Thinking Critically about Gender Equality

What do you think of when you hear the words “gender equality?” The term gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most societies, being a man or a woman is not simply a matter of different biological and physical characteristics. Men and women face different expectations about how they should dress, behave, or work. Women have historically fought to obtain equal footing with men, such as the right to vote, the right to enter colleges and universities, and the right to obtain equal pay for their equal efforts. Their fight is for gender equality, and part of this fight is to help others see the inequalities that still exist within our society and how our preconceived notions of gender can hinder gender equality.

Task 1: Activation Guide. Show how much you agree or disagree with the statements below on a 1 - 10 scale. 10 indicates that you agree most strongly.

1. Feminism is anti-man.

2. Men play an important role in whether or not women achieve gender equality.

3. Both men and women are restrained by gender roles that society imposes on them.

4. If women were paid as much as men in the workplace, this would bring about gender equality.

Task 2: Think about speeches that you have read or heard before while answering the following questions.
1. List five occasions on which a person might deliver an important speech.
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 
   4. 
   5. 

2. List five elements the content of a great speech might include.
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 
   4. 
   5. 

**Task 3: Read the speech and complete the speech SOAPSTone.**

As you read the speech, think about these effective elements of a good speech:

1. **Know your audience.** Who are you speaking to? This will determine what you say and how you say it.
2. **Make your purpose clear.** There should be no doubt in the mind of the audience as to why you’re giving your speech and the message you are sending.
3. **Use anecdotes.** Give personal stories and situations that highlight your credibility but also hook your audience into the topic emotionally.
4. **Use facts to support your points.** Using facts, statistics, and data to back up your assertions makes for a stronger speech.
5. **Keep it brief.** The attention span of a typical audience lasts about 7 minutes before you start losing them.

**EMMA WATSON’S UNITED NATIONS: “HEFORSHE: GENDER EQUALITY IS YOUR ISSUE, TOO” SPEECH**
by Emma Watson  2014

Emma Watson is a British actress, model, and activist, most widely known for her portrayal of Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* film series. In 2014 Watson became a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador and helped launch the campaign HeForShe. Watson presented the speech below at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York. **As you read, take notes on why Emma Watson believes the roles of men are important in ending gender inequality.**

**Note:** Certain words within the speech have been bolded. The definitions appear in the column to the right to aid in your understanding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEECH</th>
<th>DEFINITIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Today we are launching a campaign called “HeForShe.”</td>
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<td>I am reaching out to you because I need your help. We want to end gender inequality—and to do that we need everyone to be involved.</td>
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<td>This is the first campaign of its kind at the UN: we want to try and <strong>galvanize</strong> as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for gender equality. And we don’t just want to talk about it, but make sure it is <strong>tangible</strong>.</td>
<td><strong>Galvanize</strong> (verb): to cause people to become excited or concerned about an issue or idea, so that they want to do something about it</td>
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<td>I was appointed six months ago and the more I have spoken about feminism the more I have realized that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating. If there is one thing I know for certain, it is that this has to stop.</td>
<td><strong>Tangible</strong> (adjective): able to be touched or felt</td>
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<td>For the record, feminism by definition is: “The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes.”</td>
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<td>I started questioning gender-based assumptions when at eight I was confused at being called “bossy,” because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents—but the boys were not.</td>
<td><strong>Sexualize</strong> (verb): to make sexual, often in a way that treats the individual as an object rather than a person</td>
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<td>When at 14 I started being <strong>sexualized</strong> by certain elements of the press.</td>
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When at 15 my girlfriends started dropping out of their sports teams because they
didn’t want to appear “muscly.”

When at 18 my male friends were unable to express their feelings.

I decided I was a feminist and this seemed uncomplicated to me. But my recent
research has shown me that feminism has become an unpopular word.

Apparently I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too
strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and unattractive.

Why is the word such an uncomfortable one?

I am from Britain and think it is right that as a woman I am paid the same as my
male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about
my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies
and decision-making of my country. I think it is right that socially I am afforded the
same respect as men. But sadly I can say that there is no one country in the world
where all women can expect to receive these rights.

No country in the world can yet say they have achieved gender equality.

These rights I consider to be human rights but I am one of the lucky ones. My life is
a sheer privilege because my parents didn’t love me less because I was born a
daughter. My school did not limit me because I was a girl. My mentors didn’t
assume I would go less far because I might give birth to a child one day. These
influencers were the gender equality ambassadors that made me who I am today.
They may not know it, but they are the inadvertent feminists who are changing
the world today. And we need more of those.

And if you still hate the word—it is not the word that is important but the idea and
the ambition behind it. Because not all women have been afforded the same rights
that I have. In fact, statistically, very few have been.
In 1995, Hilary Clinton made a famous speech in Beijing about women’s rights. Sadly many of the things she wanted to change are still a reality today.

But what stood out for me the most was that only 30 percent of her audience were male. How can we affect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?

Men—I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too.

Because to date, I’ve seen my father’s role as a parent being valued less by society despite my needing his presence as a child as much as my mother’s.

I’ve seen young men suffering from mental illness unable to ask for help for fear it would make them look less “macho” —in fact in the UK suicide is the biggest killer of men between 20-49 years of age; eclipsing road accidents, cancer and coronary heart disease. I’ve seen men made fragile and insecure by a distorted sense of what constitutes male success. Men don’t have the benefits of equality either.

We don’t often talk about men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes but I can see that that they are and that when they are free, things will change for women as a natural consequence.

If men don’t have to be aggressive in order to be accepted women won’t feel compelled to be submissive. If men don’t have to control, women won’t have to be controlled.

Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong... It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum not as two opposing sets of ideals.
If we stop defining each other by what we are not and start defining ourselves by what we are—we can all be freer and this is what HeForShe is about. It’s about freedom.

I want men to take up this mantle. So their daughters, sisters and mothers can be free from prejudice but also so that their sons have permission to be vulnerable and human too—reclaim those parts of themselves they abandoned and in doing so be a more true and complete version of themselves.

You might be thinking who is this Harry Potter girl? And what is she doing up on stage at the UN. It’s a good question and trust me, I have been asking myself the same thing. I don’t know if I am qualified to be here. All I know is that I care about this problem. And I want to make it better.

And having seen what I’ve seen—and given the chance—I feel it is my duty to say something. English Statesman Edmund Burke said: “All that is needed for the forces of evil to triumph is for enough good men and women to do nothing.”

In my nervousness for this speech and in my moments of doubt I’ve told myself firmly—if not me, who, if not now, when. If you have similar doubts when opportunities are presented to you I hope those words might be helpful.

Because the reality is that if we do nothing it will take 75 years, or for me to be nearly a hundred before women can expect to be paid the same as men for the same work. 15.5 million girls will be married in the next 16 years as children. And at current rates it won’t be until 2086 before all rural African girls will be able to receive a secondary education.

If you believe in equality, you might be one of those inadvertent feminists I spoke of earlier.

And for this I applaud you.

We are struggling for a uniting word but the good news is we have a uniting movement. It is called HeForShe. I am inviting you to step forward, to be seen to
speak up, to be the “he” for “she”. And to ask yourself if not me, who? If not now, when?

Thank you.

*Emma Watson’s United Nations: “HeForShe: Gender Equality is Your Issue, Too” Speech by Emma Watson is in the public domain.*

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**TASK 3 con’t: SOAPSTone Directions:** Complete the SOAPSTone organizer below based on Emma Watson’s speech.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Speaker</strong> - Who is the speaker? What do we know about her?</th>
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<th><strong>Occasion</strong> - What prompted this speech? Specific date</th>
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and time of speech if known.

| Audience - Who is this speech directed to? |
| Purpose - For what reason did the author write this piece? |
| Subject - What is this speech about? |
| Tone - What is the author’s emotion or attitude about this topic? |

**Task 4: Opinion Writing**

1. Have you ever felt limited by your gender or the stereotypes associated with it? If so, how? If not, why do you think that is?

2. Why do you think it’s difficult for people to let gender stereotypes go?
3. In the context of the text, how do we define the roles of men and women?