

Teaching Scenario 1: The Ultrabot

Level

Ages: 11 - 14

UK Key Stage: 3

UK Years: 7 - 9

US Grade: 6th - 8th Grade

Introduction

The last decade or two has seen an intensification in the use of gender as a marketing tool, with increasing use of gender-specific colours, imagery and language to steer children and adults towards limited, often stereotypical, choices regarding toys, books, home decor, bedding and even pens and stationery.

This division imposes unnecessary pressure on children to conform to a restrictive gender identity created by marketing departments, making it harder for children with different tastes to express themselves, as well as limiting how girls' and boys' imagine their lives and careers developing. If you can't see it, you can't be it. Modern marketing tropes prevent girls from seeing themselves as scientists, astronauts, builders, truck drivers and engineers, whilst boys are prevented from seeing themselves as teachers, nurses, fashion designers, jewellers and homemakers.

Such limitations are not only unnecessary, they are damaging. By limiting children's imaginations, gendered toys limit what children can believe themselves capable of. They also create needless emotional conflict within children who find themselves interested in toys that marketing and packaging says are not for them, and provide signals to bullies that a child is 'different' for playing with a toy that is 'not the right colour'.

Learning outcomes

The aim of this scenario is to help students understand:

- How toys and other products are marketed using gender as a tool
- That gender-based marketing is an arbitrary social construct
- That marketing often depends on emotional manipulation
- That they can make their own decisions with regard to the toys, books and careers they choose
- That rejecting gender stereotypes is an expression of strength



Scenario

An innovative local start-up called Ultra Robotics has designed a new 'make your own robot' toy, the Ultrobot, which is aimed at children aged 10 or over. Their testing and research has shown that the Ultrobot is equally popular amongst both girls and boys. The company now needs to design packaging for the Ultrobot so that they can start selling them to shops. Because they are a small business, they have a limited amount of money to spend on packaging design. This means that they can only develop one design which must appeal equally to both girls and boys.

Ultra Robotics does not have a marketing department of its own, so it needs to hire a marketing agency to research and design innovative, gender-neutral packaging for the Ultrobot.

Situation

A marketing agency has been contacted by Ultra Robotics and asked to design the packaging for the Ultrobot. Every aspect of the packaging, including images, colour choices and text, must be gender-neutral and appeal to both girls and boys.

Key questions

- What is the purpose of marketing?
- What is a gender stereotype?
- How are gender stereotypes used in the marketing of toys?
- How does the use of gender in marketing limit children's options?
- How can we remove gender, and other, stereotypes from toy design and packaging to make toys more inclusive?
- What responsibilities do toy companies have to be inclusive?

Client

The client is the CEO of Ultra Robotics, Sarah Smith. Sarah is one of the principal inventors of the Ultrobot, and she is responsible not just for making decisions about the product, but also for the business's success or failure.

Stakeholders

Ultra Robotics are not the only people with an interest in the outcome of this project. Others include:

- The managing director of a national toy store, who wants to see toy packaging that fits in with what is already on his shelves.
- A campaign group that works to reduce gender stereotyping in toy packaging, and who wants to see girls given positive role models.
- A local journalist who is writing a new story about Ultra Robotics, and wants to see a groundbreaking design.



Commission

To create exciting and compelling gender-neutral packaging for a robot toy, the Ultrobot, which appeals to both girls and boys.

Tasks and activities

Research competitors

- What robotics toys already exist?
- What names are they given?
- What age groups do they appeal to?

Analyse competing packaging

- How are robot toys presented on their packaging?
- What pictures do they use?
- Who and/or what are in those pictures?
- What words do they use when describing the toy?
- Do those words feel boyish or girlish? If so, why?
- How often and when do they use words like “he, him, his”, “she, her, hers” or “they, their, theirs”?

Analyse imagery

- What sort of images — photos or drawings — appeal to girls?
- What appeals to boys?
- Why do those images have that effect?
- What sort of images would appeal to both boys and girls?

The use of colour

- What colours are the toys?
- What colours do they use on the packaging?
- If there are photos or illustrations of children on the packaging, what colour clothes are they wearing?
- Which of these colours are gendered?
- Why do you feel these colours have gender?
- Why is pink for girls and blue for boys?
- How long has this convention existed? Was it different before?
- What colours are not associated with a gender?
- How could you ‘de-gender’ blues and reds, and neutralise the gender associations through design?



Choose gender-neutral elements for packaging

- What sort of photos appeal to both boys and girls?
- What colours are gender-neutral?
- How would you describe a toy in a gender-neutral way?

Design the outer box for the Ultrabot

- Pick your images and colour scheme, and write the text for your Ultrabot box.
- Create designs for the front and back of the box.

User testing

- Show your designs to other children
- Ask them what they think of the design, whether they like it, whether they would choose it from the shelf if they saw it in a shop.
- Ask what they would change
- Consider the feedback in the context of your original commission. Incorporate any suggestions that support your aims.

Present your design

Present your design to Sarah Smith, CEO of Ultra Robotics, explaining why you made the choices you did.

Responses from other stakeholders

What kind of responses or challenges do you think your design would receive from:

- The toy store manager?
- The campaigner?
- The journalist?

This might be an opportunity for role playing, where students split into groups of four. The student playing the journalist then interviews the campaigner and the toy store manager about their opinions of the new design, and then asks the designer to provide a response.

Resources

Let Toys Be Toys

Let Toys Be Toys is a campaign to encourage retailers and publishers to stop promoting some toys and books as only for girls, and others as only for boys.

<http://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/>

<http://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/schools/>

<http://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/letbooksbebooks/>



Pink Stinks

Pink Stinks campaigns against products, media and marketing ploys that promote heavily stereotyped and limiting roles to young girls.

<http://www.pinkstinks.co.uk/>

Smithsonian, on pink and blue

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/when-did-girls-start-wearing-pink-1370097/>



Feedback

If you have any feedback on these scenarios, or the rest of the education pack, or if you would like to provide suggestions for improvements, please contact Suw Charman-Anderson at suw@findingada.com.

About this pack

This free education pack comprises of:

- Notes for Teachers
- Introduction to Teaching Scenarios
- Teaching Scenario 1: The Ultrobot
- Teaching Scenario 2: The Recruitment Fair
- Teaching Scenario 3: The Charitable Trust
- Useful Resources
- The Amazingly Enormous Careers Poster
- Ten Types of Scientist poster
- Ada Lovelace poster

All resources have been produced by Ada Lovelace Day, and are available to download for free from their website, findingada.com. These files will be continually updated so please do check the website for the latest versions.

For schools who wish to buy prints of the posters in sizes up to A0, these are available online from the [Ada Lovelace Day RedBubble store](http://AdaLovelaceDay.RedBubble.com), with prices starting at £10.99.

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