

LESSON PLAN

Violence in Sports

This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.



LEVEL: Grade 3 to 7

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Overview

In this lesson, students explore the gratuitous use of violence in sports. The lesson begins with a class discussion about sports and discuss whether they believe violence is engrained into their culture. Students discuss whether they think violence in sports is appropriate and whether they are one in the same. If violence were to be removed from sports, students think about whether they would be as popular with the general public. Students think also about how social media perpetuates violent personas in athletes. After their discussion, students will create and research profiles on two athletes: one violent and one non-violent. These profiles will highlight the popularity of their chosen athletes and whether it is tied to their behaviour, thus inadvertently rewarding their violence. Students will then present their findings to the class.

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*.

Procedure

DISCUSSION

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

- How many of you participate in a team sport?
- Which sport is it?
- 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?
- Do you think fighting or rough-housing is a big part of what kids like about sports? (You can tell them that in a study of what kids enjoy about sports, “playing rough” came in at number 65 - just ahead of carpooling on the way to the game.)
- The top five things kids like about playing sports (both boys and girls) are trying your best, working hard, getting exercise, playing together as a team and getting in shape. Do fighting or violence help you do any of these?

Now that we’ve thought about the sports that you play, let’s talk about watching sports in media.

- How many of you watch sports? Do any of you often watch a sport that you play?
- What are some of the differences between what the sport is like when you play it and how it looks in the media?
- Who are some famous athletes you know from these sports? (list responses on board beside sports)
- Are any of these athletes known for being violent? Make sure to reinforce to students that violence is not only physical but also includes threatening people or being verbally abusive, either in person or through media (including social media.)
- What type of violence do these athletes participate in? Have they ever been punished for their actions?
- Do you think it’s okay for kids to watch something where people could seriously very hurt, like boxing or mixed martial arts (MMA)? Why or why not?
- What about a sport where people pretend to get hurt, like pro wrestling?
- Do you think there’s a difference between sports where violence is part of the sport (like boxing) and ones where players get into fights with each other (like hockey)? (A good test of this question is whether there is still violence in the sport when it’s played at the Olympics.)
- If violence isn’t part of sports like hockey, why do they think sports leagues and media allow it?
- Do audiences expect to see violence in some sports? How would they react if they expected to see it but didn’t?

- Do audiences use digital media (social networks, YouTube, etc.) to encourage or reward violence? If so, how?
- What messages do you think audiences take from how fighting in sports is punished or rewarded?

TOWN HALL: VIOLENCE IN SPORTS

Tell students that they're going to take everything you've discussed so far and consider the question *Should fighting be banned from hockey?*

The format for this discussion will be a *town hall*, in which different students represent the views of different "townspeople" with an interest in the topic.

The townspeople whose views should be represented are:

- A professional (male) hockey player
- An amateur (student) hockey player
- A gym teacher or amateur hockey coach
- A hockey viewer
- A representative from a TV network that broadcasts hockey
- A doctor who treats hockey players
- A parent of a young hockey fan

(If you like you can add to this list, or let students brainstorm what other perspectives would be important to include.)

Depending on the grade level and your particular class, you may choose to have a single town hall and assign groups to the different "townspeople" or have multiple town halls with each "townsperson" represented by a single student.

Each student or group should prepare a two-to-three minute speech in which they explain whether or not they think fighting should be banned from hockey and why (or why not).

If you wish, older students can then write a short persuasive essay that incorporates what they thought were the best points raised in the town hall.

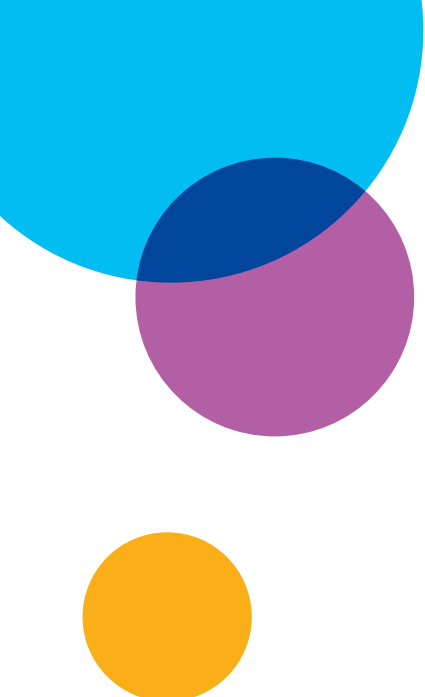
EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

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 perpetuated by the use of social media. Students could also focus on the query of whether social media increases and promotes violence within sports. Students could either:

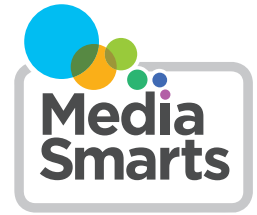
1. Students could tally the number of fights and penalties in a Hockey Night in Canada game. Students will time the length of the game, the number of fights, the duration of each fight (using a stopwatch), the number of penalties, and the duration of each penalty. They will also note the crowd's reaction 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 an athlete's image on and off social media, as opposed to spontaneous responses within the game itself? (Take a look at WWF Wrestling, for instance.)

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- What actions differentiate posturing or showmanship from regular fighting? (i.e. playing up to the crowd or the cameras, tweeting aggressive tweets at other athletes after a game, competitive “smack talk” after a competition.
 - Students could look at social media pages of their favourite athletes in various sports and see if the persona they build online is perpetuated by comments from their followers urging them to be aggressive. Were they always like this in the beginning of their career? Why or why not? Students could present this in the form of an “Instagram vs. Reality” post.

VIOLENCE IN SPORTS



Responding to Media Violence

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 conflicts, either physical or relational, that are inherent in these sports or, in some cases, that 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. Digital media, such as social media platforms, also perpetuate violence among athletes while creating personas online that youth are exposed to. The purpose of these personas might be to increase rivalries, for example, by posting verbally violent posts or messages to other athletes. Their fan base might even depend on the fact that they are seen as aggressive online, causing

controversy, which in turn increases their popularity by keeping them “current”.

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.