Unconscious bias in the primary classroom

While you're waiting, write down the first name of ten children that are most memorable as your 'best' students throughout your teaching career.

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Read, make notes and prepare for a short quiz!

A builder, leaning out of the van, shouts "nice legs" to a nurse passing by. The same nurse arrives at work, and casually mentions this to a senior doctor. The doctor said, "I'd never say that". The doctor has two grown up children who are 22 and 30. They get on very well. One is a Sergeant in the Army; the other is training to be a beauty therapist. The doctor divorced last year and is currently dating someone else.

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		True ?	False ?
1	The builder was driving a van		
2	The van was travelling quicker than the nurse		
3	There was at least one man in the van		
4	Not every man mentioned in the passage would shout 'nice legs'		
5	The doctor and his wife are no longer married		
6	The doctor has a new girlfriend		
7	The doctor's son is in the army		
8	The youngest child is training to be a beauty therapist		
9	At some point in the text a man spoke to a woman		
10	A woman was shouted at		

Unconscious bias is a *wonderful* thing

As humans, we often make instinctive decisions about people

Race   Age   Gender

Disability

Our brains are hard-wired to rapidly categorise people instinctively, we use obvious characteristics to do this.

Accent

Job title

Education   Weight   Religion

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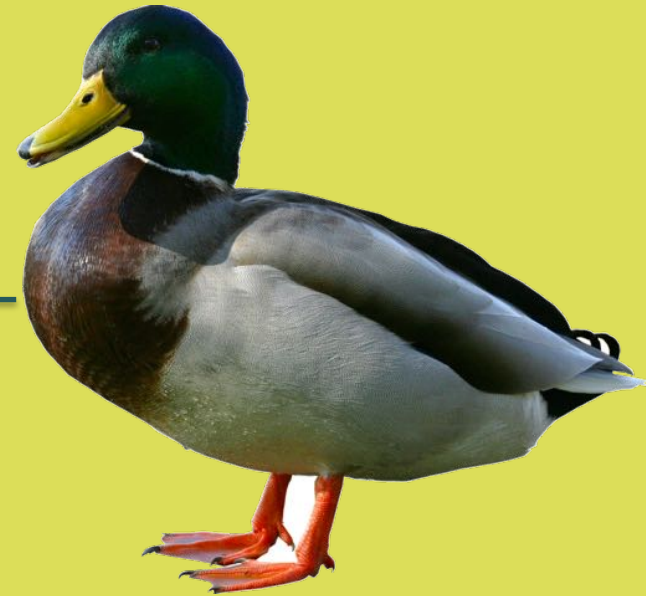
Unconscious bias – it just might save your life!

Our unconscious bias is an automatic decision making process – it is a 'danger detector'

Our brains are bombarded with millions of pieces of sensory data ever second – it cannot possibly process them all, so we make quick assumptions

Duck! It's better to be safe than sorry.

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Social categorisation

People form categories with which to prejudge others and other groups of people based on their prior experiences with a group, but also from what they have seen and heard, much of which they will absorbed unconsciously during the course of their lives.

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Unconscious bias is powerful stuff!
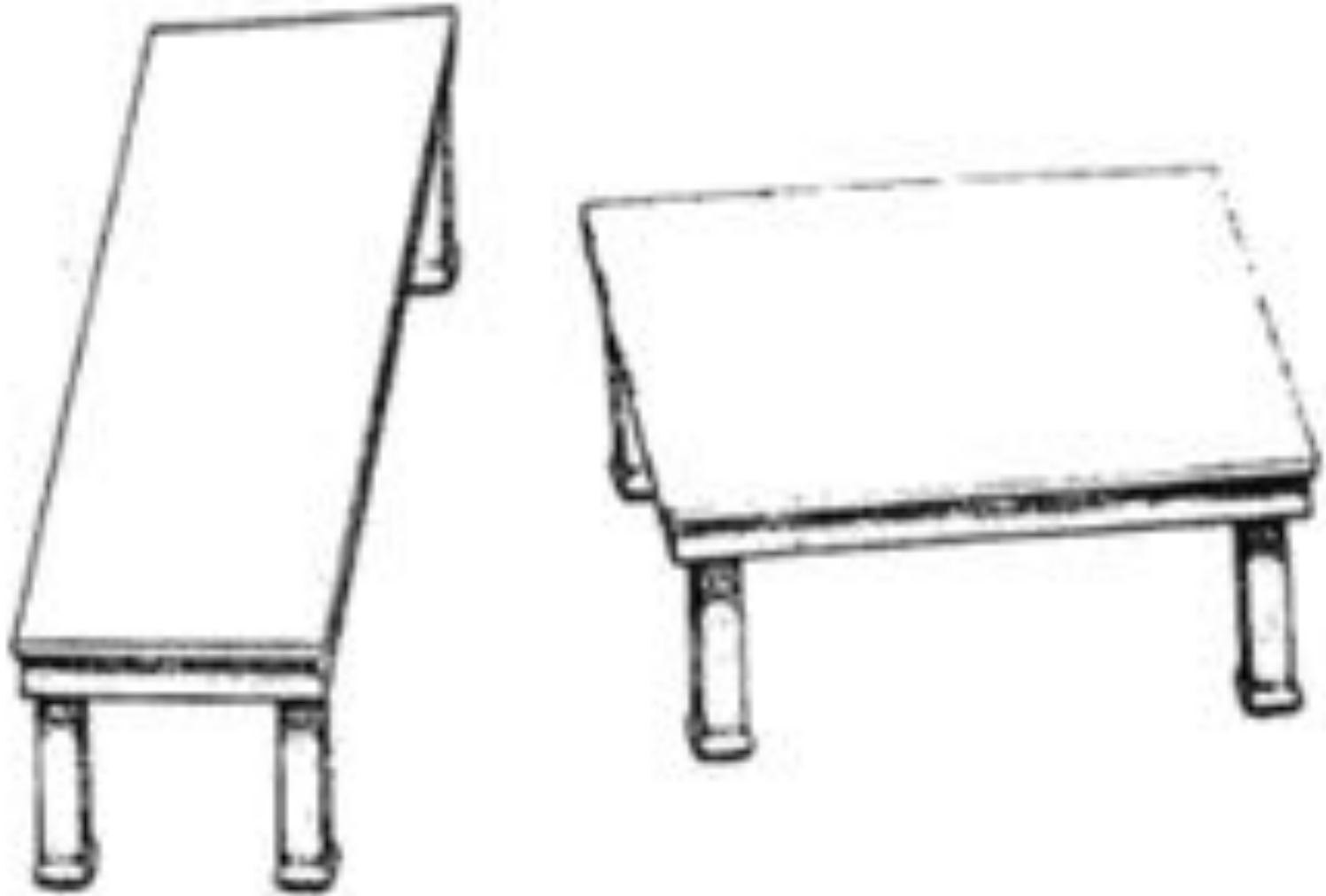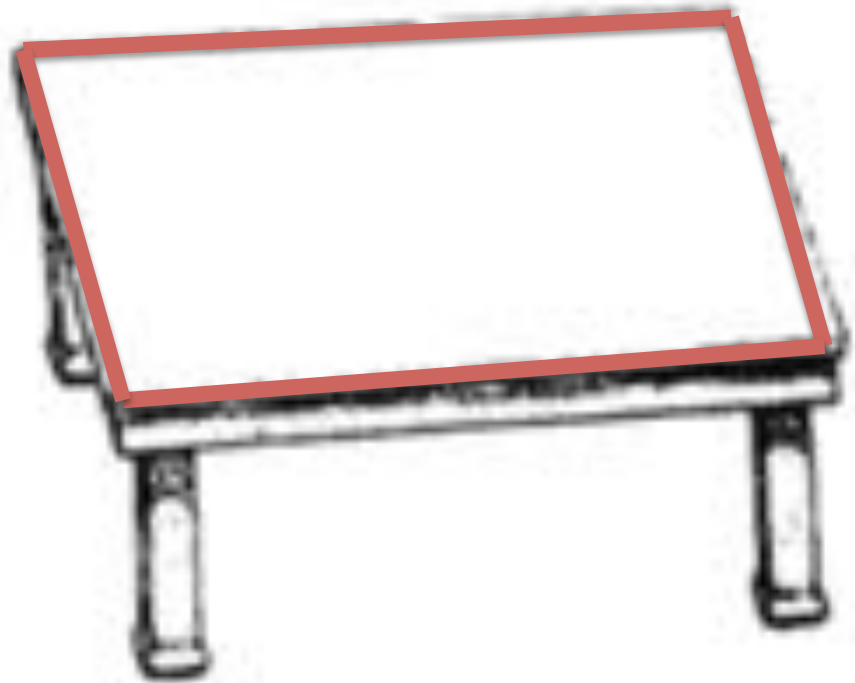
So far…

- We all have unconscious biases.
- They are important, they keep us alive.
- They are difficult to shake (even when we know about them).
- Our biases of other people are formed through social categorisation.

And now for something completely different...

Boys are 4 times more likely than girls to study physics at A-Level.

On average, men earn 23.2% more than women.

87% of the STEM workforce is male.

12% of KS3 girls aspire to be a scientist when they are older.
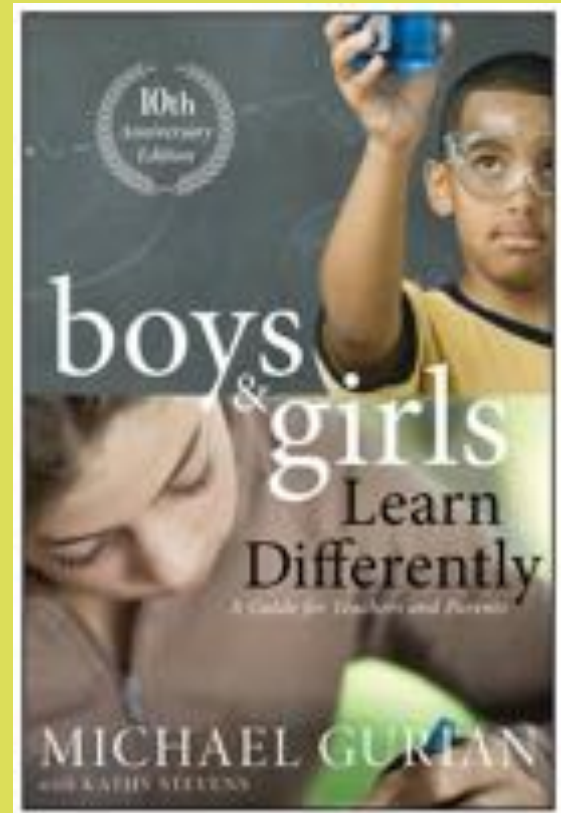
Girls outperform boys in almost all subjects at GSCE.

Girls who study Physics A-Level achieved better A*- C grades than boys.

Do any of these facts **interest**, **worry**, **concern** or **surprise** you?

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Inequality on an enormous scale, but where does it come from?

Male and female brains

Male and female brains

Researchers analysed over 1400 MRI brain scans to look at similarities and differences in structure.

"Our results demonstrate that regardless of the cause of observed sex/gender differences in brain and behaviour (nature or nurture), human brains cannot be categorized into two distinct classes: male brain/female brain"

Joel et al.,(2015), PNAS, 112 (50) 15468 -15473

Wellcome Images

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There are greater differences within genders than between genders.

So where else might this gender inequality come from?

Cognitive social learning theory – psychological gender differences are a result of females and males receiving different rewards, punishments, people's tendency to imitate same-gender models.

Perhaps the issue is rooted in society and incorporated into our unconscious biases!

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Boys and Girls

Not a challenge…

5 words to describe a stereotypical boy / girl.

5 words to describe a stereotypically male / female career.

Magnetic Girls Talk

Compliment your National Literacy range with these favourite Girls words

These CHUNKY magnets make learning FUN and encourage reading through PLAY!

clothes	hairband	heart	love	sparkle
perfume	beads	necklace	furry	lipstick
ribbon	handbag	wand	glitter	fairies
fluff	candy	flowers	wings	sherbet
bubbles	sweets	pink	make-up	skipping
magic	dancing	ballet	bunnies	rainbow
ladybird	lemonade	stars	sky	shoes
chocolate	doll	party	secret	diary	hair
jewels	princess	queen	tiara	ice-cream
teddy	music	sunshine	birds	butterfly
sugar	angel	diamond	cooking	friends

www.fridgemagic.com

Magnetic Boys Talk

Compliment your National Literacy range with these favourite Boys words

These CHUNKY magnets make learning FUN and encourage reading through PLAY!

boots	glue	monster	scary	bones
racing	moon	helicopter	aeroplane
tractor	money	lorry	wizard	conkers
frogs	sticks	mud	dirt	spiders	snails
stones	bubbles	sweets	flags	magic
pond	string	grass	rugby	bug	dogs
caterpillar	cobweb	worms	dinosaur
dragon	bike	scooter	forest	treasure
climbing	swinging	skeleton	running
ghost	trees	swimming	lawnmower
treehouse	blue	football	chocolate	car

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girls clothes
in this seasons colours (and of course pink)

12 invitations · 12 thank you cards
Colour-in Party Invites
for Boys
24 postcards to colour and send

12 invitations · 12 thank you cards
Colour-in Party Invites
for G...

Mens Interests   Mens

boys' clothes
suitable for the fussiest little monkeys

BOYS' RULES
NO GIRLS ALLOWED
PLAY GAMES
use your imagination
CLIMB BE BRAVE
TREES BUILD A FORT
HUNT FOR TREASURE
TELL JOKES HAVE
FUN
GET DIRTY
ADVENTURES

GIRLS' RULES
no boys allowed
dance like a ballerina
SING SONGS
PLAY DRESS UP
PAINT Believe in Fairies
YOUR bake cupcakes
NAILS DREAM BIG
PLAY PRETEND
Read Fairy Tales HAVE TEA
LAUGH OFTEN PARTIES

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A few shocking?! findings...

- On average, teachers give boys more time than girls to answer questions in class.
- Feedback given to girls about their work is usually focussed on presentation, feedback to boys is focused on content and how to improve.
- Boys are more likely than girls to raise their hands in class than girls.
- White males tend to get more attention from the teacher than other groups.
- When teachers are asked to remember their 'best' students, the answers are overwhelmingly males.

Sadker & Sadker, 2009

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In the classroom, have you ever heard?

"He's a typical boy writer."

"What a pretty dress you're wearing today Sophie."

"I need two strong lads to help me carry these books."

"OK guys, pens down."

"You're being very kind there Emily."

"Don't be such a girl Josh."

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A note on gendered language

Gendered words in titles:
Chairman,
Fireman,
Policeman,
Postman,
Cleaning lady,
Dinner lady.

The generic 'he'.

'Man' - used to mean humankind.

'Man' - as a verb, a 'manned' mission.

'Guys'

Our use of gendered language reinforces the stereotypes which are inherent in our unconscious biases – the subtle languages choices we make in our classes are very important!

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What can we do about it?

In your next scheme of work
- Include examples of males and females as role models.
- Embed diversity into all schemes of work.
- Choose texts and examples that are non-gendered.

During your next lesson
- Count the number of boys and girls you ask questions to.
- Use non-gendered language.
- Provide answering time to both boys and girls.

As a subject leader or department
- Provide literature that does not promote one gender over another.
- Provide access to role models: male and female.
- Instil a culture of equity and equality across a department.

Across the school
- Challenge gender stereotyping.
- Displays should be used to counter gender bias.
- Challenge sexist language (with children and staff)

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What are you going to do about it?

In Monday's lesson?

In your next scheme
of work?

Across your Key
Stage?

Across the school?

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A closing thought... didn't we fix this in the ~~60s 70s 80s 90 00s~~?

This is a huge societal issue and cannot be solved by the educational system alone. As teachers we have a responsibility to provide the best opportunities for the young people we teach, regardless of gender. Knowledge (and acceptance) of our unconscious biases and breaking down social stereotypes will help our children realise the full potential that they posses regardless of gender.

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Further reading:

This presentation - thinkphysics.org/pstt2016

Sadker and Sadker – Still Failing at Fairness

Cordelia Fine – Delusions of Gender

IOP – Opening Doors

Test your unconscious bias - https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/

Google's take on unconscious bias - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW5s_-Nl3JE

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