing to improve things.

It is particularly important to address precisely the difference between ‘my society respects women’ and ‘my society respects women’s rights’. In practice there is often a big distinction between the two, and it is worth acknowledging and exploring this from the start of the work. Very often the ‘barriers’ identified by students in the exercise below are critical points of intersection between these two different ideas.

For best results we suggest using a range of thought-provoking resources here from your own communities and cultures – the resources suggested here should be thought of as examples.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The worksheets that accompany the activities below can be found at the end of the lesson.

STARTER ACTIVITY 1
EXPLORING THE GENDER GAP WITH STATISTICS

PURPOSE
Reflecting back upon the issues raised in Lesson one – to what extent do these affect women in your own society. Are there other issues not raised that do have an impact?

Use the excellent online activity below, which uses data from the 2015 Global Gender Gap report to generate county by country comments. How does your country measure up?

RESOURCES

IN THIS LESSON

1. ACTIVITIES
   - EXPLORING THE GENDER GAP WITH STATISTICS
   - OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES
   - REFLECTIVE WRITING
   - SOCIAL ACTIONS

2. WORKSHEETS
   - 3.1 GATES & BARRIERS
   - 3.2 IDEAS FOR CAMPAIGNS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

MAIN ACTIVITY 1
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

PURPOSE
What are the opportunities and challenges for women in your communities?

Students explore where women have power and influence in their communities or nations and where women come up against restrictions.

Students work in pairs on the ‘gates and barriers’ activity sheet to help them think about where the ‘gates’ and ‘barriers’ are for women socially, economically, in public life, in different religious communities.

Bring all the paired activities together – sharing information as a whole class, and discussing the areas of agreement / disagreement.

REFLECTION ACTIVITY 1
REFLECTIVE WRITING

A piece of individual reflective writing on the discussion; what has surprised or shocked them – how do they feel about the ideas that they have discussed.
In this reflection it might be helpful (if appropriate) to have boys and girls work separately on the initial reflective writing, and then share with a partner of the other gender.

**MAIN ACTIVITY 2**

**SOCIAL ACTIONS**

**PURPOSE**

How can we get involved?

If your students are passionate about these ideas, get them involved in doing something to raise awareness of these issues in their own school community. Use the suggestions for Social Actions from Worksheet 3.2 below.

**PROJECT 1**

Have a panel discussion in school, perhaps inviting people from different faith traditions to attend the event.

**PROJECT 2**

Create a documentary and show it to other classes, to the wider school community, hold a screening of the documentary. Keep it simple: display posters around your school.

To make this less simple and engage further with your community you could invite people in to view the gallery.

**PROJECT 3**

Hold an assembly to disseminate what you have learned.

**PROJECT 4**

Write and perform a play about influential women in your community.

**PROJECT 5**

Based upon the work that students have done about women that inspire them.

1. Write an article for your school newspaper or website (link to twitter)

2. Print photos or badges with photos or pictures of the students’ chosen heroines on them with the message ‘ask me about...’

3. Write a letter to the chosen heroines outlining how they have inspired and have the letters:
   - Linked to a tweet
   - Printed in your local paper
   - Read out in assemblies, etc

**PROJECT 6**

Create a quiz or board game about women in your community and faith tradition for other students, parents and teachers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THINK ABOUT...</th>
<th>GATES</th>
<th>BARRIERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about at home, in the family, out and about, in groups or clubs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECONOMICALLY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about in the workplace, as a consumer or investor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLIC LIFE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about in politics both locally and nationally, as public speakers, in groups that lobby or campaign for change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RELIGIOUS LIFE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about the different religious groups in your locality and the roles that women play as leaders of the faith community or groups affiliated with the faith community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WORKSHEET 3.2
IDEAS FOR CAMPAIGNS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1. Raise awareness of local women who are currently working for the improved rights and opportunities for women and/or important historical figures who have worked for improved rights and opportunities for women.

2. Raise awareness of national male feminists; men who have campaigned or who are campaigning for the rights of women.

3. Raise awareness of those who campaigned for women’s rights and opportunities inspired by different faith traditions.

4. Raise awareness of powerful Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, Jain, Humanist (or other) women leaders and of the work that they did.

5. Raise awareness of Malala’s journey and message.
The purpose of this lesson is first to confront some of the prejudices and expectations that students may have about the place of women in religions. Materials are provided which give an insight into teachings from each tradition — although, for balance, challenges are also acknowledged. It’s important to understand that, just as religious teaching can often support women, it can also be used to oppress. It’s important to acknowledge that this balance exists in all traditions.

It is particularly important to address precisely the difference between ‘my religion respects women’ and ‘my religion respects women’s rights’. In practice there is often a big distinction between the two, and it is worth acknowledging and exploring this from the start of the work. Very often the ‘controversies’ identified in the sheets below are critical points where these things are explored.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The worksheets that accompany the activities below can be found at the end of the lesson.

**STARTER ACTIVITY 1**

**EXPLORE STEREOTYPES**

**PURPOSE**

To begin with, students explore stereotypes they think exist for women in different faith traditions. In pairs students make a list of stereotypical statements that they have heard or seen about women in different faith traditions.


These statements are swapped with other pairs and if the new pair of students recognise the statements they put a mark against the statement. This activity can be repeated.

At the end of the session explore the most common stereotypes according to the class about women in some faith traditions.

**Research Task:**

**RESOURCES**

Worksheet 4.1: Women, Leadership & Buddhism

**IN THIS LESSON**

1. **ACTIVITIES**
   - **EXPLORE STEREOTYPES**
   - **RESEARCH – WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP IN RELIGION**

2. **WORKSHEETS**
   - 4.1 WOMEN, LEADERSHIP & BUDDHISM
   - 4.2 WOMEN, LEADERSHIP & CHRISTIANITY
   - 4.3 WOMEN, LEADERSHIP & HINDUISM
   - 4.4 WOMEN, LEADERSHIP & ISLAM
   - 4.5 WOMEN, LEADERSHIP & JUDAISM
   - 4.6 WOMEN, LEADERSHIP & SIKHISM
   - 4.7 WOMEN, LEADERSHIP & THE BAHAI FAITH

Worksheet 4.2: Women, Leadership & Christianity
Worksheet 4.3: Women, Leadership & Hinduism
Worksheet 4.4: Women, Leadership & Islam
Worksheet 4.5: Women, Leadership & Judaism
Worksheet 4.6: Women, Leadership & Sikhism
Worksheet 4.7: Women, Leadership & the Bahai Faith

Online Resources: BBC religion good for women? [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/0/18395819]


**STEP 1**

*Place students into groups – 1 for each tradition that you are going to cover.*

**STEP 2**

*Have a large piece of paper on the each tables and some pens.*

**STEP 3**

*Ask the students to write their findings on the sheets using the resources provided plus any other resources you have found on these issues.*
STEP 4
After ten or fifteen minutes, ask the students to move tables. Students add to the next sheet being careful not to replicate what is already there.

STEP 5
Display the sheets around the room so that all of the students can view them. Students should start with the religions they had not worked on before looking at the rest.

Students should focus on these questions:
• What has been the role of women historically in your chosen faith tradition?
• What do religious texts say about respect, rights and opportunities for women?
• What is the role of women today within your chosen faith tradition?
• How do you see women having more of a leadership role in future within your chosen faith tradition?
The teaching of the Buddha himself makes it very clear that in many respects men and women should be considered equally. Indeed some elements of the earliest teaching of Buddhism suggest that attachment to gender identity is one of the main attachments that all who wish to achieve enlightenment must overcome; the Nun Soma suggests in the Soma sutra that enlightenment won’t come to “Anyone who thinks ‘I’m a woman’ or ‘a man’ or ‘Am I anything at all?” and the Buddha himself taught that this was unimportant “What does womanhood matter at all, when the mind is concentrated well, when knowledge flows on steadily as one sees correctly into Dhamma” (Samyutta Nikaya 5.2).

Other Buddhist teachers at different times have emphasised a similar point of view - the Japanese Zen teacher Dogen commented “Why are men special? Emptiness is emptiness. Four great elements are four great elements. Five skandhas are five skandhas. Women are just like that. Both men and women attain the way. You should honor attainment of the way. Do not discriminate between men and women. This is the most wondrous principle of the buddha way” (Raihai Tokuuzui).

The Buddha himself allowed women to join the monastic community or Sangha, and practice his teaching, which was extremely unusual for the time. Nuns did not have complete equality with Monks however, and had to accept eight additional rules that placed Monks above Nuns in terms of authority.

There is an enormous respect for motherhood in many Buddhist traditions - Tsultrim Allione, a teacher in a Tibetan lineage reflects upon this “…in Buddhism the image of the mother as the embodiment of compassion is used a lot. She’ll do anything for the children. As a mother I felt that depth of love and commitment and having somebody who I really would give my own life for - it was very powerful to have that kind of relationship”. Within Tibetan Buddhism the figure of Green Tara - a bodhisattva of spiritual action is a powerful representation of this principle.

CONTROVERSY

Some contemporary women buddhist teachers have been very critical of what they see as sexist attitudes that have persisted in some traditions. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo’s experience as a nun in the 1970s revealed the attitudes of some of the monks - “When I first came to India I lived in a monastery with 100 monks. I was the only nun,... I think that is why I eventually went to live by myself in a cave... The monks were kind, and I had no problems of sexual harassment or troubles of that sort, but of course I was unfortunately within a female form. They actually told me they prayed that in my next life I would have the good fortune to be reborn as a male so that I could join in all the monastery’s activities. In the meantime, they said, they didn’t hold it too much against me that I had this inferior rebirth in the female form. It wasn’t too much my fault”. As a result of this she has taken a vow “to attain Enlightenment in the female form - no matter how many lifetimes it takes”. She is also dedicated to achieving equality for all Buddhist nuns.

What do you think about that?

READ MORE:

If you don’t know about Buddhism, you can find some good basic information [http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism)

See if you can research about these notable women Buddhists who are all active now:

- Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, The first western woman ordained as a Tibetan nun, who spent time in extended retreat
- Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche, A notable tulku and teacher from a Tibetan Tradition
- Roshi Joan Halifax, American Zen Teacher
- Dharma Master Cheng Yen, founded and runs the Tzu Chi Foundation, the largest Buddhist charity in the world
Like many other traditions, Christianity has, throughout much of its history, contained many different views about the importance of women; ideas that have often been in tension. Many Christians try to understand these ideas by returning to the teachings in the Bible. Some of these teachings suggest that there should be equality between men and women, such as

> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27)

> You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)

While others seem to state that women should be subservient to men; both in marriage, and in the life of the church:

> The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Corinthians, 14:34-35)

> Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:22-24)

Many Christians continue to struggle with the challenges inherent in what appear to be quite different messages.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is hugely important in many forms of Christianity; although particularly so in the Roman Catholic church. Within this tradition, Mary is referred to as the Mother Of God, and seen also as the Mother of the Church. Mary is seen as a compassionate intercessor (one who pleads on behalf of another), and a protector of the oppressed. This belief finds some of its most powerful expressions in art, and in the belief that she has sometimes miraculously appeared to her devotees. (Note that many other Churches do not recognise Mary as having any special significance).

CONTROVERSY

Opportunities for women to take on leadership roles in Christian churches have been very controversial. Biblical verses like those above are used to argue that women should not be priests, but an increasing groundswell of Christian women have put pressure on this position - asserting that the texts that suggest that men and women are equal are more relevant today, and that the biblical texts should be seen as emerging from a patriarchal (Male-centric) context. A number of Protestant churches accept women in fully equal leadership positions, recognising them as Pastors or Priests. In some churches, such as the Church of England, there have been women priests for some time, and the first women bishops have recently been ordained. Other churches maintain that, while men and women are equal in value, they have different gifts, and that these should be expressed in different ways; they will refuse to appoint women as equal leaders. One of these churches is the Roman Catholic, although the current Pope has recognised that “many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection... [and concluded that] it is necessary to broaden the space within the church for a more incisive feminine presence”. However, he remains opposed to ordaining women as priests.

What do you think about that?

READ MORE:

If you don't know about Christianity you can find out some good basic information [http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity)

See if you can research about these notable Christian Women:
- Sister Helen Prejean, Roman Catholic Nun, and pro-life advocate
- Leymah Gbowee, Liberian peace activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner
- Penny Jamieson, The Anglican Bishop of Dunedin - 1st woman ordained as a Bishop
- Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether, leading feminist theologian
Hinduism is an enormously complex and diverse religious tradition originating in India. Within Hinduism there are many divergent points of view and opinions on nearly every issue; the status of women is a good example of this. Even within one significant text there can appear to be some contradiction. The Manu Smrti (an important text that is often referred to, but not one that is universally important for all Hindus) suggests on one hand that women are enormously important:

> Women are worthy of worship, they are the fate of the household, the lamp of enlightenment for all in the household. They bring solace to the family and are an integral part of dharmic life. Even heaven is under the control of women. The gods reside in those households where women are worshipped, and in households where women are slighted, all efforts at improvement go in vain. (Manusmrti 3:56)

and then in other sections, that women should always be subservient to their male relatives:

> She is protected by her father in her childhood, and by her husband in her youth. She is protected by her son in her old age. A woman does not deserve to be independent. (Manusmrti 9:3)

Hinduism is unique among the principal world religions in that it includes the worship of goddesses, and Hindus are able to talk and think about the divine in female terms. Popular Goddesses include the fierce and proud Durga (who is seen as a powerful mother who protects her worshippers) and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity (seen as a source of material blessings).

Many popular Hindu epics celebrate powerful female characters, who are held up as examples of perfect behaviour - like Sita, the wife, of Shri Rama in the Ramayana - who is seen as an example of a perfect wife or Draupadi in the Mahabharata.

The river Ganges is believed by many Hindus to be the Goddess Ganga, whose compassion for human beings is so great that anyone who bathes in the river will be forgiven all their wrongdoings.

CONTROVERSY

While it is true that Hinduism often teaches considerable respect for women, like any other culture, there are also examples of women being terribly oppressed and exploited - and sometimes this is linked to the Faith tradition. For many years a great many Hindu reformers protested against the barbaric practice of Sati (where a widow burned to death on her husband’s funeral pyre), and while this has been illegal for over two hundred years, the position of widows in some areas of India does not seem to have improved greatly. Every year hundreds of widows arrive at the Holy City of Vrindavan (associated with the god Krishna); some as pilgrims, others because they have been sent away by their families. Here they live in ashrams, and take part in religious activities, and are fed by those religious communities until they die. Many people, both within India and in the wider Hindu community around the world, have criticised this, and many religious people donate to NGOs who work to support the widows.

What do you think about that?

READ MORE:

- If you don't know about Hinduism, you can find some good basic information [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism)
- Research the stories of Sita or Draupadi, what might women today learn from their examples?
- See if you can research about these notable Hindu Women:
  - Vandana Shiva, scientist and activist
  - Mata Amritanandamayi (Ammaji), spiritual leader
  - Anuradha Koirala, Anti sex-trafficking activist and educator
  - Bhairavi Brahmani, The guru of Shri Ramakrishna
Many of the teachings of Islam are unequivocal in asserting that men and women are equal. There are a number of verses in the Qur’an which state this equality clearly.

And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women (2:28)

Who so does right and believes, whether male or female, him or her will we quicken to happy life (16:97)

There are also other verses which state equally clearly that Men are superior - such as “Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other” (Quran 4:34)

It is also significant to remember that, at the time of the revelation of the Qur’an, women were very badly treated in many societies, and there are a number of references to such appalling practices as things which are outlawed in Islam. The teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) gave women in Islam a number of rights which they had previously been denied: to be recognised as an independent person, to inherit property and to consent to marriage.

In addition, the Prophet Mohammed was vocal in support of powerful and strong women. He singled out four women he believed were of utmost importance. They were: Asiya (the wife of Pharaoh), the Virgin Mary, Khadijah (the Prophet’s wife), and his daughter Fatima. To Muslims, these women are considered to be role models for their devotion to their religion in the face of adversity and difficulty, and the perfect examples of virtuous character shown by their strength, patience, trust and gratitude.

While the prophet encouraged both men and women to be educated, there is a gender imbalance in education in some Islamic countries. In a 2013 statement, the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation noted that many Islamic member nations restrict education opportunities for girls and UNICEF has noted that out of 24 nations with less than 60 percent female primary enrolment rates, 17 were Islamic nations. A story that has highlighted this issue is that of Malala Yousufzai. A resident of Pakistan’s Swat valley, she defied local Taliban orders which prevented girls from attending school. Shot by the Taliban, she survived and her story has inspired people everywhere. A group of Pakistani Clerics issued a fatwa against the Taliban, claiming that their actions were un-Islamic, although the Taliban commanders justified their actions by appealing to Islam. Malala addressed this whole issue in her own speech to the UN: “They think that God is a tiny, little conservative being who would send girls to hell just because of going to school. The terrorists are misusing the name of Islam and Pashtun society for their own personal benefits”.

While certain commentators criticise aspects of the treatment of women in some Islamic countries, it is important to note that most of the things that give rise to these criticisms are not universal, and thus frequently aspects of pre-existing cultural bias that are now understood as being “Islamic”. A good example of this is the requirement upon all Muslims (both male and female) to dress with modesty. While the Qur’an tells women to dress modestly: “tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their chests, and not to reveal their adornment.” (24:30), this is interpreted in many ways. Many non-Muslims assume that women are compelled to wear veils, while many Muslim women argue that it is their choice, and an important part of their identity. The whole issue of veiling has become a huge controversy in some countries - the Niqab was recently made illegal in France.

What do you think about that?
READ MORE:

- If you don’t know about Islam, you can find some good basic information here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam)

- See if you can research about these notable Muslim Women:
  - Zainah Anwar, is a founding member of the Malaysian organisation Sisters in Islam
  - Farah Pandith, U.S. State Department’s Special Representative to Muslim Communities
  - Maria Bashir, 1st Female Prosecutor in Afghanistan, and campaigner for women’s rights
  - Shireen Ebadi, Nobel Prize winning Iranian Human rights activist
WORKSHEET 4.5

WOMEN IN JUDAISM

The Tenakh (Jewish Bible) and the Talmud (Mishnah and Gemara collected together) describe different roles for men and women. Traditionally women have a sacred role - they bear children, run the home and take responsibility for their children's Jewish upbringing. The woman passes on Jewish values and it is because of the mother's Jewish faith (not the father’s) that a child is born Jewish. While Jewish law excuses women from some religious duties (e.g., they don’t have to wear the tzitzit and tefillin while praying) there are some duties that women are obliged to carry out like the lighting the Shabbat candles. (Shabbat is the day of spiritual renewal and rest commencing at sunset on Friday, terminating at nightfall on Saturday.)

Some people argue that some traditions of Judaism are sexist. Men and women sit separately in Orthodox services and women cannot take an active part in this worship. Some Jewish women today accept these limitations, but they are as well-educated as men and choose to combine a career with family responsibilities. Progressive Jewish traditions (including Jews of both liberal and reform traditions) think that this attitude is wrong and treat women equally in all respects, so they too can become rabbis (Jewish teacher) if they choose to do so. There are very few women who have been trained as orthodox Rabbis, but they are usually referred to by other terms.

Traditional thinkers argue that, while Jewish women have less of a role in the synagogue than men, this does not mean that they are less important; as the centre of Jewish life is not the synagogue, but the home, and this is the place where women have additional important responsibilities, many of which are seen as spiritual. Indeed The Talmud says that when a pious man marries a wicked woman, the man becomes wicked, but when a wicked man marries a pious woman, the man becomes pious. The child of a Jewish woman and a gentile man is Jewish because of the mother’s spiritual influence; the child of a Jewish man and a gentile woman is not.

CONTROVERSY

The western wall in Jerusalem is probably the holiest site in Judaism. Until recently women have not been allowed to pray there in a manner that includes reading from the Torah, singing, or wearing Tzitzit or Tefillin. A number of Jewish women from different traditions within Judaism have formed the group “Women of the Wall” to protest this. When praying at the wall they have been attacked by Orthodox Jews, and have frequently been arrested. Although the supreme court have given permission for these prayers, it is still not an easy situation. This is an extremely complex situation, about which there are many strongly held and expressed opinions.

What do you think about that?

READ MORE:

If you don’t know about Judaism, you can find out some more information here: http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism

See if you can research about these notable Jewish Women:
- Annat Hoffman, chair of “Women of the Wall”
- Rabbi Julia Neuberger, Baroness Neuberger, DBE Britain’s 1st Woman Rabbi to run a synagogue
- Shari Arison, Business woman and philanthropist
- Mimi Feigelson, Trained as an orthodox rabbi
WORKSHEET 4.6

WOMEN IN SIKHISM

The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, mocked those who thought that men were superior to women; “From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married. Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generations come. When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; to woman he is bound. So why call her bad? From her, kings are born. From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all” (Guru Nanak, Raag Aasaa Mehal 1, Page 473).

Sikhism has a particularly profound emphasis upon equality for women in its teachings and Scriptures. At the foundation of the Khalsa, Guru Govind Singh introduced the Amrit initiation ceremony for both men and women; with male sikhs taking the name “Singh” (Lion), and women taking the name “Kaur” (Princess).

Women are not only initiated in Sikhism, but wear the full 5 Ks, as well as taking active roles in worship in the Gurdwara. In Sikhism, women are considered to have the same souls as men and an equal right to grow spiritually. They are allowed to lead religious congregations, take part in the Akhand Path (the continuous recitation of the Holy Scriptures), perform Kirtan (congregational singing of hymns), work as a Granthi, and participate in all religious, cultural, social, and secular activities.

The Sikh scriptures contain a number of references which not only state that men and women are equal, but that women should take a full part in worship.

Come dear sisters, let us join together. (Guru Ram Daas, p 96, line 6)

The unfathomable beloved resides in every man and woman’s heart. (Guru Ram Daas, p605, line 6)

Join with me, my sisters, and sing the songs of rejoicing the Lord of the Universe (Guru Arjan, p136, line 6)

CONTROVERSY

Recently groups of young Sikh men in the UK have attempted to prevent Sikh women marrying their non-Sikh partners in Sikh ceremonies. While the young men say that they want to maintain these particular ceremonies as only for Sikhs, others say that this does not recognise the long pluralist tradition in Sikhism. Others criticise this as a clear attempt by men to take control of women’s right to marriage.

What do you think about that?

READ MORE:

If you don’t know about Sikhism, you can find out some good basic information here: http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism

See if you can research about these notable Sikh Women:
• Dr Inderjit Kaur, President of the Pingalwara Charitable society
• Amrit Singh, Human Rights Lawyer
• Bibi Mejinderpal Kaur & Bibi Lakhbir Kaur, Honoured by the Times of India for campaigning for equal rights to perform Seva in the Harimandir
WORKSHEET 4.7

WOMEN IN THE BAHÁ’I FAITH

One of the most fundamental teachings of the Bahá’í Faith is the equality between Men and Women. This is made very clear in some key texts of the Bahá’í Faith.

The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. (Abdu’l-Bahá The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p 108.)

Women will be the greatest factor in establishing universal peace and international arbitration. Assuredly woman will abolish warfare among mankind. (Abdu’l-Bahá The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p 108.)

What do you think that these texts are saying to members of the Bahá’í Faith?

EDUCATION OF WOMEN

In Bahá’í teaching, women have always been considered as equal to men, and the reason why women have not achieved this equality yet is because of the lack of adequate educational opportunities.

Bahá’í teachings make it clear that, when given a choice, priority should go to the education of women and girls—in part because women are responsible for raising the next generation and “it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society. Bahá’ís are often keen supporters of global programmes to enhance the educational opportunities of women and girls. They argue that this will make a profound difference to the world.

For women to be able to fully participate in world affairs, they must be given the requisite tools, level of education and opportunities, of which they are often deprived. Through education, women will make unique contributions to the creation of a just world order: an order characterized by vigor, cooperation, harmony, and a degree of compassion never before witnessed in history. Bahá’í Statement to the UN Human Rights Council on integrating gender perspectives.

CONTROVERSY

Within the Bahá’í Faith Women are well represented in leadership roles, with the notable exception of the ‘The Universal House of Justice’, the supreme governing institution of the Bahá’í Faith, which women are prohibited from standing for. An American Bahá’í, Corinne True, challenged this in 1902, and received the following reply from Abdu’l-Bahá.

“The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God’s, which will erelong be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon”.

What do you think about that?

READ MORE:

If you don’t know about the Bahá’í faith, you can find out some good basic information here: [http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahai](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bahai)

See if you can research about these notable women of the Bahá’í faith:

• Táhirih, Poet, Bahá’í Theologian, and early women’s rights campaigner
• Dr. Helen Elsie Austin, One of the first African American lawyers
• Zhang Xin, Business tycoon and Founder of ‘Teach for China’
• Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, Wife of Shoghi Effendi (Head of the Bahá’í Faith until 1957). Sat on the International council which preceded the house of Justice
ABOUT VIDEOCONFERENCES

The four topics for discussion in the videoconference will be:

1. What are the opportunities for women as leaders in my community?
2. Who are the women who inspire me? Why?
3. What are the opportunities and barriers for women to take on leadership roles in different faith traditions?
4. What do women bring to leadership in different contexts? For some of the videoconferences there will be special guest speakers whom the students can interview.

Your facilitator will push on the key differentiation of the difference between ‘respecting women’ and ‘respecting women’s rights’.

Responding to what they hear is a key skill for students in a videoconference.

WATCH THESE VIDEOS:

- Asking response questions: https://youtu.be/byzrxoolK-o
- Using questions to build dialogue: https://youtu.be/6dOD8uwOKU

Remind the students of the dialogue skills that they learned in the introduction module.

TEAMTOPICS GUIDANCE

The questions for teamtopics are:

- What are the opportunities and barriers for women in my community?
- Who are the women that inspire me? What role and influence do women play in my faith tradition or one I’ve learned about?
- What limitations exist for women in my community or the wider global community? What can I do to make a difference?

CONTACT US

FOR SUPPORT & GUIDANCE

For more guidance and support, teachers can contact the Generation Global helpdesk at: helpdesk@generation.global, or the relevant country coordinator.