



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 6 to 8

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Activity Two: Whose Lenses? How Mass Media Portray Global Development

"Children are immersed daily in a dense bath of mass media images and messages. Some teach children about the world around them. Others promote deceptive, partial, stereotypical and sometimes harmful perceptions."

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Introduction

"Media Literacy for Development & Children's Rights" was created by UNICEF Canada to help young people in grades 6 - 8 understand the role played by the media in influencing their attitudes and perceptions about developing nations and development issues. This module contains a series of lessons, exercises and background information to help familiarize students with the issues and challenges surrounding representation of other countries and cultures by the media. There are four activities in Lesson Two: Making the News, Deconstructing the News, Views on the News, and Now It's Your Turn.

General backgrounders for this lesson:

- [Why Teach About Media Literacy?](#)
- [Definitions for Use in Activities](#)

Activity One: Making the News

This activity examines bias in the newspaper by reenacting how a reporter collects information: who gets interviewed, what perspective is dominant, what perspectives are left out.

Resources and materials needed for this activity:

- Review the teaching backgrounder
- gather a variety of newspapers and magazines for extension activity



Procedure

Step One: Ask two students to put on a skit, preferably without the rest of the class knowing. Ask them to act out a conflict where one student is angry with the other for not returning his/her textbook. Ask the students to be loud so that the rest of the class overhears the conversation. After the argument has gone on long enough so that all the class have heard, ask the students putting on the skit to sit down.

Step Two: Tell the students that they have just witnessed a conflict and they are going to write a news report about what happened. Divide the class into four groups. The first group will interview only one of the students from the skit, the second will interview only the other, the third group will interview both students (separately), and the last group will interview both students and two witnesses.

Step Three: After they have finished the interviews, ask each group to write an article reporting on the conflict.

Step Four: Ask someone from each group to read their article to the rest of the class.

Step Five: Discuss the articles with the students.

- Which one best explained what happened? Why?
- Which gave the least information? Why?
- Which type(s) of coverage may be most prone to promoting bias and misperceptions?
- Which type(s) of coverage appears in the news?
- Can you think of an incident you saw on the news recently that showed bias?
- What point(s) of view was missing?

Extension

Ask the students to find examples of biased reporting in magazines, newspapers or on the news and then answer the following questions:

- Why is it biased?
- What points of view are missing?
- What type of information do you think the missing points of view would give?

Activity Two: Deconstructing the News

This activity looks at how bias can be represented in the newspaper.

Resources and materials needed for this activity:

- two copies of the same day's newspaper, enough for each student or group
- a pair of scissors for each student or group



Procedure

Step One: As a class, brainstorm and list sources of news. Survey the class to find out where most people get their news.

- Why is this the case?
- What news sources do they believe are the most reliable?
- Which are the least reliable?
- Where does the media get their information?
- Do the students believe that the media has an agenda when reporting the news?

Lead the students in a discussion on bias in the media.

Step Two: Divide the students into groups so that each group has one section of that day's paper. Each group will need two copies of their section so they can clip the articles on both sides of the page. Ask the students to cut out each article and advertisement in their section of the paper, and divide the articles and advertisements into groups: national news, developing countries, young people in the news, advertisements, entertainment, and other.

Step Three: When all the groups are finished separating the articles and advertisements in their paper, share observations.

What do you notice about the categories? Is there more local news than international news?

- What percentage of the paper is advertisements?
- How are young people portrayed - or not?
- How are development issues portrayed - or not?
- How many articles talk about issues that directly concern and are about young people?
- What kind of news is lacking that the students would like to know about?
- Why do you think it is not in the paper?

Extension

Do the same activity with different newspapers (local v. national, etc.). Newspapers from various countries can be accessed at www.onlinenewspapers.com. Students can compare the different types of articles and advertisements with written analysis in their journals.

Activity Three: Views on the News

This activity explores one of the most influential image mediums - the television news. The purpose of the activity is to identify the forces that control the decisions affecting those who present the TV news; particularly, to understand the role of the news media in the construction of images of developing countries.



Resources and materials needed for this lesson:

- [discussion questions](#) and [role cards](#) for PAT and SAM (equal number of both cards - enough for one per student)
- 2 large sheets of paper
- Markers

Procedure

Step One: Where do you most often see pictures of people in developing countries? What do these images usually show? Read the following quote to your class:

THE VIEW FROM HERE

"What really hurts me sometimes in doing famine stories is this drive to find a baby that is even skinnier than the last one you've filmed. I was in Mozambique and I found myself at about three in the morning sitting up still awake and on my mind was the fact that I hadn't got a picture that I thought was going to interest my editors. In other words the child I had shot six hours earlier on film wasn't skinny enough and that is a rather sick way to look at it -- but you are forced into that. It's a problem when the only way in which you can get Third World reporting on the air is through disasters. It's like a drug, you need bigger and bigger quotas, bigger and bigger portions of it to interest the public and interest the editors."

-- TV Journalist

Discuss students' responses to the reporting of humanitarian disasters in developing countries.

- Why do these kinds of images interest the editors?
- Do you think they generate concern among the public?
- What are the dangers and problems of this kind of reporting?
- Do you think that there are other ways of reporting on developing countries which would interest the public and promote more positive images and perceptions?
- How could you make your suggestions known to decision-makers in the media?

Students could select a suggestion, implement it, and keep a record in their journals.

Step Two: Post the [discussion questions](#) for SAM on one side of the classroom and the [discussion questions](#) for PAT on the other. Divide students into two equal-sized groups. Give each student in one group a [role card](#) for SAM and each student in the other group a [role card](#) for PAT. Direct each group to the questions posted on the wall for their character.

Step Three: With their group, students review their cards and discuss the questions. Explain to the PAT group that Pat should try to solve the problems and not just block Sam's ideas -- they don't want to lose Sam to another network.

Step Four: Each Sam finds a Pat to meet with. Explain that they are going to listen to each other's point of view and try to find a solution that they will both be content with. Allow about 15-20 minutes for the pairs to negotiate a solution.



Step Five: As a class, discuss:

- On what issue was there most disagreement?
- Which of Sam's arguments did Pat find most difficult to address?
- Which of Pat's arguments did Sam find most difficult to address?
- What could both Sam and Pat agree on? Did students have ideas not mentioned in the role cards?
- How should Pat explain the outcome of the meeting to the Editor-in-Chief?
- What things should viewers of TV news think about as they watch the news?
- What other sources of news are available, and how do they compare to TV news presentations?
- Every day, about 30 000 children in developing countries die, largely from preventable diseases and malnutrition. Why do you think we don't see that reported on the daily news?

Extension

Rewrite the role cards so that they relate to a specific country or situation with which the group has some familiarity, to give the activity a degree of currency and topicality.

Activity Four: Now It's Your Turn

This activity examines the factors that affect the choice of images in the media, and how to evaluate the effects that images have on an audience.

Resources and materials needed for this lesson:

- handout: [Choosing and Editing Photos](#)
- large sheets of blank paper
- media materials: variety of newspapers and magazines, travel catalogues, development/relief agency flyers

Procedure

Step One: Cut and photocopy the handout, [Choosing and Editing Photos](#). Divide the class into small groups. Give a photo section (not the full picture or caption) to each small group of students, and have them paste their photo in the middle of a blank sheet of paper. Invite the groups to imagine what's going on in their photo, and invent a context that gives the picture meaning. Students can:

- write a caption, monologue or article about what is happening
- draw arrows to parts of the photo with written questions and interpretations about what is happening around the cropped image
- draw in the missing parts around the photo.



Step Two: As a class, examine the full picture. Discuss how closely the groups' interpretations matched the meaning of the whole photo.

- What caused the misinterpretations?
- Why might editors crop and otherwise alter the photos they use with news stories?
- What is the effect of this on our images and perceptions?

Step Three: Spread the media materials around the classroom. In their small groups, students can peruse newspapers and magazines for photographic images of developing countries. The world news and travel sections are most likely to contain photos. With their groups, students discuss and record in their journals:

- How well does the photo grab your attention?
- How did the photo affect you? When you first looked at the photo what did you think was going on?
- What is the purpose and relevance of the photo in relation to the story?
- What would you think was going on if you only looked at the photo, but did not read the article? Is the photo an accurate reflection of what is going on?
- What impression does the photo give of the country and its people? Is it realistic? For whom, when?
- Are the people in the photo like you?
- What important information might be missing?
- What might be happening outside the frame of the photo, in the surrounding area?
- What questions do you have that are unanswered about what is being depicted?

Step Four: Groups decide whether they will represent a travel company or a development/relief agency, and design a poster, flyer or ad page for a campaign using one or more of the photos, creating text to go with it. They might employ photo-altering techniques such as cropping, rotation, shading—After each group presents its piece to the class (and each student keeps a copy of the piece in their journals), discuss:

- Why did you choose that photo? Why did you reject other photos?
- What image does the photo convey about developing countries? Is the rich diversity of life represented?
- How did your text represent or misrepresent the photo?
- What techniques did you use to alter the photo? How did this change the image represented by the photo?
- What misperceptions about life in developing countries might be perpetuated if people had only these sources of information?
- How can people gain a balanced view of life in developing countries?

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Discussion Questions - Activity Two: Whose Lenses? How Mass Media Portray Global Development

Discussion Questions for Sam

1. What are your suggestions to the news editor, and the reasons for them?
2. What are the possible implications of your idea for:
 - a) appeal to viewers: how quick, clear and exciting is it?
 - b) format: how similar is it to standard news items? How much of a risk is it?
 - c) funding costs
3. What are the advantages of your idea?

Discussion Questions for Pat

1. What do you know about the idea Sam is going to discuss with you?
2. What are the possible implications of Sam's idea for :
 - a) appeal to viewers: how quick, clear and exciting is it?
 - b) format: how similar is it to standard news items? How much of a risk is it?
 - c) funding costs
3. What are the advantages of your idea? Disadvantages?



Role Cards - Activity Two: Whose Lenses? How Mass Media Portray Global Development

PAT

You are going to have a meeting with Sam, a respected and talented TV journalist. Sam is worried that many news items give a harmful impression of developing countries because only disasters are reported, and people are always made to look like helpless victims. Sam has suggested a news item on the flood in Mozambique that shows how the people are taking action in the face of this disaster. Sam wants to interview people in Mozambique so they will speak for themselves about the problems, and would like more air time to show the background issues. You are worried that it might be too long and complicated for a short news item. Viewers respond to what grabs their feelings more quickly than they respond to things they have to think about. You are planning to discuss it with Sam and try to reach an agreement. What will you say?

SAM

You are going to have a meeting with your editor, Pat. As a TV Journalist, you are worried that many news items give a harmful impression of developing countries because people are made to look like passive victims. But you know that in many places you visit, people are taking responsibility for themselves and dealing with problems in a courageous, effective way which is not reflected in the news. You are going to suggest an item that talks about the action people in Mozambique are taking in response to a disastrous flood. You want to explore the background issues of poverty and environmental destruction that have made the flood a real disaster, and you want to have people speak for themselves about it; perhaps with subtitles on the footage. You are even considering the idea of having Mozambican journalists create some of the story. You suspect Pat will object because she thinks the more usual approach makes a good story. How will you try to persuade Pat that your ideas will work?



Choosing and Editing Photos



Choosing and Editing Photos

CAPTION: A Guatemalan woman holds her infant daughter, and displays her diploma recognizing her participation in a UNICEF-assisted workshop on social administration.



Choosing and Editing Photos



Choosing and Editing Photos

CAPTION: Five-year-old Zeki is measured at a health check-up at a UNICEF-assisted health centre in Iraq.

