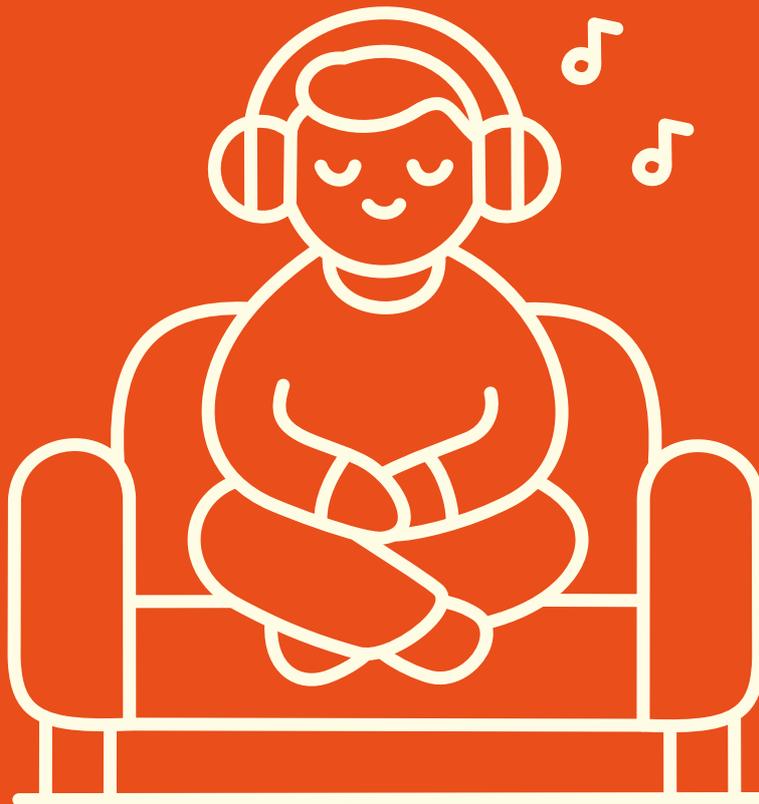


NYJO

*“I want to throw myself in and
snap off the mask”:*

***Exploring Masculinity
through Music***



Welcome!



I want to throw myself in and snap off the mask is a modular Resource Pack which explores masculinity through music, taking existing song lyrics as a starting point to encourage students to consider creating their own definitions of masculinity for a modern world.

There has been a series of brilliant resources produced recently aimed at girls and young women, encouraging them to challenge stereotypes around femininity and to think more deeply about the societal factors that shape our understanding of this. There has been far less produced, however, to support young people to explore masculinity in a similar way, despite the fact that boys are also harmed by these same limiting stereotypes and gender roles. In 2025, this need was recognised by the Department for Education who updated the statutory guidance for Relationships, Sex, and Health Education (RSHE) in schools to include specific new requirements focused on promoting ‘positive masculinity’ and identifying ‘positive male role models’ within the classroom (these requirements are outlined in full in Appendix 1 at the end of this Resource Pack).



As a result, in September 2025, NYJO delivered an exploration day at Dulwich College, together with the Southwark Schools Learning Partnership, which brought together young people from local secondary schools to consider what masculinity actually means to them today. This Resource Pack, developed following the session, uses writing and ideas generated by the young people who attended to shape the beginning of conversations that you might want to have with students in your own school.

Here, we take masculinity as our starting focus, giving space for young people to explore what masculinity means to them today and to have potentially difficult but open conversations around how male, societal gender norms have affected them. There are optional extensions to some of the following exercises if you would like to expand the discussions that you hold to focus on both masculinity and femininity, however, this Resource Pack has been specifically designed to enable young people of all genders to take part in these conversations around masculinity.

Part of the reason that society is starting to feel this need to create a space for young people to unpick masculinity is because many of the brilliant conversations that have been taking place around gender and femininity have happened in female-only spaces or via resources targeted specifically at women. This has been vital for giving girls the room and confidence to challenge the gender-based stereotypes that they experience on a day-to-day basis, but we are now at a point where we need to be having these conversations more widely and openly.



Recent statistics show that boys and young men are disproportionately both the ones perpetuating, and suffering the consequences of, violent crimes in the UK. In 2022/23, boys accounted for 83% of children cautioned or convicted for violent offences, but also 91% of hospital admissions for knife assaults, and 87% of homicide victims aged 16 to 24. Against this backdrop, content that encourages violence against women and girls continues to circulate strongly, particularly online, with 33% of 13-17 year-olds reporting that they have encountered this on their social media platforms.

To truly address these issues at their root, we have to start including boys in conversations around gender, encouraging them to find new definitions of masculinity that seek to challenge stereotypes suggesting that men must be dominant, aggressive, or even violent. **And we should be including young people of all genders in these conversations;** giving girls and non-binary young people a chance to voice how these outdated 'ideals' of masculinity have impacted on them, but also to hear how harmful these can be for their male classmates in turn.

In this way, we can enable safe, open discussions where everyone has a space to explore how they feel about the role they have been 'given' by their gender in society, and the role they might wish to create for themselves moving forward.

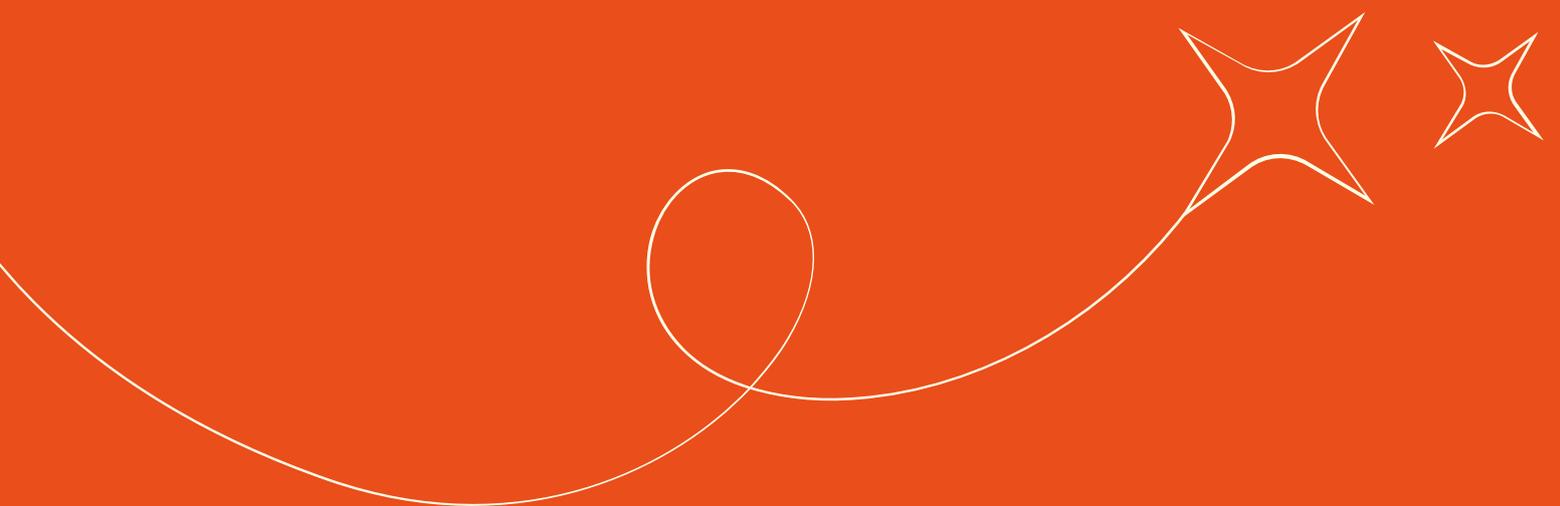


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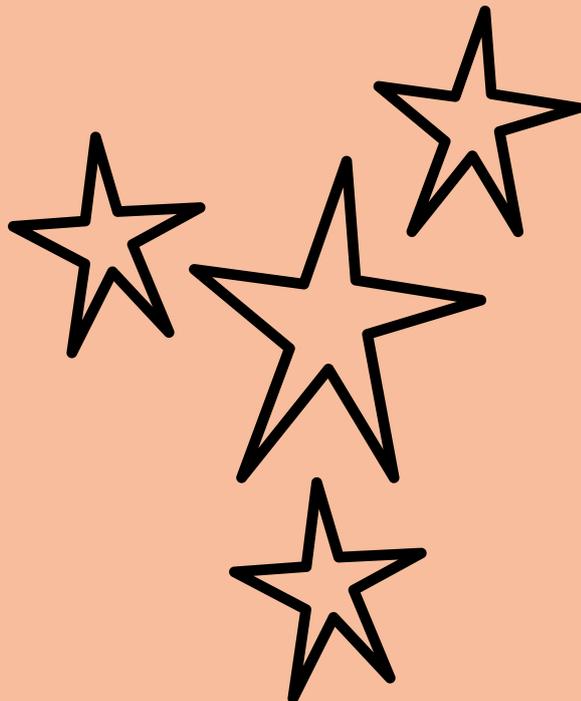
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Why Music?

We believe music, and song lyrics in particular, are a great way to open up conversations around gender with young people. In an article published in 1985, Sheila Davis, who was at the time Adjunct Professor of Lyric Writing at New York University, wrote that song lyrics ‘are more than mere mirrors of society; they are a potent force in the shaping of it.’ By her argument, when song lyrics today make reference to masculinity, they are not just reflecting back ideas that are already in circulation, but are instead taking an active role in shaping how young people might come to define this term.

But how much are we even aware that this is happening? Music Psychologist Dr Victoria Williamson, who wrote on this topic in her 2014 publication *You are the Music: How Music Reveals What it Means to be Human* states that,

“There is very little research in this area. But, at the International Conference of Music Perception and Cognition in 2012 there was an interesting presentation, where a researcher had looked at women’s attitudes to the content of rap lyrics when they read them, when they listened to them in music, and when they watched them in music videos. The researcher basically found that women had a much more negative attitude towards the nature of those lyrics when they read them, less so when they listened to them, and even less so when they watched them in videos.”

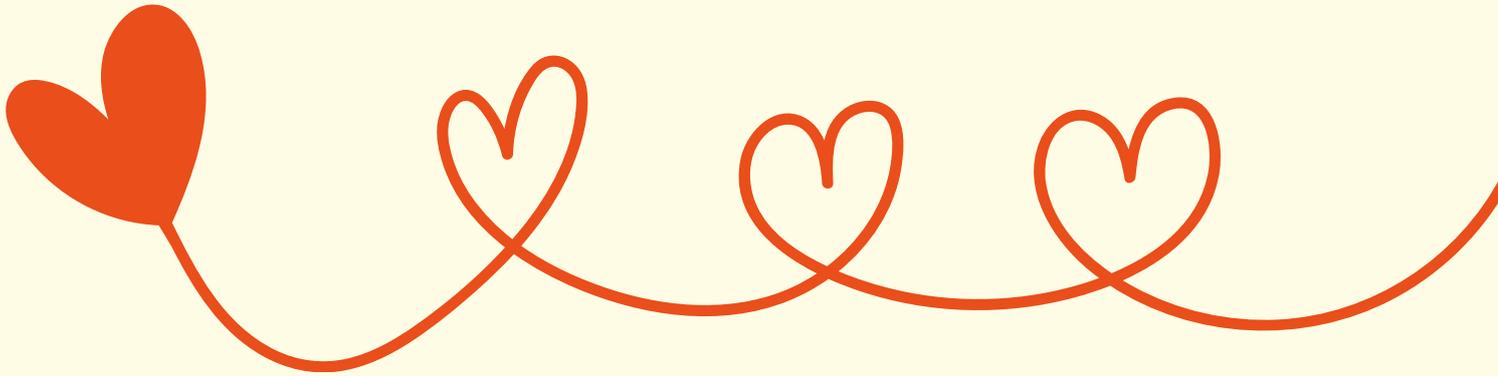


In other words, unless we actively pay attention to the lyrics of the songs that we are hearing daily, there is a strong chance that we might be absorbing stereotypes or language around gender without even realising that we are doing so. The distraction posed by colourful images and catchy melodies can stop us from noticing what a song is actually trying to tell us.

As a result, we hope that you will use this Resource Pack to give your students the space to understand what messages the music that they listen to are sending them around masculinity, and what from these messages they might wish to accept, as well as what they might wish to reject from their understanding of gender.



Facilitating Safe Discussions



Some of these activities may open up complex conversations within your classroom but, as long as they are facilitated safely, we shouldn't feel afraid to have these! Make sure that the space you are working through these resources in feels safe, secure, and private for the young people taking part and that they do not feel at risk of being watched or interrupted.

Young people should never feel pressured into sharing personal stories or first-person accounts if they don't want to. Start by focusing conversations more generally, unless a young person decides that they are ready to share something more personal. It is really important that everyone in the group engages in the process of self-reflection, and considers where they feel they sit within these conversations as individuals, but this can be done privately and does not always need to be shared with the group as a whole.

Think about how you can welcome different ways of contribution from young people who might not feel ready to speak in front of their classmates about this topic. This could look like opening up some of the questions to answer via anonymous submission, getting everyone to write down their responses on paper, or breaking the group up into smaller conversational groupings. Whatever you decide, it's really important that everyone has a way to have their voice heard in a manner that feels safe to them.



As you facilitate these discussions, it is your role to:

- Reassure the group there are no right or wrong answers.
- Ensure everyone's contributions are heard and valued.
- Be patient with young people who might take longer to open up, or find the words to verbalise their feelings.
- Ask open questions and give space for the young people to express their own thoughts, without being led by you.
- Close the conversations respectfully.



We recommend you begin your first session by making sure that your students understand that this is a space where **all views** are welcome to be shared. Although some things might come up that they don't agree with, they should understand that people will continue to hold these views unchallenged in private if we don't make space for them in settings like this. It is your role as the facilitator of these sessions to gently counter any myths, factual inaccuracies, or harmful beliefs that might emerge through these conversations, without making the young people feel any sense of shame for having shared them.

How Can I Use This Resource Pack in my School?

Factors like ethnicity, class, sexuality, and appearance affect the reality of masculinity that each individual young person experiences. Because of this, taking a 'one-size-fits all' approach to exploring what masculinity means with students does not work. Instead, we hope this Resource Pack encourages you to hold open, safe conversations with young people of all genders; asking them what masculinity has meant to them previously, and what they might want it to mean moving forward.

This Resource Pack has been designed to offer ideas for activities that you can deliver yourself. It is aimed at secondary-school age students, but they could be from a music class, a selected extra-curricular group, or a PSHE class. We hope that it acts as an exciting inspiration point, providing suggestions for how you can support and encourage your students to engage creatively with the themes and questions posed.

Feel free, however, to adapt these sessions to suit your students; we want their ideas, writing, and thoughts to shape the direction of this project as much as the exercises outlined in this resource pack! You can move the order of these exercises around to suit your group, skip sections out, and even add new things in – this is here to give you some initial ideas, but then for you to develop this for the students that you're working with.

Before You Start...

This Resource Pack is built around an understanding of gender as a social construct, but what does this mean? Society tells us that we should expect certain behaviour from men and women; we call these expectations ‘gender stereotypes’. Gender stereotypes are enforced through mechanisms like societal pressure, the legal system, threats of violence etc. Conforming to gender stereotypes is often ‘rewarded’ by society, whilst pushing against them can lead to social costs.

“Gender stereotypes are beliefs and images that are commonly seen as true and unchangeable. Gender stereotypes keep everyone from developing their full potential because they push people to act in accordance with what is expected from them instead of according to their interests or wishes. People are judged by how well they adhere to the gender stereotypes. They can lead to social exclusion of those who do not fit the stereotype.”

Plan International, Exploring Positive Masculinity, Gender Stereotypes and Anti-Violence with Young People

The media, society, family, and culture all feed into the messages that young people receive around gender. This Resource Pack encourages you to think with your students about what could change if they all work together to challenge the gender stereotypes that have traditionally emerged from these sources. We hope that it will encourage them to develop a more supportive and empathetic understanding of one another’s perspectives, as well as ultimately supporting them to think more deeply about their own identity and how they might like to take forward a different understanding of gender as they move forward from these sessions.

Before you start working through this Resource Pack together, we recommend that you introduce this topic to your students and give them some time for private, personal reflection. Gender is inextricably tied up with notions of identity. Ask your students to write the word 'me' at the top of a blank piece of paper, and then divide the paper into 3 sections using the following headings; 'Other People Think I Am', 'I Think I Am', and 'I Would Like To Be'.

Ask your students to think about themselves and then add some bullet points into each of these sections, considering how they think their friends and family might perceive them, how they perceive themselves, and then a more 'aspirational' reflection on how they might like to be perceived in the future. Encourage your students to keep these reflections private and hold onto them, so that they can return to them at the end of this project if they would like to, and reflect on whether anything has changed for them.



Session Plans

Session 1

Let's Get Listening

For students to start to recognise some of the different ways in which song lyrics might present ideas of masculinity and gender.

Session 2

Icons of Jazz

For students to start to feel comfortable exploring the different ways in which singers can portray emotion through song.

Session 3

I Would Like Masculinity to be...

For students to start to feel comfortable expressing their own ideas of masculinity.

Session 4

Visualising Something New

For students to experiment with writing poetry, prose, and/or song lyrics inspired by the theme of masculinity.

Optional Extension

For Music Classes

For students to shape their writing from the previous weeks into a song that explores themes of gender and masculinity.

Optional Extension

For PSHE Classes

For students to create a poem, drama piece, collage, or personal blog post that explores themes of gender and masculinity.

Project Conclusion

Sharing & Reflection

For students to showcase what they have created and celebrate their hard work and learning over the previous weeks.

Session 1: Let's Get Listening

Learning Objectives:

For students to start to recognise some of the different ways in which song lyrics might present ideas of masculinity and gender.

For students to start to feel comfortable discussing the presentation of masculinity through music sensitively with one another.

Opening Exercise

Split the students into small groups and ask them to draw the outline of an adult man on a piece of paper. Ask each group to imagine a man together (this cannot be a real person and must be completely invented by them!). They need to add words inside the outline that they have drawn which describe this man. What is his name? What does he look like? What is his job? What does he like to do in his free time? What is his personality? Come back together as a group and introduce your man to one another! Save these drawings for the group to return to in a later session.

Optional Edit

If you would prefer, you can divide the groups and ask some to do the opening exercise for an adult man, and some for an adult female.



Main Exercise

Listen as a group to the first four songs on our Music & Masculinity playlist, working through them together one by one:



On the following pages, you will find some suggested discussion points for each song.



Have You Met Miss Jones

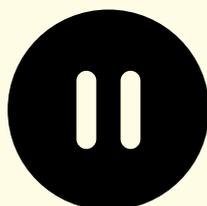
Have a listen to Frank Sinatra perform this song together as a group. Start by playing it out loud to your students, without prompting them on what to listen for. At the end of the song, ask the group how they found it; did they like the song? What moods or emotions came to mind for them when listening? What did they think the song was about?

Then, show your students this section taken from the song lyrics:

***“And then I said, “Miss Jones, you're a girl who understands
I'm a man who must be free.”***

Do they remember hearing these lyrics in the song? What ideas do these lyrics bring up for them? Does looking at these lyrics change how they originally felt about the song or its meaning? Are these lyrics suggesting that it is only the man who gets the choice to be free in this scenario? How do they think Miss Jones feels about all of this?

Ask your students to guess what decade they think this song was originally written in (1937) and what this might tell us about attitudes towards gender at the time.





GUY.exe

Have a listen to this song together as a group. Start by playing it out loud to your students, without prompting them on what to listen for. At the end of the song, ask the group how they found it; did they like the song? What moods or emotions came to mind for them when listening? What did they think the song was about?

Then, show your students this section taken from the song lyrics:

***“Oh, I, wish I could synthesize
A picture perfect guy,
Six feet tall and super strong
We'd always get along.
Oh, he'd pick me up at eight, and not a minute late
'Cause I don't like to wait,
Kind and ain't afraid to cry, or treat his momma right
That's right, that's what I like.”***

What ideas do these lyrics bring up for them? Does looking at these lyrics change how they originally felt about the song or its meaning? How does this image of a ‘perfect guy’ match with their portraits of adult men that they created earlier?

Does this sound like a perfect guy to them? Whose idea of a ‘perfect guy’ do they think this is? This song was written in 2017 – how is it different from the ideas presented in Have you met Miss Jones? Are there any places that it’s similar?



Real

Have a listen to this song together as a group. Start by playing it out loud to your students, without prompting them on what to listen for. At the end of the song, ask the group how they found it; did they like the song? What moods or emotions came to mind for them when listening? What did they think the song was about?

Then, show your students this section taken from the song lyrics:

***“You love so much, you love when love hurts
You love fast cars and dead presidents old
You love fast women, you love keepin' control
Of everything that you love, you love beef
You love streets, you love running, ducking police
You love your hood, might even love it to death
But what love got to do with it when you don't love yourself?”***

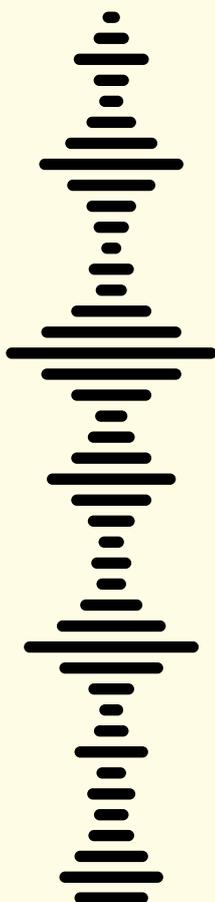
What does this song have to tell us about the traditional stereotypes associated with masculinity? Do you think Kendrick agrees with these? Why/why not?

Top Tip: Remember to vary the way that you are asking these questions to keep the session feeling interesting. Try getting the students to discuss their thoughts in different pairs or small groups. Have a go at posing some of them as yes/no questions to the group and getting them to vote, or try getting them to add words to a shared whiteboard or giant mind map!

Optional Extension for Music Classes

If you are working through this Resource Pack with a music class or ensemble, you may wish to ask your students to pick up their instruments at this stage - this can be percussion, a melodic instrument, or voice!

Play these tracks again, and get your students to respond to sections of the music by making sounds on their instrument. They can try and mimic phrases that they hear, play notes or rhythms that they feel convey the mood of the track, or even try playing something totally new that responds to the track like a conversation! Ask them what different techniques they can use to capture the mood or feel of the original tracks.



Closing Exercise

Draw an imaginary line down the centre of the room! At one end is the answer 'never again' and at the other end is the answer 'every day'.

Play your students 30 seconds of each song again, and at the end of the 30 seconds ask them to place themselves where they would like to be on the line in response to the question, 'Would you choose to listen to this song again?'.

Session 2: Icons of Jazz

Learning Objectives:

For students to start to consider the different ways that we can understand strength.

For students to start to feel comfortable exploring the different ways in which singers can portray emotion through song, and how their performance choices can affect the music's meaning.

Opening Exercise

Start with an informal call and response. Say the following words (**masculinity** and **femininity**) and ask your students to respond with any associated words or short phrases that come to mind for them. You can do this in a more structured format if you wish by going round in a circle. Tell your students that, at this stage, they are just adding words into an imaginary 'word bank'. They do not have to justify their word choices, and things might come up that others don't agree with but they should not challenge one another!

Below are some of the responses to the word 'masculinity' that young people at our workshop day with the Southwark Schools Learning Partnership came up with:

Powerful
Toxic
Opinionated
Emotionless
Control
Dominant
Bold

How do these compare with the words that your students came up with?

Main Exercise

Start by asking your students if they can name anyone else that comes to mind for them when they think of the word 'jazz'. It's totally fine if nothing much comes to mind for them, as this session they're going to be introduced to two artists who have made huge contributions to the development of this music! Explain to your students that both of the artists they will be looking at today are women, talking about men through their song lyrics. This is because societal ideas of masculinity impact people of all genders, which is why it's so important that they're all in this room having these conversations together!

Nina Simone

Often referred to as 'The High Priestess of Soul', Nina Simone was a singer, pianist, songwriter, and civil rights activist. In her lifetime, she was often labelled as purely a jazz vocalist but she rejected this, considering it much more a reflection of her race as opposed to the music that she was creating, which also incorporated folk, blues, gospel, and pop. Some of her most famous songs include 'I Put a Spell on You', 'Four Women' and 'To be Young, Gifted, and Black'.

Watch [this video](#) of Nina Simone performing 'I Put a Spell on You' together.

What do your students notice about her performance? What emotions are her facial expressions suggesting? How about her body language? Do your students think this song was written by a man (it was!) or a woman? Does knowing this song was written by a man change your students perspectives on Nina Simone's performance? Do they think she likes, or believes in, these lyrics? Why/why not?

Now try watching [this video](#) of a male vocalist performing the song. Does it feel different performed by a man? Why/why not?

*"I put a spell on you
Because you're mine."*





Optional Extension

The performance choices that Nina Simone makes here can dramatically alter the sense of the song lyrics' meaning that the audience receives. There are all sorts of ways in which the choices that we make can alter the meaning of words. Pair your students up, and ask them to experiment with saying the following sentence, but changing the word that they emphasise each time: "I didn't take your pencil."

Ask them what they noticed about how their choices in emphasis change the sentence's meaning. If you say "**I** didn't take your pencil" that suggests that someone else did. If you say "I didn't **take** your pencil" that implies that you did something else to the pencil. If you say "I didn't take **your** pencil" that indicates that you took someone else's pencil. And if you say "I didn't take your **pencil**" that hints that you took something else...

There are so many different parts of a performance that come together to convey its meaning.

Put your students back in their pairs and ask them to experiment with saying the following lyrics from songs that we have looked at so far in ways that might convey different emotions (truthful, lying, angry, happy, sarcastic, genuine, sad etc.):

**I'm a man who must be free
A picture perfect guy – six feet strong and super tall
You love keeping control
I put a spell on you, because you're mine**

What emotions came up for them – has it changed how they feel about any of these lyrics? If you're working with a music class/ensemble then you can ask them to get out their instruments at this point! Decide together on a short musical phrase that they can all play. Now experiment with playing it in different ways – changing dynamics, intonation, tempo, rhythm, articulation etc. See how many emotions they can get this one short phrase to convey!

Esperanza Spalding

Esperanza Spalding is a musician, composer, activist, and educator. She has won four Grammy Awards already for her music, which pushes the boundaries of sound and genre. She first starting teaching herself the violin as a child, after she saw the musician Yo Yo Ma playing cello on the children's television show Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood. She was then encouraged to pick up the double bass after a teacher found her playing around with the instrument after class!

Watch the music video for Esperanza Spalding's song 'Black Gold' together:

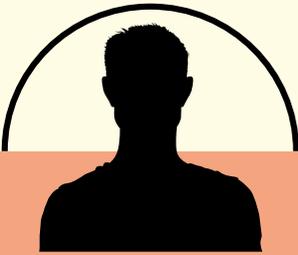
What do your students think about this video?
What words came to mind whilst watching it?
What message do you think it is trying to convey?

In 'Black Gold', Esperanza Spalding sings:

***"Think of all the strength you have in you
From the blood you carry within you
Ancient men, powerful men
Built us a civilization."***

Ask your students if, when they think about the link between the words 'strength' and 'masculinity', they think of this positively or negatively? Why are these conversations particularly important for Black and Brown men?





Come back to the drawings of an adult man that your group created at the start of session 1. Had anyone identified an ethnicity for their man? Ask the group to take a moment to think for themselves about whether they would have done anything differently if they had been explicitly asked to draw a Black adult man.

The media often depicts Black men as being particularly aggressive or violent in comparison to their white peers. Can your students think of any particular examples of this? In 2014, white police officer Darren Wilson from Missouri, America, attempted to defend his fatal shooting of the 18-year old Black teenager Michael Brown by describing him as 'aggressive', 'angry, and like a 'demon'. This is all despite Wilson being much older than Brown, and the only one of them in possession of a weapon at the time... A psychology study from the University of California from the same year found that Black children were consistently perceived by police officers as older and less innocent than their white peers.

All of this can contribute to Black men having a complex relationship with their identity, and the idea of strength. But this song by Esperanza Spalding is all about celebrating the ancient, historical strength of Black men. Ask your students to think about the different ways that there are to show strength; is it always a physical characteristic? How might we be able to think of strength more positively for men?

Closing Exercise

Put the group in pairs. Ask one person in each pair to hold up their hand and make a clenched fist. Their partner's task is to find a way of opening the fist in 60 seconds without hurting their partner. At the end, ask them whether they managed to get their partner to open their fist and if so, how. You will find that most people tried to pry open the fist using physical force, when they could have just asked their partner to open their fist... Encourage the group to consider what this tells us about different ways that we can understand the concept of strength.

Session 3: I Would Like Masculinity to be...

Learning Objectives:

For students to start to feel comfortable expressing their own ideas of masculinity, even if these might be different to many of the societal expectations placed on masculinity that they experience.

Opening Exercise

Label one end of the room agree and one end of the room disagree. Ask your students to stand in the middle of the room which is 'neutral ground'. One by one, read out the below statements and ask the group to stand where they would like to individually along the physical scale. You can ask anyone who has gone strongly to one side of the room or the other whether they would like to explain their reason for choosing this position, and see if this persuades anyone to move!

Men are less likely than women to show their emotions.

Women are more caring than men.

Men have to be stronger than women.

Support the group to understand that this is about their personal opinions and there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but remember to gently counter any myths or factual inaccuracies that might come up as part of these discussions.

Main Exercise

Ask your students individually to write 'I would like masculinity to be...' at the top of a piece of paper and give them 2 minutes to free flow write from this starting point.

Optional Edit

If you would prefer, you can divide the groups and ask some to do this exercise for masculinity, and some for femininity.



What is Free Flow Writing?

Free flow writing is a writing technique where you just start writing continuously for a set amount of time. The goal is for your students to just let the writing flow from their pens, without worrying about grammar, sentence structure, spelling, or even word choice.

We did a similar exercise at our workshop day with the Southwark Schools Learning Partnership, and below are some of the ways that the students here chose to start finishing this sentence for themselves:

I would like masculinity to be more honest.

I would like masculinity to be more fun and exciting.

I would like masculinity to be standing up for others despite difference.

I would like masculinity to be showing vulnerability with strength.

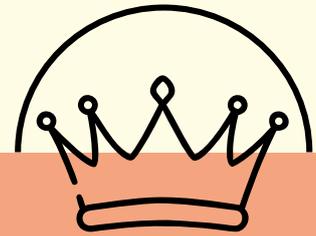
Have a listen to the next songs on the [Music & Masculinity playlist](#) together. On the following pages are some suggested discussion points for each song.





Kill Bill – SZA

Had anyone heard this song before? What do they think SZA is singing about? Did anyone pick out any particular lyrics? If not, try pulling the lyrics up onto a screen for the group and ask if anything stands out to them? How do they think this song might come across differently if it was performed by a man, and how do they feel about that?



Streets Made Me A King - Future

Had anyone heard this song before? What do they think Future is singing about? Did anyone pick out any particular lyrics? If not, try pulling the lyrics up onto a screen for the group and ask if anything stands out to them (you might want to prepare an edited, non-explicit version to pull up in advance of the session!)? How does looking at these lyrics make them feel about Future? What do they think Future feels about women based on these lyrics? Do they ever hear songs like this performed by women?



Selfish – Dave

Had anyone heard this song before? What do they think Dave is singing about? Did anyone pick out any particular lyrics? If not, try pulling the lyrics up onto a screen for the group and ask if anything stands out to them? Do they often hear men talk about their emotions in this way, and how does it make them feel hearing this? What kinds of topics do they usually hear men singing/rapping about in the music that they listen to?

Optional Extension

Have a look at these lyrics taken from Dave's song 'Selfish':



*"I know it's a lot,
But it might be all that I've got.*



*I wanna throw myself in,
Snap off the mask."*

Have a go at saying these lyrics out loud together as a group, and then individually. Play around with different ways of rhythmically phrasing these lyrics and think about how else you might want to vocalise/perform them. Ask the students how saying these lyrics out loud makes them feel.

TOP TIP: You will need to build your students' confidence slowly in order to get them to feel comfortable speaking out loud/vocalising/singing in front of one another. [Here](#), you can find a video of a NYJO band playing a gentle backing track that can accompany this exercise. Have a go at playing this loudly for the first time the students try this exercise, so that they cannot hear one another initially. As they get more confident, try gently lowering the volume of the backing track until they start to hear themselves and each other.

If you have instrumentalists in your class, get them to pick up their instruments at this point and encourage them to play along to the vocalisations! See if you can get the instrumentalists and vocalists to create something that fits together and responds to one another.

If you would like to, you can also show your students [this video](#) of some of our musicians discussing their own views on masculinity, as well as rehearsing arrangements of some of the music that you will have been listening to over the course of this Resource Pack. We would recommend this video for use with KS5 groups.

Closing Exercise

Split the students into small groups and give them the following discussion point – Jay (a 16 year-old boy) has fallen out with one of his best friends, Kate (a 16 year-old girl). At a party they attended together recently, Jay kept choosing to play music that referred to women as ‘bitches’ or ‘hoes’ and Kate found this really offensive.

When she raised this with Jay, he told her to ‘just get over it, because the lyrics don’t matter and it doesn’t mean anything anyway’. Kate was really upset about what he said, and this has made Jay think that he should probably reflect on it...

Ask your students to discuss in their groups whether they agree with what Jay said and why/why not? Do they think Kate overacted or do they think she has a point? What should Jay do next?



Session 4: Visualising Something New

Learning Objectives:

For students to experiment with writing poetry, prose, and/or song lyrics inspired by the theme of masculinity.

For students to start to reflect on the different ways in which the news presents masculinity, and how this compares or contrasts with their own understanding of the word.

Opening Exercise

Get your students to close their eyes. Ask them to visualise a person in front of them. This person represents all of the values that they would like to hold in an ideal version of themselves. What does this person do? What does this person feel? How does this person behave towards others? Bring this moment of visualisation time to a close. Ask your students to now take 2 minutes of free flow writing time inspired by this exercise.

Main Exercise

This exercise is inspired by some adapted lines from Dave's song 'Selfish' which we looked at in an earlier session:

**“Maybe it's you, maybe it's me, maybe it's the media,
But I want to throw myself in and snap off the mask.”**

Explore giving your students these two lines to use in a potential chorus for a song (if you are not working with a music class/ensemble, you may wish to encourage your students to think of using this as a 'refrain' or recurring lines in a poetic response rather than a song – remember to remind them that poems don't always have to rhyme!).

Ask your students how they feel about these lines – what themes or emotions can they find within the language? What words come to mind inspired by these lines? What images do they picture whilst reading these?

Having discussed this together, ask your students to split into small groups and explore writing 2 - 3 verses (or stanzas) that could be built around these lines and that reference masculinity, or gender more generally. If they are thinking about this as a song – remind them that at this stage they should only be thinking about the words and not worrying about melody yet!

Top Tip: Once you've started discussing these lines, you may find that your students jump straight in with ideas for more words to shape around this starting point. Some might still feel a bit stuck, however, so this can be a useful way of getting some writing flowing!

Ask them to grab the closest book in the room and turn to page 39. They should then write down 10 words from this page that catch their eye and try and use these words in their writing...

Closing Exercise

Split your students into small groups and give each group sections from a recent newspaper. Ask them to go through and cut out any articles that reference boys, men and/or masculinity either positively or negatively. Ask each group to order what they have found, from the most positive representation of masculinity to the least positive. Having spent lots of time thinking about how they would like to see masculinity spoken about in the future, how does it feel coming back to the reality of how it is spoken about in the news now? What might they like to do to challenge that moving forward?

Linked below are some recent articles you can use for this exercise, instead of having your students look through newspapers, if you would prefer:

1 2 3 4 5 6

Optional Extension for Music Classes

If you are working through this Resource Pack with a music class or ensemble, you may wish to now help them shape their writing from the previous weeks into a song that explores these themes.

You can decide together whether they would like to write their final song(s) individually, in small groups, or as a whole class. Do they have enough writing from previous sessions to become the lyrics for the final song(s) or do they need to spend some more time shaping what this will look like?

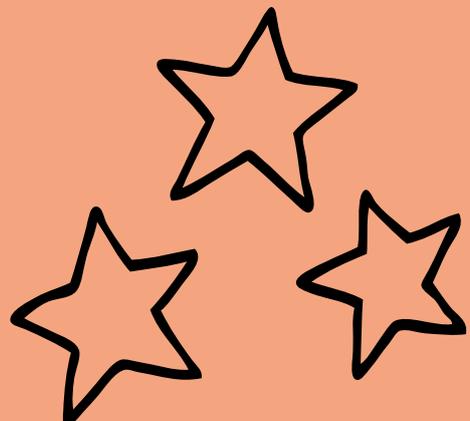
Once they feel ready to, your students can start to build a groove that will accompany their final song(s).

The following activities can work using instruments within a practical music-making space, or they can be done using music technology on sites such as Logic Pro.

If you are going to be doing these next exercises with your students using instruments, then [this video](#) will show a NYJO band demonstrating band walking through the songwriting process outlined below.

Steps to Building a Groove

1. Decide on a mood or feeling for your groove.
2. Choose its tempo/speed.
3. Choose a low/mid/high sound.



If you will be using digital music-making software, you can access our demo PowerPoint [here](#). This demonstration uses Logic Pro, but we also recommend BandLab or Garage Band as good classroom softwares.

Writing the Low Sound Rhythm (Kick Drum)

This anchors the beat and must reference some of the strong beats in the pulse. Think about leaving some space/gaps as these will be filled in by the other parts. Try making it a 4-bar loop rather than 2-bar to avoid it feeling too repetitive.

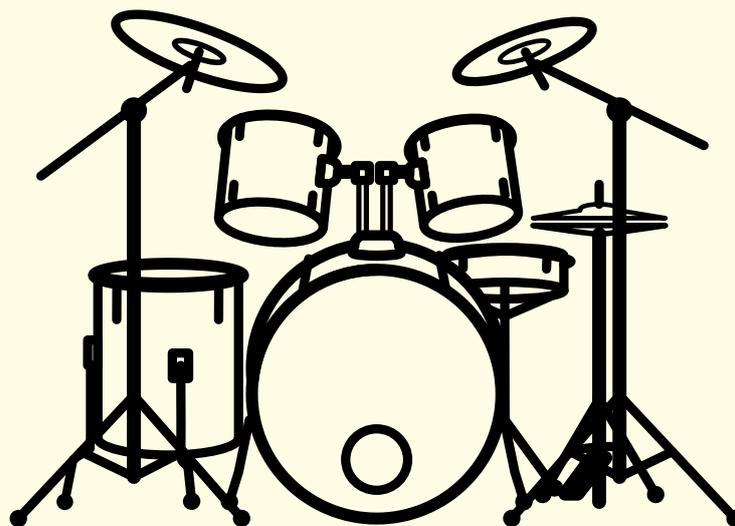
Writing the Mid Sound Rhythm (Clap & Snare)

Find the spaces in the low sound and put the notes in these gaps.

Think about it being a conversation between low and mid sounds.

Write the High Sound Rhythm (Hi-Hat)

This can be more busy than low and mid sounds.



You can then work through the following process with them to create a full backing track:

1. Write a Bass Line

Use the low part rhythm as a starting point. Keep the note choices simple and don't jump around too much.

2. Write Chords

Use the bass notes to inform you as to what the chord can be, then choose between major or minor for each prominent bass note. Select the instrument/sound for your chords.

3. Write a Melody

Whilst the bass line and chords are playing, find 3 or 4 notes which sound good (they may be made from the notes in the chords). Use these to write a simple and catchy melody. Select the instrument/sound for your melody.

4. Create a Structure

Think about the shape of the track. Which parts do you want to come in and how long for?

5. Extension Ideas

Add breaks to the beat. Think about the varying texture so that instruments are heard in different combinations. Write a second section.



Optional Extension for PSHE Classes

If you are not working through this Resource Pack with a music group, then you may wish to encourage your students to consider developing a different creative outcome to showcase what they have learned. This could be a poem, a drama piece, a collage, or a personal blog post. Feel free to choose any of the below prompts to take forward and develop with your students:

- Continue working on your poems, inspired by the lyrics taken from Dave's 'Selfish' and turn this into a finished piece of around 25-30 lines.
- Put the outline of a man on a blank piece of paper – now look through a collection of newspapers and magazines and tear out any images or words that you can use to create a collage filling in this outline that presents your dream vision for masculinity. What should this man be made-up from that might enable him to present a different ideal of masculinity for the future?
- Prepare a drama piece inspired by the closing exercise of session 3! Jay wants to apologise to Kate and explain what he felt initially when she told him that she was offended by the song lyrics, and how he feels now having felt about it now. How does Kate respond, and explain why she said what she did? Some of Jay and Kate's other friends are listening in on this conversation – how might they respond?
- Write a blog post that uses an informal tone, talking to other young people who are a similar age to you. Start by talking about how you felt towards masculinity at the start of this project. Then discuss what you have learnt over the previous weeks – has this changed your perspective on masculinity? What are your key takeaways for other young people – what do you recommend they go away and think about for themselves. Is there anything that you would like to go away and do, inspired by these sessions?

Project Conclusion

Think about having a final sharing event to wrap this project, where your students can showcase what they have created with one another and celebrate their hard work and learning over the previous weeks.

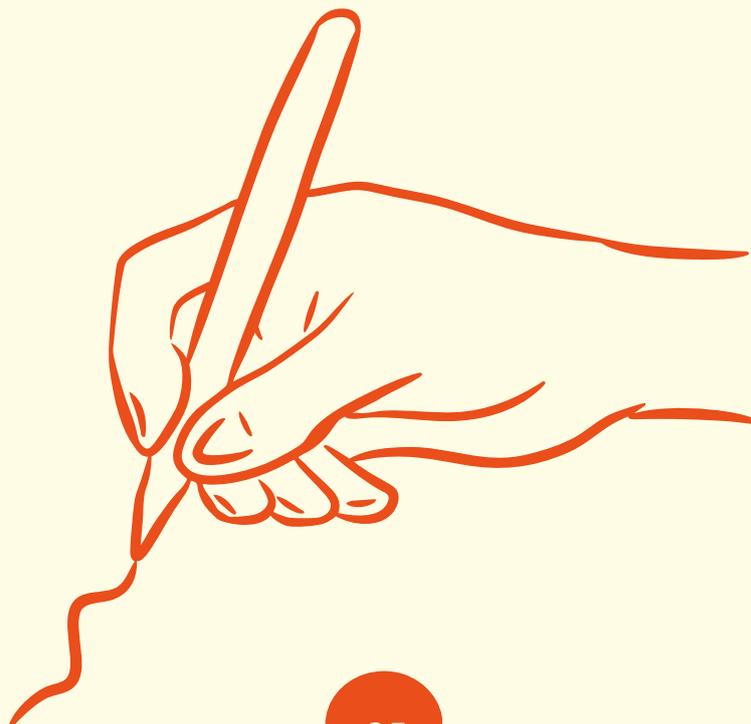
To bring this project to a close, it's important to return to how we began with a moment of private, personal reflection for your students.

Get them to look back at their pieces of paper from the very first session where they answered the following prompts; 'Other People Think I Am', 'I Think I Am', and 'I Would Like To Be'.

Encourage them to take a couple of minutes to think about whether anything has changed for them! Then ask them to bring this project to a close by finishing the following sentences for themselves on a piece of paper. You can choose to tell them to keep these private, or end by encouraging them to share these with one another:

We should all care about masculinity because...
Moving forward, I would like to think of masculinity as...

Whatever your students have created over the course of this project, we'd love it if you could share this with us through video/photos/writing extracts etc. so that we can help you celebrate their great work!



Appendix 1: National RSHE Curriculum Guidance

In 2025, the Department for Education updated the statutory guidance for Relationships, Sex, and Health Education (RSHE) in schools to include specific new requirements focused on promoting 'positive masculinity' and identifying 'positive male role models'.

Here is this updated section of the guidance in full:

“Pupils should have opportunities to develop positive conceptions of masculinity and femininity, including how to identify and learn from positive male role models. It is important for pupils to understand that most boys and young men are respectful to girls and young women and each other. Pupils may be exposed to online content which normalises harmful or violent sexual behaviours, which might include sexist and misogynistic influencers who normalise sexual harassment and abuse. Young people may be more vulnerable to this content when they have low self-esteem, are being bullied, or have other challenges in their lives. Teachers should encourage pupils to consider how this content may be harmful to both men and women, while avoiding stigmatising or perpetuating harmful stereotypes about boys, and avoiding directly signposting to specific content and content producers.”



Appendix 2: Support Services List

In line with the guidance of the PSHE Association 2021, we recommend that there are signposting of sources of support before, during and after sessions.

Please see an example list below:

NSPCC Helpline (children and young people):

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

Papyrus Helpline (support for young people struggling with suicidal feelings): www.Papyrus-uk.org.

Samaritans 24-hour helpline (general support): www.Samaritans.org.

SHORE Online (a safe space for teenagers worried about sexual behaviour): (<https://shorespace.org.uk/>)

Young Minds (mental health support for young people):

www.Youngminds.org.uk

With thanks to the below online resources, from which some of these exercises have been adapted and which we highly recommend:

Plan International, 'Exploring Positive Masculinity, Gender Stereotypes and Anti-Violence with Young People': [https://plan-uk.org/sites/default/files/2024-](https://plan-uk.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Plan%20International%20UK%20schools%20%26%20youth%20work%20toolkit.pdf)

[09/Plan%20International%20UK%20schools%20%26%20youth%20work%20toolkit.pdf](https://plan-uk.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Plan%20International%20UK%20schools%20%26%20youth%20work%20toolkit.pdf)

YouthLink Scotland, 'Imagine a Man Toolkit: Building positive masculinity with young people': <https://www.youthlink.scot/wp-content/uploads/NKBL-Imagine-A-Man-Toolkit.pdf>



Thank You!

If you have any questions about the content within this resource pack, please contact us on projects@nyjo.org.uk.

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