



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 4 to 6
About the Author: Adapted, with permission from, Television Families: A Media Literacy Resource Unit, Grades 2 - 6. The Waterloo County Board of Education © 1992.

The Constructed World of Television Families

Overview

In this lesson, students identify the differences between TV families and real families by analyzing the conventions used by TV shows; and by comparing the problems and actions of television families to real world families. Students begin by analyzing and discussing excerpts from television shows about families (selected by the teacher). Using observation charts, students then work in groups to deconstruct programs about families.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

- an awareness of the codes and conventions used in television to portray families
- an understanding how the media construct reality
- an awareness of how they, as an audience, respond to these codes and conventions

Preparation and Materials

- If possible, record excerpts from television dramas or sitcoms to show to students.
- Photocopy the Television Family Observation Chart.

Procedure

Ask students:

- How can we tell we are watching a television family show rather than a documentary about a real family?

(This question may help the students become aware of the codes and conventions used in TV, such as music, clothes, facial and body actions, openings, commercials, canned laughter.)

As a class, have students watch excerpts from television programs about, or featuring, families. While watching, students should observe and list specific characteristics. The list should include music, lighting, camera shots, titles, commercials, facial and body expressions, laughter, applause, clothes, and background.

Discuss and compare the similarities and differences of families on TV.



Activities

Activity One

Divide the class into groups. Using their Observation Chart each group will be responsible for watching an episode of a particular family show. As they watch their show, students should record:

- a) Name of show
- b) Brief description of family status. (e.g., poor, rich, blended, single mother/father)
- c) Statement of the problem
- d) The person whose problem it is
- e) How the problem is solved

Once students have gathered their observations, discuss their findings and compare their findings to real-world families.

- What kinds of problems are solved on TV?
- What kinds of problems do real families face?
- Do we learn how to solve problems from watching TV?
- Do adults and children solve problems in the same way: on TV? In the real world?

Play an excerpt from a family show to the point where the problem is posed. Stop the video and ask the students to improvise ways in which the problem may be solved:

- a) as it would appear on the TV show;
- b) as it would happen in real life;
- c) as it might happen if children wrote the script.

Activity Two

Working in pairs, have students role play interviews. Partner 'A' is an alien from a different planet, whose only knowledge of children comes from watching TV. Consequently he/she believes all children behave like TV children. Partner 'B' is a real child who tries to explain what children are really like. Switch partners and roles and try the improvisation again. Ask for volunteers to perform for the class. (Note: students can substitute parents or other family members in place of children, for variation in this activity)

Activity Three

Journal and letter writing is a valuable reflective practice. Students need time to think about what they learn. After the improvisation, the students should write a letter to the alien telling how they felt during the interview. They should try to explain the differences between real children and TV children. Perhaps they could explain why television represents children in this way.



Television Family Observation Chart

Name of show	Status of family	What is the problem?	Whose problem is it?	Who solves the problem?

Source: *Television Families: A Media Literacy Resource Unit, Grades 2 - 6*. The Waterloo County Board of Education, © 1992.

