Problem SOLVED

Where the Girls Are--

It’s Not Where the Jobs Are

Includes 2 Free Girls’ STEM Motivational Posters

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You hear it in the media all the time: the best jobs are STEM jobs. Over and over, we’re told that for the long haul, STEM jobs will pay the best and be around the longest. Sounds like a slam-dunk, doesn’t it? If you want a stable, higher paying job, get thyself to a science, technology, engineering or math class ASAP. And lots of students are doing just that. So what’s the problem? The problem is that those students are mainly boys.

Apparently, girls and STEM go together like oil and water. It’s easy to see why. Culturally, we’ve always had a notion that “girl brains” can’t readily master big old math, science, tech and engineering concepts. Take a quick look around, and you can see that the world for girls can easily be bright pink and princess-y, and mostly made out of things like jewelry, clothes, makeup, dating and dieting. Society just doesn’t seem as interested in producing a Sally Ride as it is in producing a Kendall Jenner. Ouch.

So, what is a teacher to do when faced with a female student who would rather focus on the makeup on her face instead of the makeup of outer space? You can take the direct approach and confront the bias directly, but you may have already discovered that can backfire. The student can end up more entrenched than she was before. You may have learned the hard way that directly confronting a female student’s belief that STEM subjects are too difficult, too boring or too irrelevant, produces pretty much the same result as trying to change an adult’s religion or politics. The outcome tends to be worse than if you had simply done nothing at all. With that caveat in mind, let me share with
you some indirect approaches that can chip away at the lack of interest in STEM subjects shown by many female students.

Use Humor

It can be tough to compete with Revlon and Cover Girl when you’re armed with only equations or test tubes. Compensate with humor. Silly and funny approaches cut through the resistance faster than just words, and these methods are memorable too. To get you started, go to our website to https://www.youthchg.com/teacher-professional-development-resources/ to pick up the printable version of two of my girls’ STEM motivation posters. They are pictured here, but if you go to the link, you can view them in larger size, along with dozens of other powerhouse motivational STEM posters for girls.

Re-Brand

When you think of math or science whizzes, the first thing that comes to mind probably isn’t girls. Time to re-brand. Have girls research prominent female scientists, mathematicians, astronauts, architects and tech geeks. Make sure each girl notices the many benefits of being a successful female in a STEM field, but also carefully ensure that she focuses on the advantages that are uniquely relevant to her. So, if a girl craves excitement, adventure, high pay, power and prominence, that’s the STEM job benefits you help her find and examine. You are re-branding in two ways. First, you are creating
the concept that females can be incredibly successful and competent in STEM careers. Second, you are practically marketing STEM jobs much in the way that Revlon and Cover Girl make their offerings so irresistible.

Ride the Tide

Are you frustrated with girls who are totally obsessed with boys, clothes and social success? Use what the girls already care about to market STEM to them. For example, for girls who think that school exists solely for dating purposes, you can help them discover that a girl can stand out in heavily male STEM classes. For girls who love to have an excuse to change into yet another outfit, maybe she’d look great in a lab coat or in coordinated medical scrubs. Rather than fight the tide, use it to get the girl where you want her to go.

A Dose of Reality

Propel your girls into the future where many of today’s jobs won’t exist. Help your girls identify last-century “female” jobs that are no more-- jobs like telephone operator, typist and stenographer. Next, help the girls to research which jobs are likely to be around longer than those long-gone examples. They will quickly discover that STEM careers are the way to go. Once they make that discovery, ask them if they would rather choose careers that could disappear and leave them jobless, or to choose careers that are not only going to go the distance, but pay better too. Another great activity: Have them research the pay of various STEM jobs and have play money ready to convey exactly how lucrative a STEM job can be. If necessary, help your girls realize how much makeup and clothes all that money can buy.

Girl Power

There has been a bit of a “girl power” movement starting and you can jump on board. Create an up swell of interest and ramp up “girl pride.” Surround your students with posters, signs, screen savers, door hangers and other reminders that science, tech, engineering and math can be “STEM Powered by Girls.” You can have students create these items and they can even make humorous creations with funny catch phrases like “Silly Boys, STEM is for Girls.” See dozens of additional examples on our website here: http://www.youthchq.com/posters-for-girls/.

So, resolve today to bedazzle STEM in glitter and turn it bright girlie pink. With a little luck, maybe you’ll transform America’s Next Model into America’s next Amelia Earhardt.
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