LESSON PLAN

The Constructed World of Media Families

This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A digital media literacy framework for Canadian schools: https://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework.

LEVEL: Grade 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.

Overview

In this lesson, students identify the differences between media families and real families by analyzing the conventions used by various types of TV shows media and by comparing the problems and actions of media families to real world families. Students begin by analyzing and discussing excerpts from different types of television shows, and YouTube channels about families. Using observation charts, students then work in groups to deconstruct media programs about families.

Learning outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

• an awareness of the codes and conventions used in different media texts 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

• Excerpts from television dramas, sitcoms, and reality shows.

  – An example of a drama (*Stranger Things*): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYzmCZ1WkvM

  – Example of sitcom (*Family Reunion*): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4eHcqKh-X8

  – Example of reality show (*Keeping Up With the Kardashians*): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa0ij3pEOrw

• Excerpts from YouTube as a source of television with daily vlogs and family YouTube channels.

  – Example of daily vlog (*ItsJudysLife*): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5yAuJNxvhI

  – Example of family YouTuber (*SacconeJoly*– the trailer on their YouTube page): https://www.youtube.com/user/LeFloofTV

• Photocopy the *Media Family Observation Chart*.

Procedure

Ask students for some examples of families (real or fictional) in media they enjoy. (Tell them to think of any kind of media—scripted or reality TV, movies, comics, video games, online videos, etc.)

Now ask: how can we tell we are watching a family created for media consumption rather than a family you would see in real life?

If students have difficulty thinking of differences, prompt them to think about media codes and conventions such as music, clothes, exaggerated expressions and actions, commercials or paid product placement, editing, canned laughter, etc.)

As a class, have students watch excerpts from the examples listed in Preparation and Materials about, or featuring, families.

For each example, discuss:

- How are these media families different or similar to their own? (Consider both who is *in* the families and how the families *interact* with one another.)
- How do some of the codes and conventions discussed above influence how we feel about the family as a whole, and about individual members of the family? For example:
- Are certain family members usually grouped together in shots?
- Are some more often alone in a shot?
- Does the family, or individual members, have particular music associated with them? If so, how does that music make you feel?
- How do 'reaction shots' of different family members tell us how they feel about other family members?
- Is one member of the family our 'viewpoint' character, the one the audience identifies with the most? How do we know? (For instance, does one character do voice-over narration? Does one character get more time onscreen?)
- Are family members given stereotyped roles like 'the nerd,' 'the bad boy,' 'the clown', etc.? How are these roles communicated to us?

OBSERVING MEDIA FAMILIES

Divide the class into groups. Using their Observation Chart, each group will be responsible for watching an excerpt or episode of a particular media text about a family. 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 in media?

• What kinds of problems do real families face?

• Do we learn how to solve problems from watching media?

• Do adults and children solve problems in the same way: on media? In the real world?

MEDIA VERSUS REALITY

Now have each group act out the scene from their text in which the problem is posed. (Make sure the students identify the name of the character they are playing as well as their role in the family.) When they have reached the point where the problem is posed, have them pause and then ask the class to help them 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.
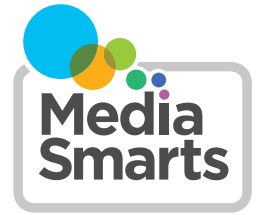
THE CONSTRUCTED WORLD OF MEDIA FAMILIES

Media Family Observation Chart

NAME OF TEXT	STATUS OF FAMILY	WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?	WHOSE PROBLEM IS IT?	WHO SOLVES THE PROBLEM?

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