

Keeping News Trustworthy

Overview:

Students keep a news media log to analyze and prompt discussion on how newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV portray daily life and events.

Materials:

Special media literacy resources for teachers and students include:

- Center for Media Literacy: www.medialit.org, (323) 931-4177
- Media Awareness Network (Canada): www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/class/
- Media Literacy Online Project at the University of Oregon College of Education: <http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/HomePage.html>
- New Mexico Media Literacy Project: www.nmmlp.org

Handouts:

- [Keeping News Trustworthy](#)

Procedure:

1. Explain that news and entertainment are powerful forces that influence how we perceive ourselves and the world.
2. Suggest that what we watch on television and the way a show presents a story or event can affect our opinions. Explain this is why TV shows have to offer equal time to political opponents running for the same office. Ask the students why this is important. Present an example of how a newscast can influence viewers' perspectives of an event or issue:
 - A news program begins with a report of a "violent" crime. The reporters explain that a woman's purse was stolen and she was knocked down. The camera shows people crying at the crime scene. Another newscast starts its show with reports on the stock market and then briefly mentions the purse-snatching event. They show no videotape of the scene and don't call the incident violent.
 - Ask students why the two stations covered the same story differently.
3. Explain that media (television, newspapers, etc.) are businesses, too, and in order for them to make money, they have to get companies to advertise.
4. Ask why companies would want to advertise on a certain television show or in a particular

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magazine. Ask them to explain how that might affect what content we read or see and why. List ways a story or event may be presented and why.

5. Inform the students they will learn to analyze (or deconstruct) what the media presents.
6. Have them list questions that would help them better understand the content of a story in the media. (How realistically do sitcoms portray real life? How do social, political, and economic factors influence what is reported in the news, and how?) Ask them how critical analysis can help maintain the public's trust in the media. Again, list key questions.
7. Explain that everything they see and read is the result of an editing process, which is necessary to tell a story. Refer back to your original example and have the class help you answer the following questions:
 - What was said or shown?
 - What wasn't? Why?
 - What effect does the way the story was presented have on your feelings and the way you think about what occurred?
8. Pass out the "Media Log" handouts. Instruct students to analyze one newspaper, magazine, or television news program for the next week (one sheet per day). Students could report their findings to the class or you could collect them and assess them as a class. Discussion topics include: impartiality, timeliness, relevance, magnitude, surprise, impact, fame, strangeness, conflict, continuity of coverage (follow-up stories), negativity, solutions, emotions, diversity, and politics.
9. Introduce the term "media literacy." Explain that being literate in the language and methods used by the media doesn't mean being cynical. It means being responsible for our own perceptions — and, through criticism, for helping to keep the media worthy of our trust.

This lesson is from the *Good Ideas* book, available for purchase from the CHARACTER COUNTS! online store: <http://www.charactercounts.org/materials>

Related websites

- [Center for Media Literacy](#)
- [Media Awareness Network \(Canada\)](#)
- [New Mexico Media Literacy Project](#)

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McREL standards

Language Arts

Standard 9. Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Level IV, Benchmark 3. Understands the conventions of visual media genres (e.g., a talk show contains an opening monologue, humorous discussion between host and sidekick, guest interviews, interaction with the audience, and special performances; news programs present events of the day as stories with setting, character, conflict, and resolution).

<http://www.mcrel.org/Standards-benchmarks/>