



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 3-7
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Violence in Sports

Overview

In this lesson, students explore the gratuitous use of violence in televised sports. The lesson begins with a class discussion about the sports that students participate in, and the rules and consequences that relate to unsporting behaviour. Students then discuss how professional athletes conduct themselves in TV sporting events, and whether the same consequences seem to apply. Students look at the “business” side of televised sports, and how violence is used to engage and attract viewers. Through a series of activities, students determine which professional athletes are role models, and which deserve a visit to the “penalty box.”

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

- an awareness of the amounts of violence in various professional sports
- an understanding of how the media uses sports violence as a marketing tool
- an understanding of how sports violence affects kids, both as spectators and participants

Preparation and Materials

- Read background information sheet *Responding to Media Violence*.
- Tape Sports News, obtain a sports highlight tape such as *Rock'em Sock'em: Don Cherry's Volume I or II*, or bring in articles or photographs of sports violence from newspapers.

The Lesson

Discussion

Begin by asking students about their own team-sport experiences:

- How many of you participate in a team sport?
- Which sport is it? (List responses on board)
- What are the rules regarding physical contact or violence in your sport? (e.g., no pushing, hitting, tripping, slashing)
- How do you feel if someone trips or slashes you during a game?



- What happens if a player breaks one of these rules? (e.g. you get a penalty, you get kicked out for the rest of the game, the other team gets to shoot on your team)
- How often does this happen in your sport?
- How would you define a "Good Sport" (Someone who plays fair, is a good athlete, puts everything into the game.) Do you consider yourself a good sport when you play your favourite game?

Now that we've thought about the sports that you play, let's take a look at the sports that we see on TV.

- What sports do you watch on TV? (List responses on board)
- Compare the sports that you watch to the sports that you play. Which sports seem more violent?
- What kind of violence do you see in sports on TV? In hockey, for instance, could the referees stop the fights sooner? Why are the fights allowed to go on and on?
- The hockey players who often fight are usually grown men – 20 or 25 years of age or older. Some are fathers. If they handled themselves like that off the ice, for example, because a clerk at Canadian Tire wouldn't take back their kid's flawed skates, what would happen? (They would be charged with assault!)

Show excerpts or photos and articles.

- *How do you feel when you see a fight during a professional hockey game, or a baseball player yelling at an Umpire?
- What message does sports violence give to kids? (That it is all right to play this way; that violence is an acceptable way to deal with anger or frustration; that it is part of the sport; that you should go for whatever you can get away with, rather than playing fair.)
- What about WWF Wrestling? Do you think it's a sport? Is it in the same category as football, soccer or hockey?
- Can you think of any sports on TV where there is no violence? (e.g., figure skating, skiing, snowboarding, Olympic sports) Do you find these sports exciting to watch? What is it that makes them exciting? (Skill, speed, competition.)
- Why do you think TV emphasizes the violence in these sports and not positive behaviour? (Like it or not, from a business perspective, violence makes good TV – stations will get more viewers when they show sports that have lots of conflict)
- Think back to our definition of a good sport. Can you think of any professional athletes who you would classify as good sports? Who would you classify as poor sports?

*Answers to this question may vary; many students might say that they find fighting exciting or funny to watch. This response is a perfect lead-in to a discussion on the marketing aspect of violence in sports and the idea that many people find it exciting, which is why it might be played up in televised sports. Individual athletes as role models for kids can also be a problem. Someone like Dennis Rodman can act in an appalling manner, yet still be considered a successful athlete. He is, in fact, a hero to many kids who might try to imitate his behaviour.



Activity (Grades 3 & 4)

Students are to complete a project on their favourite athlete. Projects are to include:

- A Title Page
- A Table of Contents
- A hand-drawn picture or photograph of their athlete
- Biographical information regarding the athlete, including, if possible, what drew the athlete to his or her particular sport
- Statistics relating to the athlete's performance
- Reasons why the student feels that this athlete is a good sport, including examples of sportsmanship on the field, rink or court, community involvement, etc.

Activity (Grades 5 - 7)

For the following week, students are to collect articles and photos relating to sports violence and articles and photos relating to positive sports stories and players.

Students will:

- Tally whether there are more positive articles on teams or athletes, or articles that emphasize bad behaviour and sports violence
- Look at the *tone* of the articles. Is the violence being condoned, glorified or condemned?
- See if the articles on sports violence are usually accompanied by a photograph
- See if the positive articles are accompanied by photographs
- Look for *consequences* to sports violence. Do they think that the consequences to unsportsmanlike behaviour are fair? Are the consequences emphasized in the articles, or is it the violence which is emphasized?

After students have discussed their articles, they will use their photos to create a class display on sports violence. Photos of positive athletes and teams might be displayed under a heading such as ***The Winners Circle***, and images of sports violence and unsportsmanlike athletes might be displayed under a heading such as ***The Penalty Box***.

Journal Reflection

Students are to consider and respond to the question: How are kids affected by sports violence?

Evaluation

- Class discussion
- Projects
- Collected articles
- Journal reflection



Extensions

Some students might like to explore the concept of visual drama in relation to sports violence. For example, there was little violence in hockey when everyone listened to it on the radio. Students might like to gather statistics that support the connection between increased violence in hockey and its evolution from an auditory to a visual form of media entertainment.

- Students involved in hockey might want to tally the number of fights and penalties in a Hockey Night in Canada game. Students will time the length of the game, the number of fights, the duration of each fight (using a stopwatch), the number of penalties, and the duration of each penalty. They will also note the crowd's reaction to the fighting, as well as the announcer's. (i.e., Does the announcer get excited? Does the announcer condemn the fighting?) Once students have their figures, ask them to consider:
 - How many fights were there during the game?
 - What was the total length of the game?
 - What was the total length of time spent fighting during the game?
 - What was the total amount of time that players spent in penalties?
 - How many (if any) goals were scored by the opposing team during these penalties?
 - Ask students to imagine that this number of fights and penalties occurred regularly in their own games. Would that make the games more or less enjoyable? Why?
 - Why are there more fights in hockey than in other team sports, like soccer or football? (It has become a convention of the game.)
 - Students can present their findings as a "Sports News" presentation to the class
- Students might also like to explore how showmanship comes into play in sports violence by answering the following questions:
 - How much of sports violence can be attributed to posturing for the sake of the TV audience, as opposed to spontaneous responses within the game itself? (Take a look at WWF Wrestling, for instance.)
 - What actions differentiate posturing or showmanship from regular fighting? (i.e. playing up to the crowd or the cameras. Overly aggressive behavior.)
 - Why do hockey teams hire players specifically to act as "goons" or "enforcers?"
 - How does the acceptability of this practice contribute to sports violence?
 - How does it change the nature of the game?
 - What other sports besides hockey do this?
- Have a debate about Extreme Sports. Topics could include:
 - "Resolve that extreme sports would not exist without television."
 - "Resolve that extreme sports encourage kids to participate in dangerous activities."
- **Or**, have a debate about WWF Wrestling, taking the position:
 - that wrestling is nothing more than entertainment, or
 - that wrestling promotes stereotypes and violence, and young kids shouldn't be permitted to watch it



Responding to Media Violence - Teaching Backgrounder

Sports and sports media appeal to adults and children of all ages. Cheering on a team is an activity that even very young children can enjoy together with parents and friends.

While many sports inspire tremendous physical and emotional accomplishments of strength and stamina, some involve varying degrees of physical violence. Media representations frequently focus on and promote the physical conflicts that are inherent in these sports or, in some cases, have been staged to increase audience appeal.

It is common, for example, for sports reports and play-by-play commentary to contain metaphorical language that glorifies and promotes physical conflict- language that enthusiasts usually enjoy because it's graphic and exciting. Commentators describe plays in terms of "crushing" opponents, throwing a "bomb", and "killing" the clock. Teams are often marketed through aggressive logos depicting ferocious animals that not only identify teams, but tap into or create consumer demand for "spinoff" merchandise.

Through graphic visual and sound images, children see and hear about countless real-life examples of extreme competitiveness. Displays of temper and arguments with authority, for example, are not uncommon in televised sports. Such images can be a powerful influence on those who experience them, and may suggest "scripts" to be imitated. It's clear, therefore, that children require images to balance their media experiences of sport. These may be provided through positive modelling of cooperation, skill development and respect in community and school sports programs.

Children also need to learn how and why different media forms, especially television, have the power to increase audience excitement and entertainment by focusing on violent elements in sport; they need to be able to see through the "hype" and staged violence in texts such as televised wrestling events and hockey games. As students develop the concepts and skills required for critically appreciating media representations of sport, they also gain greater awareness of the various strategies that real-life athletes must use to cope with the actual hard work, excitement, frustration and satisfaction of competitive sport.

Source: Used with permission from *Responding To Media Violence: Starting Point for Classroom Practice K-6*, by the Metropolitan Toronto School Board.

