



Is Barbie a bad influence?

GETTING ORIENTED

The weekly passage talks about Barbie and issues related to body image. Here is some information that might be helpful to students less familiar with this topic.

Barbie

Barbie was created in the 1950s by Mrs. Ruth Handler. Mrs. Handler wanted to give her daughter an adult-looking doll she could play with and pretend to be “grown up” with. She convinced Mattel, a toy company, to make Barbie, and it became an instant success. Almost every girl in America wanted Barbie—her clothes, her house, her car, her friends. Because of this, Barbie influenced how girls see their bodies and future lives. Barbie represented what girls thought they should look like and be like.



Eating Disorders

An eating disorder occurs when a person’s eating habits cause them serious health problems. One type of eating disorder is called anorexia. This occurs when a person does not eat enough food to maintain a healthy weight. There are many reasons why a person might suffer from anorexia. However, often people become anorexic because they do not think they look enough like the models in advertisements or the actresses on TV. Some people fear that Barbie dolls might contribute to this problem in girls and women.



Body Dimensions

If Barbie were a real woman, her body measurements would be the following: 5 feet, 9 inches (height), 36 inches (bust), 18 inches (waist), and 33 inches (hips).

Compare this to the average American woman’s measurements: 5 feet, 4 inches (height), 37 inches (bust), 29 inches (waist), and 40 inches (hips).

Barbie does not represent the average American woman’s size. This unrealistic body shape has caused many people to criticize Barbie. They say that Barbie negatively influences the way girls see their bodies and leads them to develop eating disorders and low self-esteem.





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EVIDENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

	<i>Some may have this view:</i>	<i>But others may think:</i>
Toy Makers	Barbie has made a lot of money for one toy company, creating jobs and business in the United States and around the world. Toy makers may feel that, as long as people still want to buy Barbies, and children enjoy playing with them, they are making something good.	Other toy makers may think that Barbie does not represent the 21st century woman. Girls today can see women of all shapes and sizes succeed in different jobs. Some toy makers may feel that there should be new toys for new times and that toys should try to make positive change in the world.
Parents	Many parents probably played with a Barbie doll and might want their kids to play with the dolls they did, as a way to connect with each other. They may view Barbie as an affordable, popular toy and may feel that, if other children have it, their children should have one too.	Some parents argue that Barbie encourages girls to care more about their looks than their brains. They believe that, if they buy a Barbie doll for their child, the child will think being beautiful and happy means being extremely skinny and having the right clothing and accessories. Some parents are afraid that this could lead to more serious issues like low self-esteem or even eating disorders.
Girls	Many girls think that Barbie is a fun doll to play with. You can dress her in different outfits and play make-believe with her. Almost all girls know what a Barbie doll is. It is easy to play Barbie dolls with other girls without having to explain what to do. Girls may think Barbie is pretty and cool and want to look like her.	Some girls might want a doll that looks more like them and may feel bad about themselves when they play with Barbie. They may choose to play with other toys that make them feel good about themselves and happy about who they are.
Women Leaders	Women leaders might support Barbie because there are now Barbie dolls that have different jobs. There is Barbie the President, Barbie the Doctor, and Barbie the Computer Engineer. These dolls show girls that they can have many different jobs when they grow up.	Women leaders might not support Barbie dolls because they do not show the diversity of women in the working world. This gap in representation might convince girls that jobs like president, doctor, or computer engineer are only for girls who are tall, white, and blonde. They may worry that girls will learn to focus on their looks over what is inside.

Additional Information

- In a study, 81% of 8,000 moms who had daughters under the age of 10 said they were worried about the types of role models their little girls were exposed to.
- 90% of 3-10 year old girls in the U.S. own a Barbie doll.
- In 2016, Mattel introduced a range of new body types under the Barbie brand: "tall", "petite", and "curvy". The "curvy" doll's body shape is equal to a size 4 in clothing.

Is Barbie a Bad Role Model?

<https://www.fastcompany.com/40540998/barbies-17-new-skinny-dolls-are-not-the-role-models-girls-need>

About Barbie

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbie>

Research on Barbie and Body Image

<https://psmag.com/social-justice/academics-like-to-play-with-barbies-too-3898>



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ANNOTATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Features of Academic Writing: *Structure of expository writing*

Nearly all of the focus words in Word Generation units come from a list of words called the Academic Word List. These abstract words are often overlooked in vocabulary instruction, which can interfere with students' comprehension.

In addition to this unit's focus words, there are three other words from this list included in this passage. Some are taught in other Word Generation units. These are highlighted to the right:

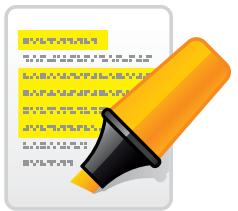
- isolated
- emphasis
- focus

Author and television personality Cindy Jackson loves Barbie. When she was a little girl, she thought her Barbie doll was beautiful and glamorous. As an adult, she decided to **undergo** surgery to look more like Barbie. Doctors made her lips and breasts larger and her waist, legs, and nose thinner.

Of course, Cindy Jackson is an **isolated** case. Many children love Barbie and other dolls like Bratz, but very few will go to such extremes to achieve the unrealistic body types they promote. Still, many adults worry about the **implications** of Barbie's body-type. When children role-play with Barbie, they often imagine themselves as Barbie. Some adults say that Barbie's thinness makes her a dangerous **role** model. It is rarely explained to young girls that Barbie's body is so unnatural that if she were real, she would not be able to lift her head and she would have to walk on all fours.

Adults also worry that Barbie's **emphasis** on glamorous looks encourages girls to **focus** on beauty instead of school, sports, and other interests. Focusing too much on appearance may hurt girls' self-esteem. A report from the Department of Health and Human Services found that 80% of girls in grades 3–6 have bad feelings about their bodies. Sometimes, feelings like these can lead to eating disorders.

Mattel, the company that makes Barbie, **denies** that the doll hurts girls' self-esteem. Instead, it claims that Barbie is a girl-**empowering** pioneer who is an inspiration to millions. Before Barbie, most dolls were babies or little girls, not women. The woman who created Barbie thought that giving girls dolls that looked like beautiful women would make them feel good about growing up. In 2014, a



Mattel design executive defended Barbie, saying that the doll was not the problem. She argued that it was the fault of parents and peers if a child had body image issues.

There are some reasons to think that Barbie could be a positive role model. Some Barbies are shown in strong roles, such as the Olympic Gymnast Barbie and the Barbie for President doll. Seeing a woman in these roles may encourage girls to set high goals. Also, Barbie's body has changed over time. In 1997, Mattel made Barbie's waist slightly thicker and her hips and breasts slightly smaller. The company said Barbie's new body would look better in new clothing styles.

If you were a mom or dad, would you buy a Barbie for your child?



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GENERATING WORDS

Word History – **empower**

The history of individual words can be very interesting. The word **empower** was first used in the 17th century. It meant “to invest with authority” or “to authorize.” Later, it came to have a more general definition simply meaning “to enable or to permit.”

The modern meaning of **empower** came about in the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement. It was used when talking about changing harmful laws that kept power away from African American people. The new laws would **empower** racial minorities.

The word became what we now call a “buzz” word, meaning people used it in some attachment to a popular idea, in this case, a political movement. It was such a known and successful word that the Women’s Movement took it up next in the search for ways to **empower** women.

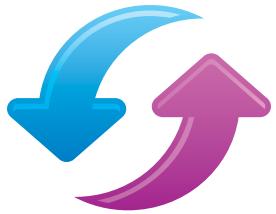
In the text, Mattel, the makers of Barbie, call the doll “a girl-**empowering** pioneer.” They are using the strength of the modern meaning of the word to suggest that Barbie is more than just a doll. She is a doll capable of making young women think in ways that will alter their feelings about themselves and what they are capable of doing in life.



Discuss with a partner what could **empower** people besides Barbie dolls. For example: Does education **empower** you? How?

With your partner, come up with some toys, characters, video games, or shows you think might **empower** kids and write them down below. Two examples are given for you. Discuss how each thing might be **empowering**.

- Legos
- Harry Potter
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



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DEVELOPING DISCUSSIONS

Survey Grid

The survey grid is a matrix you can use to poll one another on issues. You get to hear similar ideas several times, reinforcing your thinking and vocabulary.

Name of student	Do you think that Barbie dolls are bad roles models for children? Why?	Do you think that G.I. Joe and other army toys are bad for children? Why?	Do you think children should get to decide what kinds of toys and dolls they want to play with? Why?
sample	No. Kids aren't so dumb that they think Barbie is anything like a real person.	Yes. Because being a soldier is serious, hard, and dangerous, and kids shouldn't get the idea that it's fun.	No. They might think a toy gun is fun, but parents might want to teach them it's not fun.
Results	Yes: _____ No: _____ Neutral: _____	Yes: _____ No: _____ Neutral: _____	Yes: _____ No: _____ Neutral: _____

Step 1: Fill in each row on the survey grid by talking to one person at a time. Try to talk to as many people as possible or until you fill in all the empty rows. Paraphrase their responses. If they use a focus word, write it down in the box.

Step 2: Count how many students are for, against, or neutral. Write the totals in the bottom row.

Step 3: Write a sentence or two in the box to the right that explains what your survey showed. Here are a few sentence frames you can use:

- The results of my survey show that _____.
- The majority of the responses to my survey show _____ . The reasons they gave for this are _____.
- The results of my survey suggest that the majority of students are for/against _____. Reasons for this include _____.

Step 4: Report your findings to your classmates.