



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 1 to 6
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Teaching Media: Critically Evaluating 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, students learn how media influence how we see the world and send intentional and unintentional messages.

Learning Outcomes

Big ideas/key concepts: Students will understand that...

Media are constructions:

- Media are imperfect representations of reality
- Media makers make intentional and unintentional choices when making a media work
- Media have social and political implications:
- Media influence how we see reality, including what we see as being good or bad

Key questions:

- What does media tell us about the real world?
- What does media tell us about things like kindness or friendship?
- How can media works say things that the people who made them didn't mean to say?
- How does what happens to different characters shape our idea of what's good and bad?
- How does what is put in to (or left out of) a media work affect the meaning we take from it?

Frequent student misconceptions: Media are an accurate reflection of reality; all media messages are conscious and intentional

Essential knowledge: Students will know...



Media representation: Media communicate explicit and implicit messages through story, characterization, and framing

Key vocabulary: Media frame

Performance tasks: Students will...

- Consider ways in which media accurately and inaccurately reflect reality
- Analyze implications of media portrayals on our values
- Reflect on how media experiences have shaped their views and values

Preparation and Materials

Prepare to project or distribute the handout *What's in Media?*

Procedure

Class Discussion:

Start by asking students:

- Do chameleons change color to match what they're sitting on?
- Which are more dangerous, sharks or vending machines?
- What vegetable is rabbits' favorite food?

Get students' thoughts on each question, then tell them the answers:

- Chameleons do change color, but not to help them hide. Their color depends on how warm or cold they are, how recently they've eaten, among other things. (Some kinds of octopuses really do change color to hide themselves, though!)
- Each year an average of one person in the U.S. dies from a shark attack, compared to four people who died because vending machines fell on them.
- Rabbits in the wild mostly eat grass and other green plants. Pet rabbits like carrots fine, but they like the green top just as much (or more) as the orange root. Carrots are best as a treat for rabbits because they have a lot of sugar in them.

Tell students that even if they were wrong about one or more of those, they shouldn't feel bad: most people would give the wrong answer for at least one. That's because a lot of what we think we know about the world comes from media. Sometimes that doesn't matter too much (unless you have a pet rabbit) but media have a big impact on what we think is important what isn't, what we think is "normal" and what isn't, and what we think about different groups.



What do we learn from media?

Some media works try to teach you things. But we also learn things that are less obvious. A good example is the educational show *Sesame Street*. (If students aren't familiar with this program, substitute with a similar show such as *Blue's Clues*, *The Magic Schoolbus*, *Ask the Storybots* or *Octonauts*). While the obvious lessons on this show are about numbers, letters, and science, but the characters also teach us about kindness, relationships and compassion:

- 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.
- Grover shows that even if things go wrong at first, you should keep trying to help people.

The makers of *Sesame Street* think as much about those things as they do about the more obvious lessons. Other media works teach us things through the stories and characters, but the people who make them don't always put that much thought into what they're teaching.

What's in media

Explain to students that you are now going to look at how media works can send messages that their makers *didn't* plan. These mostly come from what happens in stories, who is a main character and who isn't, what things are rewarded or punished, and what things are included or left out of the *media frame*.

(Depending on students' age, you may choose to do the following either as a whole-class activity or have students complete it in pairs or groups.)

Have students list five media works that they know well. Each one can be any kind of media (a comic, a game, a TV show, etc.) so long as it tells a story and *isn't* mostly intended as an educational program.

Distribute or display the handout *What's in Media?* Have students put the names of the media works in the first column and then fill in the other columns for each one:

Who are the main characters? Think about things like their profession, their age, race, language, disability, etc.

How do they solve problems? What ways of solving problems usually work and which don't?

What things do they want (either personally or in their jobs)? What things do they not want or try to avoid? (You can also think about what characters who are unlikeable want. How are they different from what the main characters want?)

Who or what is missing from the media work? What parts of the main characters' lives or jobs do you see, and what parts do you not see? Are there groups of people that you never or almost never see? How similar or different are the people you see to people you know?

Reflection

Either in discussion or in writing, have students reflect on things they have learned from media works. Which things were obvious (like learning from a science show or documentary) and which things were less obvious, like the examples we've talked about in this lesson?



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?

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.)

Picture Perfect!

Ava wants to be on the cover of a breakdancing e-zine and she wants her pic to look perfect, just like her favourite influencer's pics! But in real life, who's perfect anyway?

- Before the video, ask: Why do you think actors or influencers use computers to change how they look?
- After the video, ask: Why is it a bad idea to compare how we look to pictures online or in other media, like movies or ads?
- Where else do we sometimes see "perfect" pictures? (A lot of social networks and photo apps have filters that make you look "better." Your students might have older siblings or even some friends that are already using them.)
- What are some ways besides computers that people make "perfect" pictures? (Pictures can be posed and lit carefully to look good. Also, people sometimes take lots of pictures and then choose the one they like best. For a photo shoot for a magazine or an ad they might take hundreds of pictures before picking the best one!



What's in Media?

| Title | Who are the main characters? | How do they solve problems? | What do they want? What do they avoid? | Who or what is missing? |
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