

# The Simpsons

“Girls Just Wanna Have Sums” (Season 17, episode 19)



*“No one is better than anyone else and everyone is the best at everything”  
– Seymour Skinner.*

*Elementary*



*Intermediate*



*Advanced*



**Teacher's File**

## 0. Technical summary

Title: “Girls Just Want to Have Sums”

Production code: HABF12.

Original air date: April 30, 2006.

Released on DVD: December 2014.

Season: 17.

Episode: 19.

Number: 375.

Duration: 21’04”.

Written by: Matt Selman.

Directed by: Nancy Kruse.

Executive producer: Al Jean.

Guest: Frances MacDormand (Mélanie Upfoot)

Theme and key-words : Education ; gender diversity ; gender stereotypes ; school ; teaching ; parody ; sexism ; feminism

Suggested thesis subject: – Are girls really weaker than boys at math and the hard sciences?  
– Why teaching math to girls?

Synopsis: In this episode, boys and girls are separated into different classes, and the girls are taught nothing useful about math. This episode suggests that gender disparity in the hard sciences (and gender disparity in some aspects of behavior) may have more to do with nurture than nature.<sup>1</sup>.

File content:

**I. Starter.** Introduction to the theme with some interactions activities.

**II. Reading.** Introduction to the theme with the reading of an article: “Why women are poor at science, by Harvard President” written by Suzanne Goldenberg.

**III. Characters.** General comprehension check exercises focused on the characters.

**IV. The story.** General comprehension check exercises focused on the content and the story.

**V. Did you understand everything?** Intensive comprehension check exercises.

**VI. Vocabulary.** Lexical and linguistics exercises.

**VII. Writing skills.** Activities to practice writing skills.

**VIII. Speaking.** Activities to practice oral skills and interactions.

**IX. Music Maestro.** Complementary reading exercise..

Cultural elements present in this file:

*The Lion King* (Walt Disney Pictures, 1994); *The Lion King 1 1/2* (DisneyToon Studio, 2004); *Hamlet* (Shakespeare, 1609); *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* (Stoppard, 1964); *Yentl* (United Artists, 1983); *Twelfth Night* (Shakespeare, 1602).

Famous celebrities present in this file:

Lawrence Summers ; Mélanie Upfoot ; Julie Taymor ; Tom Stoppard ; Shakespeare; Frida Khalo ; Georgia O’Keefe ; Cathy Guisewite ; Bette Nesmith Graham ; Joseph Shepherd-Barron ; Mary Anderson ; Carl Benz ; Wallace Hume Carothers ; Robert Hutchings Goddard ; Judge James Finley ; Geroge Washington ; Gene & Bill Prater ; Montague Redgrave ; Louis Glass & William Arnold ; Jules Michelet ; Chef Boyardee ; The Hardy Boys ; Wendy Carlos ; Stanley Kubrick ; Judas Priest ; Elton John ; Tim Rice ; Chris Butler ; The Waitresses ; Jehro Tull ; Cyndi Lauper.

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<sup>1</sup> Waltonen, K. and D. Du Vernay, D. *The Simpsons in the Classroom*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers. 2010. Page 125.

## I. Starter



**Before the episode:** Split up the group in two: boys on the left and girls on the right. Tell them that you are going to teach the boys a different lesson than the girls, but don't give them any more information. On the board, draw a line in the middle and write as a title « In favor of splitting the group » and « Against splitting of the group ». Orally, ask the students to answer questions like “What do you think about this way of teaching?”, “Would it be a good idea to separate boys from girls? Why? When?”. Write their arguments on the board.

| <i>In favor of splitting the group according to gender</i> | <i>Against splitting the group according to gender</i> |
|--|--|
| /  | /  |

**During the episode:** Ask the students to write down the differences between boys and girls that are said or shown during the episode. It can be physical or psychological differences.

**After the episode:** Share the differences between boys and girls on the board with the whole group. Do they agree with those differences? Can they think about some others? Are these differences reasonable enough to separate a group according to gender? Is it true that girls are less good at math and the hard sciences than boys? Discuss with the whole group.

| Boys (non-exhaustif)   | Girls (non-exhaustif)                                 |
|--|---|
| Obnoxious<br>Aggressive<br>Never let women be heard<br>Violent<br>Always think about war<br>Always think about fighting<br>Nothing is sweet<br>Only two French fries in five should make it in your mouth<br>Burp<br>Fart<br>Bully | Less good in math<br>Sensitive<br>Lack of self-esteem |

## II. Reading



« *Why women are poor at science, by Harvard President?* » by *Suzanne Goldenberg*.

This part of the file offers three levels of text reading. The non-modified text is the most advanced level and has been slightly changed to correspond to the elementary and intermediate levels. Teachers can work on this part as they wish, using it before or after the episode, to introduce the topic to the students or to extend it.

Link to the original online version:

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2005/jan/18/educationsgendergap.genderissues>

### III. Characters



Mélanie Upfoot  
(Frances McDormand)

Juliana Krellaer  
(Julie Taymor)

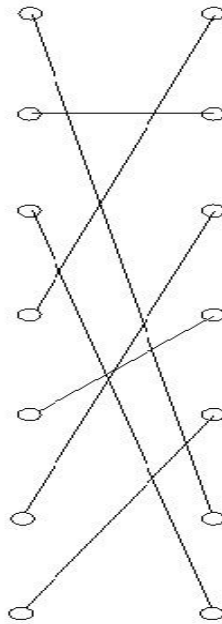
Tom Stoppard

Frida Khalo

Georgia O'Keefe

Cathy Guisewite

« Poignarde-à-mort »  
parodie du film  
« Le Roi Lion »



Frances McDormand

Long-métrage animé américain produit par Disney et sorti en 1994.

Julie Taymor

Dessinatrice américaine née en 1950 qui a créé la bande dessinée *Cathy*.

Tom Stoppard

Actrice américaine née en 1967 qui a remporté de nombreux prix, au cinéma et au théâtre. Dans l'épisode, elle prête sa voix à Mélanie Upfoot.

Frida Khalo

Metteuse en scène américaine née en 1952, connue pour la réalisation de pièces théâtre, d'opéra et de films au cinéma. Dans cet épisode, elle est Juliana Krellaer.

Georgia O'Keefe

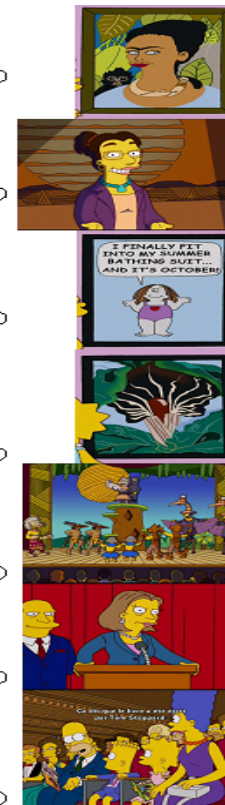
Artiste mexicaine (1907-1954) qui a peint de nombreux portraits, autoportraits et des travaux inspirés de la nature et joyaux du Mexique.

Cathy Guisewite

Auteur dramatique britannique d'origine tchèque né en 1937. Il a abondamment écrit pour la télévision, la radio, le cinéma et le théâtre.

« Poignarde-à-mort »  
parodie du film  
« Le Roi Lion »

Artiste américaine (1887-1986) notamment connue pour ses peintures de fleurs en gros plan, comme son œuvre *Jack-in-Pulpit No. 1*.



| A  | B  | C   | D | E  | F   | G |
|----|----|-----|---|----|-----|---|
| 2  | 6  | 1   | 3 | 5  | 7   | 4 |
| VI | II | VII | I | IV | III | V |



Did you know? The Disney film *The Lion King 1 1/2* released straight-to-DVD in 2004, was influenced by Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead* published in 1966. In that play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two minor characters in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, detail their story taking place during the same time as the event depicted in "Hamlet", similar to what Timon and Pumba do in *The Lion King 1 1/2*. It is interesting to note that the first film *The Lion King* is also a kind of rewriting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

## IV. The story



Number 1:



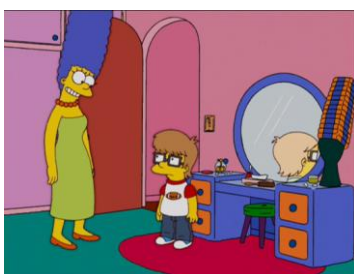
Number 2:



Number 3:



Number 4:



Number 5:



Number 6:



Teachers can precise the task by asking the student to use only verbs in present or future tenses. Answers are free and varied.



An example of a summary taken from *Pogdesign*:

<https://www.pogdesign.co.uk/cat/The-Simpsons/Season-17/Episode-19>

*“The family attends “Stab-A-Lot: The Itchy and Scratchy Musical.” The musical’s director is a graduate of Springfield Elementary and Principal Skinner puts his foot in mouth when he makes sexist comments about her education and that of women in general. He tries to make the situation better, but only buries himself deeper and deeper until he is fired and replaced by Women’s Educational Expert Melanie Upfoot. The first thing she does is split the school into girls and the boys. Lisa dislikes the way girls are being taught math and she ventures over to the boy’s side of the school in search of a challenge. Disguising herself as Jake Boyman she starts attending the boy’s school but while she finds the math problems more interesting, it is being a boy that is a greater challenge.”*

## V. Did you understand everything?



a. True or false?

|  | True | False |
|--|------|-------|
| 1. Tom Stoppard is the director of the Itchy & Scratchy Musical <i>Stab-A-Lot</i> .<br>Correction: Tom Stoppard wrote the book of the musical / Juliana Krellner is the director.            |      | X     |
| 2. For Skinner, boys are always better at maths than girls.  | X    |       |
| 3. During the lesson, Lisa doesn't want to do maths because she thinks it is too difficult.<br>Correction: Lisa doesn't want to do maths because they don't do sums or solve problems        |      | X     |
| 4. Jake Boyman is nicknamed Toilet because Bart and Milhouse meet him at the school toilets<br>Correction: Jake Boyman is nicknamed Toilet because he has toilet paper stuck under his shoes |      | X     |
| 5. For Bart, if Lisa succeeds in maths, it is because she learns to think as a boy   | X    |       |

b. Choose the right answer

- Who is going to pretend to agree with women in order to not talk with them? **a. Skinner**
- What is the educational expert Melanie Upfoot's idea to improve the school?  
**b. To separate boys and girls at school.**
- During the lesson, Melanie Upfoot tells Lisa that maths are... **b. too difficult for girls.**
- To become a real man, Lisa must... **b. change her name in Toilet forever.**
- At the end, Lisa realizes that boys' world is... **c. cruel and sadistic.**

b. Answer precisely the following questions.

- What is Skinner's plan to negotiate with women?

**He wants to pretend to agree with them.**

- What is the educational expert Melanie Upfoot's idea to improve the school?

**She wants to split the school in two, separating the boys from girls forever at school in order to reduce anti-woman bias in math.**

- According to Melanie Upfoot, how do boys deal with math that is different than girls?

**She says that boys think it is something to attack, to figure out, while girls need to "feel" the numbers in order to increase their self-esteem.**

- What is Lisa's final test to become a real man?

**She has to pick a fight with someone weaker than her.**

- At the end of the episode, what does Lisa think of boys' world? How do boys react?

**She thinks that boys' world is more cruel and sadistic than she ever imagined. Boys are proud and fight back with chairs.**

## VI. Vocabulary



A.



**Down**

1. To have a favorable impression of oneself, self-respect. To have **self-esteem**.
2. An act of judging something too quickly, especially against a racial, religious or national group. A **prejudice**.
4. A very hard candy. A **jawbreaker**.
6. To be very offensive. To be **obnoxious**.
7. To mock or to make fun of someone. To **razz** someone (US slang).

**Across**

3. To be very adhesive, sticky. To be **clingy**.
5. A word or sequence of words that is difficult to pronounce, especially rapidly. A **tongue-twister**.
8. A very loud or noisy action. A **hoo-ha** (informal).
9. A tendency toward judging something without full knowledge of it. A **bias**.

*B. Can you understand these expressions?*

1. "In for a penny, in for a pound" means... **b. That I am decided to do something, regardless of what it may entail.**
2. If you succeed in something, you will say that... **a. You did well.**

*C. Impossible to know...*

1. Chef Boyardee is the name of... **a. a food brand that sells pasta cans internationally.**
2. *The Hardy Boys* are... **a. fictional characters that appeared in several series of mystery books for children and teenagers.**
3. « *We've been Yetled!* » This sentence is said by Jimbo (18'45") when students discover that Toilet is Lisa, but what does it mean exactly?

**It means that Lisa fooled everyone: no-one could recognize her dressed as Jake Boyman.**



*Did you know?* *Yentl* is a romantic musical film produced by United Artists, starring Barbra Streisand, released in theater in 1983. It tells the story of a young Polish girl who decides to dress and live like a man in order to receive an education under the Talmudic Law. *Yentl* and this Simpsons episode both based their plot on the main feminine character dressing up like a man, a story which is also similar to Viola, the main character in Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*, performed for the first time in 1602. At that time, it was forbidden to women to perform on stage and all the feminine characters were played by young men.

## VII. Writing skills



This part of the file offers a progression in the writing skills difficulty stages. It starts from simpler and closer instructions and goes to wider and harder reflections. Teachers can modify this part as they wish.

## VIII. Speaking



This part of the file offers a progression in the writing skills difficulty stages. It starts from simpler and closer instructions and goes to wider and harder reflections. Teachers can modify this part as they wish.

### Who says what?

1. “No one is better than anyone else, and everyone is the best at everything”:

**Seymour Skinner**

2. “I insist on seeing the director!”:

**Tahiti Mel**

3. “The only math you need is you and me equals forever”:

**Homer Simpson**

4. “You’re a boy, nothing is sweet”:

**Bart Simpson**

5. “Confidence building can’t replace real learning”:

**Lisa Simpson**

6. “You just beat up the most harmless kid in school”:

**Jimbo Jones**

7. “Are you saying that men and women are identical?”:

**Edna Krabappel**

8. “Sounds like you’re trying to derail our self-esteem engine”:

**Mélanie Upfoot – Teacher**

9. “For too long, there has been an anti-woman bias in math”:

**Mélanie Upfoot – School principal**

10. “All this hoo-ha about girls and math is silly”:

**Marge Simpson**

### Who invented what?

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Liquid paper                        | Bette Nesmith Graham – 20 <sup>e</sup> century (1968)  |
| Paper                               | Cai Lun – 2 <sup>nd</sup> century BCE (48-121)   |
| Windshield wiper                    | Mary Anderson – 20 <sup>e</sup> century (1903)   |
| Car                                 | Carl Benz – 19 <sup>e</sup> century (1885)   |
| Nylon stockings                     | Wallace Hume Carothers – 20 <sup>e</sup> century (1939)  |
| Rocket ship                         | Robert Hutchings Goddard – 20 <sup>e</sup> century (1926)  |
| Suspension bridge                   | Judge James Finley – 19 <sup>e</sup> century (1801)  |
| The First Constitutional Government | The Founding Fathers of the United States, among whom George Washington – 18 <sup>e</sup> century (1789) |



|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Snowshoes        | Gene and Bill Prater – 20 <sup>e</sup> century (1972)  |
| Brass Knuckles   | This is false: metal ring and knuckle style weapons date back to ancient times and have been used all over the world for many hundreds of years.   |
| Pinball machines | Montague Redgrave – 19 <sup>e</sup> century (1869)   |
| The Renaissance  | This is false: the term “Renaissance” is a concept that refers to a period in European history. It wasn’t created by a man or a woman, but the term was first prominently used by a French historian: Jules Michelet in 1858. He was the first to use and define the word Renaissance – 19 <sup>e</sup> century. |

### IX. Music maestro



The teacher makes the students listen to the following abstracts taken from the episode in the following order.

- A. 10’12” – 10’20”
- B. 8’29” – 8’32”
- C. 1’38” – 2’12”
- D. 18’14” – 18’27”
- E. 20’00” – 20’58”

|   |   |
|---|---|
| B | <i>Breaking the Law</i>   |
| I | <i>Girls Just Wanna Have Fun</i>                                    |
| D | <i>I Know What Boys Like</i>  |
| A | <i>Beethovenia</i>  |
| E | <i>Thick as a Brick</i>   |
| C | <i>The Circle of Knives</i> , a parody of <i>The Circle of Life</i> |



*Did you know?* The title of the episode *Girls Just Want to Have Sums* is a reference to the song “Girls Just Want to Have Fun”. The song was written by and first recorded in 1979 by American musician Robert Hazard. It is better known as a single by American singer Cyndi Lauper, whose version was released in 1983. The single was a hit and is still nowadays popular, especially as a feminist claim anthem.

## Sources

### Episode

« Girls Just Wanna Have Sums ». *The Simpsons – Season 17*. 20th Century Fox. DVD. 2014.

### Bibliography

Goldenberg, S. « Why women are poor at science, by Harvard President ». *The Guardian*. January 18, 2005. Last consulted: August 31, 2018.

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Waltonen, K. and D. Du Vernay, D. *The Simpsons in the Classroom*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers. 2010.

### Online sources

*SimpsonsPark* (in French): <http://www.simpsonspark.com/>

### Online cultural references, dictionary and biographical information

Wikipedia: <https://fr.wikipedia.org>

Oxford dictionary: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>

Wordreference: <http://www.wordreference.com/>

### Pedagogical tool

Puzzle Maker: <https://www.puzzle-maker.com/>

## For further inquiry

### Books

Shakespeare, W. *Hamlet*. 1609.

Shakespeare, W. *Twelfth Night*. 1602.

Stoppard, T. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead*. 1964.

### Films

DisneyToon Studio. *The Lion King 1 1/2*. 2004.

United Artists. *Yentl.*. 1983.

Walt Disney Pictures. *The Lion King*. 1994.