

LESSON: THE LADY SIDEKICK (60 MINUTES)

In this lesson or series of lessons, students will watch the "The Lady Sidekick" video from the Feminist Frequency series *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*, and will consider the role female supporting characters often take as sidekicks to male playable characters. These characters are usually not fully developed characters and as such are used as tools to further the main character's progression through the narrative, often reinforcing presumed male players' power fantasies and the belief that women are helpless and therefore need to be protected.

LEARNING GOALS

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

1. Identify patterns in video games and other media that place female characters in positions of helplessness and reinforce harmful stereotypes through shallow characterization;
2. Compare representations of male and female supporting characters in the context of authenticity in relationships based around mutual help or support;
3. Explore and expand upon positive examples of supporting characters, or characters engaged in collaboration in various forms of media.

MATERIALS

- Computer
- Projector
- Printed copies of "The Lady Sidekick" note companions
- Access to laptops/ the internet to research independently/in pairs

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); An introduction to season 1 of the series might also be needed. **[5 MINUTES]**

Show students images by Christophe Courtois* on movie poster themes, asking students to identify what the movies have in common based on the elements of the posters (action movies, women with their backs to the camera, and characters back-to-back are worth noting). Encourage students to draw from movies they know to inform what they think the movies might share in common. **[5 MINUTES]**

Discuss:

- How do you think female characters are treated in these films based on these patterns?
- Which movies seem to have more males featured vs. women and vice versa?
- With posters that have both men and women, who do you think the main character is? **[5 MINUTES]**

Have students look up the covers from some of the video games featured in the video

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independently and consider how supporting characters might be treated within the game itself based on the covers. Note where supporting characters aren't featured at all on the cover, and how much space supporting characters are given where they do show up on the covers of these games. [5 MINUTES]

During Action!

Watch "The Lady Sidekick" video (places to pause due to time constraints or opportunities for embedded discussion and/or activities below):

- 00:25 *Bioshock Infinite* and Elizabeth
- 01:40 The Glorified Door Opener/Gatekeeper
- 02:25 Female Sidekick as Tool
- 03:10 The Damsel Escort Mission
- 04:15 Female Companions and Protection
- 05:55 Female Companions and the Ego Boost
- 06:50 Power Fantasy in Games
- 07:20 Comparison: Male Companions
- 08:30 Positive Examples [15 MINUTES]

Differentiated Instruction:

- Note companions to help students work through definitions and content, including collaboration following viewing;
- 'Pause and Reflect' opportunities throughout viewing

After: Consolidation & Connection

Brainstorm with students examples (both positive and negative) of female sidekicks/supporting characters in movies and (where applicable) male supporting characters to compare. This session should be in the context of the video, where students are making a clear distinction between shallow sidekicks and well-rounded supporting characters.

[5 MINUTES]

Research/Extended Think-Pair-Share: By themselves or in pairs depending on resources available, have students select one of the identified sidekicks (or explore one not mentioned), and ask them to research the character asking the following questions: Is this a shallow character? Do they act independently and have their own goals/desires? How is gender treated in the context of their relationship with the main character? What is the supporting media like for this book/movie/video game/tv show? Once students have researched and shared their findings with one other person/group, ask them to share their exploration with the class, making connections to concepts such as the damsel escort mission, the glorified gatekeeper, and the female companion as ego booster where applicable. [20 MINUTES]

POST-VIDEO ACTIVITY OPTIONS**Writing and Review**

Have students write/create a review similar to the analysis in the "The Lady Sidekick" video, with an emphasis on the supporting character in a tv show, movie, video game, or other narrative form of their choice. Students should make clear suggestions on how the treatment of the supporting character could be improved, including opportunities for further character development and missed chances to establish mutual help within the relationship and experiences between the supporting character and the main character.

Extension: Characterized Review

Ask to students to write a review of the video game/tv show/movie/book being critiqued *from the perspective of the supporting character*. Encourage students to reflect on moments when this is challenging because enough characterization isn't provided to authentically capture the 'voice' of the character they are writing from the perspective of.

This extension activity could also be done in the form of a blog, vlog, or on a social media platform (i.e. a series of tweets, a facebook profile dedicated to 'filling in' character information, etc.).

*Original image compilations by Christophe Courtois: <http://affichescristophecourtois.blogspot.ca/>

A website that showcases these poster compilations in English:

<http://justsomething.co/13-popular-movie-posters-cliches/>

Name: _____

Date: _____

TROPES VS. WOMEN IN VIDEO GAMES: “The Lady Sidekick”

Power Fantasy in Games

The power fantasy in video games is used to make the player feel like they are the center of the world – this often involves other characters lacking depth, as they do not challenge the main character or express their own desires and emotions but are instead reduced to a tool for the player to use.

The Damsel Escort Mission

“When a female character joins the male player character but is largely helpless and, rather than being a clear benefit to the character, she feels more like a burden.”

***Bioshock Infinite*
and Elizabeth**

**The Glorified Door
Opener/Gatekeeper**

**Female Sidekick
as Tool**

Name: _____ Date: _____

TROPES VS. WOMEN IN VIDEO GAMES: "THE LADY SIDEKICK"

The Damsel Escort Mission	
Female Companions and Protection	
Female Companions and the Ego Boost	
Shallow Female Companions and Power Fantasies	

Name: _____ Date: _____

TROPES VS. WOMEN IN VIDEO GAMES: "THE LADY SIDEKICK"

Comparison: Male Companions	
Positive Examples	