



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 1 to 4  
**About the Author:** Adapted by MediaSmarts, with permission from Gloria De Gaetano Screen Smarts: A Family Guide To Media Literacy

# Facing TV Violence: Counting & Discussing Violence on the Screen

## Overview

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This lesson helps children become aware of the types of violence that appear on television, the frequency with which these acts occur, and how they respond to these acts. It begins with a guided discussion about the different types of violence and then, how violence is portrayed on TV. Using worksheets, students then survey the television shows they enjoy for acts of violence and then, as a class, compile and discuss their findings.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students demonstrate:

- an awareness of the different types of violence in children's television programs.
- an awareness of the frequency of violent acts in children's television programs.
- an understanding of their own reactions to various types of violence..

## Preparation and Materials

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- Distribute Letter to Parents prior to lessons.
- Photocopy *TV Violence Observation Form* or *Zap Sheet*.

## Procedure

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### Guided discussion

Brainstorm with your students:

- What is violence? (Make sure that students consider both physical and emotional acts of violence in their definitions: i.e., violence is when a person hurts someone or makes them feel sad or scared.)



- How many types of violent acts can you think of? (Emotional acts include yelling, put-downs, name-calling, or dumping [transferring unrelated anger to another person]. Physical acts include threatening/bullying, pushing/shoving, hitting/punching/kicking, shooting/stabbing, vandalism and dangerous behaviour)
- How do you feel when someone yells at you, or calls you names, or threatens you?
- Why is emotional violence just as bad as physical violence? (Our feelings can be hurt, just like our bodies can be hurt. Yelling, put-downs, name-calling and threats are what kids are most likely to experience in the school yard, and emotionally violent acts can begin a cycle that leads to physical violence.  
put-downs or name-calling => threatening => pushing or shoving => hitting or punching => attacking with a weapon

(A good way to help children visualize this cycle is to use the idea of dominoes. You could use blocks of wood with each type of violent act on them, and demonstrate how one act can create a chain reaction.)

Once your students are familiar with the different types of violence, discuss the concept of violence on television.

- Are kids' TV shows real or pretend? (Television constructs reality. TV shows tell stories - they may look real, or have real people acting in them, but they are pretend.)
- Even though television shows are pretend, when you see someone on TV being hurt, how does that make you feel? (Chances are you will get responses like sad, scared, worried, angry, excited.)

Explain to your students that the problem with violence on TV is that it can confuse kids about the real world. If kids see lots of violence on TV they might believe that their own world is a scary and dangerous place. If kids see people on TV solving their problems with violence, they might think that violence is a normal part of life, or that violence is a good way to solve problems. And if kids see a lot of violence on TV it makes them less sympathetic to victims of violence in the real world. Studies have also shown that when some kids watch cartoons with lots of violence they themselves can become very aggressive, even though they are not watching real people!

The problem is that when we watch TV, we may not even notice how much violence we are watching, especially in cartoons, which move so quickly that we don't have time to really think about what we have just seen.

### Activity

Ask your students to think about their favourite TV show. Do they think that it is violent? Tell them that they are going to find out whether it is violent or not, using their TV Violence Observation Form.

### Optional Activity (For Primary Level)

Teachers of students in Grades 1 and 2 may wish to deal only with the amounts of violence in children's programs. If so, students can do a survey of a Saturday morning cartoon using their Zap Sheet and class discussion questions can be modified to suit the younger children.

### Discussion

After students have completed their *TV Violence Observation Forms*, ask them the following questions: (Responses can be in the form of a class discussion, or teachers may want to tabulate the results in a more formal manner.)



- Were there lots of violent acts in your show?
- Were you surprised with the number of violent acts? Why or why not?
- Did the show seem real to you? Why or why not?
- Would you like it if someone did these things to you?
- Which violent actions are used the most/least? What could the characters have done differently instead of using violent acts?
- Do the violent acts come at any particular times in the show, for example, just before commercials? Why might this happen?
- What is happening in the show when the violent acts occur? Music? Sound effects? Bright colours? Why might this happen?
- Who commits more violent acts? Men or women? Young or old? White or minority? (Check out the accents of the "bad guys!")
- Who is harmed by the violent acts? Men or Women? Young or old? White or minority?
- How did the violence (or absence of violence) make you feel after you watched this show?

### Activity

Have students create a poster promoting "No Violence In TV." Display these posters in your classroom as you continue with this unit.

### Evaluation

- Completed TV Violence Observation Forms or Zap Sheets
- Poster



## Letter to Parents

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parents or Guardians,

As part of our unit on Violence, we will be encouraging children to become more aware of physical and emotional violence in the television programs that they watch. Often children are not aware of the number of cruel or unkind acts they see on their favorite shows. By counting and discussing these acts, we seek to help children become aware of screen violence and its glamorized portrayal.

In the next week, your child will be bringing home a tally sheet to complete. Choose a program that your child enjoys watching and sit down with him or her. Your child is to count the number of acts that "hurt" someone, either physically or emotionally. In dealing with emotional violence, your child is looking for verbal confrontations where the victim might feel "sad" or "scared." Please help your child place a check-mark in the appropriate place.

To prepare your child for classroom discussion, you might consider the following:

1. Who commits the violent acts?
2. Who is harmed by the violent acts?
3. How would you feel if someone did this to you?
4. Did this seem real to you? Why or why not?
5. Could the problem have been handled differently?

Thank you for your help. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



## TV Violence Observation Form

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Name:

Date:

Program:

Length:

<b>Hitting &amp; Punching</b>
<b>Pushing &amp; Shoving</b>
<b>Shooting</b>
<b>Knifing</b>
<b>Zapping</b>
<b>Destroying</b>
<b>Put-Downs</b>
<b>Name Calling</b>
<b>Threats</b>
<b>Yelling</b>

Source: Television And The Lives Of Our Children, Gloria DeGaetano, © 1993.



## Zap Sheet

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Play the Saturday morning ZAP! Game. It's fun! It's easy!  
Ask your whole family to play. Wow! Family fun!

### Here's how

Pick a cartoon - any cartoon.

My cartoon is: \_\_\_\_\_

It is on channel \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ (time).

Every time someone gets hurt, put a check in the ZAP!



Do hurt feelings count? Sure they do! ZAP!

What about killing people? Does that count? It sure does! ZAP!

After the cartoon is over, count your ZAPS! How many did you get?



WOW! I had \_\_\_\_\_

Show your parents how many ZAPS! there are in one cartoon. They'll be surprised!

**Would you like it if someone ZAP!-ed you?**

Source: *Television And The Lives Of Our Children*, Gloria DeGaetano, © 1993

