

Bad Boys, Bad Boys...Whatcha Gonna Do?

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Academic Setting

The school at which I teach is located in a high crime area of town. Albuquerque Police crime statistics list over 6000 reported crimes in a one square mile area surrounding our school during the past year (City of Albuquerque). The school's boundaries meander from a very affluent community to an area of town infamous for drug deals and gang activity. In the middle of all this, are middle class students who live on Kirtland Air Force base. Although community efforts have succeeded in cleaning up the area somewhat, it's reputation of violence and decay remains. We feel, as a school, this perception is why our number of students has decreased by about three hundred in the last six years.

Poverty is a big issue at our school. It has always been an issue, but we are seeing more extreme poverty today than in the past. Free lunches for our student body is at 75%. Many teachers on our campus keep snacks in their rooms to feed students if they miss breakfast.

Mobility is another characteristic of our school. We have found of the 6th grade students entering our school, only 50% will be there in the 8th grade. We feel fortunate there are those that remain; our main feeder elementary tells us that there is a 90% mobility rate from kindergarten to 5th grade at their school. The mobility is not all due to low income families moving frequently to more economical housing or to avoid the bill collector. Our military students also come and go due to family transfers to different bases. This situation impacts us in several ways. Financially, if the students aren't on campus at the forty day count, we lose funding, teachers and programs. Academically, it hinders the students' ability to gain the knowledge necessary to be successful. Emotionally, students at the middle school level have a great deal of trouble adjusting to new schools. Children who have been at five middle schools in one year suffer when they just start to feel accepted and are moved yet again by their parents.

There is and always has been a gang presence at our school. It seemed to have dissipated somewhat over the past three or four years, but in the last year it seems to be on the rise again. Our standardized dress policy has helped somewhat in curtailing the wearing of gang colors. In addition, the School Resource Officer Program has helped.

However, a lot of neighborhood problems spill over into our school. We have had several instances wherein problems we thought were taken care of continued off campus after school. Mostly this has to do with intimidation. In the past several years we have heard of families' homes or apartments being targeted by students who are retaliating (throwing eggs, etc.). The school administration will handle problems on campus, but as a rule they don't get involved with neighborhood issues, leaving that to the police.

The population of our school is at 700 students but fluctuates daily. Our total special education population number is around 170. We have 100 "c" and "d" level students, mostly in self-contained programs. We have 60 English as a Second Language students, mostly from Mexico, Cuba and South America. We have had a higher population of Vietnamese students in the past year – numbering around 15-20 students.

The majority of our school speaks one of two languages, English or Spanish. However we have, in all, 23 different languages present at our school. The low income housing attracts immigrants, both legal and illegal. Catholic Social Services also place families in our area.

We are fortunate to have a school based health clinic in affiliation with the University of New Mexico to provide medical and mental health care for our students and their families. We also have a social services worker on campus several times per week to sign families up for food stamps, Medicaid and public assistance. These services have been in place for at least seven years.

The majority (58%) of our student body is Hispanic. One gang in particular seems to target those students. To combat this we have numerous mentoring programs available (e.g., National Guard, Wise Men – Wise Women, Big Brother and Big Sisters - they come to our school to work with children of all culture). Safe Schools 2000 is also trying to make a presence, but the social workers involved haven't had a history of staying long. Special Education is assigned a social worker two days per week, and our school has been given two counseling positions by the district, the standard issue.

Parents in our area typically work a number of jobs just to make ends meet and keep a roof over their family's heads. Often students are required to watch the younger siblings while the parents work. During the summer months, our students' parents insist they stay indoors out of harm's way. In both cases the chief form of entertainment is watching television and videos. This phenomenon is not just here in our school district, but nationwide; consequently, students from low socioeconomic background watch more television than students from either middle or upper middle class homes (Healy).

Context and Background

This curriculum unit is targeted for an after school program alternative education site addressing the academic needs of special education students who had a long term suspension hearing for behavioral issues. Federal law mandates schools not deny these students an education. My school's answer to this is an after school program four days per week. During that time they are provided academic work so they can continue their education. They can be placed in this program for up to forty-five days. This curriculum is to be focused on violence in the media and its effect on the students I will be teaching. I would like for them to see through the media's rhetoric that seems to be promoting violence, and rail against it.

Historically those assigned to this program are students who haven't been successful in classes. Most of them are boys, and most read at approximately the second or third grade level. They can be placed in this program for any number of reasons, drugs, fighting, weapons (look a-like weapons, knives under 2.5 inches, etc.) In most cases this is not the first behavioral offense of the year for them. However, in isolated cases, it has been a one time fluke, and due to district policy they are required to attend. It is my contention that the amount of television being watched is greatly influencing the behavioral choices of our students.

A lot of the behavior that we see is an imitation of television shows or current movies (on tape). On campus the "play fighting" phenomenon is reminiscent of World Federation Wrestling moves seen on TV. Teachers on campus, having introduced a concept or fact, have frequently had students reply they saw that on a show or movie. Television is a big influence on our student's behaviors and mindsets.

Elementary age children watch an average of twenty-five hours of television a week; for high school students it is twenty-eight hours per week (Healy). Violence dominates much of entertainment they see long before they can read. They are fully integrated into the world of television by the time they begin to attend school. Violence is an integral part of that world. The percentage of prime time television dramatic programs with overt physical violence was 58% in 1974, 73% in 1984, and 75% in 1994. The average rate of violent scenes was five per hour in 1974, five per hour in 1984, and five per hour in 1994 (Gerbner).

Violence is dramatic. It is necessary, though, to show its tragic consequences. Violence without consequences promotes a skewed view (to a child) that violence is not hurtful or unnecessary. Many programs advocate a violent solution to a problem over a peaceful alternative.

Exceptional programs such as "NYPD Blue" and "ER" have tried to show the tragic consequences of violent action. However, a phenomenon known as "Happy Violence," which negates consequences and is painless and always has a happy ending is becoming much more prevalent. The tragic sense of violence is being pushed aside, so as to deliver the audience to the next commercial in a receptive mood.

Action movies further escalate the body count. A count by Vincent Canby in the July 16, 1990 *New York Times* found that "*Robocop's*" first rampage killed 32 people; "*Robocop 2*" slaughtered 81. The sick movie "*Death Wish*" claimed nine victims; the sequel disposed of 52. "*Rambo: First Blood*," rambled through Southeast Asia leaving 62 corpses; "*Rambo III*" visited Afghanistan killing 106. The daredevil cop in the original "*Die Hard*" saved the day with a modest 18 dead; "*Die Hard 2*" achieved a phenomenal body count of 264. I myself observed that the great movie "*Godfather I*" produced 12 corpses, "*Godfather II*" put away 18 and "*Godfather III*" killed 53 (Gerbner).

A consistent finding of studies conducted on youth violence over the past forty years is that repeated exposure of youth to violence in the media leads to aggressive behavior and attitudes among them (Kashani et al).

Psychologist Madeline Levine in a lecture at Emory University in 1997 stated, "There have been 3,000 studies of media violence in the past 45 years, 1,000 of which examined its (television) effect on children" – she said it is an issue researchers barely bother to study anymore. How many times can you find the same answer to the same question? (Emery Report)

Of the effects mentioned, Levine cites two as the most destructive: the first 13 desensitization – being less like to act on something are sees, for example, we may not like violence, but we may not hate it as much as we should. The second is that too much television makes children less creative by limiting their imaginations.

It is her belief, based on her research, that problem solving skills require imagination as a beginning point. Children who watch a great deal of television learn one solution: violence, physicality (Healy).

Wendy L. Josephson, Ph.D., in a study of television violence for *Health Canada* states that, "Psychological research has found that televised violence has numerous effects on the behavior of children of different ages" (Josephson). This has been demonstrated in research by herself and others. These are the common effects:

- 1] Imitation of violence and crime seen on television, "copycat violence", (Bandura 1965)
- 2] Reduced inhibitions against behaving aggressively (Bandura, 1973)
- 3] The "triggering" of impulsive acts of aggression priming (Josephson)
- 4] The displacing of activities, such as socializing with other children and interacting with adults, that would teach children non-violent ways to solve conflicts (Joy, et al.) Television violence has also been found to have emotional effects on children.
- 5] Children may become desensitized to real-life violence (Thomas, et al.)
- 6] They may come to see the world as a mean and scary place,(Singer, et al.)
- 7] They may come to expect others to resort to physical violence to resolve conflicts (Liefer and Roberts)

Although early researchers S. Feshback and R. Singer suggested that televised violence might allow viewers to vent destructive impulses through fantasy instead of acting them out against real-life targets, later findings have not supported this so-called "catharsis" hypothesis. Most social concern, and therefore most research, has focused on children, although virtually all of the effects mentioned above have also been found in older adolescents and adults. None of the effects is believed to be specific to a certain age. That said, an analysis of almost 300 studies in 1986 by S. Hearold found that preschoolers tend to demonstrate more physical aggression and other anti-social behavior as a result of watching violence on TV than do older children, up to about nine or ten years old. During adolescence, the effect of violent television (especially on physical aggression) increases for boys and decreases quite dramatically for girls.

She further states that there are groups of children who may be especially vulnerable to the effects of violent television. These include:

1. **Children from minority or immigrant groups** tend to watch more television. In an attempt to learn their new culture,

they are particularly vulnerable because they may not see their ethnic group fairly represented or may see it presented in a stereotypical or devalued way. There is a particular concern of the potential of television to "homogenize" cultures in a way that undermines cultural values.

2) **Special education students** who have learning disabilities or are emotionally disturbed have a tendency to watch a great deal of television and seem to prefer more violent programming. They are much more likely to feel the content accurately reflects the real world, and they may identify with the violent characters.

3) **Parentally abused children** watch more television than other children do and prefer more violent programs. They admire violent heroes. These children are more likely to commit violent crimes later in life.

4) **Children from families in crisis**, where there are high levels of stress watch more television and may receive less parental monitoring of their viewing choices. They also tend to have less support from their parents.

Viewing Habits

Children tend to watch less television as they approach their school age due to their having less time to watch. Television viewing, however, increases from age five gradually until adolescence. Elementary school children watch less educationally focused programs and more cartoons, action adventure shows and situation comedies. Because of the emotional and cognitive development stage, age eight is considered a pivotal point in relation to television viewing and aggressive behavior (Josephson). This is primarily due to the shift from perceptual understanding to conceptual understanding of the world. If violence they see on television is portrayed as evil, hurting someone or resulting in disapproval or punishment, children of this age will be less likely to behave aggressively. Studies show eight year olds will behave aggressively if they feel the violence they have seen reflects real life. "Real" to the eight-year-old child appears to mean existing in the real world. For example, a police drama would be considered real because police officers do exist.

Bravery, power and strength are themes that run through the fantasy play of six to 11 year old children. No doubt this theme arises because children of this age group are struggling to achieve competence and independence. Children who create aggressive and violent heroes for fantasy play and who identify with them are the ones most likely to be affected by violence on TV due to these fantasies serving as rehearsals for violent responses to real-life events.

Since the 1970's studies have shown that children and adults who watch a great deal of television see the world as a mean and scary place more than those who do not watch a lot of TV. Evidence has been found that adults who live in crime-ridden neighborhoods watch a great deal of television. If children follow the same pattern this might account for their view of the world as a mean place. Children seeking TV as a refuge will not find much solace there (Josephson). What children describe as scary is when normal situations such as home and family are negatively transformed - home becomes a killing field or dolls become evil.

Since the children I see in the after school program meet more than one, if not all of the criteria for children at risk for media induced aggression, my unit will be focused on expanding their knowledge of the effects of television on their behavioral choices. **The tendency to** point out their media driven misconceptions will be avoided in an effort to elicit the student's thoughts on how they and their friends have been influenced by what they watch on TV.

Although the study of the media is quite large in scope, for my students I am focusing on a

smaller group of concepts. The Goals of this unit are:

1] to enable student to see the correlation between the media's portrayal of minority and gender stereotypes and their self concepts and behavior.

2] to understand that television is selling excitement and that police shows fiction, or reality-based, have a formula basis.

3] to identify bias on the local news and how it increases the perception that the world is a violent place.

The objective of this unit is to provide opportunities for critical thinking in the area of behavioral choices and to show them that television is playing a big part in modeling the aggressive behavior that they are exhibiting. This type of behavior, while seemingly logical on TV, is not acceptable in a school setting nor out in the general public. Since the students are in some cases virtually non-readers I will be showing them clips of television shows for discussion, assigning shows they need to watch for homework and reading articles as a class to demonstrate the concepts I want them to understand.

Media Stereotypes

The young American male should have attitude and be adventurous, aggressive and dominant. The message of attitude in commercial television links the flaunting of authority and aspiring to be a rebel. This is packaged as a cool, desirable male trait. Most of this type of advertisement is geared for the young male audience and, taken to the extreme, can also include advertisements and television shows that depict the world as a mean and nasty place where vigilante justice is the only means of survival. The message portrayed is that men, by nature, have always been aggressive and brutal and this they cannot change. This of course includes the biological fact that men must dominate women.

Gender stereotypes

While the idealized male is aggressive, bold and violent, the perfect female is thin, air-headed, scantily clad, oversexed and in many cases acts in a fawning manner toward the dominant male. The use of military or sports figures, and the consistent use of war terms to describe sporting events markets violence as cool, acceptable and suave. This is the image of manhood.

Racial stereotypes

Since the media is still a bastion of the Anglo male, the majority of Hispanic and Black youth seen on television and in the movies are portrayed as drug dealers, gang members and/or criminals. Studies have found that in news reporting, whites were more likely to be reported as the victims and African Americans when they were the perpetrators (Gerbner). Youth in general are portrayed as lazy, less than bright, mouthy and with no particular life goals.

Newspapers as well as television are, also to blame. The 1994 winter edition of *The Journalism Quarterly* reported that Chicago newspapers carried stories on only one of every three homicides in the city and that the slayings most likely to be selected were those in which the victims were White rather than Black or Latino, contrary to the actual crime statistics (Gerbner).

Mean World Syndrome

This theory, developed by George Gerbner, is played out daily in police shows, both reality based or fictional. It is also repeated at 5, 6 and 10 p.m. on the local and national news. The Mean World Syndrome presents "reality" in a lurid manner. Through the use of camera angles, slow motion replays and sensational verbiage the media implies that the world is a dangerous place in which to live and that one must be ready to protect oneself by any means possible. *UCLA Television Violence Report*, in 1997, stated that reality based shows such as *World's Scariest Police Chases*, etc... focus on crime-related brutality and are among the most violent shows on television.

Under-representation of minorities leads to over-victimization. Because their numbers don't represent their actual proportion of the population viewers associate the minority groups featured with the fictitious criminal activities on screen.

More than half of all major characters on screen are engaged in criminal activity either as victims or victimizers. Documented in the *Cultural Indicators Analysis*, Gerbner found that minority actors seem to pay a heftier price for their use of force than the majority.

News Bias

By any number of conventions, a news story can be influenced by the interviewer, photographers, writers and editors. Common methods include selection or omission of a news item, ignoring pertinent details in the story while emphasizing others, and slanting the story to give a biased representation of what is going on. This type of bias is difficult to detect and a comparison of news reports from different sources is the main way this bias can be observed.

Although not all bias is intentional, it can slant the news in a number of ways. It can determine placement of a story in the paper on a broadcast, or burying it. As part of a television monitoring project operating since 1967, Gerbner studied local news on television stations in the summer of 1995, and concluded that crime and/or violence stories usually lead newscasts and preempted balanced coverage of the city. Biased headlines or captions on news stories can express approval or condemnation. And although none of us consistently take flattering photos, unflattering pictures of news subjects can influence opinion. Terminology can be a clear indication of media bias. There are differing connotations in "terrorist" or "freedom fighter". The label "ex-con" can be used to describe someone who served multiple sentences for violent crimes or someone who was in prison one time for a minor offense. Statistics can make any event more spectacular. "Hundreds injured on train" versus "only minor injuries" reflects the opinion of those doing the counting. It is important to know the source of the information for stories. Depending on where the information is coming from will influence the outcome. The source may have a bias that will change the slant of the story.

Implementation

This unit will cover a three week span of time, five days per week, approximately thirty minutes per day. It will consist of showing selected news broadcast videos and police shows, in class reading of background information, and homework consisting of the contrast and comparison of current TV shows.

Outcome/Assessment

- Students will understand that television is selling excitement.
- They will know how the media promotes images by using stereotypes of different groups.
- They will understand that violence in the real world is coupled with consequences, legal and emotional.
- They will be able to identify bias against youth in news reports in addition to seeing how the news is used to promote images of violence.
- When watching TV, they will look at the message more critically and see how it influences their lives.
- This will be a three week unit that will focus on media stereotyping, bias and the mean world syndrome. Total points possible 680.

The New Mexico Curriculum Standards and Benchmarks

Language Arts

1. Reading and listening for comprehension.

(Benchmark 1-C): Apply critical thinking skills to analyze information.

iv. Make informed judgements about bias, propaganda, stereotyping and media

techniques.

vi. Distinguish between fact and opinion.

Week One

Introduction

The media, both print journalism and television, is a powerful force in today's society. This industry is being bought by huge conglomerates that sell a multitude of products. This has changed the way this industry is doing its job. During the 1960's the news programs changed from covering the news and explaining public policy to helping form public policies and turning the news into a media event.

We will be looking at the ways the media effects our lives, how it can shape the way we think about things, and how it can cause us to distrust the world and other people.

During the first week, students will be given the definition of the word **stereotype**, and through a number of exercises will understand that the media uses these to cut time for character development and to provide a point of reference for the audience. Students will understand why the media uses this technique in television shows. They will understand that although stereotyping is common, it can be hurtful and can promote prejudice against those unfairly presented. They will also understand that stereotyping can effect their lives by promoting an unrealistic view of teenagers.

Students will be assigned to complete a Media Journal which will include assignments from class over the course of the unit. Students will begin class daily with a writing assignment. This may include daily comments or short stories that bring to the forefront that violence in TV shows, news broadcasts and print journalism is coloring the way they are seeing their realities. I am using this as a gauge to see if there is any change in their thinking. Since my students have very low skills, this will be a short assignment. I would expect at least a three or four sentence paragraph; however, for more advanced students this could be increased. These will be placed in their Media Journal.

Activities will include discovering the stereotypes in their favorite TV shows, discussing the stereotype of a hero, and drawing posters of a hero and using the letters of the name to choose words to describe him/her. We will use visual activities such as grids or Venn diagrams to compare and contrast different characters. We will compare these media heroes to everyday heroes they know to see the differences. We will then talk about the villains on TV shows and how they are portrayed. Using a student generated list we will compare these to each other and the stereotype. Next, we will cover negative stereotyping. We will begin by showing an ad that shows a mean looking Black male with a list of crimes alongside. As you progress to the bottom of the page, you find out the man is actually the policeman who caught this violent criminal. It provides a wonderful example of how we are being influenced by stereotypes. Class discussion will follow expanding on the negative aspect of stereotypes. Students will name negative qualities they have seen in TV stereotypes of kids, old people, etc...

The male stereotype will be covered next. Students will understand that the male persona the media is promoting is limiting what they can be, do and feel. We will compare the TV male to a member of their family or older teenage friend. The media view of the fearless male, etc., will be contrasted with reality statements such as "everyone is afraid sometimes."

We will end the week by creating the ultimate stereotype in class. We will draw a character and label the stereotypic elements that will put him over the top!

Week 2

This week we will be examining media bias. Students will understand that bias is when we are influenced in an unfair direction. Although we assume the media portrays stories in an objective way, bias can be created through several methods: where a story is placed in the newscast affects our view of its importance, the choice of wording in a story can change the

perspective of the viewer, and the use of headlines can also bias the viewer.

To examine bias by placement we will have students tape the evening local news on different channels. (Teacher will provide tapes.) We will compare the broadcasts for their placement of certain stories. We will also count the more sensational stories and those about juvenile crime to see which station is focusing more on these things. We will compare the slant of the same story on different stations and will also compare that to the newspaper.

Students will take tapes home again and record the news. This time we will focus on headlines and their importance. The students will compare headlines from the local paper. Students will learn that the most often read part of the paper is a headline. Many people decide if they want to read the article by the headline. The headlines or captions on the advertisements for the news broadcasts promote interest in the story. The students will use nursery rhymes and develop headlines that are positive or negative; for example, "Teens Injured in Well Accident" and "Hard Working Kids Take a Tumble (Jack and Jill)," reflect differing perspectives of the same story.

As an extension, students will learn how the choice of words can change the slant of a story. (See story about Prisoners in Tents.) This is an activity where the class will see what a writer can do to alter a story. As a class, they will develop their own positive and negative stories from a generic story format (a proposal for dress code changes for the school is a good example).

Week 3

The final week we will focus on the Mean World Syndrome. This is a phenomenon that is occurring wherein people believe the world is a mean, violent place in which to live. They think that crime is all around and that they will be the victims of a crime even though nationally crime has dropped year after year. They get this belief from watching the news and reading the newspapers, by watching crime shows and violent movies on TV. We will begin by looking at some synopsis of crime shows on TV (these are available at about.com). After reading them, we will start our investigation into the formulas used to make these shows. Based on the episode synopsis we will put the shows into different categories.

Next we will talk about TV cop reality shows, which are among the most violent on television. Seeing only the arrest of citizens and the last few minutes of the capture gives students the idea that this is how one acts when faced with being apprehended. Read the handout "The Cops View" to get an idea of what police work is really like.

Television news is becoming more and more ratings based. One of the more outrageous stations is in Miami, Florida (WSVN). Read handout on their focus for the news. Discuss, as a class, what effects this type of reporting would have on their family.

The final project of this unit will be a presentation by the students. This can either be a cartoon or a newscast that contains all of the elements we have covered during the past weeks.

Final grade will be based on daily journal, classroom assignments and final project.

Media Literacy is becoming very important part in the education of our students. To look at the media with a critical eye is an important ability that must be fostered. (Since this is so topical, most of the information I obtained was off the Internet. There are a number of web sites dealing exclusively with media literacy and they are a valuable resource.)

<p>Week 1 Goals: Students will understand stereotypes and how the media uses them</p>	<p>Concepts to be taught</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Stereo-types in favorite TV show ● Compare stereo-type of super- ● Heroes/ ● Villains ● Male ● Media ● Stereo-type vs. ● Reality ● Negative ● Stereo-type 	<p>Time Frame</p> <p>Section on stereotyping will last one week.</p>	<p>Materials/tools</p> <p>Construction paper, markers.</p> <p>Policeman ad.</p>	<p>Assignments</p> <p>Daily journal writing.</p> <p>Superhero poster</p> <p>Ultimate stereotype of teenager/gangster wannabe.</p>	<p>Assessment</p> <p>1-A</p> <p>Reading and listening comprehension</p> <p>C(ii) Respond to information heard or read</p> <p>I-C Apply critical thinking skills o analyze information</p> <p>i. evaluate text to determine author's purpose and opinion by evaluating conclusions.</p> <p>Students will receive daily points for completion of journal entries in addition to points for completion of projects.</p>
<p>Week 2</p> <p>Students will understand how bias in the media effects them and how they can detect bias in the news.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bias may or may not be intentional. ● Bias by placement of stories in the newspaper or on a broadcast creates the impression of importance ● Bias through headlines can sway the reader negatively or positively. ● Bias through word choice can change the flavor of a story. 	<p>One week</p>	<p>VHS tapes</p> <p>"Prisoners in Tents" story.</p>	<p>Daily journal</p> <p>Students will tape news broadcasts.</p> <p>Students will create headlines for nursery rhymes.</p> <p>Write two stories from the following sentences. On should be sensational in nature and the other should report the facts.</p>	<p>Same as above.</p>

<p>Week 3 – Students will understand that due to the barrage of media violence, many people feel the world in a mean place. This is the basis for Gerbner’s study of the Mean World Syndrome.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mean World Syndrome ● The formulas used for television crime shows. ● Compar-ing "reality" cop shows to a policeman’s view of the profession. ● Television news is ratings driven and is becoming more prone to show stories about crime and violence. 	<p>One Week</p>	<p>Read lyrics to song <i>Dirty Laundry</i>, as an introduction to week’s subject.</p> <p>Crime show synopsis handouts.</p> <p>Reality cop shows. How real are they? Handout.</p> <p>Story of "American Nightmare"</p> <p>Construction paper/ markers.</p>	<p>Students will compare the formulas of crime shows with synopsis of popular shows.</p> <p>Daily journals</p> <p>Final project: Newscast or cartoon containing all elements we have studied over the unit.</p>	<p>Same as above.</p>
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Unit Lesson Plan

Week One – Stereotypes

Day 1

Journal Entry: *Television is teaching all the time. It does more educating than the schools and all the institutions of higher learning.* – Marshall McLuhan (20 points - Students are to write a reaction to the journal entries.)

To be literate is to have knowledge about a certain subject. In this case the subject is the effects the media (television/movies and print) is having on our students.

The essential question I want to ask is, **How this influence is effecting my class?**

Students will be assigned a media journal which will include assignments from class over the course of the unit.

The first week of this unit deals with stereotyping. We will begin the lesson with a discussion of our favorite television shows. Questions will include:

- Why this show is their favorite?
- Who is their favorite character and why?
- How long have they watched this show?
- Do their friends or family watch this and do they discuss the plot with each other?
- Describe their favorite episode.
- Have they ever seen their friends try to act or dress like the hero does? Have they? What Happened?

Homework: Write a list of characters from their favorite show and describe them. (20 points)

Day 2

Journal Entry:

Television, whether you like it or not, is the most powerful educational force known to man and we're quivering it away and I find that unacceptable. When are we going to scream?

- Fred Friendly, Former President of CBS News (20 points)

Collect completed homework and begin discussion about "stereotypes."

The definition in this case would be how someone or something is typically presented or portrayed. Choose the character of the hero for an example. When we think of the standard Disney hero the following qualities come to mind:

Good looking
Smart
Muscular
Tall
Brave
Strong

Have students draw a grid on the board and list heroes vertically and the stereotypes horizontally. Check off areas where the heroes have something in common. These qualities are part of the stereotype the media uses to develop the hero character.

Ask if anyone has a hero that isn't an athlete or in the movies or on television. Compare their hero's qualities to the grid. How does their measure up?

Now try the villain:

Scary looking
Devious
Dishonest
Mean
Cowardly

Have students think of the villains on their favorite movies or shows and compare them.

What is the purpose of stereotypes? Students should know that they provide easy identification for the viewer. In short TV shows, fast identification is very important. When you see an actor on the screen, depending on how they are dressed and the way they act, you should be able to tell if they play the hero, the villain, or are just nerdy or cool. That is stereotyping.

Homework: Draw a super-hero on one half of the page and write their name vertically on the other half: (25 points)

B
A
T
M
A
N

Write a word starting with each letter that describes the character:

Brave
Adventurous
Tall
Muscular
Attractive

Day 3

Journal Entry:

Entertainment is the most powerful educational force of any culture.
George Gerbner (20 points)

What are the effects of negative stereotyping?

Show class Policeman Ad Transparency (see addendum). Cover entire picture and gradually lower cover as you read the crimes that have been committed.

Class Discussion:

- What was your first impression upon seeing this picture?
 - What is it about this man that fits the stereotype of a criminal?
 - What other groups have negative stereotypes? Old people? Kids? Women?
 - How can stereotypes hurt people?
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Day 4

Journal Entry: *Television is basically teaching whether you want it to or not.*- Jim Henson, Muppet Creator (20 points)

The Male Stereotype

Begin the class talking about commercials and advertisements that feature teenage males. (Mountain Dew, Levi Jeans, etc...) MTV has many commercials that could be taped and shown. Have class come up with descriptors that make up the stereotype.

Draw a chart on the board (having students copy on their own paper) – One side for media view, the other for the reality of their own lives.

Students can choose an older male friend or relative or use themselves and complete the chart.

Men should be:

Media View - Fearless

Reality - Everyone is scared sometime.

Media View - Always wears cool clothes.

Reality - Sometimes my parent's can't afford to buy me all the clothes I would like, etc.

Class Discussion:

- Do media stereotypes we have seen influence the way our friends act?
- Do the stereotypes cause them some problems sometimes?
- Could stereotypes "lock you in" to acting a certain way?

Homework: Final Project – Due tomorrow (200 points)

Draw the ultimate teenager or wannabe gangster for a class presentation. List all stereotypes the media has bestowed upon this character including clothes, posture, hair, jewelry, etc...

Week Two – Media Bias

Day 1

Journal Entry:

We cannot blame the schools alone for the dismal decline in SAT verbal scores. When our kids come home from school, do they pick up a book or do they sit glued to the tube watching music videos? Parents, don't make the mistake of thinking your kid only learns between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. – Former President George Bush (20 points)

Begin discussion about the word "bias." Students should understand that bias can be a view of something and that when the media writes or presents a story in a certain way, it can influence the reader or viewer. The media is aware of this and tries to remain unbiased, but due to the commercial nature of TV, radio and print journalism, bias can and will often appear.

Tape several news broadcasts from different local channels for comparison and discussion.

Class Discussion:

- Identify the similarities and differences between the reporting styles of the three news sources.
- For stories dealing with the same news item, was there any difference in how the story was presented by the different stations?
- In stories relating to youth and crime, were the youths portrayed as victims or perpetrators?
- Which news sources are teenagers most likely to get this story from? TV, newspapers or radio? What about their parents?
- Does the news source make a difference to a person's perception of a story?

Homework: Choose students to take a VHS tape home to tape one news broadcast from a local station. Each student should have a different channel to tape so there can be a comparison. (10 points)

Day 2

Journal Entry: *We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but the worst is abandoning the children. – Gabriela Mistral, Chilean poet. (20 points)*

Bias by placement or omission of stories in the newspapers or on a broadcast creates the impression of importance or can trivialize it.

View tapes with students. Discuss the placement of stories in the differing newscasts.

- Discussion should be centered around what each channel shows as the lead story.
 - Which channel showed more stories about violence in ABQ?
 - Have students count the number of stories about violence or about teenagers getting into trouble.
 - Was there a channel that seemed to show teenagers as criminals more than another?
 - If there was a story about a teenager being a victim of a crime, how did the media portray him?
-

Day 3

Journal Entry: *Shall we just carelessly allow children to hear casual tales which may be devised by casual persons, and to receive into their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up? Plato (20 points)*

Students should be aware that headlines are the most often read item in the newspaper. People choose what story to read by the headline. (Pass around newspapers and tabloid papers to class) Based on the headlines in the papers, would they say these would affect people negatively or

positively?

Next view the tapes again, looking at the captions on the screen and analyze the effect they would have on the viewer. Have the news media sensationalized the stories by the use of headlines or captions?

As a class, take the nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill" and turn it into two headlines, positive and negative.

Negative: Two Children Seriously Injured in Well Accident!

Positive: Hardworking Kids Take a Tumble!

Homework: Have students write their own headline from a nursery rhyme. Students should choose from the following: (20 points)

Mary had a Little Lamb.

Humpty Dumpty

Wee Willie Winkie

Three Blind Mice

Day 4

Journal Entry:

If you came and found a strange man teaching your children to punch each other, or trying to sell them all kinds of products, you'd kick him right out of your house, but here you are, you come in and the TV is on, and you don't think twice about it. – Jerome Singer (20 points)

Begin class by discussing the results of the headline writing exercise. Stress that choice of words can really make a difference in the slant of the headline. Word choice is very important in all news stories, whether in print or on TV/radio.

Preface reading the "Prisoners in Tents" article by explaining there is a shortage of beds in detention facilities across the country and other cities have tried different ideas regarding how to accommodate those incarcerated. This article was written two ways: the first is an excerpt of what was written in the newspaper, the second has been slanted against the use of tents.

Have students read and discuss the differences in what a few words will do. As a class have students take the following scenario and write it two ways:

"A new dress code will be voted on by our school's parents. All male students will wear blue shorts and yellow knee high socks. Female students will wear blue skirts and yellow socks. All students will wear yellow polo shirts and jackets with the school emblem. Parents can purchase these articles at many department stores around town. The cost is approximately \$75 per outfit and we are requesting all parents buy at least three."

Day 5

Journal Entry:

Television in the main is being used to distract, delude, amuse and insulate us. – Edward R. Murrow (20 points)

Write the following on the board and have students give examples of each:

Bias by placement and omission

Bias by headline

Bias by word choice (100 points)

Handout copies of song *Dirty Laundry* by Don Henley.

<http://gunther.simplenet.com/v/data/dirtylau.htm>

Read and discuss the news and tabloids and how they can make people feel.

- What does the term "dirty laundry" mean?
- Do you feel that newscasters are frustrated actors?
- What stories have you seen that have been sensationalized on TV?

Week Three = Mean World Syndrome

Day 1

Journal Entry: *What always puzzles me is why parents aren't more alarmed*

about the impact of television content and why they don't make their concerns felt, but they don't. – Joan Clooney, Founder, Children's Television Workshop (20 points)

There have been studies which show that when people watch a lot of TV or read/listen to the news a lot they can become fearful that something violent is going to happen to them. This is called the Mean World Syndrome.

Some people feel that in our society, the increase in violence is due to people not taking any chances or that people have become so desensitized to the amount of violence they see on TV that they feel violent reaction is the normal thing to do.

This week we will be looking at shows on TV which promote violence or encourage the Mean World Syndrome in people.

Although the media would like us to believe this, television is not reality based, nor is it a window on the world. It is manufactured reality. This "reality" is sponsored by advertisers who want the viewers to buy their products. Since most producers and distributors of entertainment are conglomerate businesses which are multi-national, they want to promote their entertainment shows across the globe. Since there are cultural differences in humor and other types of entertainment, distributors have found that violence sells. Everybody can understand someone getting killed or being in danger.

Cop shows are very popular on TV and have been for years. There are five types of shows. We will learn the formulas that these shows are based on.

One hour police drama (hero based) -

- Has been the most popular type of show historically
- Revolves around one main character
- Hero is usually a lead investigator or detective
- There is a distinct beginning, middle and end to each week's episode
- There are other characters, but the show belongs to the hero
- *Colombo, Baretta* are examples

One hour police drama (group based) -

- Has become the most common type of police drama
- Revolve around two or more characters or an ensemble cast
- Have several stories in each episode
- Often have a continuing storyline
- *NYPD Blue, Law and Order* are examples

One hour police drama (not primarily police-based)

- The story usually revolves around a crime
- Hero (or Heroes) may not be in law enforcement
- Most private investigator shows fall into this category
- *Rockford Files, Murder She Wrote, X-files* are examples

Half hour police shows (comedy/drama) -

- Most tend to be comedies
- These type of shows tend to be the least common type of show
- *Barney Miller, Dragnet* are examples

Reality based cop shows

- Use real footage and real people
- Promoted as "true stories" to viewer
- Inexpensive to produce
- Rarely deal with anything but arrest or investigation
- Some show actors reenacting the actual police investigations

Cops, World Scariest Police Videos, America's Most Wanted are examples. (Adapted from *What is a Cop Show? A Definition of the Genre* by Greg Baerg)

Week of October 21st, 1996

Show #2031 - Oct. 21 Bullets fatally wound two victims during a drive-by shooting; a motorcyclist tries to conceal his identity from officers; a landlord is convinced that his tenant is a terrorist; and mini-market employees attack suspected shoplifters with beer bottles.

Show #2032 - Oct. 22 Air and ground units are in hot pursuit of a stolen vehicle as a suspect waves a gun at them; suspects flee the scene after crashing into a mailbox; a suspect tries to extort drug money from his girlfriend; and police search for a man exposing himself to beachgoers in Venice, CA.

Show #2033 - Oct. 23 Officers try to control the crowds at Venice Beach; an argument escalates to gunfire; a pair of suspects steal a car to avoid the walk home; and a divorce becomes ugly when a woman falsely accuses her husband of a crime.

Show #012034 - Oct. 24 Southeast officers serve multiple warrants simultaneously against wanted gang members; a suspected drug dealer is found holding a probation officer's badge; a misunderstanding leads to a full-blown fight; and "grand theft auto" suspects lead officers on a hot pursuit.

Show #2035 - Oct. 25 A young boy is shot during a drive-by shooting in South Central, LA; officers respond to a domestic violence call in the nick of time; a traffic accident leads to a fight; and an undercover vice sting focuses on johns soliciting prostitutes.

PREVIOUS EPISODES

Pass out worksheet (see attachment) on Cop Shows and as a class read the synopsis of different shows. Decide which category each show fits into. (100 points)

Day 2

Arrange to have SR officer come to class for a local perspective.

Reality based cop shows as we mentioned are very popular and very cheap to produce. Hand out synopsis of show and have class read. Then hand out "How real is the reality in reality cop shows? By Greg Baerg. Read and discuss with SRO.

Day 3

Journal Entry: *We don't care really about children as a society and television reflects that indifference to children as human beings.* – Bill Moyers (20 points)

We have all seen the *National Enquirer* and the *Star* at the local grocery store checkout counter. These are called tabloids and have little to do with reality in most cases. Since news broadcasts are now commercially produced programs which fight for ratings, the stories have become more and more sensationalized. One of the most notorious stations for "crime time news" is WSVN in Miami, Florida.

Read the article "WSVN in Miami: Diary of an American Nightmare" with the class.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/issues/violence/resource/articles/crime.htm>. Discuss with class their perceptions of the article and what the school resource officer had to say about the number of crimes committed in Albuquerque.

Show statistics on differences between Canadian news and US news and the type of stories they choose to run.

Home work: Have students watch evening news and count how many violent stories are on the broadcasts. Have students watch different local channels to compare. (20 points)

Day 4

Journal Entry:

To harness the power of television for the education of our nation's children, everyone must get involved – Television programmers, government leaders, teachers and above all parents. – Edwin Newman (20 points)

Students will report findings to class and will graft them on the board. (Bring in newspaper to add to the total count.) Which news source reports the highest number of violent stories?

Final Project (for presentation to class): Draw a cartoon of a newscast or perform a newscast that incorporates all we have learned in the past three weeks. It must include: stereotypes, bias and the Mean World Syndrome.

Day 5

Journal Entry: *We are strip-mining our children's minds and we're doing it for commercial profit without any concern for the longer term consequences for them and for our society.* – Al Gore (20 points)

Final Presentations (200 points)

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<http://www.nmmlp.org> - New Mexico Media Literacy Program – valuable workshops are available. They have some good resources on line.

<http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/HomePage> – a wonderful site with great background materials from the University of Oregon.

<http://coptv.about.com/?once=true&terms=baerg> – TV cop shows – a site that lists all police dramas from Dragnet to present day complete with the synopsis of every show.

Cop Show Format Name _____

Select the correct format for the following cop show titles.

1] Half hour comedy/drama 2] Hour crime drama (hero based)

3] Hour crime drama (group based) 4] Hour drama (not police based)

5] Reality based

Law and Order ____

Nash Bridges ____

NYPD Blue ____

America's Most Wanted _____

Falcone _____

Diagnosis Murder _____

Cops _____

Wiseguy _____

Police Squad _____

Profiler _____

Barney Miller _____

Hawaii Five-O _____

Magnum P.I. _____

Kojak _____

Jake and the Fatman _____

LAPD – Life on the Beat _____

Dragnet _____

Law and Order ___ 3 – Group based

Nash Bridges ___ 2 - Hero based

NYPD Blue ___ 3/4 Police and lawyers

America's Most Wanted ___ 5 Reality/reenactment

Falcone ___ 2 – Fed agent infiltrates mob

Diagnosis Murder ___ 4 Doctor and son solve crimes

Cops ___ 5 Reality based

Wiseguy ___ 2 Federal agent/mob situation

Police Squad ___ 1 Basis for movie about Lt. Dribben

Profiler ___ 4 Psychic helps federal agencies

Barney Miller ___ 1 Police station comedy/ ensemble cast

Hawaii Five-O ___ 2 Special investigator for state of Hawaii fights crime

Magnum P.I. ___ 4 Vietnam vet turns P.I. in Hawaii

Kojak ___ 2 Lolly-pop sucking Lt. of Homicide gets the bad guys

Jake and the Fatman ___ 2/4 District atty and detectives solve crimes

LAPD – Life on the Beat ___ 5 Reality in L.A.

Dragnet ___ 1 Half hour crime drama, probably the first of it's kind!