Defining Popular Culture

Overview

Defining Popular Culture is part of a three-lesson unit designed to introduce students to the concept of popular culture and the role that it plays in their lives. In this lesson, students learn about the media's role in defining and perpetuating trends and influences in popular culture. They begin with a class discussion about popular culture and past and present examples of fads, trends and icons. Following this, students participate in a number of activities in which they explore popular culture in more depth.

Learning Outcomes

Students demonstrate:

- an understanding of the concept of popular culture and its components
- an understanding of the prevalence of popular culture in their daily lives
- an awareness of the cyclical nature of popular culture

Preparation and Materials

- Dictionaries
- If a copy of the video *Scanning Television: Seeing Ourselves* is available through your school board, use this film to introduce the concept of popular culture to your students.

Procedure

Guided discussion

Write the following on the blackboard:

Popular Culture is the arts, artifacts, entertainment, fads, beliefs and values that are shared by large segments of society.

- With a student at the blackboard writing down suggestions, have your class brainstorm a list of objects, individuals and attitudes that are considered "Popular Culture." *(Students will probably need prompting to include items from various sources such as clothing, TV, music, art, slang, activities, etc., and don't be afraid to include items from your own past and lifestyle.)*

- Once a list has been compiled, place the following words on the blackboard beside the list. Each student should consult a dictionary or other online resource for a definition, which should be placed in their workbooks. Discuss definitions as a class.

Fads Trends Icons

- To conclude this activity, have students classify appropriate items from the brainstorming list under each of these headings in their workbooks. As a class, discuss which category each item should fall under. When discussing fads and trends, ask students if they can think of current fads that they believe will become trends. *(You might want to post these fads on a bulletin board and mark their progress over time.)*

Ask students:

- What does it take for a fad become a trend?
- What is the difference between a celebrity and an icon

Activities

Activity One: Journal Topics

- Ask students to list their encounters with popular culture over the next twenty-four hours and reflect on their findings in a journal entry.

- Assign the question "Is there a difference between American and Canadian popular culture?" Have students write their answers to this question (with examples) in their journals.

Activity Two: Group Research

- In groups, have students research the fads, trends and icons of popular culture from specific decades during the twentieth century and present their findings to class.

Activity Three: Computer Extension

If your school has access to a scanner or programs such as Powerpoint or Hyperstudio, students might consider creating an online presentation exploring Canadian popular culture.

Note to Canadian Teachers: The book *Mondo Canuck: A Canadian Pop Culture Odyssey*, by Geoff Pevere and Greig Dymond, is an excellent resource for this activity.

Activity Four: Art Extension

The term Pop Art, from the early 1960s, was used to classify works of art that used the common, everyday environment as their subject matter. Subjects like coke bottles, beer and soup cans, comic strip characters and even hamburgers were depicted in various mediums to make witty, satirical comments on the popular culture of the time. After introducing students to the works of artists like Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, Claes Oldenburg and Duane Hanson, have them create their own Pop Art piece that reflects today's popular culture.

Evaluation

Journal entries, group and individual activities.