

Lessons for Life



Introduction

Of the world's one billion poorest people, over 60 percent are women and girls and of the nearly one billion adults who cannot read, almost 70 percent are female. Many societies do not allow girls to go to school for various reasons – some girls are needed at home, some may need to work and earn money, while for others it is a safety issue. But whatever the reason, uneducated girls have fewer opportunities for employment and economic freedom than their educated counterparts.

Studies show that women who can read have healthier children. They also tend to delay marriage and childbearing because they have other options like college and employment. There is a strong link between education and fertility rate; the more education women have, the more likely they are to have small families. Raising the status of women and making education equally available for girls and boys around the world is key to breaking the complex cycle of poverty that traps so many women around the world.

Materials

Student Reading
Student Worksheet
Internet access
Multiple computers/tablets with internet access (optional)

Part 1: Educating Abeba

Procedure

1. Distribute copies of the Student Reading “Why has Abeba dropped out of school?”
2. Give students time to complete the reading and answer the questions on the Student Worksheet. Discuss the answers as a class.

Part 2: A Day In The Life Of Two School Girls

Procedure

1. Students will watch and listen to stories about the daily routines of two teen girls, one in Papua New Guinea and one in Senegal, and the role that school plays in their lives. These photo essays

Concept

Equal education for girls is key to a country's development and a stable population.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain why girls in many countries receive less education than boys.
- Interpret graphic data related to female education and fertility rate.
- Analyze the relationship between female education and population growth rate.

Subjects

Social Studies (geography),
English language arts

Skills

Reading comprehension,
interpreting bar graphs,
comparing and evaluating

Method

Students read and discuss a short conversation between two Ethiopian girls, watch two photo essays of school girls in less developed countries, and interpret a graph illustrating the link between female education and fertility rates worldwide.



can be found on the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative website: www.ungei.org. Type "photo essays" into the search field and select "UN Girls' Education Initiative – News and Events – Photo Essays."

2. Scroll down to watch "A day in the life of a girl in Papua New Guinea" and "A day in the life of a Senegalese schoolgirl." You could watch these as a class or have students watch them individually or in small groups around personal computers.

Note: The Papua New Guinea story mentions that some girls fear walking long distances to school because of rape. Use your discretion as to whether this is appropriate for your class.

3. Discuss the questions below:

- a. What are the similarities and differences in Emily's and Aminata's schedules?
- b. Do they have similar standards of living? Why or why not?
- c. What are the similarities and differences in their school experiences?
- d. What do you think will determine these girls' futures?
- e. Do you have similar responsibilities around your home to those of Emily and Aminata? If so, do you spend the same amount of time on these responsibilities? If you did, would it be more challenging for you to excel in school? Why or why not?
- f. What other aspects of Emily and Aminata's lives make it challenging for them to stay in school?

4. If time allows, have students create a Venn diagram comparing their own daily life to that of Emily or Aminata. They should be sure to include information about their daily schedule, family structure, school experiences, lifestyle, and daily responsibilities.



Assessment

Students write a brief journal reflection (3-5 sentences) on the cultural and economic factors that contribute to the education gender gap and how the gender gap impacts population growth.



Follow-Up Activity

Explore the status of women in the United States using students' own "heroes" to examine how our society values the contributions of men and women. Have small groups of students brainstorm four or more "heroes" in a particular category. Categories could include politics, sports, literature, religion, music, television, fashion, history, etc. Students should consider how many heroes in that category are men vs. women and hypothesize why. Students can also discuss what they admire about male vs. female heroes in their particular category.

The nature of this activity is subjective, so it is up to you to draw connections between students' own personal heroes and the traits and ideals that are valued by society as a whole.



Why Has Abeba Dropped Out Of School?

As Rediet lowered her pail into the sun-dappled stream from which she fetched her family's water each morning, she heard a pure, high voice singing the old song about the maize flowers blooming all over Ethiopia. It was Abeba; the voice was unmistakable – and much missed in class now that her parents had pulled her out of school to help her mother at home after the birth of her latest brother. Rediet didn't quite understand why they had done that; her own mother had just as much work as Abeba's. And it made her uncomfortable that she was still in school when Abeba wasn't. She set her pail down and ran up the path to greet her former classmate; she didn't want Abeba to feel that they weren't close friends just because they no longer saw each other daily.



“We got a new goat to go with my new brother,” said Abeba as Rediet took her hand.

“Which one is more troubling?” asked Rediet, smiling.

“It's hard to tell. The goat, I guess. Yesterday it ate the sleeve of my red blouse.”

They laughed together and, at the stream's edge, kicked off their sandals to cool their feet in the water.

“It's my little sister who's exciting,” said Abeba. “She's beginning to talk. She still stumbles when she walks, but she chatters away. Just like me at her age, Mamma says.”

Rediet wondered if Abeba's baby sister would ever go to school. She tried to remember the proverb her mother had learned at the dressmaking centre where she had also learned to read a few years before. All the eight-year-old girl could recall, though, was that when she had asked if she should stay at home like Abeba, to help with the younger children and the other household chores, her mother had pulled her ears gently and said, “Not you, honeypot. With that head of yours, you're going to write the kind of books that taught me how to read.”

“And your father thinks the same,” his voice had boomed suddenly in the doorway, “so don't go asking him such foolish things.” He had entered the house, smiling, and threatened to tickle her to death if she raised the question again. That had closed the matter – for her at least. The problem, thought Rediet, as she looked at her friend's rippled reflection in the water, was that Abeba's head was just as good as hers. Different, but just as good. One of the reasons she missed Abeba so much in class was that her friend's answers to their teacher's questions often set off new thoughts in her own head. Had each made the other's head better?

And now Abeba was asking just the question Rediet had been dreading: “What's going on at school?”

“We're learning division,” she replied. “It's easy,” she added, remembering how good Abeba had been



at math. “I could teach it to you if you like.” Suddenly she realized that she’d said something wrong. “Of course it’s easy,” Abeba retorted. “Just the opposite of the times tables we were doing when I left. If five times two is ten, then two goes into ten five times.” She stood up and filled her pail. “You know,” she said, “I bet I can get my older brother to teach me everything he’s learned in school. I don’t really need to go myself.”

Rediet wondered, but she said nothing. That brother wasn’t very interested in school – and he never seemed to have time for anyone but his friends. Then her mother’s proverb came back to her: “Educate a boy and you educate one person; educate a girl and you educate a nation.”

Adapted with permission from *Girls: Challenging the World*, United Nations, 1995.



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Student Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Part 1: Reading Comprehension

1. How old is Abeba? _____
2. Why did Abeba's parents take her out of school? _____

3. Why did Rediet's mother decide to keep her in school? _____

4. What might the mother's proverb mean? "Educate a boy and you educate one person; educate a girl and you educate a nation." Do you agree with the mother? Why or why not? _____

5. How might Rediet's future differ from Abeba's as a result of her having gone to school? _____

6. What kinds of choices will Abeba have when she is older if she never returns to school? _____

7. Which girl might get married first? Why? _____

8. Which girl might have children first? Why? _____

9. List two possible results of societies denying girls an education. _____



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Part 2: Graph Interpretation

1. On the graph below, which country has the highest average years of schooling?

2. Which country has the highest fertility rate? _____

3. What is the relationship between women's education and fertility rate? Why? _____

4. How does a country's fertility rate impact its population growth? _____

