

Lessons for Life



Introduction:

Ask students to imagine what it would be like if they were not allowed to go to school because of their gender. This is a reality for girls in many parts of the world, where, because of social, cultural, and economic factors, women do not have the same choices and opportunities that men have. Of the world's one billion poorest people, over 60% are women and girls. Of the nearly one billion adults who cannot read, almost 70% are female.

The cycle of discrimination against women in developing countries begins with the treatment of girls. Many societies do not allow girls to go to school, and therefore girls have few opportunities for employment and economic freedom. In these cultures the main function of women is to have children and tend to household duties, so it is common for girls to marry and have children at an early age. In many of these cultures boys are preferred because they are the ones who will someday work and support their parents in old age. Daughters, on the other hand, are often viewed as economic burdens. When they marry, they move away to wait on husbands and husbands' families. Since female children are not as valued by the society, they often receive less food, medicine, and education. In this way the cycle of discrimination continues.

Breaking this complex cycle and raising the status of women begins with making education equally available for girls and boys around the world. Studies show that women who can read have healthier children. They also tend to delay marriage and childbearing because they have other options like college and employment. There is a strong link between education and fertility; the more education women have, the more likely they are to have small families.

Women in different parts of the world face different struggles. In less developed countries women and girls are struggling for access to education, health care, and employment outside the home. In the United States and other developed countries, women have attained a much higher status and more opportunities in recent decades. Even so, women still struggle to earn an equal wage as men for equal work and to be well represented by lawmakers. These struggles are similar because they are about increasing the options available to women. In recent years, people have begun to realize that discrimination against women has a negative impact on individuals, communities, societies, and the environment.

Concept:

Equal education and status for girls is key to a country's development and a stable population.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Explain why girls in many countries receive less education than boys do.
- Identify links between female literacy and status and population growth.
- Interpret graph data.

Subjects:

Economics, Family and Consumer Science, Health, History, Language Arts, Social Studies

Skills:

Critical thinking, reading, brainstorming, interpreting graphs, creating timelines

Method:

Students will read and discuss a short conversation between two Kenyan girls, watch and listen to two photo essays of school girls in less developed countries, and interpret a graph correlating literacy and fertility rates worldwide.



It would seem that because girls and women make up 50% of the world's population that they would be in a position to influence and improve human well-being. However, the needs, the work, and the voices of women around the world are often ignored. The key to a healthy planet includes social equality. Promoting the health, economic, and educational status of the world's women will guarantee a better quality of life for all. In this activity students will think about the role education plays in elevating the status of women.

Materials:

Student Reading "Why has Wanjiku dropped out of school?"

Student Worksheet

Paper

Pen or pencil

Internet access for viewing online photo essays

Procedure:

Part 1: Educating Wanjiku

1. Copy the story "Why has Wanjiku dropped out of school?" and distribute it.
2. After students have completed the reading, have them answer questions on the Student Worksheet. Discuss the answers as a class.

Part 2: A Day in the Life of Two School Girls

1. Have students watch and listen to the stories of two teen girls, one in Nicaragua and one in the Central African Republic about their daily routines and the role that school plays in their lives. These photo essays can be found on the website of the United Nations Girls Education Initiative website: www.ungei.org. Click on the tab for "News and Events," then "Photo essays." Scroll down to watch the last two photo essays: "A day in the life of a determined schoolgirl" (Haitza Ortiz) and "A day in the life of schoolgirl in the Central African Republic" (Josiane). You could view these as a class on a large screen using a whiteboard and projector or have students view them individually or in small groups around personal computers.
2. Discuss the questions below.
 - a. How are the family structures different for Haitza and Josiane?
 - b. Do they have similar standards of living? Why or why not?
 - c. What are the similarities and differences in their daily schedules?
 - d. What are the similarities and differences in their school experiences?
 - e. What do you think will determine these girls' futures?
 - f. Do you have similar responsibilities around your home to those of Haitza and Josiane? If so, do you spend the same amount of time on these responsibilities? If you did, would it be more challenging for you to excel in school? Why or why not?



3. If time allows, have students write out a timeline of their daily activities on a typical school day from the time they wake up in the morning until they go to bed. Then have them do the same for Haitza or Josiane, based on the information they give in their photo essays. They may need to view the photo essays a second time. Have them compare and contrast their daily activities and time allotment to one of these school girls.

Follow-Up Activity: Who are your heroes?

As a follow-up, students will consider the status of women in the United States. They will use the indicator of heroes to examine how our society values the contributions of men and women. The nature of this activity is subjective, so it is up to the facilitator to draw connections between students' own personal heroes and the traits and ideals that are valued by society as a whole.

Procedure:

1. Divide students into groups of three or four and assign each group a category from the list below.
2. Ask each group to brainstorm on a list of four or more famous figures or heroes in their category.
3. Have each students answer the following questions about their heroes:
 - a. How many of them are men? How many are women?
 - b. If you have more of one gender than another, hypothesize on why that is.
(Example: If your political heroes are mostly men, it might be because more men hold political office.)
 - c. What is it about your female heroes that you admire? (Is it intellectual ability, physical ability, physical beauty, other?)
 - d. What is it about your male heroes that you admire?
 - e. What do "heroes" tell us about culture or society as a whole?

Categories of heroes:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. political heroes | f. religious heroes |
| b. sports heroes | g. music heroes |
| c. literary heroes | h. television/movie heroes |
| d. personal heroes (family/friends) | i. fashion model heroes |
| e. American history heroes | j. world history heroes |



Name: _____ Date: _____

“Why has Wanjiku dropped out of school?”

Student Worksheet

Part 1: Reading Comprehension

1. How old is Wanjiku?
2. Why did Wanjiku’s parents take her out of school?
3. Why did Nyambura's mother decide to keep her in school?
4. What might the mother’s proverb mean? “Educate a boy and you educate one person; educate a girl and you educate a nation.” Do you agree with the mother? Why or why not?
5. How might Nyambura’s future differ from Wanjiku’s as a result of her having gone to school?
6. What kinds of choices will Wanjiku have when she is older if she never returns to school?
7. Which girl might get married first? Why?
8. Which girl might have children first? Why?
9. List two possible results of societies denying girls an education.



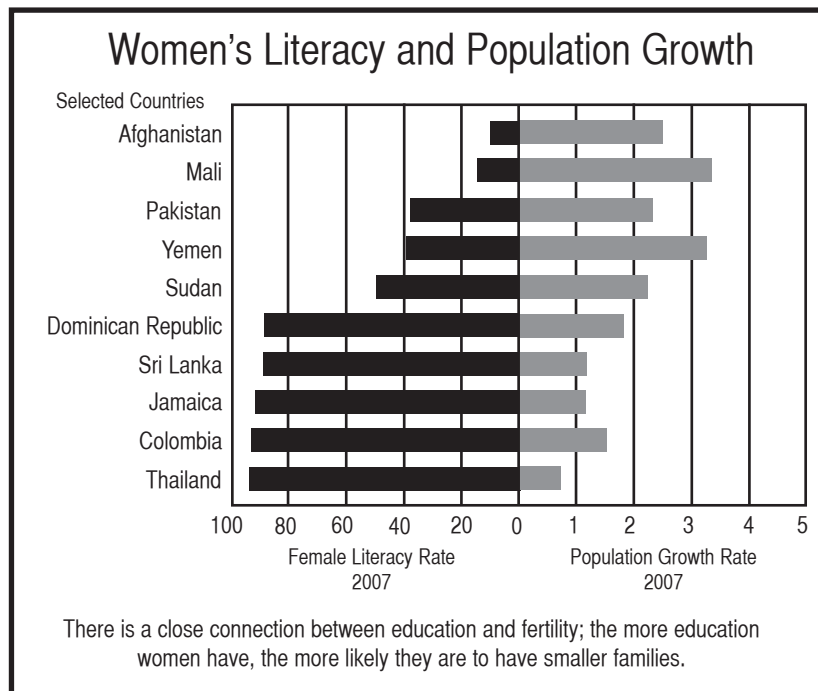
Name: _____ Date: _____

“Why has Wanjiku dropped out of school?”

Student Worksheet

Part 2: Graph Interpretation

1. On the graph below, which country has the highest female literacy rate?
2. Which country has the highest population growth rate?
3. What might be the relation or connection between the female literacy rate and the population growth rate?



Data sources: UNDP Human Development Report, 2009; PRB World Population Data Sheet, 2007.



Why has Wanjiku dropped out of school?

As Nyambura lowered her pail into the sun-dappled stream from which she fetched her family's water each morning, she heard a pure, high voice singing the old song about the maize flowers blooming all over Kenya. It was Wanjiku; the voice was unmistakable — and much missed in class now that her parents had pulled her out of school to help her mother at home after the birth of her latest brother. Nyambura didn't quite understand why they had done that; her own mother had just as much work as Wanjiku's. And it made her uncomfortable that she was still in school when Wanjiku wasn't. She set her pail down and ran up the path to greet her former classmate; she didn't want Wanjiku to feel that they weren't close friends just because they no longer saw each other daily.

"We got a new goat to go with my new brother," said Wanjiku as Nyambura took her hand.

"Which one is more troubling?" asked Nyambura, smiling.

"It's hard to tell. The goat, I guess. Yesterday it ate the sleeve of my red blouse."

They laughed together and, at the stream's edge, kicked off their sandals to cool their feet in the water.

"It's my little sister who's exciting," said Wanjiku. "She's beginning to talk. She still stumbles when she walks, but she chatters away. Just like me at her age, Mamma says."



© 2006 Sean Hawkey, courtesy of Photoshare

Nyambura wondered if Wanjiku's baby sister would ever go to school. She tried to remember the proverb her mother had learned at the dressmaking centre where she had also learned to read a few years before. All the eight-year-old girl could recall, though, was that when she had asked if she should stay at home like Wanjiku, to help with the younger children and the other household chores, her mother had pulled her ears gently and said, "Not you, honeypot. With that head of yours, you're going to write the kind of books that taught me how to read."

"And your father thinks the same," his voice had boomed suddenly in the doorway, "so don't go asking him such foolish things." He had entered the house, smiling, and threatened to tickle her to death if she raised the question again. That had closed the matter — for her at least. The problem, thought Nyambura, as she looked at her friend's rippled reflection in the water, was that Wanjiku's head was just as good as hers, different, but just as good. One of the reasons she missed Wanjiku so much in class was that her friend's answers to their teacher's questions often set off new thoughts in her own head. Had each made the other's head better?

And now Wanjiku was asking just the question Nyambura had been dreading: "What's going on at school?"



“We’re learning division,” she replied. “It’s easy,” she added, remembering how good Wanjiku had been at math. “I could teach it to you if you like.” Suddenly she realized that she’d said something wrong. “Of course it’s easy,” Wanjiku retorted. “Just the opposite of the times tables we were doing when I left. If five times two is ten, then two goes into ten five times.” She stood up and filled her pail. “You know,” she said, “I bet I can get my older brother to teach me everything he’s learned in school. I don’t really need to go myself.”

Nyambura wondered, but she said nothing. That brother wasn’t very interested in school — and he never seemed to have time for anyone but his friends. Then her mother’s proverb came back to her: “Educate a boy and you educate one person; educate a girl and you educate a nation.”

Reprinted with permission from *Girls: Challenging the World*, United Nations, 1995