

Media

Introduction

The Power of Media

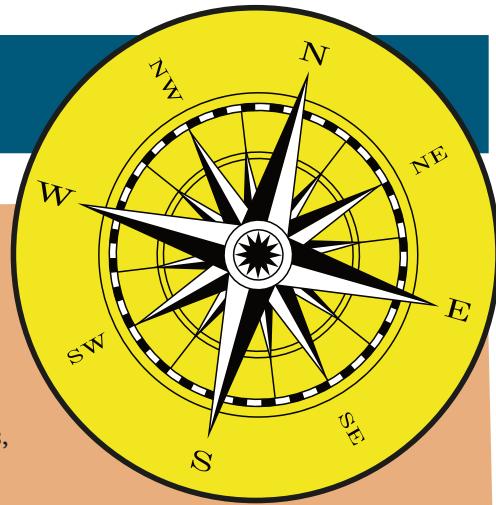
The power of media is unquestionable. Whether the medium is print, audio, visual, or digital, the impact of media is profound and far-reaching. The media's effect may be positive or negative, but it is seldom neutral. At its best, media serves to inform, communicate, and entertain. At its worst, it skews perceptions of reality and manipulates emotions. It creates artificial needs through advertising that drive consumerism and result in the depletion of global resources.

As media critic George Gerbner stated, "For the first time in human history, most of the stories about people, life, and values are told not by parents, schools, or others in the community who have something to tell, but by distant conglomerates that have something to sell." (*Gerbner, p. 2*) Analyzing and evaluating who owns and controls media enables us to critically reflect and think about the content and purpose of the stories told by mass media.

"The medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology..."

We shape our tools and afterwards our tools shape us."

– Marshall McLuhan



Exploring the Issues

The principles of media literacy should be incorporated throughout the course as part of each inquiry. However, students may also undertake an in-depth study of key media-related issues, including those related to the control and impact of media. The following are some suggested media issues for inquiry.

Control of Media – Who owns it? Who controls it? To what end?

- convergence and concentration of media ownership
- agenda (profit, power, propaganda, social engineering)
- bias through selection and omission
- marketing and advertising strategies
- freedom of the press: media regulation, ethics, legislation, and censorship
- public control and “citizen journalism”
- alternative media and social justice

Impact of Media – Who is affected? How are they affected?

- creation and perpetuation of racial, class, and gender stereotypes
- psychological influence (e.g., objectification, sexualization, body image, fear)
- violence in media
- the rise of “infotainment”
- power and influence of advertising (e.g., pervasiveness, embedded messages, product placement)
- popular culture and the decline of social mores



Essential Questions

Inquiry questions related to media issues may include the following:

Although there are no definitive answers as to how to solve issues related to the influence and control of media, students will use critical inquiry, investigation, and discussion to enrich their understanding about the role of media in their lives and in today's world. Critical media literacy will enable students to progress from passive, unquestioning recipients of information to active, responsible, and informed citizens.

Inquiry questions related to media issues may include the following:

- How does media influence, affect, and control us?
- How has this influence changed through time?
- Do media create or reflect our world?
- How free is the press?
- What is the relationship among media control, power, and profit?
- What is the impact of new and alternative media?
- How does media literacy help us to become critical thinkers and responsible citizens?

What do we mean by media?

The media communicates messages to a mass audience using a variety of means.

Traditional media communicates content in a mass-produced format using words, images, and/or sound: radio, television, film, print, audio, or audio-visual. Traditional media is most often used to refer to newspapers, advertising, magazines, books, and other paper-based publications.

New media refers to content that is available on demand through a variety of devices and includes digital interactivity in the form of user participation and feedback. What distinguishes new media from traditional media is the digitization of content. *Wikipedia*, an online encyclopedia, is one of the most well known examples of new media, combining Internet-accessible digital text, images, and video with web links, contributor participation, interactive feedback, and the formation of a participant community of editors and writers. A significant factor in new media is the so-called "democratization" of the creation, publication, distribution, and consumption of media content.



What is critical media literacy?

Critical media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create all forms of media, to critically understand the power of media, and to be aware of our relationship to media. A media-literate student is both a critical thinker and a skeptic who understands the need to identify information sources, as well as their motives and techniques.

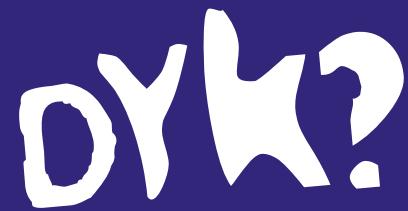
Key principles to keep in mind

The Ontario Ministry of Education published a *Media Literacy Resource Guide* that included the following key principles of media literacy:

- All media are intentional and carefully crafted constructions. They are not mirror reflections of reality.
- The media shapes our interpretations, attitudes, and observations about how the world works.
- Audiences interpret and negotiate the meaning of media messages.
- Media have commercial implications. Mass media production has an economic basis that determines content, technique, and distribution.
- Media contain implicit or explicit beliefs and values.
- Media have social and political implications.
- Form and content are closely related in the media.
- Each medium has a unique aesthetic form. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1989)

Questions posed by the media-literate person in response to any media message:

- Who created this message?
- What techniques does this message use to attract my attention?
- How might others understand this message?
- Which values and lifestyles are represented and which are absent?
- Why was this message created?



Did You Know?

"Children spend more time watching television than in any other activity except sleep." (Huston et al.)

"In 1983 there were fifty dominant media corporations; today there are five. These five corporations decide what most citizens will—or will not—learn." (Bagnikian)

"As of 2006, there were eight giant media companies in the US. They include: Disney, AOL-Time Warner, Viacom, General Electric, News Corporation, Yahoo!, Microsoft, and Google." (Krasny)

"There is a near absence of female characters in top-grossing American motion pictures. After evaluating the 101 top-grossing G-rated films from 1990 to 2004, of the over 4,000 characters in these films, 75% were male, 83% of characters in crowds were male, 83% of narrators were male, and 72% of speaking characters were male. This gross underrepresentation of women or girls in films with family-friendly content reflects a missed opportunity to present a broad spectrum of girls and women in roles that are non-sexualized." (Bazzini et al.)

"The average American child sees 200,000 violent acts and 16,000 murders on television by age 18." (Czaja)

"Sexualization of girls in the media has negative effects in a variety of domains, including physical and mental health. There is ample evidence that it leads to low self-esteem, eating disorders, and has a negative effect on healthy sexual development in girls." (APA)

"The media have a lot of power to endorse stereotypes. We go into First Nations communities to talk to youth about gangs. When asked, the kids estimate that about 95% of Aboriginal youth is involved in gangs. The actual number is 21%. Why do they think these numbers are so high? It's because this is what they get from television and newspapers." (Swan)



Thought-Provoking Quotations

"Whoever controls the media controls the mind."

– Jim Morrison

"Cinema, radio, television, magazines are a school of inattention: people look without seeing, listen in without hearing."

– Robert Bresson

"I believe in equality for everyone, except reporters and photographers."

– Gandhi (Tripathi)

"An unconscious people, an indoctrinated people, a people fed only partisan information and opinion that confirm their own bias, a people made morbidly obese in mind and spirit by the junk food of propaganda is less inclined to put up a fight, ask questions and be skeptical. And just as a democracy can die of too many lies, that kind of orthodoxy can kill us, too."

– Bill Moyers

"The effect of the mass media is not to elicit belief but to maintain the apparatus of addiction."

– Christopher Lasch (Smith et al.)

"Advertising, in fact, is the main storyteller of our society. The right question to ask is not whether this or that ad sells what it is advertising, but what are the consistent stories that advertising tells as a whole about what is important in the world, about how to behave, and about what is good and bad?"

– Sut Jhally



"The media is too concentrated, too few people own too much. There're really five companies that control 90 percent of what we read, see and hear. It's not healthy."

– Ted Turner

"If the nervous system of any organism is obstructed, important messages cannot get through and its health suffers. So it is with information in the media of the body politic."

– Carl Jensen

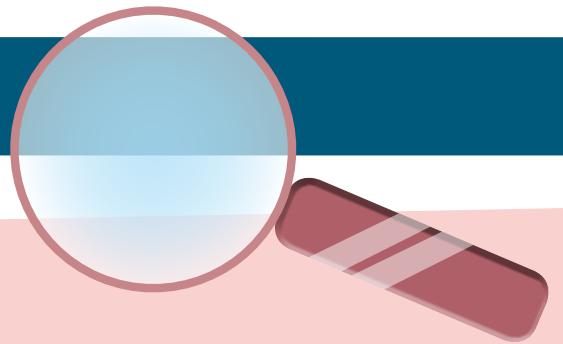
"Media service to the corporate sector is reflexive: the media are major corporations. Like others, they sell a product to a market: the product is the audiences and the market is other businesses."

– Noam Chomsky



Making a Difference

Name	How they make a difference
Project Censored Media Freedom Foundation Carl Jensen	<p>Project Censored was founded by the late Carl Jensen in 1976, and is a media research program based out of Sonoma State University (SSU) in California. Project Censored researches global news stories that are underreported, ignored, misrepresented, or censored by the U.S. corporate media. They also publish a yearbook called <i>Censored: The News That Didn't Make the News</i>.</p> <p>www.projectcensored.org</p>
Adbusters	<p>Adbusters is a non-profit, Vancouver-based organization that was founded in 1989 by Kalle Lasn and Bill Schmalz. Its philosophical stance is anti-advertising, anti-consumerist, and pro-environment, although it supports many other political and social causes as well. Adbusters is renowned for its social marketing campaigns including Buy Nothing Day and Digital Detox Week.</p> <p>www.adbusters.org/</p>



Glossary

Bias:

A preconceived preference or prejudice for or against something (e.g., a person, thing, or even an idea).

Branding:

Formulating a public image for a specific product or service.

Censorship:

Preventing the exchange of information on the premise that the information is too offensive or objectionable to be disseminated.

Citizen journalism:

Also referred to as grassroots or participatory journalism, this type of journalism refers to when private individuals without formal journalism training collect, report, and publish information. The information can take many forms, from a podcast editorial to a report about a city council meeting on a blog. It can include text, pictures, audio, and video.

Convergence:

When different media (e.g., print, film, music) come together under one corporate umbrella, often because of advances in technology (e.g., smart phones).

Critical autonomy:

The ability of a reader to analyze and interpret a text in a manner that is different than the writer intended.

Critical viewing:

The ability of a viewer to analyze and interpret a piece of visual media.

Flak:

Described by Herman and Chomsky as “negative responses to a media statement or [TV or radio] program.” It can take the form of mass letter-writing campaigns to political decision makers and social media petitions.

Hegemony:

The dominance of one group over others, often through the media’s dissemination of the idea that the dominated groups are better off with the dominant group in power.

Mainstream media (MSM):

The large, commonly regarded organizations that disseminate messages to the general public through print, radio, television, and the Internet.

Marketing:

The act of promoting or selling goods and services.

Mass media:

See *Mainstream media (MSM)*.

Media literacy:

The ability to access, critically analyze, evaluate, and create media.

**Oppositional:**

The state or position of being opposed to the position that is put forth in a media text.

Product placement:

The paid inclusion of commercial products in video and print media for advertising purposes.

Propaganda:

Potentially biased or misleading information that is intended to promote a particular point of view or political cause.

Psychographics:

The application of psychological criteria, such as attitudes and ideologies, to the study of demographics, particularly in relation to market research.

Social media:

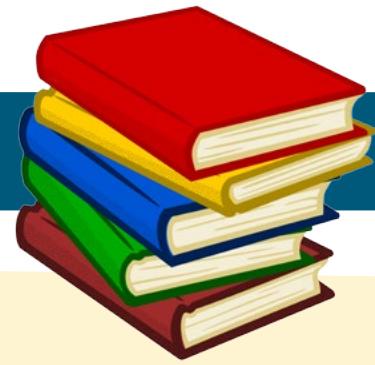
Web-based communication tools that enable users to generate their own content and share it with other users.

Stereotyping:

The expression of preconceived, oversimplified, and biased notions of the common characteristics of particular social or cultural groups.

Subtext:

Messages in texts that are only indirectly related and implied, but not explicitly stated.



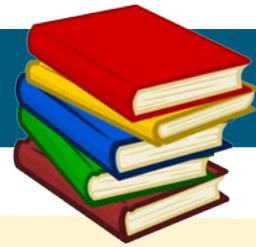
Resources

Books

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Articles

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- Regulation, Awareness, Empowerment; Young People and Harmful Digital Content in the Media Age*. The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, UNESCO, 2006. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001469/146955e.pdf>



Websites

Center for Media Literacy

The Center for Media Literacy is an educational organization dedicated to supporting media literacy education by helping people develop necessary critical thinking and media production skills for the 21st-century.

www.medialit.org

Persuasion with Principle

Dr. Nancy Snow is a professor of philosophy and the director of the Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing at the University of Oklahoma, her research has focused on moral psychology and on virtue ethics.

<http://nancysnow.com/>

Media Watch

Media Watch promotes K–12 media literacy and challenges abusive stereotypes and other biased information through education and action.

www.mediawatch.com/

Project Censored

“The news that didn’t make the news.” Project Censored exposes news censorship, promotes independent journalism and critical thinking, and educates students and the public about the importance of a free press.

<http://projectcensored.org/>

UNESCO

This site is a resource for sustainable education in the 21st century.

<http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-21st-century>

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