Lesson Plan

Struggle for Employment: Anti-Nepotism Rules in the Academy

Students will learn about the institutionalized discrimination of women scientists and their struggles for employment.

With long hours in the laboratory and observatory, scientists often found spouses at work. Such unions proved problematic in the careers of women scientists, however. Nepotism is the act of hiring an employee’s spouse or family member which can cause various perceived issues in the workplace. Throughout the 20th century, many universities and government agencies had anti-nepotism rules that prevented family members from working in the same department. These regulations were intended to remove bias and favoritism from the work place. For married couples working in the same field, this

Grade Level(s): 9-12
Subject(s): History, Physics, Astronomy

In-Class Time: 50 or 100 minutes
Prep Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials
- Photocopies of University of Chicago historical document (found in Supplemental Materials)
- Photocopies of Biographies Handout (found in Supplemental Materials)
- Photocopies of “Consequences of Nepotism” article (found in Supplemental Materials)

Objective

Introduction

With long hours in the laboratory and observatory, scientists often found spouses at work. Such unions proved problematic in the careers of women scientists, however. Nepotism is the act of hiring an employee’s spouse or family member which can cause various perceived issues in the workplace. Throughout the 20th century, many universities and government agencies had anti-nepotism rules that prevented family members from working in the same department. These regulations were intended to remove bias and favoritism from the work place. For married couples working in the same field, this

meant unemployment for one partner. The anti-nepotism rules most often discriminated against scientific wives. Astronomer Cecelia Payne-Gaposchkin and physicist Maria Goeppert Mayer both struggled to find employment and recognition because of their husbands’ careers. In this activity, students will read about these successful women and the institutionalized discrimination that complicated their careers.

### Instructions/Activities

#### Engage: 10 minutes

Most students will not be familiar with the idea of nepotism or anti-nepotism. Instead of telling students directly what this is, let them split into groups and read the employment offer from the University of Chicago (found in Supplemental Materials) to experience what anti-nepotism meant for many female scientists.

**What is the teacher doing?**

Have students form small reading groups and pass out the University of Chicago document to every student. Ask students to silently read the document. This should not take long (about 3 minutes).

**What are the students doing?**

Students should form small groups and then silently read the historical document from the University of Chicago.

After students are done reading the letter, have them write down a simple sentence explaining why they think it was a problem for both Dr. Stadtman and his wife to be hired. This will be revisited later at the end of the lesson plan and students can see if their hypothesis was correct.

**What are the students doing?**

Students should take a few minutes to silently think about the letter and then write a simple hypothesis about why the University of Chicago would not offer immediate positions for both husband and wife.

Have students discuss the letter and why they think that it would be a problem to hire both Dr. Stadtman and his wife. Have a few students share out ideas to the rest of the class.

**What are the students doing?**

Students should be talking about the letter and their hypothesis that they wrote down with their groups and thinking of ideas that they could share with the class.

#### Explore: 20-30 minutes

Students will now read through the stories of two women who faced difficulties because their husbands were also scientists and about why universities would choose to have anti-nepotism rules. Astronomer Cecelia Payne-Gaposchkin and physicist Maria Goeppert Mayer found it difficult to find paid employment and recognition for their research due to the anti-nepotism rules.

**What is the teacher doing?**

Make sure that each student has a copy of the Biographies Handout about the scientists and a copy of the “Consequences of Nepotism” article. If desired, also hand out the Discussion Questions. Ask that everyone silently read through the documents to understand this situation from both points of view.

**What are the students doing?**

Students should read through the documents and think about their own stance on anti-nepotism rules. They should be taking notes and answering any Discussion Questions.

#### Explain: approx. 20-50 minutes

Students will have the opportunity to participate in a debate about the idea of universities hiring married women when their husbands are also scientists working in the same department. Students can...
choose to be on the team siding with the university (against hiring married women) or on the team against anti-nepotism laws. Depending on class size, students may also choose to be a part of the audience/jury. These students can ask questions of both teams and will decide the outcome at the end of the debate. The debate can be shorter or longer to fit the time available. A longer debate could be scheduled for a class period the day after the lesson while a shorter debate could use the remaining time in the current class period.

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<td>Have students pick a team for the debate from the following options (you may also wish to assign teams):</td>
<td>Students should be choosing the team that they want to be a part of when participating in the debate. Students should also decide which roles they will be responsible for within this team and should prepare their speaking points for these roles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• For anti-nepotism laws</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Against anti-nepotism laws</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Jury/audience</td>
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<td>Conduct the debate by calling on the teams to give their initial arguments. Once both arguments have been heard, ask for a rebuttal from both teams. At the end of the debate, ask for questions from the audience. After all questions have been answered, ask the audience to vote on the outcome of the debate.</td>
<td>Students should be participating in the debate with their talking points when called upon. Students in the audience should be writing down questions to ask later while listening to the debate.</td>
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**Elaborate: included in Explain**

The elaborate portion of this lesson is a time for the teacher to explain any unclear points that are brought up. The teacher should be aware of which topics are discussed during the debate and should address these concerns at the end of the debate, during the question and answer portion, if necessary.

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<td>The teacher should be keeping track of possible topics that need to be addressed during the debate process. The teacher can also answer questions that other students are unable to answer. If there are few questions from the audience after the debate, the teacher can ask questions to prompt conversation.</td>
<td>Asking questions about any unclear topics and looking to their teacher for guidance when they do not know the answer to a question.</td>
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**Evaluate:**

The most obvious way to evaluate students during the debate is to create an evaluation based on participation. You could also evaluate students on their answers to the Discussion Questions. Other means of evaluating student learning could be through a homework assignment. The following are some suggestions that could be used as a homework assignment after the debate:

- Write a letter to the university physics department explaining how your employment/your wife’s employment would benefit the department or write a letter to an applicant explaining why your department should not hire spouses of current employees
- Have students create a poster urging universities and the government to change anti-nepotism laws. This poster should include some facts and perhaps an artistic illustration supporting the end of anti-nepotism stances.
### Required/Recommended Reading and Resources


### Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions can be found as a Handout with a corresponding Answer Key in the Supplemental Materials to this lesson plan.

1. How did the scientist develop an interest in science? What is her educational background?
2. Did her family and teachers encourage or discourage her interests?
3. How did the scientist’s career change after marriage?
4. What kind of discrimination did she face in the workplace?
5. What sacrifices did the scientist make for her career? For her family?
6. If the scientist was unable to find employment in her desired field, what other jobs did she take?
7. Did the scientist have role models or mentors?
8. What surprised you most about these stories?

### Further Reading and Additional Resources


### Extensions

Some possible extensions are provided in the form of possible homework assignments in the Evaluate section of this lesson.

### Common Core Standards

### Speaking & Listening

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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1</td>
<td>Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4</td>
<td>Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1</td>
<td>Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4</td>
<td>Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.</td>
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### History/Social Studies

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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1</td>
<td>Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2</td>
<td>Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.</td>
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<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3</td>
<td>Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.</td>
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<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8</td>
<td>Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.</td>
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<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9</td>
<td>Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1</td>
<td>Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2</td>
<td>Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7</td>
<td>Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8</td>
<td>Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9</td>
<td>Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.</td>
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Next Generation Science Standards


N/A