What is beauty?

a) Where do we get our images of beauty?

b) Are the images we see stereotypes or are they fair representations of all women?

c) Susie Orbach wrote a book in 1978 called Fat is a Feminist Issue, and argued that “the beauty and variety of the female form are judged unacceptable, and instead thinness is promoted for profit and control”. What do you think she meant by this and why do you think the issue still exists for women today?

Shakespeare wrote 788 male characters and 141 female characters. Discuss the representation of women in theatre in light of this fact and the following five quotes, which are taken from reviews of Phyllida Lloyd's all-female production of Julius Caesar at the Donmar Warehouse.

a) Why do you think Phyllida Lloyd chose to stage an all-female production of this play? Do you think there should be more productions like this?

b) Why do you think there are more opportunities for men than women in theatre?

c) What difference does it make to a production whether the cast is male, female or mixed?

“Imagine you are trained and capable of playing Beethoven's piano concertos but you are forbidden to perform them because you are a woman… People have come up with the most ridiculous excuses for why women aren’t on stage more: "Women can’t do the physical stuff" or, "Women aren’t in touch with aggression" - these attitudes should be exposed for the rubbish that they are.”

The Times 29/12/12, Harriet Walter

“Al-female cast makes past interpretations look cissy”. Harriet Walter as Brutus is “pale, handsomely chiselled, androgynous and tragic, her thoughtful bright dangerous eyes command every scene… If this extraordinary human being gets shoved back full-time into frocks it will be a shocking crime against theatre. Harriet Walter could play Hamlet, Iago, Leontes, Richard III, Macbeth, in a mixed cast, without jarring.”

The Times 05/12/12, Libby Purvis

“Women make up just 35% of actors, 17% of theatre writers, 23% of theatre directors and 9% of film directors in the UK. This production of Julius Caesar is an exciting attempt by director Phyllida Lloyd to redress that imbalance.”

The Independent 04/12/12, Emily Jupp

“Women can’t do the physical stuff” or, “Women aren’t in touch with aggression” - these attitudes should be exposed for the rubbish that they are.”

The Times 29/12/12, Harriet Walter

“Who would have guessed that the London production currently boasting the greatest testosterone also happens not to have a single man in its cast?”

The International Herald Tribune 11/12/12

Since 1989 (that's around 300 monthly issues), only nine black women have been featured on the cover of US Vogue.

a) Why do you think there are fewer women of ethnic minorities in media?

b) How you think this might make young women feel about themselves?

c) What responsibility do we have? How can we campaign for better representation, which reflects the diversity of women?
Research in the past has divided behaviours into gender-specific categories. Reflect on the list below. Do you agree that these behaviours are typically ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’?

This research extract is taken from Coleman 2002: 100, quoting the Bem Sex-Role Inventory 1974, p.157

Have a look at the selection of toys in this catalogue:

a) What careers/roles are these toys preparing girls and boys for?
b) How might looking at this catalogue affect children’s view of themselves?

Discuss the role of women in religion in light of the following scriptural quotes and your own knowledge of different faiths.

“Everyday Sexism’, a Twitter campaign “documenting experiences of sexism, harassment and assault to show how bad the problem is and show solidarity”, now has over 170,000 followers. @everydaysexism

“Petition: Lucy Anne Holmes, who started the ‘No More Page 3’ petition on change.org “because boobs aren’t news”, now has over 200,000 signatures. www.change.org/lucy-anne-holmes-no-more-page-3

“Choose an issue that you have heard about today and write your own tweet about it, in no more than 140 characters. We will tweet your responses after the conference.”