



## LESSON PLAN

<b>Level:</b>	Grades 9 to 12
<b>About the Author:</b>	Matthew Johnson, Director of Education, MediaSmarts
<b>Duration:</b>	1-2 hours

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# Miscast and Seldom Seen

## Overview

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In this lesson students consider how well their favourite TV shows, movies and video games reflect the diversity of Canadian society. Students are introduced to the media education key concepts that "media are constructed to represent reality" and "media communicate values and messages", and learn about the constructed nature of media products, how media "re-presents" people, ideas and events from a particular viewpoint, and what the possible consequences of under-representation and inaccurate portrayals of diversity might be. Next, students learn about Canadian voluntary industry codes on diversity portrayal and consider whether they should be applied to other media. As a summary activity, students take a stand on a diversity issue relating to media through creating a social media campaign on a platform of their choice.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will:

- become aware of how diversity is portrayed in Canadian media
- understand the effects of under-representation and stereotyping on minority groups and on society's perceptions and attitudes towards them
- appreciate the consequences of under-representation both behind and in front of the screen
- learn about how to take action on issues relating to diversity in media
- express and support their opinion by creating a media product

## Preparation and Materials

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Review the mini-lesson [Unpacking Privilege](#)

Photocopy the following documents:

- *Diversity Portrayal Worksheet*
- *Industry Diversity Codes*
- *Diversity Advocacy Campaigns*
- *A Quick Guide to Online Activism*
- *Advocating for Better Portrayals of Diversity in Media*



If you are showing the *Media Literacy 101* and *Digital Literacy 101* videos, arrange to project them with a digital projector or display them on a digital whiteboard.

## Procedure

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### How Media Affects Our Views of Diversity

Begin by asking students to name their favourite TV shows. Make a list on the board and have students vote for the top four favourite comedy shows, top four dramatic shows and top four reality shows (eliminate any that are entirely unfamiliar to a significant number of students). Then do the same for the top four video games and top four recent movies.

Introduce the idea that **media are constructions that re-present reality**. You may choose to show your students the video [Media Literacy 101: Media are Constructions](#) as a way of doing so. Afterwards, explain that this means that media texts are created – every part of a media text is the result of a decision made consciously or unconsciously regarding what to include and exclude as well as how to present what is included – and that audiences perceive media products as representations of reality, correctly or not. (You may choose to illustrate the later point by showing the video [Media Literacy 101: Audiences Negotiate Meaning](#).)

Give students the example of a documentary: we accept it as a representation of reality, but the director had to make decisions about what footage to include and what to leave out, what music to use on the soundtrack, and even where to point the camera – pointing a camera in one direction automatically means you’re leaving out everything that camera isn’t pointing at.

Remind students that people who *make* media are not necessarily media *literate*. They often use tropes and clichés without realizing they are harmful stereotypes, and like most of us base their understanding of areas like medicine or law enforcement more on media they themselves have seen than on reality. Ask students how a media producer’s decisions and assumptions might influence diversity portrayal (she may have an assumption that a particular type of character must be white, male, heterosexual, etc.; the media she creates might be based on her own experience, which might not include certain minority groups, etc.). As well, media makers often make use of stereotypes associated with different *genres*: for example, Asian characters are often portrayed either as sexless (if male) or highly sexualized (if female), and are either the butt of jokes in comedies or martial artists in action movies; Black characters are often stereotyped as criminals in action movies, appear as wise advisors to White characters in dramas, and are rarely in comedies at all unless they have all-Black casts.

Introduce the idea that **media communicate values and messages** (even if these are just the creator’s unquestioned assumptions) and **have social implications** (because we base our view of the world in part on the media we consume). (You may choose to illustrate this point by showing the video, [Media Literacy 101: Media have social and political implications](#).) Ask students how the portrayal of diversity in media texts can influence how we see the world (we might have an inaccurate view of certain groups or associate them with **stereotypes**).

### Students’ Experiences with Diversity in Media

Divide students into five groups: comedy TV, dramatic TV, reality TV, video games and “blockbuster” movies (define this as movies you would want to see first in the theatre.) Each group should make a list of all of the characters they can think of in each show/game/movie and identify each character as Lead (the show is about them or they are part of a group of four or fewer main characters), Major (a secondary character in a show about one person or a significant part of an ensemble of five or more characters) or Minor (does not fit either of the other two categories).



Distribute the *Diversity Portrayal* worksheet and have students analyze their lists of characters. How many characters are members of a visible minority? How many characters can they think of whose religion they can identify? How many Indigenous characters, how many are LGBTQ+ characters and how many characters have a disability? In cases where characters are part of a minority group, are they Lead, Major or Minor? Are these characters portrayed with harmful stereotypes that are often found in the genre?

Have groups share their findings. Did they find a greater range of portrayals in a particular medium? Which groups are better represented in each medium, or overall? Are there any groups not represented at all? Do students feel that the diversity that exists in society is accurately represented in the media? (For accurate data on ethnic diversity in Canada, see <<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016016/98-200-x2016016-eng.cfm>>. For religion, see <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3210019801>> For disability, see <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>>. For sexual orientation, see <[https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/dai/smr08/2015/smr08\\_203\\_2015#a3](https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/dai/smr08/2015/smr08_203_2015#a3)>.

As a class, make a list of the minority group characters who were identified. Were there any Lead characters? How many were Major characters? Have students go into more detail about the characters – were they portrayed as well-rounded characters or in a stereotyped way? (You don't need to "fish" for negative portrayals – it's important to recognize positive portrayals as well as positive aspects of problematic portrayals.) How might a member of that group feel about the character's portrayal? If there are groups that are entirely unrepresented, discuss how it might feel to never see anyone like you in a particular genre or medium.

Distribute or project the *Voluntary Industry Diversity Codes* handout and talk through it. Ask students: should other media (movies, video games, magazines, music videos, etc.) adopt similar codes? Should these codes be applied to video sites like YouTube or streaming services like Netflix? Why or why not?

### Advocating for Better Portrayals of Diversity in Media

Explain to students that those diversity codes were created in part because people *advocated* for them. In the old days that meant things like writing letters to industry groups like the CBSC and regulatory bodies like the CRTC, and that is still an effective kind of advocacy. Thanks to social networking, though, it's easier than ever for people who want to make a change to meet and organize people who care about the same issue and to get other people involved. If you wish you may show students the video [Digital Literacy 101: Interactions Through Digital Media Can Have a Real Impact](#) to help communicate to students the ways in which young people can use digital media to make a difference.

Distribute or project the handout *Diversity Advocacy Campaigns* and either have students read it individually talk through it with the class. You may have students answer the questions in writing or simply discuss them with the class:

- What were the goals of the different campaigns?
- How did each campaign use social media?
- What can you conclude about what makes a media diversity campaign successful?



## Evaluation Activity

Distribute the assignment sheet *Advocating for Better Portrayals of Diversity in Media* and the handout *A Quick Guide to Online Activism*.

Explain to students that they will create a campaign on a social network of their choice (such as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter or Facebook) that will either:

- 1) advocate for applying industry diversity codes such as the CBSC's Equitable Portrayal Code to media other than broadcast/cable TV and radio, or
- 2) advocate for a specific change to a particular diversity portrayal practice (such as the examples explored in the *Advocating for Better Portrayals of Diversity in Media* activity.)

Go through the assignment sheet and discuss with students which issues they might want to address. Encourage students to consult the handout *A Quick Guide to Online Activism* while developing their campaign.

If necessary, remind them that the point is to address groups that are either under-represented or badly represented in media. If a significant number of students do not seem to understand this, you may want to pause to deliver the [Unpacking Privilege](#) mini-lesson.

Once students have completed the assignment, have them present their media products and campaign plans to the class.



## Diversity Portrayal Worksheet

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**Medium/Genre:**

1. List the TV shows, movies or games in the far-left column. In the other columns list any characters you can think of that fit that category.

	<b>Visible Minority Characters</b>	<b>Indigenous Characters</b>	<b>LGBTQ+ Characters</b>	<b>Characters with Disabilities</b>



2. List the characters you identified above and identify in what show, video game or movie s/he appears and what minority group s/he is a member of. Then say whether they are Lead (the show is about them or they are part of a group of four or fewer main characters), Major (a secondary character in a show about one person or a significant part of an ensemble of five or more characters) or Minor (does not fit either of the other two categories) and explain why you feel s/he fits in that category.

Character	Appears in...	Minority Group	Major, Lead or Minor?	Harmful stereotypical trait?	Reason



## Industry Diversity Codes

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In Canada, there's a system in place to ensure equitable representation in broadcast media. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) – the regulatory agency that governs radio and television content in Canada – clearly states that Canadian television programming should reflect the country's cultural diversity, and when broadcasters apply for, or renew, their licences they are expected to demonstrate a commitment to cultural diversity through specific initiatives.

The Canadian Broadcast Standards Council's Equitable Portrayal Code was created to uphold the equitable portrayal of all people on broadcast/cable television and radio. The Equitable Portrayal Code was created to overcome any "negative portrayal and stereotyping in broadcast programming, including commercial messages, based on matters of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, or physical or mental disability".

A few examples of the general principles of the code created by the CBSC are:

- The portrayal of recognizable groups should be reflective of their actual social and professional achievements, education, etc.
- Broadcasters should attempt to show all identifiable groups in various social and occupational roles outside and inside of the home.

Nothing should censure what a healthy sexuality looks like; nothing should promote sexual harm; avoid and eliminate the depiction of gratuitous harm in a sexual context.

- Ensure a varied approach to programming that reflects all identifiable groups

The physical code itself has ten different parts that are outlined in more detail on their webpage, they are as follows:

1. Equitable Portrayal
2. Human Rights
3. Negative Portrayal
4. Stereotyping
5. Stigmatization and Victimization
6. Derision of myths, traditions or practices
7. Degrading Material
8. Exploitation
9. Language and Terminology
10. Contextual Considerations

The application of this code is overseen by the CBSC and any complaints or queries should be lodged with them.



## Diversity Advocacy Campaigns

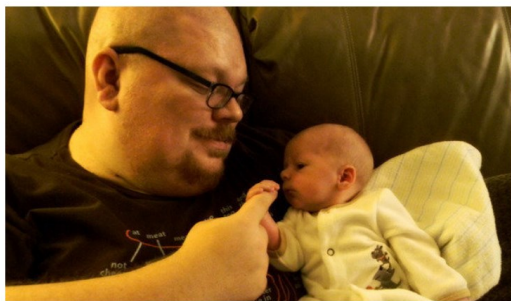
### #OscarsSoWhite



This hashtag was started by activist April Reign in response to only White actors receiving Academy Award nominations for acting in 2015. Though the tweet above (which refers to something frequently experienced by Black women) had not been intended as the slogan of a campaign, because Reign's Twitter account was followed by many other activists and people in the entertainment industry it quickly became a popular hashtag. When only White performers were nominated again in 2016 the hashtag became the focus of a more activist campaign and, as a result, the Academy's board of directors agreed to double the number of women and visible minorities by 2020. Nominations in the next three years were significantly more diverse and the Academy has met its target for increased diversity, although it is still 84% White and 68% male.

### Dads, Not Dummies

#### We're Dads, Huggies. Not Dummies.

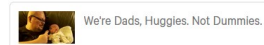


Chris Routly started this petition to Kimberly-Clark / HUGGIES

I'm a dad of two young boys, both still in different stages of diapers.

#### Confirmed victory

This petition made change with 1,322 supporters!



Share on Facebook

Send a Facebook message

Send an email to friends

Tweet to your followers

Copy link

This campaign was started in response to an ad campaign for Huggies diapers that invited mothers to "Nominate a Dad ... Hand him some diapers & wipes and watch the fun ... Tell us how it went on Facebook!"

Chris Routley objected to the way the campaign suggested men were not able to do basic parenting tasks like changing diapers. He started a petition at the Change.org website and encouraged people to share it on social media, as well as responding on Huggies' own Facebook page. After more than a thousand people signed and shared the petition, Huggies

pulled the "nominate a Dad" campaign and changed its ads to show fathers being more involved in raising their kids. It also created a movement that responded when other brands did ads that showed fathers as being incompetent or uninvolved.





## “If You’re Surprised…”



Shiden Tekle, Liv Francis-Cornibert, Kofi Asante and Bel Matos da Costa were all teenagers when they founded Legally Black and collaborated with activist group Advocacy Academy to create a series of movie posters that showed Black actors playing roles such as Harry Potter, James Bond and the Doctor (from the UK TV series *Doctor Who*). While the posters were originally meant just as a personal project, another activist organization, Special Patrol Group, agreed to print them and placed them on billboards in London. Each poster had the tagline “If you’re surprised, it means you don’t see enough Black actors in major roles.” Although most of the posters were taken down in a few days, by that time many people had posted pictures of them on social media. The ads, which are still fond on Legally Black’s Instagram page and shared widely on social media, have spurred a lot of discussion about diversity representation in UK media and in 2020 an episode of *Doctor Who* featured a Black woman as the Doctor.

### Questions

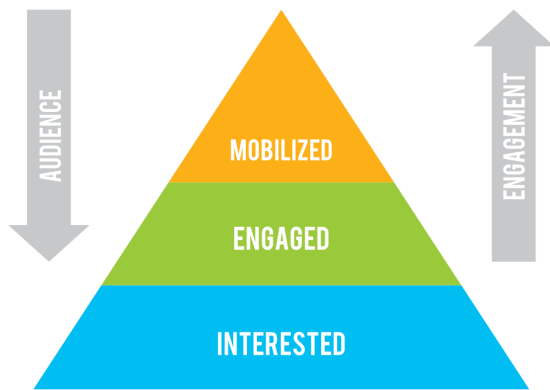
- What were the goals of the different campaigns?
- How did each campaign use social media?
- What can you conclude about what makes a media diversity campaign successful?



## A Quick Guide to Online Activism

Thanks to the internet and social media like Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok, it's easier than ever to share your views and encourage others to join you in making change.

Because everything on the internet is connected, anyone has the chance to reach a worldwide audience, but not everyone will respond to the same message.



Based on Mobilisation Lab's *Engagement Pyramid*

Think of the people who might see what you post as being a pyramid.

As you go up the pyramid, you reach fewer people, but the people that you reach are more engaged.

To promote your cause, you need to make the base of the pyramid bigger by getting more people interested in your cause, and also move people further up the pyramid by getting them more engaged.

### How to interest a wide audience

"The more educated I got, the angrier I became." Shiden Tekle, 18, *Legally Black* cofounder

**EDUCATE OTHERS AND RAISE AWARENESS.** The best way to widen the base of your pyramid is to let people know more about your issue.

Don't just use facts and figures – tell a story about a person or group of people directly affected.

Use images and video. Most social networks rank posts with images and video content higher, and people are more likely to interact with them too (sharing, clicking on links, etc.) Memes are another way of getting your message across in a way that can be funny but also call attention to serious issues.

How to engage an interested audience

**SHARE WHAT YOU'RE DOING.** Sharing is what social media is all about, and it's also one of the best ways to convince people who are interested in your issue to get more involved. Showing people what you're doing can make them feel like they can do it, too.

Another way of engaging people in a cause is to show them that other people believe in it. Most of us base our beliefs, at least partly, on what we think most other people believe, and social media can create a "majority illusion" that makes it look like the loudest voices are the majority. If your audience sees that lots of people care about your issue, it will make them a lot more likely to get involved.

**CONNECT WITH OTHER PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT THE SAME THINGS.** Social media is also about making connections, and it can be a great way to find other people who care about the same issues as you. You can do things like search hashtags or see who other people are following to find allies you didn't know you had.



**AMPLIFY OTHER PEOPLE'S VOICES.** Don't just use social media to promote your own voice: once you have a platform, you can use it to help other people be heard as well. You can do this through a hashtag that invites other people to speak out, like #MeToo, but you can also make a point of inviting and sharing voices that might otherwise not be heard. That's extra important when there are people who might have a different perspective or are more directly affected by your issue than you are.

"Part of [what I do] is ... give others a platform. I am very aware of the fact that I am white, middle-class and able-bodied, and there are a lot of things I feel I can't speak to." Ellen Jones, LGBTQ+ activist.

### **How to mobilize an engaged audience**

**ADVOCATE FOR YOUR ISSUE.** Because most politicians, corporations and government agencies have a social media presence, you can connect directly with them.

Once your campaign is off the ground, you might be able to get news outlets to cover it, so make sure to find reporters who cover the right "beat" (the topics they write about – for example, most news outlets have different beats for science, education, health, etc.) and either tag them or contact them directly. You can also get their attention indirectly by tagging them or using hashtags. Depending on your issue, you may also get results by contacting advertisers.

**ORGANIZE FOR ONLINE AND OFFLINE ACTION.** Whether you're trying to change people's minds, change the world, or both, you have a lot more impact when you're not doing it alone. Social media can let you work together with people from around the world who care about your issue, and sometimes it can be the best way to organize people in your own neighbourhood.

Some platforms, like Change.org, Dosomething.org and Ushaidi.com, were made for activism, but you can use the platforms that you and your audience are already on too.

**ENERGIZE YOURSELF AND OTHERS.** It can be hard to keep from getting discouraged, and even the most committed people in your movement can get burned out and drift away. You can keep them (and yourself) engaged by sharing your successes, and your frustrations too. Have fun and make it social by sharing funny memes and videos as well as more serious stuff.



## Advocating for Better Portrayals of Diversity in Media

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For this project you will be creating a social media activism plan about a diversity in media issue. This could relate to how often members of a group appear in media (like *#OscarsSoWhite*), how they're portrayed (like *Dads, Not Dummies*), or both (like *If you're surprised*) or any related issue. Alternately, you may create a plan for a campaign advocating for applying industry diversity codes such as the CBC's Equitable Portrayal Code to media other than broadcast/cable TV and radio.

To do this you will:

Establish the goal(s) of your campaign:

- What medium (TV, video games, movies, etc.) and/or genre (crime shows, role-playing games, superhero movies, etc.) are you focusing on?
- What issue do you want to advocate for?

Identify the target audience of your campaign:

- Do you want to reach consumers of this medium/genre (like *If you're surprised*) or the people who make it (like *Dads, Not Dummies* or *#OscarsSoWhite*)?

Identify the most effective methods for reaching your audience:

- Which social networks will you focus on?
- How will you encourage people who see your message to respond and to share it?

Identify the most effective goal for your campaign:

- Consult the handout *A Quick Guide to Online Action* and decide whether the purpose of your campaign is to *interest* a wide audience, to *engage* an interested audience, or to *mobilize* an engaged audience.
- Once you've decided on a purpose, choose which *action* connected to that purpose you're going to focus on.

Develop a "call to action" for your campaign:

- Develop at least three short media texts (text, images, video, etc.) that will communicate the message of your campaign. Not all of your media texts have to be of the same media.
- What kind of content these are will depend on the social network you're using and the audience you're trying to reach, so consider:
  - What kinds of content are shared widely on the social network?
  - What kinds of content do the people you're trying to reach respond to?
  - What kinds of content are best suited to communicate the message of your campaign?

Present your outreach plan to the class:

- Explain the issue you are advocating for
- Present the media you have created



## Assessment Task Rubric

	<b><i>Learning Expectations</i></b>	<b><i>Achievement</i></b>
<b>Use</b>	<p><i>Community Engagement:</i> use digital media to be part of a community exhibit leadership as a digital citizen participate in society through online engagement in democratic actions (e.g. lobbying, petitions, parliament)</p> <p><i>Consumer Awareness</i> use digital media to promote awareness of consumer issues</p> <p><i>Making and Remixing:</i> communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
<b>Understand</b>	<p><i>Community Engagement:</i> understand how meaning is produced through multimedia (text, images, audio, video) and how culture is produced through the Internet and social media in particular show awareness of the discourse on both the issues and the opportunities involved in new media</p> <p><i>Consumer Awareness</i> understand the ways in which consumers can use digital media to influence corporations' actions understand industry regulatory codes and practices understand the technologies they are using at a level that is sufficient to underpin consumer activism</p> <p><i>Making and Remixing:</i> understand how meaning is produced through multimedia (text, images, audio, video) and how culture is produced through the Internet and social media in particular show an understanding of the forms and techniques of a medium and genre: the chosen topic, issue and solution were clear the product displayed an insight into a topic and opinion</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>



	<b>Learning Expectations</b>	<b>Achievement</b>
<p><b>Create</b></p> <p>“Create” is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.</p> <p>The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.</p>	<p><i>Community Engagement:</i> make valuable contributions to the public knowledge domain (e.g. wikis, public forums, reviews)</p> <p><i>Consumer Awareness</i> create a practical implementation plan for a consumer action campaign</p> <p><i>Making and Remixing:</i> contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems interact, collaborate, co-construct content and publish with peers, experts or others employing a variety of digital environments and media remix different existing digital content into something new effectively apply the forms and techniques of the medium and genre</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>

