



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 1 to 6
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Teaching Media: Thinking About Media



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

Overview

In this lesson, children begin to think about basic concepts such as how audiences interpret meaning, and the constructed world of television and film.

Learning Outcomes

Know: Students will learn the following essential domain knowledge:

- Reading media: How elements such as camera shots are chosen for specific effects
- Making and remixing: How film-makers and other media creators use camera angle, distance, composition and colour to communicate character
- Media representation: The ways that how we feel about characters represented in media is influenced by the techniques that are used to portray them

Understand: Students will learn the following key concepts/big ideas:

- Media are constructions: Media works were made many people who made choices that affect the final work
- Each medium has a unique aesthetic form: Different media communicate in different ways
- Media have social and political implications: Media influence how we see people and groups

Do: Students will *use* tools to create a media work, *understand* how media makers' choices influence how we experience a work, and *engage* with sympathetic and unsympathetic media representations

Preparation and Materials

- Prepare to display or distribute the handout *Likeable and Unlikeable Characters: Film Techniques*



Procedure

Viewing, Thinking, Forming Opinions

Discuss a television show that most students are familiar with. It can be an animated or live-action show.

Ask students:

- Do you like this program?
- What do you like best about it?
- Are there any parts you don't like?
- In this show, what are some things that could really have happened?
- Does anything happen that could never happen in real life?
- Who is your favourite character? *(Try to get a consensus about which characters are generally liked.)*
- Who is your least favourite character? *(Get a consensus about which are disliked.)*



(Photo by Depositphotos.)

Exploring some filmmaking techniques

Television and movies communicate part of their message without words. The "language" of film includes music, lighting, costumes, props, camera angles, editing, and other techniques, which we understand on an almost subliminal level. We can help children to recognize and to name these elements, and to discover how the makers of TV shows and movies use these techniques to create atmosphere and construct meaning.

Have students try this with a partner:

- Stand a few feet apart and look at each other through a frame you've made with your hands (see photo above for an example)
- Now "zoom in" for a "close-up" by walking closer to each other until all that's in your view is your partner's face.
- Try stepping a little closer for an "extreme close-up." How do you feel about being so close to your partner?
- "Zoom" back out to a "medium" shot so that you can see your partner from their chest to the top of their head.
- From this distance, try talking about how the different shots feel, and as you are talking, start zooming out again, this time, to a "long" shot. How does this affect the conversation?

Have students change partners and then try this:

- Find a reasonable distance for talking to your partner and get a chair.
- Have your partner stand on the chair and look down at you, while you crouch on the ground and look up.
- How does your partner look from your low angle? Trade places.



- How does your partner look from the high angles?
- Which angle would you choose to illustrate a character who is large and powerful? Which angle is best for creating a character who is small and unimportant?
 - Medium shots give you some idea about what's happening between two people.
 - Close-ups let you know lots about feelings.

Point out to students that many different media use these same techniques, such as comics, news and video games.

Character in camera

Remind students of the discussion from earlier about which characters were generally seen as being likeable, and which were seen as being unlikeable. Now ask them to explain what makes these characters likeable or unlikeable *other than things they say or do*. If they are an animated character, how does the character design make them likeable or unlikeable? If they are a live action character, what is the effect of the casting, costuming and makeup (hair, etc.)?

Now ask about how the character is *filmed*:

- Do they get a lot of time onscreen?
- Do we often see things from their point of view (as though we were looking through their eyes) or watch them doing something interesting?
- Are they often filmed in close-up (which makes us feel like we know them)?

All of these things can make a character more sympathetic. If we often see them in extreme close up or long shots, or if we see them from another character's point of view, we will be less sympathetic to them. Camera angles (high or low shots) can work both ways: a low angle might make a character feel heroic or dangerous, and a high angle might make us feel that a character is weak and not worth our attention, or that they are helpless and need us to protect them.

Project or distribute the handout *Likeable or Unlikeable Characters: Film Techniques* and ask students how you can tell, without knowing anything about either movie, that the first character is likable and the second is unlikeable.

Make sure the following points come up in the conversation:

Light and colour: The first shot has a slightly hazy light and gentle, soothing colours. The light on the character's face and clothes is soft, so that he almost blends in with the background colours. The second shot has very strong, harsh light on the character's face, which makes it pop out against the blurry background (especially with the reflective frames of her glasses). The colours on her face and glasses contrast strongly with the background.

Angle, distance and composition: The first shot is a medium close-up, which lets us see his whole face. It's a very slight high angle, which makes him feel unthreatening, and his eyes are at around our eye level which makes him feel trustworthy. The shot has a lot of empty space on the left side of the frame, which makes us feel like the character is giving us space, and his eyeline is at the character whose should we see to far left. He has a mild, open expression, as though he is listening sympathetically to something we're saying.

The extreme close up, with the top and bottom of her face out of frame, along with the extreme expression on her face, makes her seem almost grotesque. This is emphasized by the low angle, which places her nostrils at her eye level so that we are practically looking up her nose and open mouth. She fills the centre of the frame and her eyeline is towards us, which feels aggressive and disturbing. If something bad happened to her, we wouldn't be too upset.



Six-shot story

Now tell your students that you are going to tell a story in six shots. These can either be six moving shots (filmed with a video camera or the video function on a phone) or six still shots (shot with a still camera or the still photo function on a phone).

The story is:

- Two characters find an object on the ground at the same time.
- They both want it.
- They argue over who should get it.
- One of them takes it and then they both leave.

To start, film a “neutral” version of the story with the whole class. Try to make sure that your choices of angle, distance, and composition don’t make us feel more sympathetic to one or the other character.

Next, divide the class into groups. Have each group create their own version of the story in which they use film techniques you’ve studied to “stack the deck” in favour of one of the characters, by making one more likeable and/or making the other less likeable. Make sure at least half the groups choose to make the one who takes the object the likeable one. **Remind students that they can choose to show additional details (like a character’s expression or something they’re holding in their hand) but cannot change what either character does: characters cannot punch one another, for example.** (With younger students you may want to make this a whole-class project instead.)

Representing Likeability

After students have made and viewed the “slanted” scenes, review the different ways students made the characters seem likeable or unlikeable. Point out that it was relatively easy to make viewers side with one or another of the characters in the scene.

Now ask:

- Is it fair that media makers can make you like or dislike a character in ways that have nothing to do with what the character does?
- Imagine that a particular group, like kids, was always portrayed in a negative way. Do you think it would change how people saw that group?
- How can we watch for unfairly negative (or unrealistically positive) portrayals of different groups of people in media?

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?

You Do You!

Girls don't always have to be pink princesses and boys, blue superheroes even though that's often what we see in the media. We're all different and unique, and we can avoid stereotypes by just being ourselves. You do you!

- Before the video, ask: What are some ways that people who make toys, movies or games make it seem like some things are just for boys or just for girls?
- After the video, ask: Why do you think advertisers use stereotypes? (They save money by only advertising to the people they think are likely to buy something.)
How can stereotypes change how we see ourselves or other people? (Make sure students understand that there isn't anything wrong with girls liking princesses, or boys liking superheroes. The problem is if girls think they can't like superheroes and boys think they can't like princesses.)



Likeable and Unlikeable Characters: Film Techniques

What film techniques make the first character seem likeable? What makes the second one seem unlikeable?



Lion (2016)



Delicatessen (1991)