

Beauty standards and feminism

READING

LEVEL
Advanced

NUMBER
C1_2025R_EN

LANGUAGE
English



lingoda



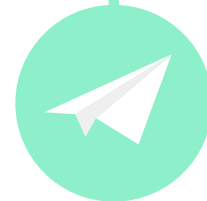


Goals

- Can read and understand a lengthy text about changing beauty standards for women.
- Can evaluate and provide my own views on the connection between beauty and feminism.



Is it the job of a **feminist** to ignore **beauty standards** and embrace their natural looks? Or is it feminist to be able to improve yourself?





You and your looks

How much time do you spend on your looks? Do you think men or women spend more time on this?



woman



man



What do you think?

Have you heard the expression below? What do you think it means and do you agree?

//

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

//



These words will be in the text. Do you know what they mean?

to adhere

augmentation

to stem from

to vilify

enfranchised

akin

frail

flaw





Vocabulary in context

to adhere

We always **adhere** to the rules – we never break them.

to be
enfranchised

Women were **enfranchised** in the UK in 1918.

frail

He has been ill and is now very **frail**.

to vilify

She was **vilified** in the press after leaving her husband.

augmentation

She had breast **augmentation** last year.

flaw

They used Photoshop on the picture so that she had no **flaws**.



Beauty standards and feminism

It is a famous **adage** that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and indeed it is true that standards of beauty vary from one society to another, from one person to another. But the truth is that there always is a standard, and something that we have to live up to in order to be considered beautiful. While there is growing pressure on men to **conform** to beauty standards, it is still women who are most affected by changing ideas of what constitutes beauty.



Beauty standards and feminism

Firstly, it is worth looking at where these standards of beauty come from, and how they have changed. Since the twentieth century, accepted beauty standards have **stemmed from** what is portrayed in the mass media. The standards seem to be **arbitrary**, changing from one decade to the next, or even faster. The only thing that they have in common is that for most women, the standard is unattainable, whether it was the super skinny look of the sixties, or the current trend for a hugely exaggerated hourglass. All over the world the standard is different. In certain societies where food is scarce, a plump body is prized, while in many Asian countries, extremely white skin is seen as beautiful. The perpetuation of these standards is seen as deeply anti-feminist. Just to take one example, as women grew more independent and **enfranchised** in the 1960s and 70s, so the ideal appearance of women became more and more childlike, the **frail**, malnourished-looking body contrasting with the political and economic power women were gaining.



Beauty standards and feminism

Airbrushing of images in the media is widespread, getting rid of **flaws** and creating something that is unachievable in real life, even for the models. And it isn't just the media which is guilty of this: most celebrities and increasing numbers of non-celebrities put airbrushed or edited pictures on social media. Thinning thighs here, enlarging eyes there, these tweaks create an image of a woman more **akin** to a doll than to anyone we might actually see on the street. This airbrushing and the presentation of the perfect woman is thought to have caused many problems: eating disorders are rising consistently, as is depression and the feeling of low self-esteem caused by comparing oneself to others.





Beauty standards and feminism

Some feminists argue that the presentation of perfection makes women spend too much time focusing on the non-serious issues of make-up and body image, rather than on pursuing economic and political goals. It is a way of keeping women down, and distracting them from seizing the power from men. Others argue that this is too simplistic, and gives little agency to women, making them seem incapable of making their own decisions.



True or false?

	TRUE	FALSE
1. There is little or no pressure on men to conform to beauty standards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The current beauty trend in the West is for an extreme hourglass figure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. In societies where food is plentiful, a plump body is prized.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Tweaking photographs eventually makes the image unattainable for normal women.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. There is thought to be no connection between airbrushing and low self-esteem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Some argue that a focus on beauty keeps women in second place to men.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Read through the dialogue and fill in the gaps



arbitrary

Do you think we can _____ beauty standards we see around us?

tweak

Yes! And they're so _____ - they change really quickly.

unattainable

Better plump than _____.

hourglass figure

If only we could _____ our bodies in real life like the magazines do.

No, I think they're _____, especially because of airbrushing and Photoshop.

And it depends where you go – in one place you need to be skinny, in another _____.

That's true. And now we need to have a perfect _____ - tiny waist and big hips.

plump

live up to

malnourished



Worldwide beauty standards

What does beauty look like in your country? Do you know about any other countries' beauty standards?





Over to you

Answer these questions, referring to the text for ideas to help.



1

Do you think all printed photographs are airbrushed? Do you think this is a good or bad thing?

2

Do you agree that ensuring women spend more time on their appearance is a way of stopping them seizing power from men?

3

Do you think men will ever be as affected by beauty standards as women currently are?



Beauty standards and feminism

Going much further than airbrushing, plastic surgery has experienced a **boom** in popularity in the past twenty years. In the USA, 92% of all cosmetic procedures in 2016 were **carried out** on women, with breast **augmentation** and liposuction being the most popular choices. South Korea, renowned as the world's plastic surgery capital, sees more procedures **per capita** than anywhere else. Many surgeries in Korea focus on **reconstructing** the face, often to give a more Western appearance.



Beauty standards and feminism

Plastic surgery in particular is **vilified** as being anti-feminist. Women who go to such extremes are seen as betraying their gender by not accepting the face or body they were born with, and putting themselves in danger in order to please others. On the other hand, some have begun to argue that plastic surgery is an expression of feminism: women have every right to change their bodies if they are not happy with them. **Condemning** individuals for making a decision is not helping the overall problem of creating a society which is happy with their faces and bodies.

Women have been changing their appearance for centuries, aware that being perceived as more beautiful can give them more access to jobs and better relationships. Beauty is power, and while men hold the power in society, women will continue to adhere to their ideal beauty standards.



New vocabulary

Can you remember what these words referred to in the text?



per capita

to vilify

boom

to reconstruct

to carry out

to condemn



Fill in the gaps

Use five of the words on the previous page to fill in the gaps.

1. Has there been a _____ in plastic surgery in your country in recent years?
2. Would you ever choose to _____ a part of your face?
3. South Korea has the most plastic surgery _____ in the world. Which other countries do you think see a lot of plastic surgery?
4. Why do you think so many people _____ plastic surgery?
5. Is it fair to _____ people for their personal choices?

Now, answer the questions.





Plastic surgery



The text argues both that plastic surgery can be feminist and anti-feminist. Which side do you agree with?



Beauty is power

Do you agree with the final paragraph of the text which says that beauty is power? Is it true that beautiful people have advantages in life?





Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!





Answer key

Exercise p. 19

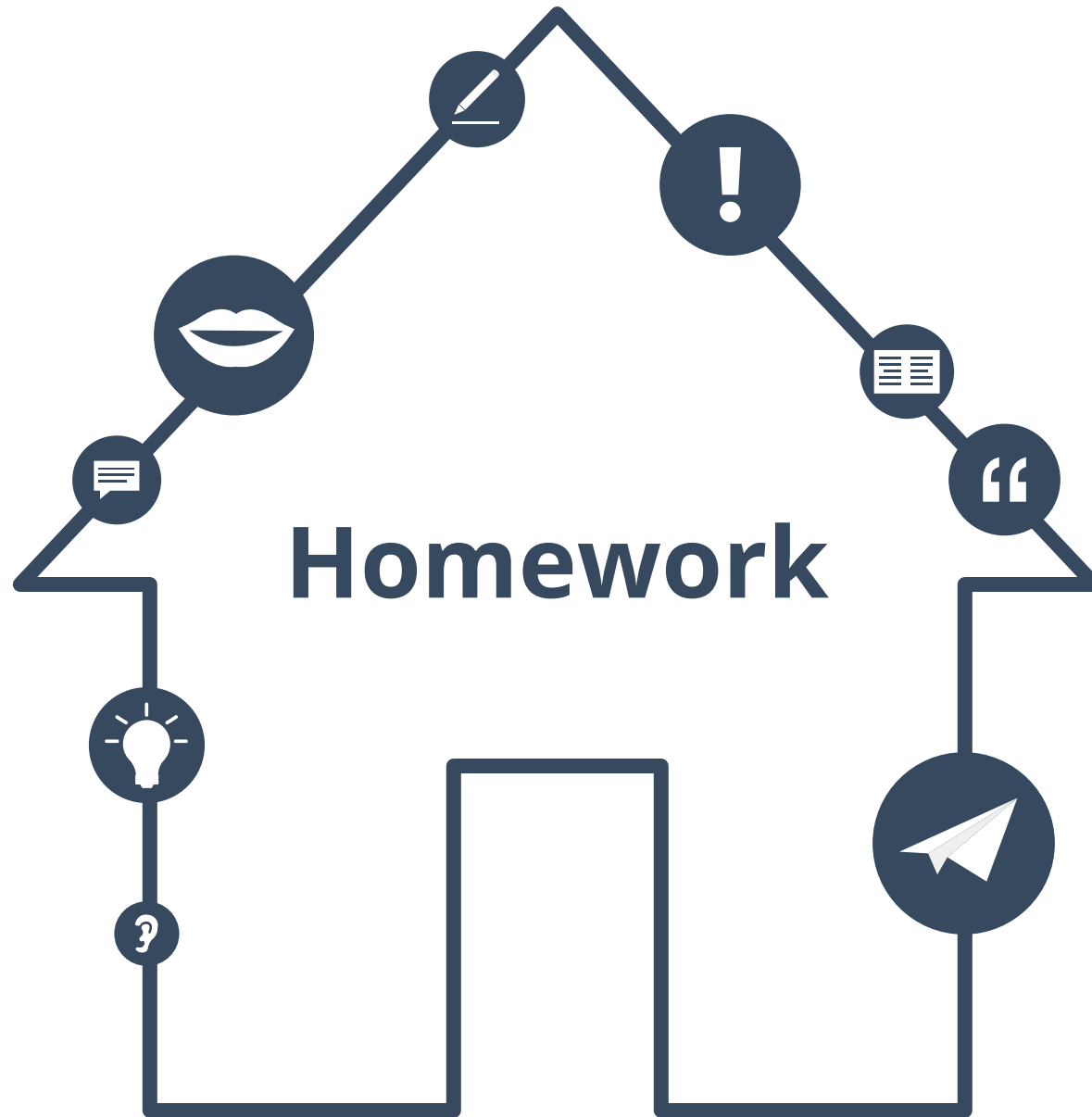
1. boom, 2. reconstruct, 3. per capita, 4. vilify, 5. condemn

Exercise p. 13

live up to, unattainable, arbitrary, plump, malnourished, hourglass figure, tweak

Exercise p. 12

1. T, 2. T, 3. F, 4. T, 5. F, 6. T





Fill in the gaps

What _____ beauty? It depends where you are and in what time period. Our image of what is beautiful _____ the media, who show us airbrushed pictures of _____ beauty. From _____ our pictures to full facial _____, we can easily change how we present ourselves to the world. But many feminists _____ those who try to change themselves, and condemn the plastic surgery _____ that is gripping much of the world.

boom

reconstruction

stems from

constitutes

tweaking

unattainable

vilify



Writing

Write a short text about how beauty standards have changed over time.

beholder

hourglass figure

malnourished

plump

enfranchised

scarce





Homework answer key

Exercise p. 22

constitutes, stems from, unattainable, tweaking, reconstruction, vilify, boom



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