



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 11-12 (Secondary 4 and 5)
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Duration:	2.5 hours

Film Classification Systems in Québec



This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

Overview

In this lesson students learn about the systems used to classify films, TV programs and video games. Students are asked to take a critical look at the criteria applied to classify these media products, and then take into account and discuss the underlying social and political aspects arising from those systems.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- understand the film classification system of the Régie du cinéma;
- understand TV program and video game classification systems and discuss them with a critical eye;
- understand the legal and ethical issues associated with limiting the access of the population to some media products;
- become aware of the challenges facing film classification regulators in determining “social consensus”;
- understand the following media literacy key concepts in relation to film classification:
 - that media products have social and political implications;
 - that audiences negotiate meaning;
 - that media have commercial considerations
- read an article and answer comprehension questions;
- present and defend an opinion.

If students participate in the optional activity, they will also learn:

- how to assert their opinions;
- how to defend their rights as citizens and consumers.



Preparation and Material

Photocopy the following documents:

- *The Régie du cinéma's Film Classification Process*
- *Classification and the law*
- *A day in the life of a TV content assessment officer*
- *The Bechdel test and its derivatives*
- *Classifying video games*

To teach the optional extension activity, photocopy the document *Speak up: What can you do if you have questions concerning a classification or if you wish to file a complaint?*

Visit Cinema Montreal's website and choose some movie trailers to show your students. View them in their entirety beforehand to make sure they are appropriate. Also, make sure they have been classified by consulting the Régie du cinéma movie trailer directory.

- Cinema Montreal: <https://www.cinemamontreal.com/movies/trailers>
- Régie du cinéma movie trailer directory (French only): <https://www.rcq.gouv.qc.ca/RCQBandesAnnonces.asp>

Optional: Have the following videos ready to present:

- *Media have social and political implications*
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=UU_jQ4vYf-WPf4_5eSdGABWQ&v=YZi6s22yktw)
- *Audiences negotiate meaning*
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=UU_jQ4vYf-WPf4_5eSdGABWQ&time_continue=7&v=goyXz1VmhWA)
- The Bechdel test
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5HmBa_ExQ)

Procedure

Activity 1: Understanding Film Classification

This activity explores the social and political implications that media products have and how the audience determines the meaning of a media product. To show more examples of these concepts, share the *Media Minutes* videos [Media have social and political implications](#) and [Audiences negotiate meaning](#).

1. First, divide the class into teams of two. Without sharing their guesses with the class, play the pre-selected movie trailers and ask each team to guess how the film being advertised is rated.
2. Then hand out the document Film Classification Process of the Régie du cinéma. Read it with the class and then answer the questions as a group. Next have each team classify the film trailers they saw using the Régie du cinéma's classification system. Have teams share their ratings and, if there is significant disagreement, have them briefly discuss their reasons for the rating they chose.



3. Next, go to the Régie du cinéma movie trailer website and compare their ratings with the Régie's. Where there's a difference, discuss the possible reasons why certain teams may have classified the trailers differently. (During the discussion with the students, make sure to mention that the Régie's reviewers/classifiers view films in their entirety and that a trailer's classification may differ from the film's classification. To consult the classified film repertory, go to: <http://www.rcq.gouv.qc.ca/RCQ221FilmClasseRecent.asp>.)
4. Hand out the article Classification and the Law and have students answer the questions in class.
5. Hand out the article A Day in the Life of a TV Content Assessment Officer. As a class, go through the questions related to the article and provide correct answers where necessary.
6. To close the discussion, ask students the following question: Do you think that cinema and television influence social consensus, or does social consensus influence cinema and television? Give a few examples of both cases: for instance, you could talk about how some cultures are more concerned about depictions of sex versus depictions of violence, which is reflected in their rating systems. An example of media influencing social consensus, might be how increased and improved portrayals of marginalized groups (such as gays and lesbians) in film have led to changed attitudes towards these groups.

These discussions will prepare students for Activity 2.

Activity 2: Debating the issues

1. Have students read the article *The Bechdel test and its derivatives*.
2. Divide the class into two groups; give each group 10 to 15 minutes to prepare a debate, with half of the class arguing **for** the following resolution and the other half arguing **against** it:
Criteria like the Bechdel test should be added to the classification systems to take social inequalities into account.
3. Each group must prepare an argument and a rebuttal. If necessary provide guidance to help students prepare opening and concluding statements and to choose which argument to present.
 - a) When writing for the “pro” side, challenge students and ask them to think about the aspects that deserve special attention besides sex and violence.
 - b) When writing for the “con” side, ask students to take into account the challenges they face in finding the boundary between protecting the public against harmful content and promoting social programming. Ultimately, the goal of this preparatory exercise is to help them avoid classic errors, like attacking their opponents as opposed to their ideas or expressing their views as facts. After the practice debate, divide the class into groups of four and ask each group to choose a different subject to debate from the list provided and then divide them into “pro” and “con” sides just before they present the debate.

After the practice debate, divide the class into groups of four and ask each group to choose a different subject to debate from the list provided and then divide them into “pro” and “con” sides just before they present the debate.



The Régie du cinéma's Film Classification Process

Since the mid-1960s, censorship is no longer practiced in Quebec. As a result, the Régie du cinéma does not cut any material from films but rather classifies them according to age groups. This system better meets the expectations of our society to protect young people while ensuring the widest possible access to cinematographic works. The ratings also provide the public with information that can help them make choices.

Overall, films are judged according to general trends and values of Quebec society in such a way as to be in keeping with the rules of public order. However, when the Régie believes that a film presents a real danger to public order it reserves the right to refuse classification. In such cases, the showing, sale and rental of the film are prohibited.

Every work is judged in its entirety, and the rating seeks to reflect the overall impact of the film on young viewers¹.

The Régie du cinéma is constantly striving to keep track of the ever-evolving social consensus, a primary consideration in film classification.

In addition to taking into account the habits of the population, the Régie du cinéma follows the evolution of public opinion and social thinking on all matters that can enlighten its decision-making process. It also calls on experts for issues that require specialized advice.

The classification system includes the following categories:

General

A “General” classification does not necessarily mean that the film is of interest to children. It only means that its content is not likely to be disturbing to young viewers. However, when a film with a “G” rating could offend the sensibilities of children less than eight years of age, the Régie du cinéma adds “Not suitable for young children” to the general classification.

Films classified as “General” can still have occasional scenes of violence. These are very few, not overtly intense and are not condoned. The tone and genre of the film are important elements in the decision-making process: scenes of violence in a comedy or adventure film centered on a hero who is larger than life do not have the same impact on children as those in a more realistic film.

Although there may be some nudity, love scenes remain rather discreet. Depending on the context, some expletives are tolerated.

1 <http://www.rcq.gouv.qc.ca/en/process.asp>



13+**13 years and over**

This category is used to classify films that require a certain level of judgment because these films contain parts or sequences that may offend the sensibilities of younger viewers.

Teenagers are more aware that a movie is not reality and are better prepared psychologically to follow more complex or dramatic films. In 13+ films violence, eroticism, coarse language or horror may be more developed and may constitute a dominant theme. At the same time, it is important that the viewers are able to understand the meaning and context of the actions of various characters, because teenagers are not necessarily prepared to face everything. That is why certain themes (drugs, suicide, troubling situations, etc.) and their treatment are carefully examined when classifying a 13+ film.

16+**16 years and over**

Generally speaking, around the age of 16, young people enter a transition period between the end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood. They are more independent, and have usually gained a certain level of psychological maturity.

Films with this rating present troubling themes, situations or behaviours and adopt a more direct point of view about things. Therefore, they may contain scenes where violence, horror and sexuality are more graphic.

18+**18 years and over**

Films reserved for adults most often deal primarily with the representation of explicit sexual encounters. They may also be extremely violent, showing scenes of hyperrealistic cruelty, torture and horror.

Indications

Reviewers can add indications to a classification in order to specify the dominant characteristic of the film. They are an integral part of classification. They must be displayed with the classification category, where applicable. These may prove quite useful when the classification alone does not provide sufficient information.

For children

Associated with a “General” rating, this indication means that the film is particularly suitable for young children.

Not suitable for young children

Associated with a “General” rating, this indication warns that the film may be disturbing to children less than eight years of age. Note: This indication is virtually considered a category.



Coarse language

Accompanies a rating of “13 years and over,” “16 years and over” or “18 years and over.” This indication means that the film contains coarse or obscene language.

Eroticism

Accompanies a rating of “13 years and over,” “16 years and over” or “18 years and over.” This indication specifies that the film contains enough visual elements pertaining to sexuality to make this one of its dominant characteristics.

Violence

Accompanies a rating of “13 years and over,” “16 years and over” or “18 years and over.” This indication means that violence is one of the dominant aspects of the film.

Horror

Accompanies a rating of “13 years and over,” “16 years and over” or “18 years and over.” This indication warns that the film is strongly characterized by scenes aimed at provoking disgust, repulsion or fear, such as those showing mutilated bodies.

Explicit sexuality

Only accompanies the classification of “18 years and over.” This indication means that the film essentially contains scenes of real and explicit sexual activity. In the retail video industry, the presence of this indication requires the store owner to place the film in a room reserved for adults.

Reclassification of films

Moral standards evolve with time and the social consensus changes accordingly. What may have caused a scandal in 1960 does not have the same impact today. Similarly, violence in films is no longer represented in the same ways. When a distributor asks for a film that was classified more than 10 years ago, the Régie takes this opportunity to see the film again and verify that the classification is still relevant. It can maintain the classification already issued or change it so it better suits today’s standards.

Refusal of Classification

The Régie du cinéma may refuse to classify certain films. These cases, which are quite rare, involve films deemed to interfere with public order. They are usually based on an undue exploitation of sexuality, presented in a context of non-fictional violence, cruelty and dehumanization of the protagonists. Such exploitation is considered to be beyond the threshold of tolerance within contemporary Quebec society, therefore these films cannot be made public in this form.

The showing, sale or rental of the film is prohibited.



Questions

1. How does the Régie assess films before classifying them?
2. Why not allow parents to assess and classify films themselves?
3. With this system, how would you classify training videos and educational films?
4. In your opinion, why was it considered preferable to create the indication “Not suitable for young children” instead of creating a category for children 8 years and over?
5. Why do you think that Quebec adopted its own act regarding film classification?



Classification and the law

In Canada, all provinces and territories have established laws on the classification of films. For example, Ontario has the *Film Classification Act*², British Columbia has the *Motion Picture Act*³, Nova Scotia has the *Theatres and Amusements Act*⁴, and Quebec has the *Cinema Act*⁵.

According to the *Cinema Act*, the Régie du cinéma assesses films as follows in Quebec.

- *On receiving an application for a stamp in respect of a film not previously classified or of a film eligible for reclassification under section 84, the Régie, within 15 days from the date on which the application was presented, and if of the opinion that the content of the film does not interfere with public order, in particular, that it does not promote or condone sexual violence, shall, for the protection of youth, classify the film under one or other of the following classes:*
 - (1) “For all”, if it considers that the film may be viewed by persons of all ages;
 - (2) “13 and over”, if it considers that the film may be viewed only by persons 13 years of age or older;
 - (3) “16 and over”, if it considers that the film may be viewed only by persons 16 years of age or older;
 - (4) “18 and over”, if it considers that the film may be viewed only by persons 18 years of age or older.
- *In assigning a class to a film, the Régie may, if applicable, indicate the type to which the film belongs. In such case, the stamp shall bear the indication prescribed by regulation of the Régie. [Chapter III, section I, article 81]*

To be shown or sold, a film must be classified.

- *No person may exhibit a film to the public, or possess, on premises where films are exhibited to the public, a print of a film unless a stamp showing the class of the film has been issued by the Régie for its exhibition to the public in accordance with this Act and affixed to the print in the manner prescribed by regulation of the Régie, except in the case of a film exempt from classification under section 77. [Chapter III, section I, article 76]*

However, certain films do not require any classification.

- *The following films are exempt from classification:*
 - (1) *films made for industrial or commercial promotion, with the exception of trailers for films not exempt from classification and video-clips;*
 - (2) *films made for educational or pedagogical purposes, provided that they are used in an educational, health care, social services or scientific research institution, in a public library or in a museum;*
 - (3) *films made for vocational training purposes provided that they are used within the scope of a course, a conference or other activity of a similar nature;*
 - (4) *instructional films on a language, sport, physical exercise program or a similar skill, provided they do not include scenes of violence or explicit sexual activity;*

2 <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05f17>

3 http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/consol23/consol23/00_96314_01

4 <http://nslegislature.ca/legc/statutes/theatres%20and%20amusements.pdf>

5 <http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/C-18.1>



(5) *films on sporting events;*

(6) *films exhibited at a diplomatic event, a film festival or any other similar event recognized by the Régie.*
[Chapter III, section I, article 77]

Questions

1. Why do you think the categories “General,” “13 years and over,” “16 years and over” and “18 years and over” were created? Why not 8, 17 and 21 years and over?
2. In your opinion, what does the *Act* mean by “public order”?



Teacher's Answer Grid

Answers to questions on The Régie du cinéma's Film Classification Process

- 1) How does the Régie assess films?
 - By evaluating the content of the film as a whole.
 - By analyzing the intensity of elements of violence and sexuality and the language used in the film. Particular themes like drugs, suicide and troubled relationships are subject to a specific evaluation.
 - By using the benchmarks it set out.
 - By taking into account the general trends and values of the Quebec society.
 - By building on the cognitive and emotional development of children and teenagers.
 - By respecting the legislative and regulatory framework of the Cinema Act. En évaluant le contenu du film dans son ensemble.

- 2) Why not delegate this task to parents?
 - That would require a lot of work from the parents. They would be forced to watch each film before showing it to their children to determine if it is appropriate.

- 3) With this system, how would you classify training videos and educational films?
 - These types of films are exempted from classification in part because they usually do not contain any violent content.

- 4) In your opinion, why was it considered preferable to create the indication "Not suitable for young children" instead of creating a category for children 8 years and over?
 - The Régie's answer: In fact, at the time, the Régie chose to create an indication instead of another category because while some children will be frightened more easily than others, some are ready to watch films that are classified in the category "General – Not suitable for young children" ("Visa général") from the age of 6, and some will still experience fear when faced with certain contents at age 10. The indication gives parents the choice while taking into account the personalities and development of their children.

- 5) In your opinion, why did Quebec adopt its own act regarding film classification?
 - To take into account that the social consensus is different in each society. It is important to note that the Régie's role is different from that of parents. Beyond the restrictions enforced by the act, it is the duty of the parents to make sure their children see films that are in keeping with their personal values.

- 5) Why do reviewers-classifiers decide to add indications?
 - To specify the age group for which the film is intended (for children or not suitable for young children) to emphasize the dominant characteristics of a film (violence, coarse language, horror, eroticism) or indicate that the film mainly contains scenes of sexual activity (explicit sexuality).



Answers to questions on *Classification and the law*

- 1) Why do you think the categories “General,” “13 years and over,” “16 years and over” and “18 years and over” were created? Why not 8, 17 and 21 years and over?
 - Possible answer: These categories were created to coincide with the stages of cognitive and emotional development of children.

- 2) In your opinion, what does the *Act* mean by “public order”?
 - Generally speaking, it consists of all mandatory rules regarding the organisation of a nation, from economy and morality to health, security, public peace, and fundamental rights and freedoms of each individual.



A day in the life of a TV content assessment officer

Hello! My name is Marie-Josée and I work as a classification and indication assessment officer for a broadcaster. What does my job entail? In short, I watch all TV fiction programming, films and variety shows (like the Just for Laughs Gala) that are broadcast on our network so I can classify them.

More precisely, I must highlight any sensitive elements in each program in order to assign a ranking (general or 8, 13, 16 or 18 years and over) according to the level of violence shown. This ranking allows viewers to know the nature of the content they are about to watch.

However, what most people do not know is that classifying a TV program is a lengthy process that requires weighing and questioning, sometimes on several occasions, many factors (like the values of society) that have a great impact on the rating of a program.

WHY CLASSIFY TV CONTENT?

The main goal is to first protect children and young viewers from a content that would be too violent or that would trivialize violence. Thus, this rating aims to help parents choose contents that are tailored to their kids according to their age.

For example, for children aged 12 to 18, special attention should be given to intellectual violence (false beliefs and values) and antisocial messages, especially if they are presented in a subtle manner, because at this stage of their development, it seems that elements related to antisocial behaviours have a greater influence on young people than the level of violence.

The regulations established by the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) require that children's programming, fiction programs (drama), reality shows and films clearly display a ranking icon during the first 15 seconds of broadcasting. This symbol allows viewers to have some idea of the content they are about to watch.

It is important to note that certain programs are not subject to this classification: news, public affairs programs, sporting events, documentaries and variety shows (comedy galas, talk shows, contests, etc.) are exempted; partly because they usually do not contain violent content, but mainly because these programs are usually not fictional.

The ratings icon is used mostly to highlight the level of violence of a production. However, because violence is not the only element likely to disturb or upset, "indications" of possible inappropriate content are also provided to viewers.

Among the contents likely to be inappropriate and that must consequently be reported by means of an indication are sexuality (elements or scenes), coarse language and offensive language (such as swearing) are the key elements. However, an indication could also be included to warn young viewers that the program in question contains behaviours that can be dangerous if imitated.

Depending on the circumstances, I can choose among about 50 indications created over time according to our needs. A few years ago, for example, we decided to create a specific indication for an episode of a series dealing with a Christmas theme and in which it was revealed that Santa Claus did not exist. For this specific episode, we had created an indication saying that in the spirit of Christmas, the content of the program might not be suitable for young children.



HOW TO CLASSIFY: FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE CLASSIFICATION

Since context is so important to determine classification, I need to ask myself a number of questions before making a decision.

For example:

1. For what age groups is this program appropriate?
2. What type of violence is shown (physical, psychological, verbal, intellectual, etc.)? Is it based on race or ethnicity? Is it based on gender?
3. Who is this violence targeting (women, animals, minorities, etc.)?
4. Is the violence shown essential to storytelling, or is it gratuitous, excessive and glamorized?
5. What level of violence is shown or mentioned? Is the violence so intense that it can seem shocking even to adults? Is it excessively graphic and detailed?
6. What impact could this violence (shown or suggested) have on a child of a particular age group?

I also take into account how much a viewer might identify with the story. For example, a murder in a fantasy movie such as Harry Potter series is not received the same way as a murder in a story taking place today, presenting characters we can identify with. The trials and tribulations of a young magician unfolds in a fictitious universe gives the violence less impact.

I also need to take into account the level of violence shown. For example, we cannot view a slap in the face that leaves a swollen lip or a punch that gives a black eye the same way as a murder by close-range gunshot. The level of intensity is thus an essential element to consider, and the way in which more sensitive elements (violence, sexuality, etc.) are presented.

SOCIAL CONSENSUS

What must I rely on to determine a classification? I have to avoid making any value-based judgment on what I personally consider violent and cannot judge the way a viewer could imagine one thing that is not shown, but merely suggested. Instead, my judgment is mainly based on the social consensus: what is acceptable or not in the eyes of the public. I keep myself up-to-date with the evolution of the social consensus by first reviewing the comments and complaints provided by viewers regarding our programming. Complaints make up a sort of database since some of them are about a precise content. Because standards keep evolving, it is difficult to determine in advance what the public will consider acceptable or not. However, those comments help us identify, to a certain extent, the trends regarding what is more or less a cause for concern at a given time.

Thus, the social consensus gives us an overview of the public at a given time. In this regard, the fiction series *Unité 9* (*Unit 9*) is a good example of the more graphic violence found in some series today. Here, the violence is justified by a universe showing us the reality of women who end up in prison for various reasons. Coming mostly from rough environments, these women have often learned that violence is the only way to deal with or react to difficult situations or events. Even if the violence shown in *Unité 9* is never gratuitous, the way it is presented would have simply been inconceivable 30 or 40 years ago. And what's more, never television would have never starred those women who, to deal with the difficult prison environment in which they must live, fall in love with other female inmates.



That raises an interesting question: does television influence the social consensus, or does the increasing open-mindedness of the public influence the themes addressed on TV and in the movies? I tend to think that both are related and influence each other.

ONGOING PROCESS

The classification of programs is a lengthy process. Consequently, I must at all times be ready to question myself. I must be ready to defend my classifications in case I receive a complaint from a viewer for which I would have to provide arguments. If necessary, I must then explain to our audience services those arguments that led me to choose a classification over another.

Questions

1. Who uses the classification categories that Marie-Josée establishes or who benefits from them?
2. What type of content is evaluated and what type is not?
3. How does Marie-Josée determine the classification of a program?
4. To what type of content is special consideration given? Why?
5. According to Marie-Josée, about 50 different indications can be used, in addition to classification categories. Name 3 indications (or “warnings”) you would like to see or have already seen.
6. List some of the essential questions guiding Marie-Josée during her decision-making process.
7. How does Marie-Josée determine the “social consensus” regarding a particular element of a program?
8. What do you think of Marie-Josée’s last question: Does television influence the social consensus or does the social consensus influence television?



Answers to questions on A day in the life of a TV content assessment officer

Réponses aux questions sur *Une journée dans la vie d'une agente d'évaluation du contenu télévisuel* :

1. In the end, who uses the classification categories that Marie-Josée establishes or who benefits from them?
 - Parents.
2. What type of content is evaluated and what type is not?
 - All programs and films on television, except news, public affairs programs, sporting events, documentaries and variety shows.
3. How does Marie-Josée determine the classification of a program?
 - She takes into account the degree of identification that the viewer could establish with the storyline she is analyzing and the level of violence shown. She avoids making any value-based judgment on what she personally considers violent but instead bases her decision on the social consensus.
4. To what type of content is special consideration given? Why?
 - Violent content.
5. According to Marie-Josée, about 50 different indications can be used, in addition to classification categories. Name 3 warnings you would like to see or have already seen.
 - There is no right or wrong answer to this question.
6. List some of the essential questions guiding Marie-Josée during her decision-making process..
 - The list can be found on the second page of the article.
7. How does Marie-Josée determine the “social consensus” regarding a particular element of a program?
 - She relies on complaints and comments provided by viewers.



The Bechdel Test and its Derivatives

The Bechdel test was created in 1985 by cartoonist Alison Bechdel. It is based on the fundamental premise that, to pass the test, a movie must include two women, who both have names, discussing anything but a man.^{1,2} In 2013, Sweden integrated the Bechdel test into its film classification system.³ At that time, only 30% of Swedish films passed the test, compared to 80% in 2015.⁴

Since then, similar tests have been suggested to control other stereotypes, like the DuVernay test (which examines if African-American and other minorities portrayed in a film have their own character development instead of just being part of the backdrop of stories featuring Whites)⁵ and the Chavez Perez test (which evaluates if two characters from minority groups have other topics of conversation besides crime).⁶

Could or should other tests be done for the movie industry, such as tests showing how persons with disabilities, the poor and politicians are represented?

- 1 DESHESDIN, Cécile. « Le dernier film que vous avez vu passe-t-il le test de Bechdel? », *Slate*, 7 novembre 2013. <http://www.slate.fr/monde/79745/test-bechdel-cinemas-suedois-independants-femmes-sexisme>
- 2 ELLIS, Samantha. « Why the Bechdel test doesn't (always) work », *The Guardian*, 20 août 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/womens-blog/2016/aug/20/why-the-bechdel-test-doesnt-always-work>
- 3 ASSOCIATED PRESS. « Feminist movie rating system introduced in Sweden », *CBCNews*, 6 novembre 2013. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/feminist-movie-rating-system-introduced-in-sweden-1.2416473>
- 4 KANG, Inkoo. « What Happened After Swedish Theaters Introduced a Bechdel Rating for Its Movies? », *IndieWire*, 17 février 2016. <http://www.indiewire.com/2016/02/what-happened-after-swedish-theaters-introduced-a-bechdel-rating-for-its-movies-204746/>
- 5 CHILD, Ben. « Ava DuVernay backs 'DuVernay test' to monitor racial diversity in Hollywood », *The Guardian*, 1^{er} février 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/feb/01/ava-duvernay-test-racial-diversity-hollywood-selma-director-oscars>
- 6 KANG, Inkoo. « What Happened After Swedish Theaters Introduced a Bechdel Rating for Its Movies? », *IndieWire*, 17 février 2016. <http://www.indiewire.com/2016/02/what-happened-after-swedish-theaters-introduced-a-bechdel-rating-for-its-movies-204746/>



Classifying video games – Entertainment Software Rating Board’s classification system (ESRB)

In Canada, no federal law requires that video games be classified. However, some provinces (Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan) provide for legislative provisions requiring that games sold in stores display the Entertainment Software Rating Board’s (ESRB) rating and that stores restrict access to those games according to their rating. In other provinces, video game producers and stores are free to use or not the ESRB rating.

It is unclear whether the regulations apply to digital versions of video games bought online, but large online stores like Steam, Amazon and Uplay display ESRB’s rating for most of their games. Because payment is usually made using a credit card, access to digital versions of video games is not much of a concern: in all provinces, cardholders must be over 18 or 19 years old to hold one. That being said, it is possible to play video games on many websites where games are not rated.

ESRB’s classification system is similar to that of the Régie, but includes more categories.

Rating categories¹



EARLY CHILDHOOD

Content is intended for young children.



EVERYONE

Content is generally suitable for all ages. May contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.



EVERYONE 10+

Content is generally suitable for ages 10 and up. May contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.

¹ http://www.esrb.org/ratings/ratings_guide.aspx





TEEN

Content is generally suitable for ages 13 and up. May contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling and/or infrequent use of strong language.



MATURE

Content is generally suitable for ages 17 and up. May contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.



ADULTS ONLY

Content suitable only for adults ages 18 and up. May include prolonged scenes of intense violence, graphic sexual content and/or gambling with real currency.



RATING PENDING

Not yet assigned a final ESRB rating. Appears only in advertising, marketing and promotional materials related to a "boxed" video game that is expected to carry an ESRB rating, and should be replaced by a game's rating once it has been assigned.



Debate Guidelines

Here is the debate structure you will engage in with another team.

FOR: Opening statement (maximum of one minute)

AGAINST: Opening statement (maximum of one minute)

FOR: First argument (maximum of two minutes)

AGAINST: Refute the first “FOR” argument (maximum of one minute)

AGAINST: First argument (maximum of two minutes)

FOR: Refute the first “AGAINST” argument (maximum of one minute)

AGAINST: Second argument (maximum of two minutes)

FOR: Refute the second “FOR” argument (maximum of one minute)

FOR: Second argument (maximum of two minutes)

AGAINST: Refute the second “AGAINST” argument (maximum of one minute)

FOR: Concluding statement (maximum of one minute)

AGAINST: Concluding statement (maximum of one minute)

Note: Refuting an argument does not mean creating a new argument, but rather demonstrating the falseness of the other team’s argument by finding flaws in the logic or presenting evidence that it is untrue.



Debate questions

Please write down the subject assigned to your team (or the one it chose) and use the handouts on this subject to prepare your arguments.

1. Criteria like the Bechdel test should be added to the classification systems to take into account social inequalities.
 - Think about the aspects that merit consideration, other than sex and violence.
 - You cannot repeat the arguments presented during the practice debate.
2. Video games should be rated with the help of film classification systems because of their increasing film content.
 - Think about the differences between different media and the ways they influence us.
3. The videos airing online on websites such as YouTube and Netflix should be rated with the help of a system like that of the Régie.
 - Think about the international nature of Internet and the fact that anyone can produce and distribute content.
4. The videos produced by hate or terrorist groups, like ISIS, should be classified using a system like that of the Régie.
 - Carefully read the article on refusal of classification in the Quebec Cinema Act.
5. A government agency like the Régie, and not broadcasters themselves, should classify TV programs.
 - Ask yourself for example if businesses should be authorized to regulate themselves.
6. A national classification system should govern the overall media content.
 - Think about the “social consensus” concept and ask yourself if it is easier for a small or a large community to reach a consensus.
 - Ask yourself if different provinces share the same values and if they have the same tolerance threshold concerning different societal issues.
7. There should not be any classification system, and each person or family should be free to make their own choices.
 - Think about the moment when children are ready to choose their content and the responsibilities parents have towards the media that children consult.



Extension Activity: Speak up: What can you do if you have questions concerning a classification or if you wish to file a complaint?

1. Distribute the handout titled *“Speak up: What can you do if you have questions concerning a classification or if you wish to file a complaint?”*
2. Have students visit the website of the organization responsible for classifying films, TV programs or video games in their province and ask them to write down on the handout what the organization recommends they do to dispute a classification or get an explanation about a classification assigned to a specific video, program, film or video game.
3. Ask them to imagine that they have to explain the process to a friend and to break it down into steps (e.g. step 1, step 2, etc.). Make sure they include the URL address of the page containing all the relevant information.



To learn more about the topics addressed in this course outline:

- Régie du cinéma's website:
<http://www.rcq.gouv.qc.ca/en/>
- *Cinema Act*:
<http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/C-18.1>
- *Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming* – A reference guide from the Canadian Association of Broadcasters:
<http://cab-acr.ca/english/social/codes/violencecode.shtm>
- Canadian Broadcast Standards Council website:
<http://www.cbsc.ca/>
- Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission website (CRTC):
<http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/home-accueil.htm>

