

Of Smurfs and Smurfettes

1 Vocabulary

With the help of the online dictionary given below, look for definitions of the words listed in the table and find example sentences.



Online dictionary: <http://www.linguee.de/>

	definition	example sentence
trope		
Smurfette		
ensemble		
disproportionately		
meddling		
divisive		
impostor		
nostalgia		
default		
sidekick		
Tokenism		

2 Listening: The Smurfette Principle

The Smurfette Principle was named two decades ago by Katha Pollitt, when she noticed that there were a disproportionate amount of male characters in programming aimed at young people. Even in adult programming, when women do appear in the primary cast of a television show or movie, they are usually alone in a group of men. Sadly, this trope has made its way into the 21st century.



- a) Watch the video below and find out more about the Smurfette principle.



The Smurfette Principle:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opM3T2_IZA

- b) While watching, you should:

- note the examples given for movies or TV series to which the Smurfette Principle applies
- write down the reasons why the Smurfette Principle also applies to movies or TV series that seemingly feature a "heroic" female protagonist

- c) After watching, skim through the user comments below the video on the YouTube page. Work with a partner.

- Compile a list of aspects you agree with/don't agree with.
- Discuss the phenomenon of the Smurfette Principle: What do you think of the theory? What are the possible consequences of it for our lives which are influenced more and more by mass media?
- Comment on the style, layout and language of the video. Why did/didn't you like to watch it?

- d) The following quotes are from the video clip on the Smurfette Principle. Put them into context, i.e. explain in which context they appear in the video and what they mean.

But one day the evil wizard Gargamel decided on a devilish plan to sabotage smurfdom.

We can even see the Smurfette Principle outside of programming aimed at young people.

Boys define the group, its story and its code of values. Girls exist only in relation to boys.

The Smurfette Principle is an alternative name for Tokenism or the Token Minority ...

Here's a simple test you can ask yourself when you're writing your scripts ...

3 Reading: Hers; The Smurfette Principle

Poet and essayist Katha Pollitt reflected upon the Smurfette Principle when she bought her three-year-old daughter one of her Christmas presents: a cassette of *The Little Mermaid*. Ariel, the mermaid, is an exception among characters in children's movies and literature: She's active, brave and determined, the heroine of her own life – she even rescues the prince.

- a) Read the article from the New York Times and answer the questions in the grid.



Hers; The Smurfette Principle: <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/07/magazine/hers-the-smurfette-principle.html?pagewanted=all>

1. What's the difference between Ariel and other fantasy characters popular with girls?	She thinks of other things than just romance and wedding bells.
2. According to the author, what has changed since the 1950s concerning children's TV?	
3. What message does the use of the Smurfette Principle in media convey to the audience?	
4. What are the differences between commercial and public TV concerning female characters?	
5. Why is the exposure to predominantly male characters problematic for preschoolers?	
6. What do these observations tell us about what goes on in our society?	

- b) Write a **letter to the editor** as a reply to Katha Pollitt's article. In your letter, you should:
- highlight the aspects that are most important according to your view
 - relate Pollitt's observations to your own experiences and media consumption
 - suggest ways in which each TV-viewer or moviegoer may influence producers and media companies
- Write about **250 words**.

4 Listening: The Bechdel Test for Women in Movies

The Bechdel Test is a simple way to gauge the active presence of female characters in Hollywood films and just how well rounded and complete those roles are.

- a) Watch the video below to find out more about how the Bechdel Test works.



The Bechdel Test for women in movies: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLF6sAAMb4s>

- b) Apply the Bechdel Test to your favourite movies. Tell your class about your findings.