

The banner features the text "DIVERSITY MEMO" in large, bold, white capital letters, with "for teachers" in a smaller, white, lowercase font below it. The background is a dark blue gradient with abstract, concentric circular patterns in lighter shades of blue and green.

DIVERSITY MEMO

for teachers

Sheroes for Today: Enduring Voices for Women's History Month

Dear Teacher and Leader,

March is designated as Women's History Month with International Women's Day officially observed on March 8th. This month offers us an opportunity to celebrate the varied and wonderful contributions and stories of women from diverse cultures. This occasion also calls us to find ways that each of us can work for a more equitable future.

The movement toward an International Women's Day began in the early 1900's with annual marches in the U.S. demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights for women. Today there are thousands of different types of events that take place around the world.

The disparities that exist between men and women look different in various cultures. From unequal financial compensation to access to education, damaging stereotypes, or the prevalence of domestic violence, the conversation about women's rights continues to evolve around the globe. At the same time, important breakthroughs and moments of great pride take place all the time.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women that was held in Beijing, China in 1995, global leaders made the case that *women's rights are human rights* and that therefore, working for women's equality is everyone's responsibility. As educators we can pick up this charge to bring lessons about equality to all of our students.

This *RaceBridges Diversity Memo* celebrates diverse voices and examines current challenges for women to better prepare students to work for equity and justice.

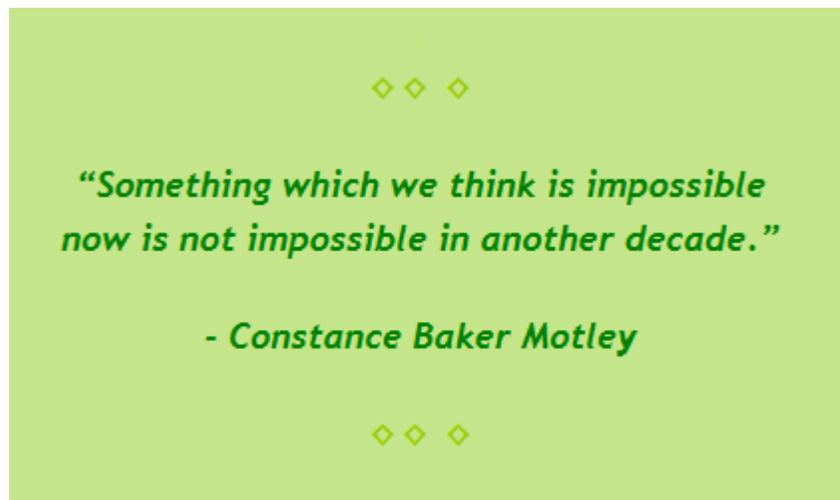
Enjoy!

Classroom Activities

This brief lesson-starter invites your students to imagine a future of equality. A whole-classroom action is included at the end.



Constance Baker Motley was the first African American woman in the U.S. to become a federal judge. Begin by posting or writing this quote from her where everyone can see it:



Have students brainstorm things that were once considered impossible but are possible now.

Have students brainstorm things that were once considered impossible specifically for women. Why were they considered impossible? Are they considered possible for women around the globe today?

- What is considered impossible for women now?
- What is standing in the way of that being possible?
- What do you think will become possible in your lifetime?
- How about in the next decade?
- What about in the next two years?

Classroom Pledge

(A Pledge is meant to focus the attention and intended thoughts and actions of a student group as well as to give it direction towards your next step/lesson with them.)

After you wrap up the class discussion, ask students to work on their own with some free writing.

In this free writing activity, give students ten minutes to address the following questions:

- Of all the things on the list of what will become possible in your lifetime, what got you the most frustrated or excited? Why? How does that issue impact your life?
- What are you personally going to do to advance human rights? How will you do that? How can you begin today?
- Have students write their strongest idea in a new sentence that begins, “I pledge to work for human rights by _____.”

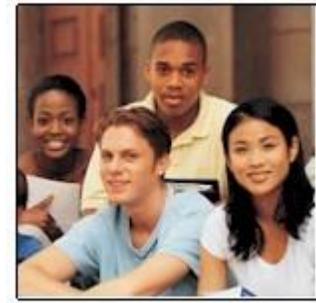
Have students share these pledges with each other out loud or post them on a bulletin board for others to see.

Some ideas to get started in the classroom.

- Watch a few of the videos from the professional women storytellers that are posted on the Race Bridges for Schools Video site. Each of these women brings their unique perspective from different racial, economic and faith backgrounds. Their range of experiences can open up rich conversations with your students about how women’s roles and lives are shaped by their environment. Let these storytellers inspire your students’ own stories about where they come from. <http://www.racebridgesstudio.com>
- Consider the wide range of women’s diversity through images. You could start with this slideshow from Reuters <http://online.thomsonreuters.com/womensday/> or bring in your own images. Ask students to select one or a few images that interest them and list the qualities they see. You could add a second part to this exercise in which students bring in images from their own families or magazines that reflect similar or opposite qualities.
- Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton remains in the spotlight as an international figure. At the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, she was First Lady of the United States and made this powerful speech: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/hillaryclintonbeijingspeech.htm>. Share the complete text or watch the video of her speech with your students. Lead your students in a discussion about how things have changed since 1995 and how they have stayed the same.

Check these out before diving into the topic.

- Be sure to include elements of celebration and pride in your Women’s Month activities.
- Be mindful to avoid stereotypes when discussing “qualities of women” or what makes a woman”.
- Conversations about gender imbalance and inequity can be complicated and uncomfortable for students from varied backgrounds and experiences.
- Lay the groundwork to create a non-judgmental climate in the classroom as you try to honestly explore these issues.



Resources to help you plan lessons about the topic.

Links to RaceBridges for Schools Site:



There are several professional women storytellers featured in the Race Bridges for Schools collection. These women highlight a diversity of experiences of what it means to be a woman from various backgrounds, racial identities and faiths.

Look through the bios and select a few voices. As you will see, several of these stories are accompanied by lesson plans that you can adapt for your classroom.

Recommended Resources

- Discover more about how International Women’s Day is acknowledged around the world:
<http://www.internationalwomensday.com/first.asp>
- Research more about the history International Women’s day:
<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/women/>
- Find recent statistics and analysis of current issues at the United Nations Women Watch site:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>

Use these quotations at the beginning of the lesson or unit to spark student interest; try having students respond to them in writing or discuss them in small groups.

Post these quotes around the room and invite your students to discuss them throughout the month.



**“We’ve chosen the path to equality,
don’t let them turn us around.”**

- Geraldine Ferraro

**“Remember no one can make you feel
inferior without your consent.”**

- Eleanor Roosevelt

**“As a woman I have no country. As a
woman my country is the whole world.”**

- Virginia Woolf

“When alone I am not aware of my race or my sex, both in need of social contexts for definition”

- Maxine Hong Kingston

“ Reporting from Cairo, Egypt as the protests and changes began –

Women, long considered second-class citizens, say they have found an unexpected equality on the front lines of the demonstrations against President Hosni Mubarak. ‘It’s a revolution in how we’re perceived,’ says one.

Of all the astounding things that Rihab Assad has witnessed during these days of tumult, one stood out for her: the sight of a woman with a megaphone leading a crowd of demonstrators in chants. “And all of these men just chanting after her, repeating what she said,” said Assad, an office manager in her 40s who lives in Cairo. “To me, this was something entirely new.” “

- February 02, 2011 | By Laura King, Los Angeles Times

Use these questions to inspire your own thinking and teaching about the topic.

“The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn.”
—Gloria Steinem

As Gloria Steinem reminds us, we are taught early what it means to be a boy or girl and the lessons continue throughout our lives. These teachings, though well intended, may be rife with stereotypes or become limiting as we grown up and become more fully ourselves.

- What stereotypes do you want to uncover or be sensitive to as you address issues of gender equity and human rights with your students?
- What personal experience can you share with them to reveal how times have changed in your lifetime? What story can you tell to reveal the work yet to be done?



We all bring personal experiences to our teaching. Take some time to consider what might help your students to understand these issues of gender and equality in a new way.