



## Lesson Plan: Bitter Memories

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**Duration:** Scenarios USA strongly recommends two class periods for this lesson.

**Instructional Goal:** Students will examine their attitudes towards traditional gender norms and reflect on their own definitions of masculinity; with a particular focus on gender-based violence.

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- Explore the concept of masculinity
- Identify and explain the characteristics of gender-based violence (also known as Violence Against Women)
- Analyze themes in a short film and write original dialogue to complement the final scenes of a film
- Avoid making sexist, racist and homophobic comments

### Materials

- Scenarios USA DVD *Bitter Memories*
- Writing journals, student notebooks, or paper
- Definitions and hotlines **Handout for Students**

### Procedure

**An important note to teachers:** Thank you for choosing to show *Bitter Memories* to your students. This film deals with a question critical to today's youth: what's the real deal about masculinity? In order to address this question, this film also contains brief scenes of verbal abuse and threatened physical abuse, as well as the sounds of physical abuse. This is powerful content and may evoke strong emotional reactions in some of your students.

Before you show this film, please review your school's and your state's **reporting protocol** on how to handle issues involving gender-based violence, intimate partner violence and child abuse. You may wish to alert your school counselor or guidance office that you are screening this film in the event that a student approaches you for help. You may also want to invite the school counselor to the screening. *Remember, you may be the trusted adult a student in crisis may reach out to.*

### Activity 1: Introduce and watch the Scenarios USA film *Bitter Memories* (16 minutes)

The goal of this activity is to have students watch a short film about gender-based violence. Introduce the film and also prepare students for the violence that is portrayed in the film since some students may have an emotional reaction. When you prepare them, do not explicitly disclose the

story line. Have a plan for what to do if a student becomes visibly upset.

### **Suggested language**

“*Bitter Memories* is a short film written by a 16-year old girl from Texas and made by Scenarios USA, which is an organization that produces films written by teenagers. *Bitter Memories* is a story about a character named Rob, a young man who grows up watching his father abuse his mother. One night, jealousy brings Rob face to face with his own violent tendencies toward women and as a result he confronts his father’s ideas about masculinity. As you watch this film, you have permission to look away. I also suggest that if the content becomes difficult to watch that that is a signal for you to start writing in your journals (or notebooks) about what you are thinking and feeling. After the film we will have time for questions, discussion and reflection.”

- Play the film for the students without interruptions

### **Activity 2: Students respond privately to the film (5-7 minutes)**

The goal of this activity is to give students an opportunity to write down, process and possibly share their personal reflections about the themes presented in the film.

- Give the students 2-3 minutes of silence to write down, in their journals or notebooks, their initial responses to the film. Tell them they can write whatever comes to mind, and remind them that this response is private unless they choose to share with the class.
- Open question to class: Does anyone want to share their thoughts about the film or the characters in the film?
- Invite a few students to offer their reflections. Peers may give their feedback on others’ reflections if their feedback is positive and respectful.

### **Activity 3: General discussion (5 minutes)**

Explain to students they will watch the entire film again, to discuss individual scenes. Before that, however, you will go over some general first impressions as a class.

- Did you think *Bitter Memories* was an interesting film? Why or why not?
- Do you think the actors did a good job? Why or why not?
- What was the writer of this movie trying to tell us? About what? Was the writer successful? Why or why not?

### **Activity 4: Breakfast (10 minutes)**

Students will compare and contrast the place where the film is set to their own place. Show the breakfast scene again (starts at 1:05), until where Rob leaves home to go to school. Write the following column on the board:

		<b>Rob</b>	<b>Me</b>
Same	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
Different	1.		
	2.		
	3.		

Ask students to think of at least 3 things that are the same between Rob's morning routine and their own and at least three things that are different (as a class or individually).

Example:

		<b>Rob</b>	<b>Me</b>
Same	1.	Has a hard time getting ready for school!	I also can't get my act together in the morning
	2.	Has breakfast at home	I have my breakfast at home
	3.	Fights with his mom	I fight with my mom sometimes
Different	1.	Eats a burrito!	I eat pancakes or cereal
	2.	Lives in a warm place	It is FREEZING here
	3.	Has no brothers or sisters	I have a big family

All students should be able to identify that although this film was written and made in Texas, there are elements in Rob's life we can relate to, if we look past the details of "place" or "context". Mariella's story about Rob and his attitudes towards masculinity are relevant and important to us, whether we are from Texas or not.

### **Activity 5: Miniskirts (10 minutes)**

Show the next part of the film until Rob and Ashley have had their conversation about how she dresses. Tell the students they will explore the two conversations about miniskirts in more detail.

- Do you recognize the conversation between Rob and his friends about miniskirts from things you've heard at school?
- Do you think they would have had that conversation in front of girls? Why or why not?
- How would this conversation have made any girls feel? Why?
- Why do you think some boys talk about this stuff with their friends? What are they trying to prove to their friends and to themselves?
- Why does Ashley's miniskirt bother Rob?
- Why does Ashley not take Rob seriously?
- How could Rob express his concerns to Ashley in a less controlling way?
- How could Ashley respond to Rob in a more serious way?

Explain to students that control is often part of an abusive relationship. Telling someone what to wear is a form of control. If Rob is unhappy with something Ashley is doing, he needs to express himself in a way that shows he considers her to be his equal, and not as someone who has more power than she does.

### Activity 6: More Control and Power (10 minutes)

Write the words Power and Control on the board. Tell the students they are going to watch a few scenes from *Bitter Memories* again, but this time they will note all the ways the father, Alberto, exerts power and control over his family. Continue showing the film until the moment Alberto grabs Rob's mother by her wrist.

When going over the students' answers, ensure they include:

- Demeaning/ insulting Rob by calling him a *niñita* (little girl)
- Financial control/ handing Rob money
- Pressuring Rob to "score" ("don't come home too soon")
- Threat of violence (raised fist)
- Actual violence

Ask students why calling Rob a *niñita* is intended as an insult (Alberto is undermining Rob's perceived masculinity). Ask students why they think Alberto behaves in such a controlling way towards his family members. Guide students towards the understanding that some men feel pressured to exert control over others to show they are dominant, and therefore "real men."

### Activity 7: Rewind and rewrite (10 minutes)

Ask students to rewrite the scene before Rob leaves for the party, with at least five lines for Rob and five lines for Alberto. The rewritten scene should show Alberto supporting his son emotionally (with questions about and concern for his wellbeing); and supporting him financially without being controlling (being matter of fact about giving him money, rather than patronizing Rob). Invite students to act out their rewritten scenes and give each other feedback.

Ask students if they think a father who does not act in a controlling way but in a supportive way is still a father. Is a supportive father still a "real man?"

### Activity 8: Reflections (5 minutes)

Review the flashback scene where Rob is staring at his reflection and that of his younger self. Discuss the scene with your students:

- What was the writer, Mariella, trying to say with this scene?
- Do you think this scene is effective or interesting? Why or why not?
- What do you think Rob is feeling and/or thinking during this scene? Who or what is he thinking about? (Invite students to write their answers in their journals if they don't want to share).
- Does Rob respect his father?
- Does Rob want to be like his father? How do you know?
- To what extent do Rob and his father have the same attitudes about masculinity?
- To what extent are their attitudes different?
- What do you think Ashley is feeling and/or thinking at this time? (Invite students to write their answers in their journals if they don't want to share).

### Activity 9: The Apology (20-30 minutes)

For this pair of activities, students will use the film as a springboard to their own writing. The filmmaker chose to leave the film open-ended. This presents the opportunity – and the

responsibility – for the viewer to fill in the blanks. The goal of this activity is to have students reflect on the previous class discussion about their concepts of masculinity and what it means to be a “real man” and to work in groups to write original dialogue to complement the final scenes of the film. Students will propose possible additional scenes to the film in groups.

- Begin by asking students if they liked the ending. Why or why not? Explain that perhaps the filmmaker left the decision to us, and therefore makes us a part of the film.
- Divide the students into groups of 3-4. Tell students that they will write their own ending for the film. Each group must write a script for the thoughts going through Rob and Ashley during the last moments of the film (from “You gotta do something, man” to the end.)
- Have groups read their scripts. If possible or if you like you can have them do this while the final scene of the film is being played.
- After each group has read their ending, begin a discussion where each group explains why they choose their ending. Groups must back up their decision with information gleaned from what we know about the characters, the characters’ body language, what we know about Rob’s background *and* explain why he would make that decision (encourage them to use their notes from the previous class discussion). With more time, students can debate what Ashley should do.

**Activity 10: Consolidation writing (Total time 7-10 min)**

The goal of this activity is to have students reflect and the various themes and ideas raised in the film and the class discussion (no more than 1 page). Write the following journaling prompt on the board and have students respond in writing in their journals.

- What do you think a “real man” is? Does a “real man” have to be dominant and controlling in his relationships with others?

## HANDOUT

### DEFINITIONS

**Intimate partner violence:** violence (physical assault or verbal threats) by intimates (current or former spouses, girlfriends, or boyfriends) *Source: US Dept. of Justice*

**Child abuse:** violent crimes (plus non-forcible sex offenses) committed against juveniles *Source: US Dept. of Justice*

**Gender-based violence/ Violence Against Women:** any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. *Source: United Nations*

### HOTLINES

CDC AIDS Info	(800) 342-2437
Child Find	(800) 426-5678
GLBT National Youth Talkline	(800) 246-7743
National Drug Abuse Hotline	(800) 662-4357
National Hotline for Missing & Exploited Children	(800) 843-5678
National Runaway Hotline	(800) 621-4000
National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline	(866) 331-9474
National Teen Dating Violence Hotline	(866) 331-9474
Rape Abuse and Incest National Network Hotline	(800) 656-HOPE
Self Injury Hotline	(800) DONTCUT
Trevor Hotline	(866) 488-7386
United Way Help Line	(800) 411-UWAY
Young MalesTown Parent/Teen	(800) 448-3000
Youth Crisis Hotline	(800) 448-4663