

Media have social and political implications

GRADES 6-8 **DURATION** 45-90 minutes

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students watch a video introducing the media literacy key concept that media have social and political implications. They discuss the idea of explicit messages in media products and then, after watching the video “It’s Not Easy Being Green,” discuss the idea that media products may have less obvious implicit messages. Students apply this analysis to another media product familiar to the class and then, in an optional final task, identify how a favourite media product has influenced them.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- understand the key concept that media have social and political implications
- understand the idea that media products may have both explicit and implicit messages
- identify implicit messages in a media text

PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

- Arrange to have access to a digital projector or digital whiteboard
- Cue up the videos **“Media Have Social and Political Implications”** [<http://bit.ly/15LZHNO>] and **“It’s Not Easy Being Green”** [<http://bit.ly/1hZlIQo>]. (If you are unable to access YouTube, this video is also available at <http://bit.ly/17OhJuP>. Full lyrics are available at <http://1.usa.gov/1gnBVxM>)

PROCEDURE

Begin by showing the video **“Media Have Social and Political Implications”** [<http://bit.ly/15LZHNO>]. At the end of the video, ask students to think about the points that are raised.

- What does it mean to say that “media have social and political implications?” (*Media can influence how we feel and what we think about social and political issues.*)
- What are some examples of things that can be influenced by what we see in media? (*What’s worth our attention and what isn’t; what’s acceptable and what isn’t; how we see particular groups.*)
- How can ordinary people use media to influence social change? (*Social media can give people a voice and help them to organize.*)

Now read from the screen the assignment: “Think about ads, articles or websites that influence positive (or negative) social or political change.”

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Ask the class to name educational TV shows they watched when they were younger (or that their younger siblings currently watch), such as *Sesame Street* or *The Magic School Bus*, and have students name subjects or lessons they learned from them (such as learning about letters or numbers from *Sesame Street* or science from *The Magic School Bus*).

Now show students the video **“It’s Not Easy Being Green”** and ask students:

- What parts of the song make it sound like Kermit is sad about being green? (*the title; wishing to be “much more colorful” and not “blend in with so many ordinary things.”*)
- What parts of the song make it sound like Kermit is happy he’s green? (*The good things green can be – Spring, a mountain, an ocean, and a tree.*)
- At the end of the song, Kermit still has mixed feelings about being green (“it’ll do fine... I think it’s what I want to be.”) What *implicit* (not obvious) message can we take from that? (*Possible answers: That we all sometimes wish we were different; that we should be proud of who we are, even if it makes us sad sometimes; that it’s better for people to be different than for everyone to be the same.*)

Ask students if they can think of other lessons from educational TV shows that aren’t as obvious. Here are a few examples to get them started:

- Ernie and Bert show that it’s possible for people to be very different and still be friends.
- Oscar the Grouch shows that other people may like things we don’t like, and might not like the things that we do like.
- The adventures on *The Magic School Bus* show that you can solve any problem with ingenuity and knowledge of science.

Now have the class brainstorm a recent *non-educational* TV show or movie that all or nearly all in the class are familiar with. Ask students to consider:

- What kinds of things do characters do that are rewarded, and what things are punished?
- What different kinds of roles do male characters play in the story? What different kinds of roles do female characters play? Is there a difference between the range of roles?
- Are there characters who are members of a visible minority, have a physical or mental disability, are Aboriginal or are identified as being of a particular religion or as not being heterosexual? If so, how many characters fall into any of these categories? Is there a difference between the roles played by these characters and the roles played by White, abled, non-Aboriginal or heterosexual characters?
- What things are shown as being desirable (status, friends, attention)?
- What things are shown as being undesirable? (*If students are stuck on this question, have them identify an unsympathetic character and describe what s/he is like and what happens to him/her.*)

Record a master list on the board of the implicit lessons the class has identified in the TV show or movie.

OPTIONAL TASK

Have students select a media product (TV show, movie, book, video game, etc.) that is or was a favourite of theirs. Using the same questions as above, have them identify things they learned (possibly without being aware of it) from the media product.