

The ABCs of Assertiveness Start at Home

By Angela Bianchi

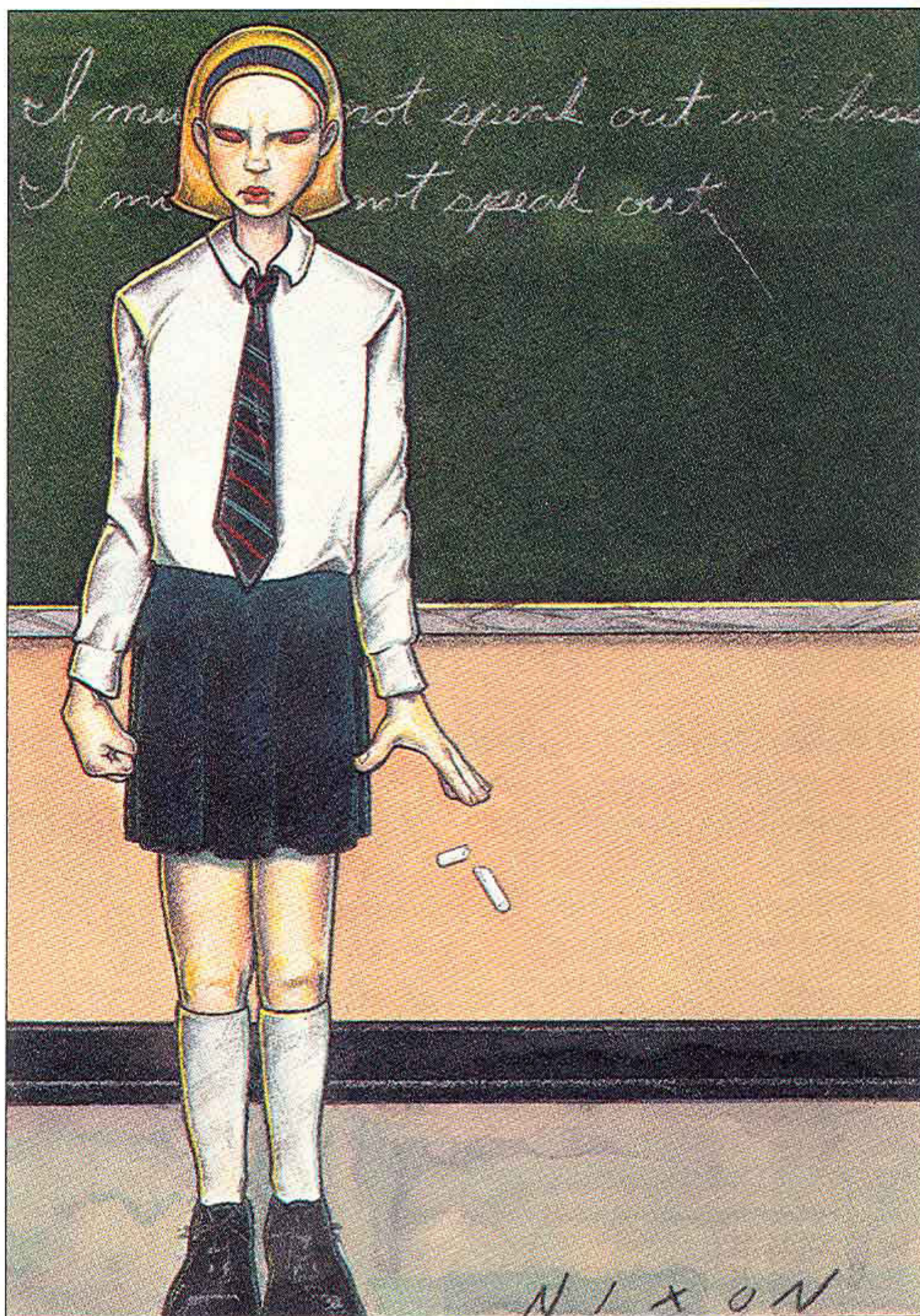
As we approach the year 2000, more and more women will break through the glass ceiling and take advantage of new opportunities in the workforce, says Esther Greenglass, a psychology professor at York University.

Although most women have always had the ability to develop leadership potential, they have often lacked the confidence to pursue higher positions. That lack of confidence, she says, is often the result of insecurities stemming back to childhood.

"The most important thing we can do for young girls, is build their self-confidence, and that happens in the home and at school," says Greenglass, who has studied assertiveness in young girls, and written extensively on gender roles and discrimination.

"The schoolroom plays a crucial role in shaping girls' self-esteem and encouraging assertiveness," she says. "The teacher is an essential player and should make an effort to encourage girls' participation in class."

"If a child is sitting in a classroom, making a lot of noise, the child (in most instances a boy) is drawing more attention to himself – negative attention – from the teacher. That in itself means that girls on average will get less attention, and therefore less feedback from the teacher," says Greenglass.



If girls are discouraged to ask questions by inattentive teachers or embarrassed to demonstrate their knowledge – "fearing boys won't like a smart girl" – this affects their long-term career development.

"Assertiveness has to do with self-confidence, and that's nurtured in a girl's early years, in the school and in the home," says Greenglass.

The media also play a major role in providing young girls with positive female role models," she adds.


"By watching *Roseanne*, a girl learns that the glamour gal is not always the popular person. Roseanne lets her hair down and is funny. But

on the down side the show doesn't demonstrate any depth in intellectual values. It fosters rudeness... there's no mutual respect, and their family values are shallow," Greenglass adds.

In sitcoms, women are still stereotyped as dumb blondes, wimpy and servile. And when they're cast as older characters, they're generally portrayed in an unfavourable light, she says.

Another source of negative female stereotyping is school textbooks, says Greenglass. "Students are still reading the same books I read — where the man demonstrates how to use scientific equipment."

To reinforce positive ambition in girls, Greenglass says, teachers should provide them with constructive feedback. But that doesn't always occur. So it's especially important that parents become aware of their

daughters' strengths, and reinforce their skills and abilities, while at the same time avoid making negative comments to them. 



Esther Greenglass