Lesson Plan: Five Developmental Stages of the Animus and Anima

Audience: Adults studying Jungian psychology, mythology, or individuation
Format: Two 90-minute sessions, or one extended workshop
Purpose: Help participants reflect on how inner patterns of agency, feeling, meaning, relationship, and imagination appear in their lives.

Jung's original model generally describes four stages, not five. For the anima, the traditional sequence is Eve, Helen, Mary, and Sophia. For the animus, the sequence is usually described as physical power, action, the word or intellect, and spiritual meaning. The fifth stage below is a teaching adaptation: it represents conscious integration rather than a historically distinct Jungian stage.

These terms should be used symbolically, not as claims that women are naturally one way and men another. Contemporary Jungian writers have criticized the original gender binary and often interpret anima and animus as capacities present in everyone: relatedness and receptivity on one side, agency and discernment on the other.

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson, participants should be able to:

- Explain anima and animus as symbolic psychological patterns.
- Recognize projection, possession, and inner conflict.
- Identify the stage or stages most active in their current life.
- Distinguish a developmental task from a fixed personality label.
- Create one practical experiment for moving toward greater integration.

Important ground rules

Begin by explaining:

- These stages are not a diagnostic test.
- A person may show different stages in different areas of life.

- Development is not strictly linear; people often move backward during stress or crisis.
- No stage is "bad." Each contains a useful energy and a possible distortion.
- The goal is not to become more traditionally masculine or feminine. The goal is to become more conscious, flexible, and whole.
- Participants may use "woman" and "man" in the traditional Jungian sense, or adapt the exercise to theirown gender identity and experi ence.

Jung understood anima and animus as unconscious figures that can be projected onto romantic partners, teachers, leaders, or imagined figures. Individuation involves recognizing the projection and reclaiming the psychological quality for oneself. iaap.org1

Session One: The Animus in Women

In this lesson, the animus represents symbolic capacities for agency, discernment, conviction, language, initiative, and the ability to act in the world. The stages below are adapted from Jung's four-stage model by adding a fifth stage of conscious integration.

The five stages of animus development

Stage	Symbolic image	Developing capacity	Common distortion	Key question
1. Physical Force	The athlete, warrior, strong man	Vitality, courage, bodily confidence	Equating strength with domination or hardness	"Do I feel safe and powerful in my own body?"
2. Action and Achievement	The builder, provider, rescuer, doer	Initiative, competence, practical effectiveness	Compulsive doing, overwork, rescuing others	"What am I trying to prove through constant action?"
3. The Word	The professor, preacher, judge, intellectual	Speech, thought, argument, discernment	Rigid opinions, criticism, needing to be right	"Do my beliefs help me understand or do they silence others?"
4. Meaning and Vision	The sage, guide, reformer, spiritual teacher	Purpose, moral direction, inner authority	Grandiosity, ideological certainty, spiritual superiority	"What meaning genuinely guides my life?"
5. Integrated Dialogue	The inner partner or wise collaborator	Flexible agency joined with feeling and relationship	Either passivity or domination	"Can I act decisively while remaining open, humane, and teachable?"

Stage 1: Physical Force

At this level, the animus appears primarily as power, courage, protection, sexuality, athleticism, or physical presence. The positive task is to develop a grounded sense of bodily agency.

The shadow appears when a participant believes she must become invulnerable, aggressive, or physically impressive in order to deserve respect. She may also project strength onto powerful men and assume that authority must come from someone else.

Reflection prompts:

- When do I feel physically strong or physically powerless?
- Do I avoid conflict because I fear my own strength?
- Do I admire or fear people who embody power?
- What would healthy strength look like in my body?

Practice: Stand with both feet grounded and write three sentences beginning, “I have the right to…”

Stage 2: Action and Achievement

The animus becomes a figure of action: the person who fixes, organizes, builds, protects, earns, or gets results. This stage develops competence and independence.

Its shadow is compulsive achievement. A woman may feel that rest is weakness or that she must rescue everyone. She may also choose partners who allow her to remain dependent while secretly resenting them for it.

Reflection prompts:

- Where am I effective and capable?
- Where am I doing too much for other people?

- Do I confuse usefulness with worth?
- What task am I avoiding because action would make the situation real?

Practice: Choose one unfinished task and complete it without seeking praise or permission.

Stage 3: The Word

Here the animus appears through language, ideas, opinions, education, law, doctrine, and intellectual authority. The woman begins to trust her own mind and articulate her own position.

Its shadow is the "opinion complex": automatic criticism, harsh judgments, ideological certainty, or the belief that every conversation must be won. Jungian writers often describe this stage as the animus becoming a bearer of the word, but the word can either clarify reality or dominate it. thirdeve.com1

Reflection prompts:

- Which opinions do I defend automatically?
- Which beliefs did I inherit from family, religion, education, or culture?
- Can I state my view without making the other person inferior?
- What would I say if I did not need to sound certain?

Practice: In one disagreement, replace "You are wrong" with "Here is how I see it, and here is what might change my mind."

Stage 4: Meaning and Vision

The animus becomes a source of purpose, moral conviction, creativity, or spiritual direction. The participant asks not only, "What can I do?" but also, "What is worth doing?"

Its shadow is grandiosity: identifying with a cause, teacher, ideology, or spiritual image so completely that ordinary human limitations are denied.

Reflection prompts:

- What principle would I continue to serve even without recognition?
- Which ideals inspire me, and which ideals make me harsh?
- Am I using spirituality to become more human or to avoid being human?
- What is the difference between a calling and an obsession?

Practice: Write a personal statement of purpose in no more than 50 words. Avoid abstract words such as “success” or “happiness”; describe actual behaviour.

Stage 5: Integrated Dialogue

This is the workshop’s added stage. The animus is no longer experienced as a harsh inner commander or as a voice that must always be obeyed. It becomes a partner in dialogue.

The integrated animus can make decisions while listening to feeling, care for others without losing boundaries, speak clearly without becoming dogmatic, and pursue purpose without sacrificing relationship.

Reflection prompts:

- Can I act without shutting down my feelings?
- Can I change my mind without experiencing it as humiliation?
- Can I be receptive without becoming passive?
- What would firm but compassionate authority look like?

Practice: Write a dialogue between “My inner authority” and “My inner feeling.” Let each speak for five minutes before making a decision.

Animus self-location exercise

Ask participants to rate each statement from 0 to 4:

- 0 = rarely true
- 1 = occasionally true
- 2 = sometimes true
- 3 = often true
- 4 = very strongly true

Stage	Self-rating statements
1. Physical Force	I am learning to feel safe, strong, and present in my body. I either avoid power or overidentify with toughness.
2. Action	I feel most valuable when I am achieving, fixing, organizing, or rescuing.
3. The Word	I have strong opinions and may become critical, argumentative, or certain that I am right.
4. Meaning	I am searching for a guiding purpose, moral vision, or spiritual direction.
5. Integration	I can combine clarity with empathy, action with reflection, and conviction with openness.

Participants should not simply choose the highest score. Ask them to identify:

1. The stage that feels most familiar.
2. The stage that appears when they are stressed.
3. The stage they admire in other people.
4. The stage they most need to develop.
5. The stage they may be exaggerating or using defensively.

Session Two: The Anima in Men

In this lesson, the anima represents symbolic capacities for feeling, relationship, imagination, receptivity, emotional depth, beauty, and connection with the unconscious. The traditional sequence uses Eve, Helen, Mary, and Sophia. The fifth stage below represents embodied integration.

The five stages of anima development

Stage	Symbolic image	Developing capacity	Common distortion	Key question
1. Eve	Mother, provider, instinctual woman	Attachment, bodily feeling, dependence, care	Emotional dependency or treating women as providers	"Can I need care without surrendering responsibility?"
2. Helen	Romantic muse, erotic ideal, beauty	Desire, attraction, imagination, appreciation	Idealization, fantasy, serial infatuation	"Am I relating to a real person or to an image?"
3. Mary	Sacred beloved, moral or spiritual ideal	Devotion, tenderness, loyalty, reverence	Splitting women into pure or impure categories	"Can I love someone who is complex and imperfect?"
4. Sophia	Wisdom figure, inner guide	Reflection, intuition, creativity, meaning	Escaping into fantasy or spiritual abstraction	"What is my inner life trying to teach me?"
5. Integrated Relationship	Real human partner and inner companion	Feeling joined with responsibility and reality	Sentimentality, emotional avoidance, or fusion	"Can I remain emotionally open without losing myself?"

Stage 1: Eve

At this level, the anima is connected with bodily needs, mothering, nourishment, safety, sexuality, and attachment. The developmental task is to recognize legitimate needs without expecting another person to function as a permanent parent.

The shadow appears when a man becomes dependent on a partner for emotional regulation, domestic care, identity, or permission to live.

Reflection prompts:

- What do I expect a partner to do for me that I could learn to do for myself?
- How comfortable am I receiving care?

- Do I equate vulnerability with helplessness?
- What bodily feelings do I tend to ignore?

Practice: Take responsibility for one practical or emotional need without asking someone else to manage it.

Stage 2: Helen

The anima appears as romantic attraction, beauty, sexuality, fascination, and the ideal beloved. The positive task is to awaken desire, imagination, appreciation, and emotional aliveness.

The shadow is projection: believing another person is perfect, uniquely destined, or responsible for making life meaningful. The traditional Helen stage concerns the movement from purely biological attraction toward romantic and aesthetic relationship. Wikipedia1

Reflection prompts:

- What qualities do I project onto people I desire?
- How quickly do I turn attraction into a story about destiny?
- What happens when the fantasy begins to fade?
- Can I appreciate beauty without possessing it?

Practice: Write two columns: “What I actually know about this person” and “What I have imagined about this person.”

Stage 3: Mary

At this level, feeling becomes associated with devotion, moral seriousness, loyalty, tenderness, and spiritual love. The man becomes more capable of valuing a woman as a whole person rather than merely as a sexual or romantic object.

The shadow is idealization. A man may divide women into “pure” and “impure,” “good” and “bad,” or admire women only when they conform to an ideal.

Reflection prompts:

- Do I expect people I love to remain morally pure or emotionally reassuring?
- Can I tolerate anger, sexuality, ambition, and imperfection in the people I admire?
- Do I confuse devotion with self-sacrifice?
- Can I love without turning the other person into a saint?

Practice: Describe someone you love using five qualities you appreciate and three qualities you find difficult. Hold both lists together.

Stage 4: Sophia

The anima becomes an inner source of wisdom, imagination, intuition, creativity, and meaning. The man begins to relate to feelings not merely as moods but as information about his life.

The shadow is retreat into fantasy. A man may become fascinated with symbolic ideas while neglecting concrete responsibilities, relationships, or the body.

Reflection prompts:

- What feelings have I dismissed as irrational that may contain information?
- Where does imagination help me live more truthfully?
- What am I learning from recurring dreams or emotional patterns?
- Is my inner life making me more compassionate in daily life?

Practice: Keep a seven-day feeling journal. Record the feeling, the situation, the bodily sensation, the impulse, and the possible message.

Stage 5: Integrated Relationship

This is the workshop's added stage. The anima becomes a conscious bridge between emotion and action, inner life and outer life, imagination and responsibility.

An integrated man can feel without being ruled by every feeling, communicate vulnerability without demanding that others repair him, and relate to women or partners as distinct people rather than as containers for an unconscious ideal.

Reflection prompts:

- Can I listen without immediately fixing?
- Can I express a feeling without blaming someone else for it?
- Can I remain connected while maintaining boundaries?
- What action does this feeling invite?

Practice: Use the sentence structure: "When ___ happened, I felt ___. The story I told myself was ___. What I need or choose now is ___."

Anima self-location exercise

Use the same 0–4 scale:

Stage	Self-rating statements
1. Eve	I depend on another person to provide emotional security, care, or direction.
2. Helen	I easily idealize romantic interests and confuse attraction with deep knowledge.
3. Mary	I tend to idealize, morally judge, or divide people into worthy and unworthy.
4. Sophia	I am developing a richer relationship with dreams, imagination, feeling, and meaning.
5. Integration	I can feel deeply, relate realistically, take responsibility, and remain emotionally open.

Ask participants to identify:

1. The stage that best describes their relationship history.
2. The stage that appears during loneliness or romantic attraction.
3. The stage they tend to project onto partners.
4. The stage they distrust or avoid.
5. The quality they need to reclaim from projection.

Closing exercise: Reclaiming the projection

Have participants complete these sentences:

- "I am most fascinated by people who seem to possess…"
- "I assume those people can give me…"
- "The quality I may be projecting is…"
- "One way I can develop that quality myself is…"
- "One way I can relate to others more realistically is…"

Then introduce the central individuation principle:

What overwhelms or fascinates me in another person may point toward a quality in my own unconscious life—but recognizing that quality does not mean denying the other person's individuality.

Suggested homework

Ask participants to keep a one-week journal with five columns:

Situation	Emotional reaction	Projection or inner figure	Unowned quality	Conscious response
What happened?	What did I feel?	Who did the person seem to be?	What might this reveal in me?	What can I do differently?

For example:

Situation	Emotional reaction	Projection or inner figure	Unowned quality	Conscious response
A colleague spoke confidently	Envy and irritation	"He has authority I lack"	My own right to speak clearly	State my view directly at the next meeting

Instructor's closing summary

The animus and anima are most useful when treated as living symbols, not permanent identities. A woman may need to develop feeling, receptivity, and relatedness just as much as she may need agency, judgment, and assertiveness. A man may need courage and structure just as much as emotional openness, imagination, and care.

The developmental movement in both models is:

projection → recognition → dialogue → responsibility → integration

Individuation is therefore not reaching a perfect fifth stage. It is learning to recognize when an inner pattern has taken over, listen to what it is trying to develop, and express that quality consciously in real life.