



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 2 to 6  
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# Teaching Media: Learning With Media



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

## Overview

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In this lesson, students learn about media as a source of information, and how this information is presented from a particular point of view.

## Learning Outcomes

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*Big ideas/key concepts:* Students will understand that...

Media are constructions

- Media makers make particular choices to achieve specific purposes

Media have social and political implications

- How media present reality affects how we see the world

Each medium has a unique aesthetic form:

- Codes and conventions of genres influence creators audiences
- Media makers draw and direct audiences' attention using specific techniques

*Key questions:*

- How do we learn about the world from media?
- How do we learn differently from different mediums and genres?
- What different purposes are media makers working to achieve?
- How do media makers draw and direct our attention?
- How do media makers' purposes and choices affect what we learn from media?



*Essential knowledge:* Students will know...

- Reading media: Common media genres; media techniques for drawing and directing attention.
- Making and remixing: Basic video production techniques
- Media representation: Effects of genre and purpose on how accurately a work reflects reality.
- Key vocabulary: *Genre, Documentary, Educational video, Reality show, How-to video, Feature film, Action movie*

*Performance tasks:* Students will be able to...

- Name examples of different genres
- Assess how realistic different genres are
- Identify different ways that media makers direct attention, speculate on the reasons for their choices and analyze their effects
- *Optional:* Create a media work that demonstrates their knowledge of media codes and conventions

## Preparation and Materials

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Prepare to project the video clips [How to Build a Fire](#), [Cast Away](#), [Hudzabe Tribe](#), and [Survivor: Cook Islands](#).

Prepare to distribute the handouts *Fantasy or Reality?* and *Storyboard Template*.

Optional: Prepare to project the videos [Boogie Doodle](#) and [Tripping the Rideau Canal](#)

## Procedure

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### How do we learn?

Start by asking students: How do you make a good paper airplane?

Let them discuss for a minute or so without giving feedback. If your students do not have much experience making paper airplanes, you can try an alternative such as making snowballs or cootie catchers, playing hopscotch, jumping rope, etc.

Now ask: How can you *learn* to make a good paper airplane (or your alternate activity)?

Let students discuss for a few minutes and list answers on the board. The following ways of learning are likely to come up:

- Somebody (like a teacher, a parent/guardian, or another student) teaches you
- You watch somebody else do it
- You figure it out yourself and practice until you get better.



## How do we learn with media?

Now ask students to name things that enjoy doing with media (favourite TV shows, movies, games, books, etc.)

When they have listed a few examples, ask: Is it possible to learn from media?

If they need prompting, ask: Has anyone ever watched a YouTube or Tiktok video to learn something? Has anyone ever watched a TV show that taught them something? Have you, or another teacher, ever shown them an educational video?

Discuss: How is learning from media similar to the other kinds of learning you discussed earlier? How is it different? Is there a difference between when you are using media to learn by yourself and when someone is using it to teach you (like a parent/guardian or teacher reading you a book, or showing you a video and talking about it with you)?

Write the following words on the board and ask students if they know what they mean:

Documentary      Educational video      Reality show      How-to video      Feature film      Action movie

Make sure students understand these basic definitions:

*Documentary:* A media work that tries to represent something in the real world as accurately as possible

*Educational video:* A media work that tries to teach a specific thing to its audience

*Reality show:* A media work that uses footage of real people to entertain its audience

*How-to video:* A media work that demonstrates how to do a particular thing

*Feature film:* A full-length video that does not claim to represent the real world and tries to entertain its audience

*Action movie:* A feature film whose story is about heroic characters who solve problems through physical feats, including violence

Encourage students to give examples of each category from media that they or their family enjoy.

## Fantasy vs. reality

Now project or distribute the handout *Fantasy or Reality* and explain that we cannot say that any work is entirely real or entirely fake. To demonstrate, ask students to imagine media works that would be as far to the left or the right as possible: Could a media work be perfectly real and accurate? Could one be totally *unreal*?

As an example of an almost totally unreal work, you might discuss (and, if it is practical, show) the film [Boogie Doodle](#), which animator Norman McLaren made by drawing directly on film. Point out that while it is almost completely abstract, it has shapes (like a heart and the lines that resemble bass strings) that mean something to us and that we can't help feeling as though the shapes on the screen have some relationship to one another.

For an example of the opposite end of the spectrum, you may tell students about the Canadian documentary [Tripping the Rideau Canal](#), which is a three-hour documentary which shows a continuous point-of-view shot of a boat traveling along the Rideau Canal in Ontario. Point out that even here, though, we are only seeing what the film-maker wants us to see (the canal) during a specific time period in which they filmed. In other words, *no media work can ever be completely real or accurate because they are always framed by their makers' choices.*



Now that you have established that “reality” and “fantasy” (or “fiction” and “non-fiction” if your students are already familiar with these terms) are relative, ask students where they would place the types of media that you defined earlier. (You may have them do this individually or in pairs, using *Fantasy or Reality?* as a handout, or make it a full-class activity.)

Prompt student thinking by asking them to consider both the *content* and the *purpose* of a work:

- How “real” do we consider an educational animated show that is made with puppets (like *Sesame Street*) or is animated?
- Both documentaries and reality shows are made with unscripted video, but documentaries are made to *inform* while reality shows are made to *entertain*. How does that affect where we place them on the arrow? How does that affect how much you can trust them as a source of information?
- Where would you place a feature film that is “based on a true story” or on a historical event? What specific things about that film would affect where you placed it?
- Although documentaries generally only include things that really happened, the people who make them carefully choose what to include. In fact, a two-hour documentary is typically edited down from *four hundred hours* of footage. Does that change where on the spectrum you would place a documentary?

### Making Fire

Now tell students that they are going to watch the same activity—building a fire — in four different types of media.

Have students watch the following film clips:

*How to Build a Fire*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h5JP4HWoac>

*Cast Away* (2000) - fire making scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUDEjulbqzk>

*Hudzabe Tribe*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tW6BCcKtLik> (play to 2:30)

*Survivor: Cook Islands* (2017) - survival challenge: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oEQk3pDIBc&t=135s>

After each clip, ask students:

- What kind of media is this? (*How-to video, feature film, documentary, reality show respectively.*)
- What jumped out at you when you were watching it? What were the most memorable or interesting images and sounds? How (if at all) did each one use music?
- What made those things interesting? What did the media makers do to grab and direct your attention?
- Do you think it was made mostly to inform or to entertain? What makes you think that?
- How accurate or realistic a portrayal was it of making a fire?
- How *useful* do you think it would be to you in learning how to make a fire?

Make sure to point out that while you aren’t going to learn anything useful from a media work that isn’t accurate, being accurate doesn’t necessarily mean you can learn something useful: the documentary, for instance, was made to teach you about the Hudzabe people, not how to make a fire.



Once students have watched all the clips, ask:

What *choices* did the makers of each media work make that were different from the others? (*Prompt students to think about things like camera distance and angles, length and pacing of shots, use of sound or music and casting of “actors.”*)

How did those choices help the work be entertaining or educational?

### **Optional activity for older students:**

Have students make a *how-to video* that demonstrates how to make a paper airplane. (You may choose to have them do this either as a whole-class activity or in groups. As with the discussion at the beginning of the lesson, you can substitute another activity that students are more familiar with if you want to.)

Distribute the *Storyboard* handout and have students plan out roughly six *shots* for their video. Any sound (narration, music, sound effects, etc.) should be noted below each shot. Remind students of the different ways that the makers of the different clips got and directed the viewer’s attention to different things and encourage them to think carefully about what choices will be the most *useful* in teaching the viewer how to make a paper airplane.

If possible, have students film their videos using a smartphone or video camera. (It will probably be easiest to film each shot in sequence rather than editing them together.)

Once students have made their storyboards and/or videos, have them reflect on what choices they made in order to make the video *useful* and *educational*. What different choices might they have made if they were making a feature film, or a documentary about a champion paper-airplane maker?

### **Extension: Wacky Media Songs**

You may consider supplementing this lesson with the TVOntario Original Series *Wacky Media Songs*. These short videos explore a variety of digital media literacy topics. Here are a few suggested videos and discussion topics:

#### **[Frame It!](#)**

Frames aren’t just for pictures! When we tell a story, we choose what parts to keep in and what parts to leave out. What we keep is “in the frame”. Every type of media has a kind of invisible frame, too! Get in the frame with Ava!

- Before the video, ask: What kinds of choices do you think people make when they make media, like filming a movie?
- After the video, ask: What’s the difference between looking out a window and seeing something framed in media?  
How can the media frame sometimes be misleading?



### Reading Images!

Did you know you can read images almost like you read words? It's called visual communication and it has its own language. Sing along with Ava as she explores how camera angles and lighting are used to affect our emotions.

- Before the video, ask: Think about some of the best scenes in your favourite movies. What makes you remember them? What makes them exciting, or funny, or dramatic?
- After the video, ask: Did some of the movie scenes you thought of use the things Ava was talking about, like close-ups, camera angles, and light and colour? (You can use YouTube to watch some of these scenes if you don't have a copy or access on a streaming service.) Do other media, like comics or video games, use some of the same techniques? What other techniques do they use to do the same thing?

### Fake News!

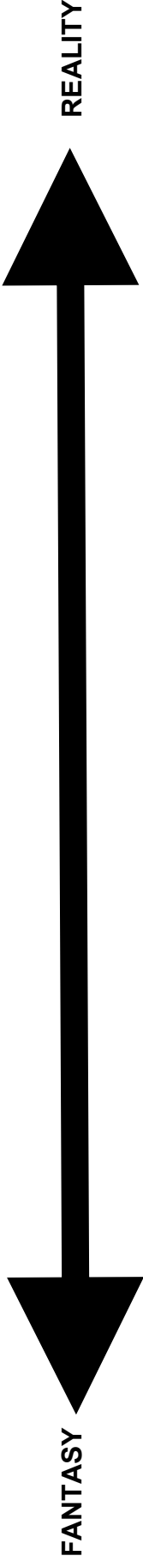
Fake news can look like it's real, but sometimes it's just someone trying to trick you. How can you tell the difference? Ava's got hot tips on how to spot fake news!

- Before the video, ask: What's the difference between news and other media?
- After the video, ask: What are some of the things Ava suggests doing to find out if a news story is reliable? (Find out where it came from and if they're a reliable source of news.)
- What are some places reliable news comes from? (Print newspapers, TV news broadcasts, websites of reputable news organizations.)



# FANTASY OR REALITY?

MOST FANTASTIC



MOST REALISTIC



## STORYBOARD

