

Media Literacy

within the

Multicultural Classroom



This teacher-developed resource is dedicated to the memory of Stella Midgely Bullock and was funded in part by the generous donations of her family and friends.

This resource has been made possible through the generous donations of private individuals, foundations, and corporations who support the Curriculum Foundation, the charitable arm of Curriculum Services Canada. For more details please see www.curriculum.org and “Grants for Teachers.”

What is Media Literacy?

Media literacy is the result of learning about different media forms and how they communicate meaning. Closely interrelated to media literacy is the relationship to popular culture and the understanding of the profound influence that media have on our lives. Media forms include songs, films, television programs, video games, radio programs, magazines, and websites. Media messages give us our sense of reality. Media messages are constructed from the creator's personal background, e.g., attitudes and cultures. Audience members interpret and respond to messages based on their personal backgrounds, e.g., attitudes and cultures. Different people experience the same messages differently. It is important for students to realize how media forms influence our perceptions and values – our way of seeing and understanding the world around us.

Students need to develop an awareness of the social, political, cultural, and economic messages of the media and the reality that is portrayed. They should be able to deconstruct the various forms and analyze the messages contained in them while at the same time gaining understanding of the aesthetic aspects of the various forms and be able to create their own media products as a result.

Learning through Media

Media messages are created using a wide variety of tools – visual effects, sound effects, words that have positive/negative connotations, headlines that grab our attention, and photographs that may sensationalize. There are powerful sound bites and slogans whose purposes are to inform, to persuade, or to influence behaviour.

Media literacy seeks to empower students to transform their passive relationship with media to an active, critical relationship. Developing media literacy is an ongoing process. Students are encouraged to ask questions about what is there in media and to notice what is not there – to become aware of which groups are included/excluded in various media forms.

Recognizing Cultural Diversity

Canadian classrooms celebrate a strong cultural diversity. *Media Literacy within the Multicultural Classroom* provides teachers with a guide for integrating the study of media into their curriculum, with a sensitivity to and respect for the values and cultural customs of the learners. This resource includes strategies to assist teachers in supporting students as they view media messages with a critical eye and with ongoing sensitivity and awareness of the ethnic diversity of their classmates. It is important to help students identify the target audience of any given media so that they can better understand how and why the topics and messages are portrayed – the purpose of the message and the audience's reaction to it.

In their classrooms, teachers can focus on the cultural backgrounds of their students by looking at different aspects of media literacy and their effect upon students' lives. It is important for educators to remember that much of a student's time is spent in contact with a variety of media forms, e.g., viewing television programs and their accompanying advertisements, or listening to popular music. They engage in many of these activities with their peer group and as such, peer influence will invariably come into play in selecting the media form and the reaction to it.

About this Resource

Media Literacy within the Multicultural Classroom provides activities that engage the learners in using critical thinking skills and in making reflective and reasoned judgments. Questions that require thought and reflection before response, can increase understanding and make the learning more meaningful. The strategies are designed to support the teacher with higher-level questioning techniques to promote this learning.

The resource can be integrated into a variety of curriculum areas and with a range of ages and grade levels. Teachers know the learners in their class and should be sensitive to their differing emotional and social maturity and their cultural background. They are encouraged to adjust or modify the strategies and activities, as appropriate. It is also important to be aware of the Board/school policy with respect to which media texts have been approved for classroom use, e.g., licensing rights.

Cultural Sensitivity

Students think about a movie they have seen recently and recall what was in it that could be identified as being “North American.” Record their responses in a class brainstorm. They might offer suggestions such as popular music soundtracks, food eaten by the actors, only English language spoken, and familiar product names used.

Have students consider how a newcomer to Canada might feel if he/she views this movie soon after arriving here and record their predictions. To guide their thinking, pose questions such as:

- What pressures may this individual feel?
- Do these pressures seem real to you? Why or why not?

If possible, students can talk with someone (child or adult) who recently moved to Canada to see if she/he felt any pressures to behave in a certain way and compare the actual responses with their predictions.

Critical Viewing

Ask students what the term ‘equitable’ means to them – list their responses and as a class, decide on a definition. Connect their thinking to media representations and cultural diversity as they discuss a popular television sitcom by asking questions such as:

- What role do these characters play in society?
- How do these characters interact with one another?
- Do the actors playing the roles fairly represent people in our society?

Working with a partner, students analyze another television program, identifying the intended audience, its purpose and any underlying messages presented. They can use the same or similar questions to guide their investigation. Encourage them to think critically and make reasoned responses.

Pose a further question for students to apply their learning: How would you determine an equitable cast for a television sitcom geared to you and your peers?

Compare and Contrast

Students choose a video game, rated for their age group, and record the main attributes of the characters. On a T-chart, they compare the characters' attributes to the attributes of their own peer group.

<i>Video Game Characters</i>	<i>My Friends</i>

They share their findings in small groups, using the following questions to guide their discussions:

- Are video game characters recognizable as individuals with whom we can relate?
- Do these games display characters from particular cultural groups?

Students should be prepared to explain their thinking.

Extend their thinking and reasoning by posing further questions:

- What is the purpose of fantasy?
- How can we separate fantasy from reality?
- Why is it important not to mix fantasy with reality?

Examining Advertisements

Students examine the advertisements in teen magazines to answer the question: Do teen magazines consider cultural diversity when choosing their advertisements?

Pairs choose an advertisement that they find appealing and write about their choice. They consider the question and discuss/explain why the ad appealed to them.

As a class, do an inventory of the advertisements.

Students revisit the initial question while comparing all the ads chosen by their peer group and present a justified conclusion.

Students reflect on their learning by responding to the question: In what ways did your perception of teen magazine advertising change as you worked through the task?

Who Created the Message?

Students brainstorm to create a list of various media messages, e.g., news article, magazine article, radio commercial, billboard ad.

Pairs of students select one type of media message and consider the many people involved in its production. They prepare a list for display in the classroom. For example, a news article may involve (among others):

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| • a writer | • a copy editor |
| • a research assistant | • a photographer |
| • people who were interviewed | • a graphic designer |
| • an editor | • a delivery person |
| • a printer | |

Pairs then discuss ways that each of these people brings his/her own perspectives to the job they are doing. For example, consider the following questions:

- How might a photographer's background influence his/her decisions about background images?
- What might affect a research assistant's choices about sources for information?

Creating a Media Message

Working in small groups, students choose a topic and decide how they will present their message – what media they will use, who the audience is, how they will engage their audience, etc. They decide how they will divide the tasks among the group members – writers, artists, actors, technology experts, etc.

Make available a variety of equipment such as computers with presentation and graphics software, digital cameras, video cameras, CD/DVD players, scanners, tape recorders, etc.

Stimulate their creative thinking by providing open-ended criteria such as:

- The media text should have a coherent message.
- Use more than one media source.
- Include a written description of your purpose.

The groups make their media message presentations and invite questions and comments from the class.

Lead a class discussion by posing questions:

- What is bias?
- Is there anything that doesn't contain bias?
- How can we recognize whether a media message contains bias?

On a KWL chart, list their previous knowledge of the term *bias* and then add new knowledge as the discussion progresses.

KWL Chart

What We Know

What We Want to Know

What We Learned

Students reflect on their small group presentations and decide whether the presentations present balanced messages.

To extend and apply their learning, the small groups can revisit their presentation and refine it to be more inclusive and balanced.

Books in Our Library

Working with the school's teacher-librarian, the class produces an annotated bibliography of books for their age level – both fiction and non-fiction. In pairs, students screen a number of books in the library's collection. For each title, they record the intended audience and purpose for which the book is written. The results are combined and tabulated. Students determine whether there are any trends that can be detected and identify topic areas or genres where they would like to see more books as they consider the following questions:

- How are the books 'packaged'? – What graphics/designs have been used?
What words have been selected for use on the book jacket?
- How well does the school library's collection represent our student population?
- Is it a fair representation?
- What types of books could be added to make the collection more balanced?

Students could then write a letter outlining their findings and thoughts to the teacher-librarian. This task would give opportunities for report writing, letter writing principles and appropriate, constructive feedback.

Another Viewpoint

Students choose two articles/reports on the same current topic from different media outlets to compare points of view, e.g., a report from two different television newscasts, an article from a community newspaper and a national one. Students consider reasons for similarities and differences as they answer the following questions:

- How are the articles/reports the same?
- How are they different?
- What does this tell you?

Assessment of Learning

Consistent and continuous assessment as students are engaged in learning is important in supporting their growth. Teachers are encouraged to assess throughout the lesson and to determine whether students are able to transfer their learning to different contexts. Frequent assessment allows teachers to make adjustments to their instruction to meet the needs of the learners within their classroom.

The following questions can form part of the criteria that teachers use in determining students' learning as they work on various tasks involving media literacy.

- ✓ Does the student demonstrate understanding of audience and purpose in media messages?
- ✓ Does the student apply reasoning skills, e.g., compare and contrast and provide justification for responses?
- ✓ Can the student express his/her ideas logically both orally and in writing?
- ✓ Does the student recognize and value different opinions and points of view?
- ✓ Can the student apply new learning in different contexts?
- ✓ Does the student participate with others in class and small groups?

Recommended Reading

Berger, A. A. (2005) *Making sense of media: Key texts in media and cultural studies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Brooks, J.G. & Brooks, M.G. (1999). *In Search of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Media Awareness Network. (2006). *Media education: Make it happen!* Government of Ontario.

O'Connor, Ken. (2002). *How to Grade for Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Wade, B.C. (2004). *Thinking musically: Experiencing music, expressing culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.