

Lesson Plan: A Short History of the Long Fight against Sexual Harassment

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Featured resource

KQED's The Lowdown: [A Short History of the Long Fight Against Sexual Harassment](#)



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The New York Times video: [Why Hasn't Sexual Harassment Disappeared?](#) (11:27)

Opening quick write prompt:

How would you write the definition of sexual harassment in your own words? What do you think is needed to stop sexual harassment in the workplace?

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze the current and historic fight against sexual harassment.
- Students will evaluate the ongoing problem of sexual harassment in the workplace and reflect on ways to address it.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

How has the fight against sexual harassment changed over time? How can sexual harassment be stopped?

Accusations of sexual harassment and assault against media mogul Harvey Weinstein caused a groundswell of allegations that have ended the careers of media, entertainment and political figures, such as Al Franken, Matt Lauer, Charlie Rose and Kevin Spacey. Over a million women throughout the country and the world stood up to be counted in solidarity, using the hashtag #MeToo. But sexual harassment is nothing new. Women have encountered sexual harassment since entering the workforce, though the modern fight for equal rights has brought attention and visibility to the problem. In fact, the term 'sexual harassment' wasn't even coined until the 1970s. This lesson explores the history of the fight against sexual harassment, the context in which this fight took place, and the women, many of them women of color, who blazed the trail to the current #MeToo movement.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the reading, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
plaintiff (n.)	A person who sues another person or accuses them of a crime <i>A growing number of women are plaintiffs in sexual harassment lawsuits.</i>
rampant (adj.)	Something that is very common and widespread <i>The #MeToo hashtag revealed that sexual harassment is more rampant than many Americans believed.</i>
relentless (adj.)	Continuing without losing strength or intensity <i>Many women report that sexual harassment is relentless in their workplace, and they are afraid of being fired if they speak out.</i>
sexual harassment (n.)	Discrimination consisting of unwanted verbal or physical actions directed at an employee because of his/her gender <i>Sexual harassment has always been a serious problem, though men accused of sexual harassment have only recently been held accountable publically..</i>
systematic (adj.)	Involving an entire system or done according to a system <i>Systematic sexual harassment creates a hostile workplace and can cause mental and psychological harm.</i>

Investigate

- Discuss the quick-write prompt to gauge what students already know about sexual harassment. (**Note:** If needed, reinforce classroom norms around respectful discussion. [Here](#) are ideas for creating a safe space to discuss difficult subjects.)
- Write the definition of sexual harassment on the board. Use the definition above or build a definition from students' quick-write responses.
- **Ask:** What well-known men have recently been accused of sexual harassment? What has happened as a result? (**Note:** Make sure students know the extent of the current accusations. Add names, if needed, to illustrate how widespread the accusations have been.)
- **Explain:** Today, men like Matt Lauer and Al Franken (and others) have been fired or forced to resign after being accused of sexual harassment. But this is new. Historically, sexual harassment has always existed in the workplace—and most evidence shows that it is more common than

anyone thought. But men accused of sexual harassment rarely faced lasting consequences, even when the allegations became public. Instead, the woman's story was questioned or not believed. This moment is unusual because so many famous men are facing significant consequences (**Note:** For more resources about the prevalence of sexual harassment and personal stories from a variety of women, see the resources at the bottom of [The Lowdown post](#).)

- **Ask:** Why do you think men accused of sexual harassment are facing consequences today when they weren't before? Call on students to share ideas. Students may mention previous examples of women coming forward.
- **Explain:** There is a long history of women fighting back against sexual harassment, even though people doubted them. Tell students they will have a chance to learn some of the history that has led to the present moment.
- **Optional but recommended:** [The New York Times](#) video provides a detailed overview to give students context before reading [The Lowdown post](#). If you don't have time to watch the whole video (11:27), choose a segment to help fill gaps in your students' understanding of the topic:
 - **Historical background (start-4:19):** Establishes sexual harassment as a longstanding problem, the founding of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Supreme Court decision declaring sexual harassment illegal
 - **Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings (4:19-7:59):** Describes the hearings, their culture significance and the fallout (*Note: There is a non-explicit reference to oral sex.*)
 - **The current moment (7:59-11:27):** Focuses the fall of Weinstein and others, the current flood of allegations and reasons that prevented more women from coming forward sooner
- **Check for understanding after the video:** What were ways women were sexually harassed in the workplace? How serious or common was the problem? What are ways the courts, employers and politicians tried to solve the problem?
- In small groups or individually, students read [The Lowdown post](#) and explore the timeline. As they read, they should make notes on how the fight against sexual harassment has changed over time and what specific actions led to these changes.
- **Check for understanding after reading the timeline:** Who was someone whose actions caused a change in how sexual harassment was viewed or addressed? What did this person do?
- **Transition to the Make and Share:** Tell students they will have a chance to share their thoughts on this issue in the comments section of The Lowdown. The first time they comment, students must sign in to [Disqus](#), a free discussion app embedded in The Lowdown.

- To sign in to [Disqus](#), click the “Comments” button at the bottom of the post.
- Click the blue “Get Started” button in the gray “Welcome to Disqus” box.
- Students will need to enter a username. We recommend first name, last initial.
- After signing in for the first time, students must verify their email address before commenting. A verification email will appear in their inbox once they sign in to Disqus.

Make and share

- Individually or in small groups, students post in the comments section in response
 - Responses should be supported by evidence from [The Lowdown post](#).
 - Encourage students to reply to other comments after posting their response. Remind them to use evidence to support their claims and respectful language when responding.
- Students can write their own response or use the following questions as a starting point:
 - Why is it important to end sexual harassment in the workplace? Provide evidence to support your claim.
 - Who is a woman who has fought against sexual harassment and what was her greatest accomplishment, in your opinion? Give specific examples.
 - Who is most responsible for preventing sexual harassment at work? Corporations? The courts and lawmakers? Other employees? Explain your answer in detail.

Assessment/reflection

- Students reflect on what they have learned either through a class discussion or in writing:
 - What have you learned about the history of sexual harassment and the way it’s been addressed over time? Did your opinion change or stay the same as you learned more about the issue?
 - What was it like to post your responses publicly and reply to other posts? What did you learn from other students? What do you hope they learned from you? What will you do the next time you post a comment in response to The Lowdown?

[Circle chats](#), small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension/homework

Help create a harassment-free space at your school: Connect students to the principal or dean of students to learn more about your school’s sexual harassment policy. Encourage students to re-write the policy into easy-to-understand language, and then create a video public service announcement, poster or presentation to spread the word about creating a school where harassment isn’t tolerated.

Write/speak locally: Students turn their opinions about ending sexual harassment in the workplace into a letter, short speech or presentation, then research ways to make their voice heard in their community. (Example: Speaking during the public comment section of a city council meeting, posting on an online forum, etc.) For a list of how to contact local officials in your area, check out [KQED Learning's Local Election Toolkit](#).

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.