



Appearance Ideals

Lesson Summary

During this lesson and unit, students will deepen their understanding of appearance ideals and where pressure to achieve them comes from. They will recognize the pressures that cause people to try to match appearance ideals, and the impact this has on their everyday lives. Students will develop strategies to challenge appearance ideals, resist appearance pressures, and build body confidence.

Teacher Message

Trying to match appearance ideals can be harmful. They are based on opinion, not fact, and are changing all the time. This makes them unrealistic and impossible for most people to live up to. The way you look is not a measure of your worth. Rather than focusing on appearance, it is important for students to learn to value other qualities within themselves and their peers, and to celebrate their real successes in life.

In the culminating task of this unit, students will compile their work and artifacts from all five lessons to create a movie. It is important for students to keep their artifacts, notes, images, quotes, and so on in a safe, organized place so that they can access them when putting their movie together.

Materials

Projector
Whiteboard
Pens
Spare paper
Chart paper and markers

Dove® *Confident Me*: School Workshops for Body Confidence

Session 1: "Appearance Ideals" (available at <https://beyondimagesca.files.wordpress.com/2022/06/confident-me-01-appearance-ideals.zip>)

- Workshop guide for teachers
- Workshop interactive
- Student activity sheets

Media Clips

Change One Thing, Dove. (Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2CfEc-mf9c>)

Learning Organizer

Learning Organizer 1-1 Who Am I?
Learning Organizer 1-2 Costs of Chasing Appearance Ideals
Learning Organizer 1-3 Addressing Appearance Ideals
Learning Organizer 1-4 Going Further

Assessment Tool

Assessment Tool Lesson 1 Observational Checklist

Supporting Curriculum Outcomes

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Lesson Outline

Inspiration: How will I engage the students?

1. **Explain that in this lesson students will focus on understanding appearance ideals** and how they can challenge the pressure these ideals create.
2. Using slides 4 to 6, test students' current knowledge of body confidence and appearance ideals. Read out the question, followed by each answer and get students to raise their hand to vote for the correct answer.

- Slide 4, "What is Body Confidence?"

Correct answer is D: *Feeling comfortable with your appearance and accepting your body for how it looks and what it can do.*

- Slide 5, "What are Appearance Ideals?"

Correct answer is B: *What our society or culture tells us is the ideal way to look.*

Talk briefly about how appearance ideals differ from culture to culture as well as over time.

- Slide 6, "What are Appearance Pressures?"

Correct answer is D: *All of the above.*

Mention that this lesson will look at how appearance pressures are created and why they may be detrimental for maintaining body confidence.

3. **Highlight that body confidence affects everyone, no matter your gender, age, race, or background.** Make the following points:
 - We all have a unique body, and each of us will have different feelings towards our bodies and body parts. Some of the feelings may be positive, and others may be negative. Some may be neutral. meaning neither positive or negative).
 - The way that we each feel about our own bodies is impacted by the society we live in, and by the different roles, identities, and experiences that we each have.

Mention to students that some of their identities, and experiences will be similar to other students in the room, and others will be different.

4. **Tell students that to help them consider how body confidence is affected by the society we live in,** they are going to begin by thinking about who they are. Instruct students to fill out **Learning Organizer 1-1 Who Am I?** Give students a few minutes to fill out each section of the pie chart with all of the different ways they would describe themselves (meaning the different roles or identities that they have, e.g. student, sibling, athlete, member of specific community, etc.). Note that they will not be asked to share their pie chart with anyone.

5. **Make the point that the roles they have listed are just some of the ways to describe themselves and that they may change over time.** Each of our their pie charts looks different because they are all unique people with different identities, interests, hobbies, roles, responsibilities, and values. Share the following points:
 - In our society, people are often treated differently based on their skin colour, the size and shape of their body, their gender, who they are attracted to, and if they have a disability, among other things. That means that each of us has different experiences based on who we are and how the world sees us. [Provide an example of what this can look like that will resonate with the students in the room].
 - Even though our society as a whole may treat people differently based on who they are and how they look, we can start to change this by being compassionate and kind to everyone, whether they are similar or different from us.
 - Another way that we can start to change this is to think critically about how our body confidence is shaped by the society we live in, and how our body confidence may be affected by the unfair way that our society treats people.
6. **Write column headings “The Ideal Woman” and “The Ideal Man” on flipchart paper or a whiteboard or chalkboard.** Point out to the class that our society tends to send very specific messages about what the “ideal” appearances are.
7. **Ask students to call out the physical features that characterize the “perfect woman” according to our society.** Encourage them to be as specific as possible Record students’ responses under “The Ideal Woman” heading.
 Example responses: thin, fit/toned, large breasts, flat stomach, tall, no body hair, clear skin, straight teeth, young age, tanned (but their race is white).
 Review the list with students and highlight inconsistencies (e.g. thin but also large breasts). These characteristics comprise the “feminine ideal”. Emphasize the overall importance placed on thinness for the feminine ideal.
8. **Repeat this brainstorming exercise to create a list of the physical features that characterize the “perfect man” according to our society.**
 Example responses: muscular/toned, broader shoulders, v-shaped body, tall, strong jaw, full head of hair, body hair (but only in some places), younger, clear skin, straight teeth, tanned (but their race is white).
 Review the list with students and highlight inconsistencies (e.g. thin but also large breasts). These characteristics comprise the “masculine ideal”. Emphasize the overall importance placed on muscularity for the masculine ideal.
9. **Talk about how our society’s appearance ideals reference body parts of cisgender men and women** and promote thinking about gender as a binary – i.e., masculine vs. feminine, boys vs. girls. These ideals send the (false) message that the only attractive way to present yourself to the world is either very feminine or very masculine.
10. **Facilitate a class discussion about about who (else) is left out of these binary ideals.** Ask: *Look at the list we created for the Ideal Woman and Ideal Man – who is represented in these ideals and who is missing?*
 Example responses: people of different gender, races, ethnicities, sexual identities, body sizes, abilities, ages.

11. **Engage in a discussion about appearance pressures**, which are pressures we feel to match appearance ideals and to look good and be attractive. Be careful not to create a blaming atmosphere. Messages about appearance ideals are part of our social environment and are so common that those around us may not even be aware of them. Ask:

- *Where do you think these pressures to look beautiful or attractive come from?*

(Possible response: They come from advertisements, magazines, fashion industry, websites, celebrity culture, the diet industry, our parents or family, friends, other young people, bullies, social media, and even our own thoughts.)

- *Why do you think it is important to know where these ideals come from?*

(Possible response: By knowing where these ideals come from, we can begin to change how we react to the ideals when we see them.)

Facilitation: How will students learn the concepts?

12. **Explain that now that students understand what appearance ideals are and where pressures come from, they are going to explore some of the pressures they can create in our daily lives.** Play the film "Change One Thing" (linked on slide 9).

Ask for volunteers to describe in their own words what is happening in the film and why they think the young people want the physical characteristics that they listed.

13. **Point out that the film shows how young people from different backgrounds experience appearance pressures.** Mention that all of the young people in the film wanted a physical characteristic that they thought would make them look more ideal. Discuss with students the ways that diversity is portrayed in the video. Consider commenting on:

- how young people may experience various pressures that include having silky hair, being thin/lean, having white/lighter skin, being able-bodied, and identifying with the gender they were assigned at birth.
- the importance of recognizing that ideals are harder for some people to achieve than others--but this does not make the pressure to try to achieve them any less real.

14. **Survey the class.** Ask: *Have you ever heard someone say something similar to the young people in the film?* Invite students to raise their hand in response. Point out that wanting to change something about our appearance is a common experience.

Application: How will students demonstrate their learning?

15. **Explain that now that students have considered the pressures trying to meet appearance ideals can cause, they are going to examine the reasons why people might still put these pressures on themselves.** Facilitate a class discussion by asking questions such as the following:

- *What do you think people think they will achieve by meeting appearance ideals?*

Sample answer: They may think that they will get the ideal boyfriend or girlfriend, greater popularity, or positive attention or they may believe that they will feel more accepted or loved.

- *What else do they think might happen or change in their life?*

16. **Explain to students that trying to look like the appearance ideal has major negative impacts on people and society as a whole.**

17. **Split the class into groups of 3-4 and instruct students in their groups to fill in Learning Organizer 1-2 The Costs of Chasing Appearance Ideals.** Tell them to think of all of the negative things that could happen if they or someone they know chased these ideas – costs can be general things like lower self-esteem, as well as specific things like not feeling like you can wear the clothes you want. Give them a few minutes to generate lists of ideas.

Example responses: losing money, decreased self-worth, physically and mentally exhausting, encourages dieting, eating disorders, not enjoying food, depression or anxiety, being unhappy, avoiding certain activities.

Make the point that these ideals incur costs in terms of time, money, and our emotions and feelings.

18. Facilitate a brief class discussion based on the small group work. Ask the following questions:

- *How do these ideals affect your health?*

Example response: They can make you physical or mentally unwell (e.g., through dieting or putting chemicals on your skin)

- *What does chasing the appearance ideals do to your time?*

Example response: It takes up a lot of time that you could spend doing something more enjoyable.

- *How would trying to change your appearance to fit the ideals make you feel about yourself?*

Example responses: That you're not good enough, alone, or excluded.

- *Given this long list of costs, who benefits from the ideals? Who makes money when people try to pursue them?*

Example responses: the media, the fashion industry, beauty industry, diet/weight loss industries, fitness industry.

- *Are we part of the group that benefits?*

Note: Students may provide examples of people who have had cosmetic surgery (as a financial cost). Take care not to criticize anyone that students might personally know; rather help them see that surgery is a serious step and can't guarantee that it will result in a person always feeling confident in their looks. Similarly, students may mention the time and cost of using make-up or styling hair. Take care not to suggest that doing these things is wrong or that young people only do them to meet appearance ideals (as using makeup or styling one's hair can be an artistic activity and allow for self-expression).

- 19. Ask: *Given all of the costs identified, is chasing appearance ideals worth it?*** Note: students might use this task to argue that some people can match appearance ideals with little time, money, or emotional energy. Remind students that these people might still not feel satisfied with their appearance, and will not always feel that they look their best – and even people who meet appearance ideals do not necessarily have a lifestyle that is any more ideal.
- 20. Emphasize that the importance of recognizing that speaking out against appearance ideals is not about criticizing** anyone's natural body or features, or the choices people make about their appearance - it is about challenging the idea in society that there is a perfect way to look, and the pressures this creates. Remind students of the impossibility of achieving appearance ideals and the negative impacts of chasing these ideals.
- 21. Explain that now that students have recognized that trying to attain appearance ideals can cause lots of problems and be harmful to body confidence and self-esteem, they are going to consider ways they can feel better about themselves.** Remind students that societal and media influences are powerful. Explain that because of this, it can take some time and effort to start to change how we think and feel about our bodies so that we are not focused on appearance.
- 22. Instruct students to complete Learning Organizer 1-3 Addressing Appearance Ideals.** Explain that one way that we can think differently about our bodies is to think about how our bodies look when we do things to support our physical health, mental health, and overall quality of life (e.g. eating different foods to fuel our bodies, exercising, school activities, social activities. We can also think about bodies as neither entirely negative nor entirely positive. We do not have to love every part of our bodies all of the time. Note: although some students may feel body-positive about themselves (which is great!), it is important to remember that not everyone will. If students bring up the idea of body positivity, make the point above and take care not to encourage students to be 'body positive' in a way that promotes having positive feelings at all times, which can actually be harmful because it does not take into account all of the various factors that influence body confidence, such as the way that our society endorses certain appearance ideals.

Reflection: How will students reflect on their learning?

23. **Take some time for students to reflect on the learning in this lesson**, to prepare them for continuing their work during the rest of this unit. In upcoming lessons, students will use what they have learned in this lesson to make a commitment to personally challenge appearance ideals.
24. **Ask: How are you going to take action to challenge appearance ideals?** Encourage students to make a pledge to commit to a small, specific action, and to write it down on paper or in their agenda/day planner. Invite one or two students to share their ideas.
25. **Have students complete Learning Organizer 1-4 Going Further**, encouraging them to be aware of the ways they talk about appearance.

Assessment

The focus for this lesson is to launch into the unit by providing students with building blocks they will need to think, reflect, listen, and share their ideas about the role of media in their lives. **Assessment Tool Lesson 1 Observational Checklist** allows you to assess the listening and speaking skills students will need to use in this unit.

Related Resources to Extend Learning

Best Bets for Teachers:

Dove Self-Esteem Project:

<https://www.dove.com/ca/en/dove-self-esteem-project.html>

This website includes a wealth of information about instilling body confidence in students and promoting positive body-image.

BeReal: The Campaign for Body Confidence (resources):

<https://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/resources>

This website provides a collection of impactful resources for both teachers, and parents.

Best Bet for Students:

Teens Health: Body Image and Self-Esteem:

<http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/body-image.html>

A great website for students to navigate and learn more about the importance of positive self-esteem and body-image.

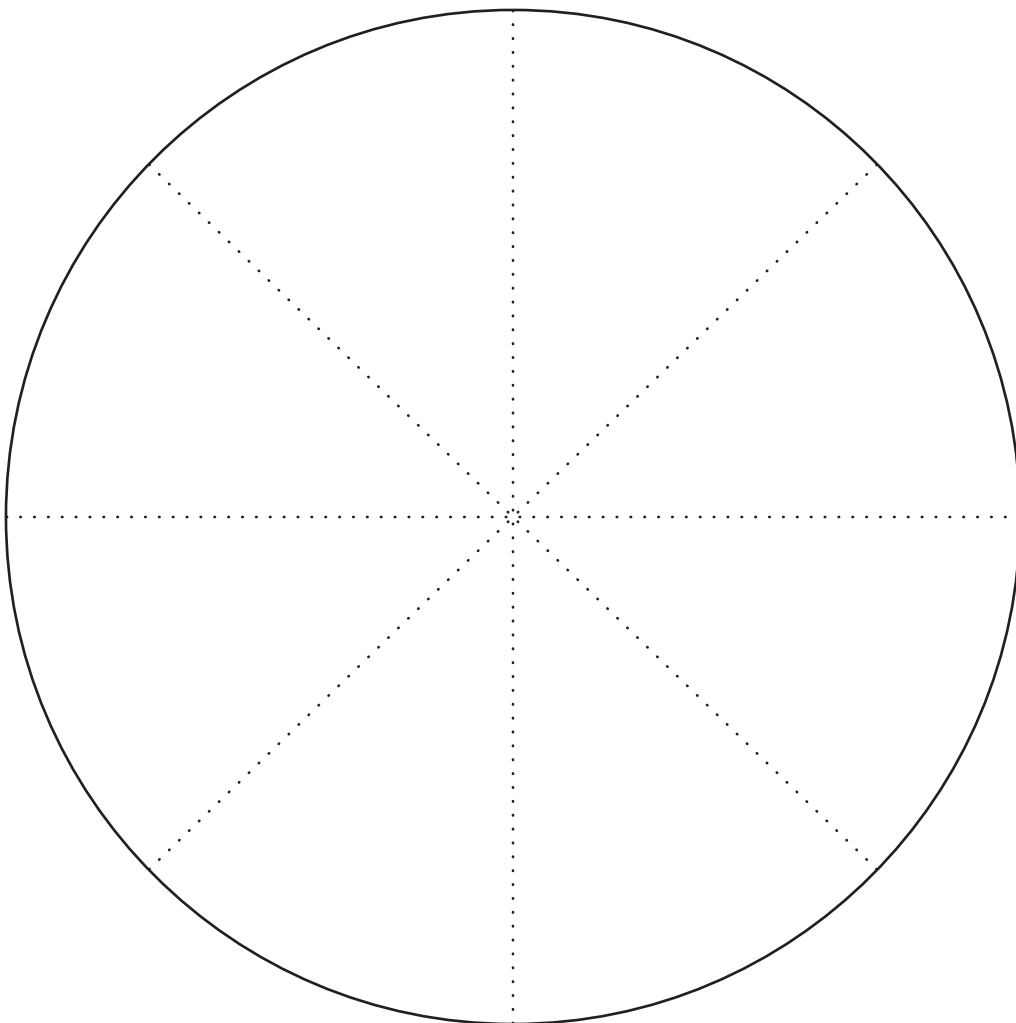
Learning Organizer 1-1 Who Am I?*

Name: _____ Date: _____

Create a pie chart that represents all of the different roles and identities that you have.

Think about who you are in relation to others (e.g., friend to, child of, sibling of, employee of...), your membership within a group (e.g., nationality, culture, religion) or things are part of your identity (e.g., hobbies, clubs, sports).

Write these roles and identities into the pie chart below. You may use the dotted lines as guidelines, or feel free to draw your own lines.



Learning Organizer 1-2 Costs of Chasing Appearance Ideals*

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What are the costs of chasing appearance ideals?

2. Do we benefit from chasing appearance ideals? Why or why not?

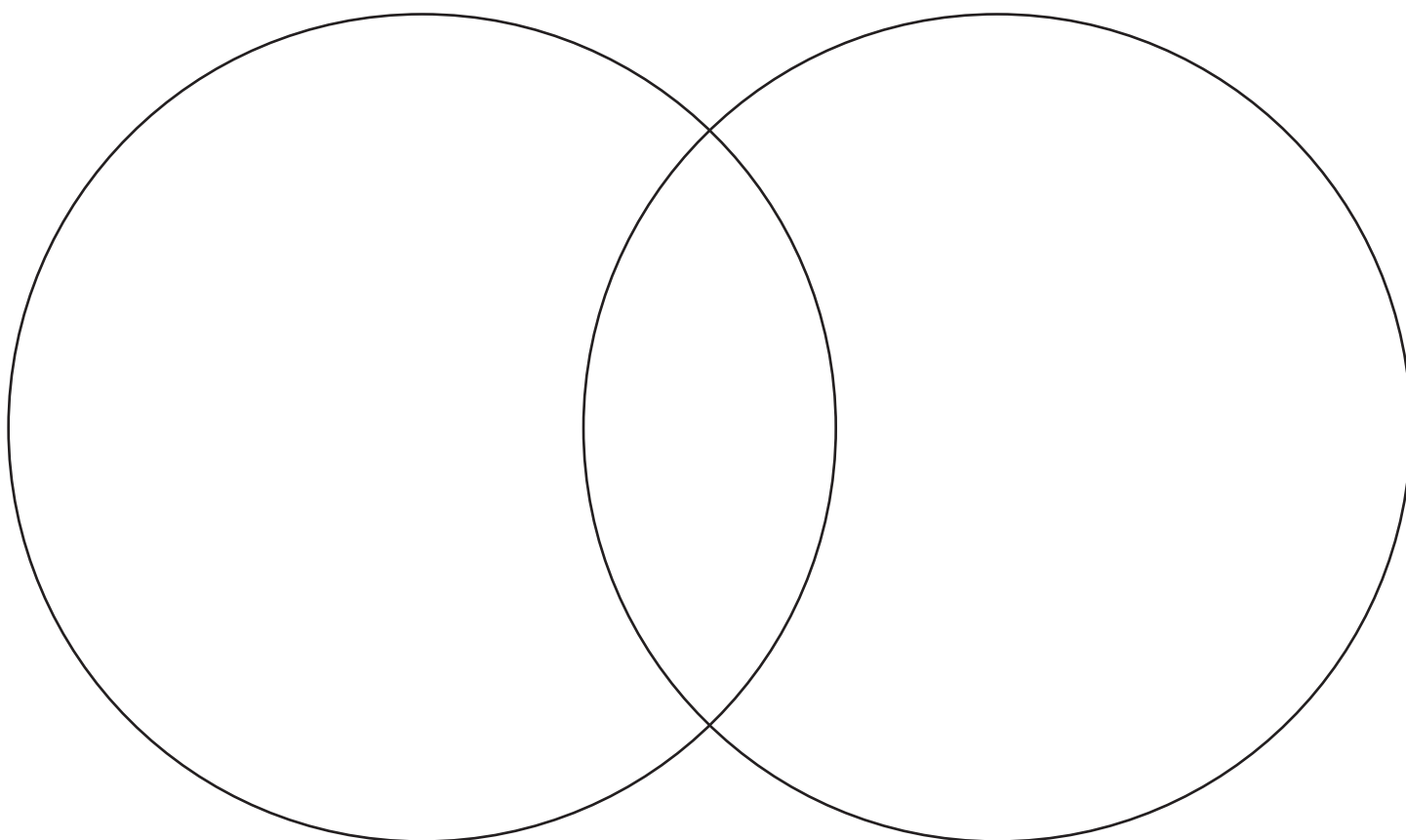
Learning Organizer 1-3 Addressing Appearance Ideals*

Name: _____ Date: _____

In the circles below, write down things you can do for yourself and others when appearance pressures impact you and others. If something helps both you and others and the same time, write it in the space where the circles overlap.

For Yourself

For Others



* From Dove Confident Me Session 1: "Appearance Ideals." Used with permission.

Learning Organizer 1-4 Going Further*

Name: _____ Date: _____

Appearance ideals: main messages to remember

Trying to match appearance ideals can be harmful.

They are based on opinion, not fact, and are changing all the time. This makes them unrealistic and actually impossible for most people to live up to.

The way you look is not a measure of your worth. Rather than focusing on appearance, value other qualities within yourself and your peers, and celebrate your real successes in life!

What action could you take to make appearance less important and to prevent yourself and others from focusing on appearance ideals? Record your answers below.

Taking action for yourself

What I did:

How I felt:

Taking action for others

What I did:

How I felt:

* From Dove Confident Me Session 1: "Appearance Ideals." Used with permission.

Learning Organizer 1-4 Going Further* *(continued)*

Things you could do:

Surprise someone with a non-appearance-related compliment, e.g., tell a friend that you appreciate their kindness or creativity.	Carry out three feel-good things instead of spending time, money, and/or emotional energy on trying to match appearance ideals.
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Celebrate your individuality and the diversity of the people you know.

Aim to be the best you can be — you are one of a kind!

Observational Checklist

Oral Language Skills: Listening, Speaking, and Collaborating

Student: _____

Listening Skills The student:	Most of the time	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
• looks at the speaker.				
• thinks about what is being said.				
• tries to figure out how other people's ideas will connect with their own.				
• knows what they are listening for (listens with a purpose).				
• asks when they don't understand something.				
• uses body language that shows they are listening.				

Active Listening Skills

Comments: _____

Observational Checklist *(continued)*

Speaking Skills The student:	Most of the time	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
• contributes new ideas to the discussion, in order to progress the discussion.				
• contributes ideas and comments that are on topic.				
• asks questions when they are not sure what someone means.				
• prepares for the discussion by recalling what the selection was about.				
• is authentically engaged: makes connections and builds on peers' thoughts and ideas.				
• asks insightful questions to get their group members thinking (e.g., do you agree with what the character did?)				
• communicates effectively and speaks clearly.				
• makes notes and uses them to help them share thinking and support ideas.				
• uses respectful language when sharing and responding.				

Comments: _____

Observational Checklist *(continued)*

Collaboration Skills The student:	Most of the time	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
• shows respect to the speaker.				
• waits for the speaker to finish before beginning to talk.				
• can disagree with someone's ideas or opinions without getting angry.				
• encourages other group members to share ideas.				
• tries to help other group members resolve problems.				
• helps their group complete tasks within the timeline given.				
• reads the assigned passage, as agreed by the group, and speaks only about the relevant section(s).				

Comments: _____

Supporting Curriculum Outcomes

Alberta

Language Arts

Express personal understandings of ideas and information based on prior knowledge, experiences with others, and a variety of oral, print and other media texts.

Listen and respond constructively to alternative ideas or opinions.

Use talk, writing and representing to examine, clarify and assess understanding of ideas, information and experiences.

Select and focus relevant ideas from personal experiences and prior knowledge to understand new ideas and information.

Justify own point of view about oral, print and other media texts, using evidence from texts.

Develop, clarify and defend own interpretation, based on evidence from the text with support from own experiences.

Atlantic Provinces

Language Arts

Express clearly and with conviction, a personal point of view, and be able to support that position.

Listen attentively to grasp the essential elements of a message, and recognize and consider supporting details.

Participate in small-group conversation and whole-class discussion recognizing that there are a range of strategies that contribute to effective talk.

Demonstrate active speaking and listening skills such as making eye contact, rephrasing when appropriate, clarifying comments, extending, refining, and/or summarizing points already made.

Demonstrate respect for others by developing effective ways to express personal opinions such that they reflect sensitivity to others, including differences in culture and language.

Extend personal responses, either orally or in writing, to print and non-print texts by explaining in some detail initial or basic reactions to those texts.

Make evaluations or judgments about texts and learn to express personal points of view.

While learning to express personal points of view, develop the ability to find evidence and examples in texts to support personal views about themes, issues, and situations.

Recognize that print and media texts can be biased and become aware of some of the ways that information is organized and structured to suit a particular point of view.

British Columbia

Language Arts

Use speaking to explore, express, and present a range of ideas, information, and feelings for different purposes and audiences, by staying on topic in focussed discussions, and explaining and effectively supporting viewpoints.

Listen critically to understand and analyse ideas and information, by interpreting the speaker's verbal and nonverbal messages, purposes, and perspectives.

Use speaking and listening to respond, explain, and provide supporting evidence for their connections to texts.

Use speaking and listening to improve and extend thinking by questioning and speculating, considering alternative viewpoints, and summarizing and synthesizing.

Respond to selections they read or view by expressing opinions and making judgments supported by reasons, explanations, and evidence; explaining connections; and identifying personally meaningful selections, passages, and images.

Manitoba

Language Arts

Compare own and others' insights and viewpoints.

Summarize and represent personal viewpoints in clear and meaningful ways.

Ask specific and focused questions for elaboration and clarification; engage in dialogue about experiences and understanding.

Demonstrate growing self-confidence when expressing and sharing thoughts, ideas and feelings.

Ontario

Language Arts

Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate listening behaviour by adapting active listening strategies to suit a wide variety of situations, including work in groups.

Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate speaking behaviour in most situations, adapting contributions and responses to suit the purpose and audience.

Generate ideas about more challenging topics and identify those most appropriate for the purpose.

Interpret increasingly complex or difficult media texts, using overt and implied messages as evidence for their interpretations.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the presentation and treatment of ideas, information, themes, opinions, issues, and/or experiences in media texts.

Health

Identify factors that affect the development of a person's self-concept.

Make informed decisions that demonstrate respect for themselves and others and help to build healthier relationships, using a variety of living skills.

Prince Edward Island

Health

Tell a story of how self-perceptions of body composition and body image influence one's physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being.

Québec

Language Arts

Use collaborative talk purposefully in order to interpret new information and experiences and fit them into what s/he already knows, seek multiple perspectives on the issue, and extend understanding of the issue or topic by building on the ideas of others.

Accommodate responses of peers as part of the discussion process.

Saskatchewan

Language Arts

View, listen to, read, comprehend, and respond to a variety of texts that address identity, social responsibility, and efficacy.

View and demonstrate comprehension and interpretation of visual and multimedia texts with specific features and complex ideas including the visual components of media such as magazines, newspapers, websites, reference books, graphic novels, broadcast media, videos and promotional materials.

Use oral language to interact purposefully and appropriately with others in pairs, small groups, and large group situations.

Use oral language to effectively express information and ideas of some complexity in formal and informal situations.