In this lesson or series of lessons, students will watch the 'Damsel in Distress: Part 1' video from the Feminist Frequency series *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*, and will learn and explore the history of the 'Damsel in Distress' trope in both its interactive media and popular culture contexts. Through the characters Princess Peach (*Super Mario*) and Princess Zelda (*The Legend of Zelda*) in particular, students will begin to consider how this trope works as a plot device by disempowering female characters and empowering male characters, alongside the potential consequences of the trope. Students will delve deeper into the subtleties of the 'Damsel in Distress' and its mechanics and uses, exploring various tropes it is often used in conjunction with (i.e. "The Smooch of Victory") or variations on the trope itself ("The Helpful Damsel"). Finally in this lesson students will consider the broader implications of representations of women where female characters are disempowered and objectified within the narratives they inhabit.

LEARNING GOALS

By the end of this lesson/series of lessons, students/viewers will:

1. Learn about and explore the history of the 'Damsel in Distress' trope as it relates to both interactive media and popular culture;

2. Analyze how this trope is used in video games to disempower female characters, and consider both popular characters and the effects of this plot device;

3. Consider the implications of this trope in broader contexts outside examples of interactive media, where students will be asked to question how this trope and disempowering representations of women can perpetuate sexism.

MATERIALS

- Computer

- Projector

- Printed copies of "Damsel in Distress: Part 1" note companion

- Newspaper

- Chart paper and markers/ pencil crayons

Before: Minds On

Divide students up into small groups, or pairs if it is a small class. Hand out 2 pieces of blank chart paper to each group, and on one ask them to draw a 'Hero' and on the other 'Someone Saved by a Hero' (without any direction as to what these titles mean/what the characters would look like). Encourage students to talk among themselves to come up with these images. When viewing the video, ask students to keep this 'Draw an Archetype' activity in mind. **[15-25 MINUTES]**

Alternative Opening Activity: In pairs, prompt students to 'Describe/Write a scene where a hero saves the day'. Once they have completed them, students will be asked to consider their 'heroic scenes' in the context of the video.

If this is the first lesson being used in the *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* series, a preliminary discussion regarding 'critical analysis' as a process of questioning, and 'tropes' as identified patterns, will help students understand the goal of the videos (helping viewers question the media they use/consume and the broader implications of media). Alternatively, a brief outline of the video will help provide students with a foundation for understanding some of the concepts discussed. **[5 MINUTES]**

During Action!

Watch the 'Damsel in Distress: Part 1" video. Appropriate points to pause due to time constraints or opportunities for embedded discussion and/or activities are listed below:

1:00	Dinosaur Planet and the Case of Krystal
3:10	Damsel in Distress Outlined
4:00	History of the Damsel in Distress (before video games)
6:10	History of the Damsel in Distress in Video Games and Princess Peach
10:00	Subject/Object Dichotomy
12:45	Misconceptions about the Trope
13:30	*The Legend of Zelda*
17:10	Consequences of the Trope in Video Games
21:00	Consequences: Broader Implications
22:30	What Game Developers can do **[25 MINUTES]**

Questions to Ask During Video: to prompt critical analysis thought process

- What do you notice about the clothing/colours/voices of the 'female'/'male' characters?

- What assumptions are made about the sexuality of the 'female'/'male' characters?

- What expectations do we have for the 'female'/'male' characters when we are presented with the game?

- Would you have wanted to play *Dinosaur Planet*? Why or why not?

Differentiated Instruction:

- Note companions to help students work through definitions and content, including collaboration following viewing;

- 'Pause and Reflect' opportunities throughout viewing

- Emphasis on the use of visual examples

- Drawing from familiar characters for reference

After: Consolidation & Connection

Give students 10 minutes to consider the drawings/scenes they created, and reflect on the activity based on the video and considerations of archetypal roles and the traditional hero/saved (damsel'd) relationship. Prompts could include:

- How are these ingrained ideas of what a hero looks and acts like socially constructed?

- What similarities do we notice in the heroes and 'saved' images we drew, and what differences between them? **[10 MINUTES]**

Ask students to 'present' their drawings or scenes informally alongside their related reflections, and encourage them to discuss the activity and their thoughts about empowered and disempowered characters alongside broader implications of the trope itself. Ask then also to offer alternative images of heroes and their quests. To support the exploration of these broader implications a newspaper may be provided to each group with the prompt to make connections between the types of empowered and disempowered characters we see and those who we see victimized or idolized in the news. **[10 MINUTES]**

POST-VIDEO ACTIVITY OPTIONS

1. **Expanding on the Hero**
   This activity will be used to encourage students to expand on their idea of a 'hero,' where a discussion will be had about whom students see as either their heroes, or people they admire for traits the class discusses as being 'heroic'. For example, showing courage does not necessarily have to happen through some sort of grand rescue. During this activity students will expand on their idea of the hero through researching an individual they think is a hero or has acted heroically (i.e. someone they know, someone from history, someone from a book/movie, someone from the news, etc.). After this discussion, students will be asked to present whom they chose and base their presentation around the following questions:

   - Why do you consider the person you chose a 'hero'?

   - How does this expand on the more simplistic notions of heroism often exhibited in 1980's and 90's video games, where heroes are often heroic simply because they rescue a damsel in distress? *Alternative*: How does this compare with examples of heroism in contemporary gaming?

2. **Her Own Narrative**
   Discuss the characters Princess Peach and Princess Zelda and how their disempowerment functions within their respective narratives, where they are not given their own stories but are rather objects within their male counterparts' storylines. Provide an overview of one of the plots of the games they are in, and ask students to imagine what those games would look like if Princess Peach or Princess Zelda were the protagonist instead. Expand on the difference between games where these characters are playable and where they are fully-fledged protagonists in their own right. This is an opportunity to discuss the subject/object dichotomy outlined in the video. Allow students to work in pairs or small groups to come up with a 'game pitch' for a game that empowers these characters by making them subjects in their own narratives.

   Alternative Activity: If students are unfamiliar with Princess Peach or Princess Zelda, provide the option of using another female character from a game, book or movie where they think through what a narrative that empowers those characters would look like. Have students make a pitch for this idea.

3. **The Impact of Popular Culture on Society**
   The concept of popular culture, including video games, impacting society is an important idea which students should be encouraged to consider within both broader and personal contexts. In order to recognize how our thoughts and opinions are influenced by popular media it is beneficial to start by deconstructing the sources one frequents for enjoyment and make connections between personally held beliefs and how they are reflected in these media sources.

Have students list their 3 favourite websites (or tv/shows/media outlets) and to revisit them using the lens of critical analysis. Ask them to reflect on the following questions:

- What tropes/themes/devices does this source use to capture their readers/followership?

- Write in one sentence the message this source is sending to their following.

- List the patterns you identify between the 3 sources you are analyzing.

- Why do you like these sources so much and how does it align or influence (or potentially challenge) your own thoughts and opinions?

This activity asks students to 'free write' their thoughts on these questions in the form of a one-page reflection, where form isn't as important as facilitating an opportunity to think about how they feel about media and its potential to spark social and individual change. Teachers should make students aware of research done on the impact and influence of media on both individuals and groups as part of conversations around this activity.