

A Woman's Place

Student Activity

Method:

After reading and discussing a passage based on a typical woman's life in Sub-Saharan Africa, students simulate planning a family as a North American couple and as a couple from a developing nation. Students then work in cooperative learning groups to create a brief oral report on the status of women in different countries based on individual research.

Introduction:

In every country and culture, women play vital roles in society, but often the only role that they are recognized for is their reproductive one. Women around the world have made great progress in improving their lives and the lives of their families, but they still face many inequities in political representation, economic well-being, health, and human rights. These inequities do not only affect individuals but also entire societies, as there is an increasing amount of evidence that improving the status of women is key to improving the health and well-being of families and stabilizing fertility rates around the world. In this activity, students explore the complex relationship between women's status, development, and fertility. Sharing images of women in different regions, if you have them, exemplifies this information to engage various types of learners.

Procedure:

Part One: Fatima's Story

1. Give each student a copy of the student reading, *Fatima's Story*, and a copy of the student worksheet. Explain to the students that *Fatima's Story* is the story of a woman who lives in Sub-Saharan Africa, but her situation is typical to that of women in many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.
2. After the students have had a chance to read *Fatima's Story*, divide the class into small groups of four to six students and have them answer the discussion questions on the worksheet as a group.
3. Once the students have had a chance to discuss and answer the questions, go over the answers as a class. Be sure to save time to discuss the final question, "What would you do if you were Fatima?" Structure the response by having the students first state their opinion and then defend it with supporting information from the text and discussion.

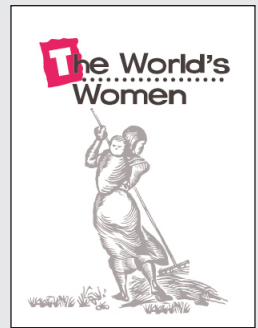
Alternative: Have each group do a role play of what Fatima and Jalal Din might do in this situation. The main characters would be Fatima, Jalal Din, and Jalal Din's mother; other students could play the roles of Zarin or Aziz, the local teacher, the local family planning worker, a relative, a concerned neighbor, or the narrator.

Based on the activity, "The Value of a Son, The Value of a Daughter," appears in *Choose a Future!: Issues and Options for Adolescent Girls*, The Centre for Development and Population Activities, 1996

Part Two: It's a Toss-up!

Ask the students, "*Many people want to have a certain number of boys or girls when they have children, but what happens if they don't get what they want right away?*" This exercise simulates the kinds of situations people face in planning their families.

1. Have each student take out a piece of paper and write down the number of children they would like to have, including the number of boys and the number of girls that they want.
2. Give each student a penny and explain that heads is a girl and tails is a boy. Ask the students to imagine that they are now part of a couple and want to start a family. Have



Concept:

The status of women in regions throughout the world influences fertility rates and therefore the rate of population growth.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Analyze and describe the status of women in a Sub-Saharan African nation, using examples from the student reading.
- Express their values as they respond to the dilemma posed in the reading.
- Simulate the size and make-up of their own family size in a simulation that utilizes statistical probability and cultural and personal preferences.
- Research the status of women in different countries.
- Present research findings to the class.

Subjects:

Social studies, family and consumer sciences, women's studies, language arts

Skills:

Cooperation, observation, interpretation, public speaking, research, calculating averages and probability, critical thinking, analyzing data

Materials:

Copies of Student Reading and Student Worksheet

One penny for each member of the class

If possible, images of women in Africa, Asia, and Latin America

them flip the coin to determine the sex of their first child. After recording on their sheets if the first child is a boy or a girl, the student must decide whether to flip again (have another child) or stop. Continue this process until all students feel their families are complete. Determine the average number of children per couple (remember you will have to double the number of people in the class as each student is assumed to have a mate).

3. Next, tell the students that you are going to repeat the exercise but this time they must imagine that they live in a culture similar to that of Fatima's where having sons is very important. Ask each student to decide whether they want two, three, or four sons, and how many daughters they would like as well. Repeat the steps above. Tell the students to continue to flip the coin (have more children) until they have the number of sons and daughters they want, or until they feel they don't want any more children. Determine the average number of children per couple as above and compare the two numbers.

Discussion Questions:

1. Were you able to "have" the number of children you originally said you wanted in the first scenario? In the second? How about the number of sons and the number of daughters you wanted? Why?

2. What factors, besides income, determine how many children people have?

Possible answers might include cultural and religious traditions and values, family traditions, career choices, lifestyle, and use of family planning.

3. Why might a boy child or a girl child be preferred in a North American family? How might this preference vary from one culture to another?

Parents may feel that they could better "relate" to a boy or a girl based on their own experiences. There are also stereotypes that might determine preference, such as that "girls are better behaved than boys." In many developing countries, parents depend on sons to help support them in their old age, while girls often marry early and live with their husbands' families.

4. What difference does it make to a society's population whether there is a tradition of large family sizes or a tradition of small families?

In a society where most people have many children, the population grows quickly and the society must provide more goods and services for more people.

5. How do your personal family size decisions affect other people in the society? How do they affect the natural environment?

One person's decisions may not seem very significant in a large society. However, each person's decisions multiplied by everyone in the society add up to a lot. This is the same principle as voting in a national election. Think about what would happen if everyone makes the same choice as you do. If lots of people choose large families, this increases stress on the natural environment for living spaces, fields for food, and areas to dispose of waste.

Adapted with permission from Carolynn S. Howell, Palm Bay High School, Melbourne, FL.

Part Three: Researching a Woman's Place

1. Divide the class into groups of four students. You can assign students to groups ahead of time or have students select their own groups.

2. Each group will be assigned one of the following countries to research (if the class has fewer than 36 students, eliminate countries from the list):

Pakistan	Nigeria
Brazil	Poland
Saudi Arabia	Jamaica
Australia	India
China	

3. Each student will have a specific area to study related to the status of typical women in his or her group's assigned country. Each student will research one of four categories:

- **education of women** (includes literacy rate, average years of schooling)
- **employment of women** (includes employment rate, types of employment, average wages, employment in the home)
- **health of women** (includes life expectancy, vulnerability to disease, nutrition, fertility)
- **legal and political status of women** (includes women's rights, laws relating to women's status, representation in government)

For instance, if a group is assigned to research Pakistan, each group member will focus on one of the above four categories related to women's status in Pakistan. **For each category, students should determine how women's situations compare to those of men.**

U.S. Gender Statistics		
Categories	Women	Men
Population	154 million	149 million
Literacy Rate	99%	99%
High School Graduation Rate	85%	85%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	26%	29%
Employment Rate	60%	74%
\$75,000+/Year Wage	6%	16%
Full Time Average Earnings	\$26,300	\$36,500
Living on Less than \$10,000/Year	4.4%	2.8%
Below the Poverty Level	13%	10%
Life Expectancy	81 years	75 years
Fertility Rate	2.1 children born/woman	N/A
Legal and Political Rights	Constitution-based federal republic; strong democratic tradition; women equal to men	Constitution-based federal republic; strong democratic tradition; women equal to men
U.S. Senators	16	84
U.S. House Representatives	72 (17%)	363 (83%)
(Table statistics based on U.S. Central Intelligence Agency World Fact Book 2008: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/print/us.html ; The US Census: http://www.census.gov ; and The Library of Congress: www.thomas.gov)		

Websites that may be useful include: The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (www.unfpa.org), UNICEF (www.unicef.org), and UNIFEM (www.unifem.org).

* Teachers may want to write a couple of the following statistics from the table above on the board as an example of the U.S. status of women. Also, the students can use this as a means of comparison between the U.S. and the country they were assigned. Make sure to explain that the chart is just a start to their research.

Allow two or three days for students to accumulate information on their particular categories. Then students should meet in their groups and share information on their findings. Together, group members will create a brief oral presentation on the status of women in their assigned country. The presentation may include visual aids, such as a poster or a skit, and may be presented by a group representative or all four group members.

4. After all groups have presented their findings, lead a discussion on the similarities and differences in the reports. In which countries is women's status closest to that of men? In which countries do women have the lowest status? How is the fertility rate in each

region related to the status of women? How is the status of women related to population growth? To environmental quality?

Assessment Ideas:

1. Did the student(s) present the information in a logical and interesting sequence that the audience could follow?
2. Did the student(s) demonstrate a full knowledge of the topic by answering all the class questions with explanations and elaboration?
3. Did the student(s) use graphics or additional resources to explain and reinforce his or her presentation?

Fatima's Story

Student Reading

Fatima is a mother with five children – a son, Aziz, and four daughters.

Her husband, Jalal Din, is a reliable man and a good father. He and Fatima are farmers and they work hard together in the fields.

They all live together with Jalal Din's mother, who is a widow. She is a good woman, but she is always critical and nags at Fatima. In fact, she talks from early morning until she goes to bed. "When are you going to light the fire? It is broad daylight already!" And, "Wives should obey their husbands." Sometimes she criticizes Fatima for work not done, sometimes for spending too much money. And she always complains that Fatima has produced only one son and burdened her dear Jalal Din with one daughter after another!

Fatima has learned to live with her mother-in-law and to keep her mouth closed. In this way, she is a very dutiful wife and daughter-in-law. But she did do something in secret last month – well, it was a secret between her and Jalal Din – that they didn't tell Jalal Din's mother. Fatima started practicing family planning. The big reason she made this decision was that she wasn't feeling very well. As you know, having 5 children in 9 years can make a woman feel unwell. She has a backache and she is tired most of the time. But she has so much work to do – finding firewood, carrying water, preparing food, washing the family's clothes, working in the fields – when can she rest?

But there was another reason Fatima started using family planning. It was because of her eldest daughter, Zarin. She is the first child and a lovely little girl, a joy to everyone. Zarin goes to school along with Aziz. Every afternoon she brings her exercise book home and proudly reads to her mother what she has written. She is so happy in school! But Fatima knows that if she has another baby, Zarin must leave school to care for the new baby while Fatima works in the fields. There is simply no other way all the work can be managed. In a way, Zarin knows this too, because she has seen this happen to her little friends. Almost all of them no longer go to school, but instead care for younger brothers and sisters.

Today there is a terrible scene in the house when the family gathers to eat. The old woman is wailing and pulling her hair. The family is alarmed and gathers around her where she sits on the floor. Between sobs, she finally tells them. At the village well this morning, she talked with an old friend who told her someone had seen Fatima at the family planning clinic.

"You are very bad!" she shouts at Fatima. "And you will pay! You will pay for such wickedness. Now you will have no more sons. And who will care for you in your old age? Aziz is a good boy, but he is only one. A family needs many sons. Think of our name. Who will help Jalal Din in the fields? Who will take care of me, if God forbid, something happens to Jalal Din?"

Jalal Din sits next to his mother and comforts her. And he looks at Fatima as if he doesn't know what to do. Zarin is also looking at Fatima. She knows what this is all about – at least she knows what it will mean to her. There are tears in her eyes.

Fatima really has a problem. What would you do if you were Fatima?

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Student Worksheet

1. What are Fatima's problems? What are her concerns?
2. What are some of the things that Fatima must do every day for her family?
3. If Fatima was married when she was 16, about how old is she now? What if she was married at 23? (Remember, she has had 5 children in 9 years.)
4. What are the concerns of Fatima's mother-in-law? Why is it important for her to have grandsons? Is she concerned about the effect on her granddaughters of another baby in the family? What does this say about how she values her granddaughters?
5. What are some reasons sons are more highly valued than daughters in Fatima's culture?
6. How do Fatima and Jalal Din's views differ from those of his mother? Is there a generation gap?
7. Why did Fatima and Jalal Din decide to start practicing family planning? Do you think it was a wise decision?
8. How might it benefit Fatima and her family if she has no more children?
9. How might it benefit Fatima and her family if she had another son?
10. What will happen to Zarin if her parents have more children? How might it affect her future?
11. What are some things that the government or other groups could do to help women like Fatima?
12. What should Fatima do about her mother-in-law and her wish to have more grandsons? How could her husband help? What would you do if you were Fatima?

Based on the activity, "The Value of a Son, The Value of a Daughter", appears in *Choose a Future!: Issues and Options for Adolescent Girls*, The Centre for Development and Population Activities, 1996. Reading, "Fatima's Story" adapted from *Working With Villagers*, American Home Economics Association, 1977.