

Introducing Middle School Students to Media Literacy by Conducting a Classroom Media Campaign

Charles Kappus

Academic Setting

I teach Social Studies (World History) and Language Arts to sixth graders at Lyndon Baines Johnson Middle School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. LBJ serves a middle class, ethnically diverse population and is located on the city's rapidly-growing West Side.

Approximately 1,200 students attend our school, with programs designed to meet the needs of regular education, special education, gifted, and severely handicapped students. LBJ is proud of its high expectations, parent involvement, and student performance on standardized tests. To ease the "culture shock" students sometimes feel when moving from an elementary school to middle school setting, sixth grade students spend extended periods of time with one teacher in "blocked" classrooms. With nine years of teaching experience and a strong desire to develop interdisciplinary units and project-length assignments, I welcome the opportunity to teach a Humanities block for the first time this school year. I will teach a 92-minute class to approximately 75 students per day (three groups of 25), and the same students will have another 92-minute block for Math and Science. Although this media literacy project could be adapted to meet the needs of any classroom, I will use it primarily to meet Language Arts competencies and promote some of our school's social concerns, namely recycling, character education, drug and tobacco awareness, and school safety.

Because television plays such a major role in the lives of my students, I believe a unit about the media will be a perfect way to get my students thinking about the impact of media messages on themselves and others. My goal is to help my students become more savvy consumers of media, able to analyze the media creations of others as well as create media themselves. By conducting a media campaign, students will be able to view media messages from the perspective of the sender and the receiver, discuss production techniques and ethical issues, and begin to evaluate the effectiveness of different media strategies for selling products and promoting important social concerns.

Media literacy is a worthwhile goal for any student, but especially for adolescents just beginning to examine choices about how to spend their time and money. Students need to know just how carefully

advertisements are constructed and placed, and how the various media attract an audience and then sell it to advertisers. In my nine years of teaching, I have discovered (sometimes the hard way) that my students read and write best when they are motivated by an interesting topic. I have also noticed that television shows (like the latest WWF extravaganza) and television ads (like the Budweiser "Wassup" series and Brittany Spears' latest soft drink promotions) are topics that most middle school students can identify with. I think a unit on media literacy can be a place where student interest and teacher goals intersect.

The goals of my unit are the same as the goals of our ATI seminar: to increase knowledge of mass communication and understanding of mass media industries; to show students how individuals interact with media content to create meaning; and to help students become more skilled consumers of media content. To make this happen, I want to present enough background information about what the media are and what the media do that my students can carry on informed discussions on the topic. As essential as the "nuts and bolts" facts about media are, I believe it is equally important to move quickly into activities, indeed, to create an environment where students discover these concepts themselves, not by copying notes from the board or from a lecture, but through a hands-on experience with media. I'd like to think that my unit blends the best of both worlds -- direct instruction and a student-centered project. The constructivist approach to education, which I practice alongside more traditional methods stressing structure and discipline, advocates learning topics "from the inside out" and provides activities that allow student choice and autonomy. This combination of theory and practice provides both a framework for learning and a springboard for student creativity. Throughout the course of the school year, I'll have my students create at least a half-dozen projects like travel guides for a country we're studying or in-depth reports about some aspect of an important civilization; so the prospect of producing a media campaign should not be overwhelming or unusual.

The activities set forth in this unit serve the dual purpose of developing in students a more sophisticated understanding and awareness of media, and an active utilization of all of the Language Arts competencies: reading, writing, listening, speaking, and research skills. The partnership of media literacy and Language Arts curriculum is by no means a new phenomenon; media literacy is now emphasized in primary and secondary education in many parts of the country, with 38 states mandating coverage in the school curricula. I feel lucky to teach in Albuquerque, New Mexico, because our city is

the home of the New Mexico Literacy Project (headed by Bob Mc Cannon and based at Albuquerque Academy). NMMLP materials and teacher training sessions have raised the awareness of educators about the importance of this discipline. When the Albuquerque Public Schools recently revised its Language Arts standards, media literacy skills were written into the new scope and sequence document.

Rationale (Why Media Literacy Matters)

The premise of this unit is that media literacy is an essential survival skill as we begin a new millennium. From the moment we get up in the morning until the time we turn in at night, most Americans are bombarded by a constant stream of media messages: the radio jingle that wakens us, the *Today* show that entertains us as we dress, and the headlines of the morning paper sitting on the kitchen table are all there in our home from the get-go. As we drive to work, we notice bumper stickers on the cars in front of us, glance at billboards we pass by, and are even lured to buy a candy bar at the gas station when we read the message on a "pump topper" perched over the gas pump. Even the receipt that we get after paying has an advertisement printed on the back! In *Mass Communication, Media Literacy and Culture*, author Stanley J. Baran estimates that the average person spends 3,154 hours a year - nearly 60 percent of his or her waking hours - consuming mass media content. Teachers of every content field - but especially Language Arts teachers - should challenge our students to ask questions about these messages and begin to analyze their structure and purpose.

Media scholar RuAnn Keith defines media literacy as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce a variety of media texts. This last step - producing media - will comprise the major part of my unit. Working in small groups at "media stations" set up in different parts of my classroom, students will make posters and billboards, radio advertisements, letters to the editor, editorials, TV commercials, and I-Movies (a new Apple multimedia program) as part of their media campaign project. But before students can make media, they should first understand the governing principles of media literacy. These I will present first via direct instruction (lecture and note-taking). According to Keith, there are five such concepts, each with specific challenges for students:

- Audiences actively interpret media. (How does a media consumer decode a message and make meaning? What are the manifest (literal/surface) and latent (inferential/subconscious) messages being presented?)
- All media are constructions. (How is this message put together

and transmitted? What skills are necessary to make this medium?)

- All media are owned. (Who owns the medium? Is financial profit their only motive?)
- All media express values. (Whose story is told? Whose story is left out?)
- All media adhere to specific codes and conventions. (What are the rules of production and what purposes do they serve?)

For better or for worse, media are the storytellers of the electronic age, with positive and negative consequences for all of us. Students should know that the mass media include books, magazines, recordings, the Internet, advertising, public relations, film, television, radio, and newspapers. This unit will not delve deeply into any one of these, rather, it will provide an overview of the media's incredible scope and influence. After a brief discussion of communication theory, I will present a timeline illustrating the major technological breakthroughs that have made mass communications possible. The development of useful symbols that began 5,000 years ago with the first alphabets is a starting point on a continuum that includes the corporate logos and computer icons emerging today. Literacy is defined as the ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and use written symbols. Technological advances such as the Gutenberg printing press (1446), daguerreotype (photographic) imaging (1839), the telegraph (1844), sound recording (1877), radio broadcasting (early 1920's), and television (1939) brought media into the equation, allowing messages to be transmitted on a massive scale through various media. Students should know that this relationship between media and technology continues today, altering how the public is entertained and informed. For example, the television era of three major networks dominating the airwaves has been revolutionized by cable television, and network newscasts -- and newspapers, for that matter -- must now compete with the Internet for a share of the audience. The point is, technology and mass communications have developed side-by-side to create the crowded, sometimes confusing, media environment we live in today.

In *Responsibility in Mass Communication*, author William Rivers describes five functions of mass communications:

- Mass communication helps us watch the horizon, much as the ancient messenger once did. We no longer depend on distant drums or a messenger for news, watching instead for the latest bulletins or commercials.
- Mass communication helps us respond to the challenges and opportunities on the horizon and helps us reach a consensus on

social action. Town meetings have given way to televised debates, which enable us to weigh rival viewpoints.

- Mass communication helps us transmit the culture of our society. Think of all the value statements presented in an episode of *Leave It To Beaver*: honesty, citizenship, the importance of family, and gender roles are all given treatment in a manifest or latent manner.
- Mass communication helps entertain us. According to another media scholar, George Gerbner, the average American spends more than seven hours per day watching television; what are the benefits and costs of this incredibly pervasive medium? And are the stories we are viewing, like Gerbner suggests, creating a fearful public due to violent television content out of proportion with reality?
- Mass communication sells goods and services. Stanly Baran estimates that the typical person sees 250 ads a day and more than 2 million ads by the time he or she is 25 years old. Although it seems to consumers that media companies are in the business of creating their texts, broadcasts, and programming, they are really in the business of selling their audiences to advertisers. Has the competition for audience share caused, like many media critics suggest, a "dumbing down" of content, a pandering to the "lowest common denominator" as evidenced by trashy television talk shows and the prevailing newscast ideology of "if it bleeds, it leads"?

I hope to address these questions with my students as we discuss the media. As a former journalist, I always begin my larger unit about media with a two-week unit focusing just on newspapers. I always begin my newspaper unit with an examination of media ethics, and the rights and responsibilities of a journalist. I believe that these ethical principles - the protections of the First Amendment, the duty of a reporter to be fair and objective, the notion that a good newspaper creates a forum whereby a community can become a better place to live - should be applied to other media as well. By examining media with a critical eye and learning to deconstruct content, students can decide for themselves if news stories, advertisements, and entertainment are serving the public interest or betraying the public trust.

Issues For The Classroom

Although this unit is designed to be an introduction to media literacy, the field has many fascinating subtopics that can be examined along the way. In *Gender Advertising*, author Erving Goffman devotes an

entire volume to the discussion of male and female roles in our society as presented by the advertising industry. In what ways do advertising and popular culture maintain - and even exacerbate - gender stereotypes? Is racial stereotyping an issue as well? (For example, why are so few Hispanics seen on network TV sitcoms?) How does advertising make us want things through careful manipulation of sound and imagery, slogans, and camera angles? In what ways do advertising and popular culture contribute to unhealthy lifestyles? And what do all these advertisements say about our American society? Does rampant American consumerism make us villains in the global community, as some critics suggest, or merely the most successful nation in the history of the world? Although any one of these issues could be the topic for its own media literacy unit, they can still serve as lively questions for classroom discussion as we learn to view, evaluate, and make media in the context of the Language Arts classroom.

Media, Technology, and the Constructivist Classroom

In their book, *Media and Literacy, Learning in an Electronic Age*, authors Dennis Adams and Mary Hamm make a strong case for empowering students with the latest technology and an understanding of the media these technologies can make. Social power, they assert, extends from being able to understand and manipulate the processes used to create messages in the modern world. This outlook on education fits hand in glove with the philosophies of John Dewey and L.S. Vygotsky, whose ideas provide rationale for my use of cooperative learning groups and project-length assignments. Dewey, whose ideas about education provide the cornerstone of the Constructivist philosophy, argued that traditional education snuffs out children's inherent curiosity about the world and advocated more real-world experiences and hands-on opportunities. Vygotsky suggested that cognitive development depends on the people in a child's world and occurs through the interaction of the child with the more capable members of the culture, adults, or more able peers. When I walk around the classroom to check on the progress of student groups, I am continually amazed by students' ability to learn from each other, borrowing from each other's strengths to overcome each other's weaknesses. Vygotsky called this interface the zone of proximal development, the area where the child cannot solve a problem alone but can be successful under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more advanced peer. I see this process playing out, for example, if stronger writers take a leadership role in creating the text of an advertisement, while a more gifted artist designs and draws the visuals. I plan to facilitate this process in the way I

structure the groups, taking skill levels and personalities into consideration and providing roles for every group member at each media station.

Every medium, from newspapers to the Internet, has its own vocabulary, and I will require students to compile a "media glossary" in the notebooks as they complete their media campaigns. Again, this fits neatly with the constructivist conception of the brain functioning more like a processing device than a storage cabinet. In *Social Learning Theory*, author Albert Bandura implores teachers to put language at the center of everything we do. Language modeling, by the teacher or other students, will help every student to acquire new words and use them in meaningful ways. For example, a media station requiring students to write an electronic message to a list of recipients might contain these vocabulary words: icon, program, list serve, menu, scroll, and drag. With every medium having its own treasure chest of words, think of how this unit can expand a student's word power!

It is significant that many educators who advocate integration of media literacy skills across the curriculum are also part of a growing consensus of professionals who view children as "active learners." Cornelia Brunner and William Talley, authors of *The New Media Literacy Handbook*, agree that learners build powerful maps of the world only by starting from, and adding to or revising, their existing maps or schemas. Students, therefore, need opportunities to formulate, test, and revise their concepts about the world and its phenomena, be they human, mathematical, or scientific. The work teachers do to prepare a suitable environment for this inquiry is sometimes called "scaffolding." This term reflects the fact that teachers let students - like construction workers on a scaffold - perform the essential tasks of building knowledge but craft a rich and carefully designed learning environment to support their work. In this case, each media station will have age-appropriate materials, examples of the kind of media students are producing, clearly defined roles for each group member, and a step-by-step procedure students can follow. This "student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach" methodology makes learning a shared responsibility between student and teacher, and puts the teacher "down in the trenches" with students where they can share in the excitement of creativity and new understanding.

Meeting State Standards

Although this unit could be adapted to meet the needs of a variety of disciplines (for example, creating a media campaign to support the school's science fair or participation in Black History Week), it was

created by a Language Arts teacher with the state (New Mexico) standards for English in mind. When listing the unit objectives, I will reference each objective with the state benchmark that day's activity addresses. There are three major state content standards for English/Language Arts:

- Reading and Listening for Comprehension - Content Standard I: Students will apply strategies and skills to comprehend information that is read, heard, and viewed.
- Writing and Speaking for Expression - Content Standard II: Students will communicate effectively through speaking and writing.
- Literature and Media - Content Standard III: Students will use literature and media to develop an understanding of people, societies, and the self.

Within these standards there are performance benchmarks for specific skills. Rather than assign each activity a specific benchmark (such as II-C), I will note Roman Numeral I, II, or III after each unit objective to place it within the scope of a state content standard. Of course, many activities address more than one content standard and are noted accordingly.

Objectives and Unit Calendar

This unit has three major components: the history and background of the media will be discussed in week one; topics will be chosen (day six) and media products will be made - one per day at six media stations set up in the classroom -- during all of week two and the first two days of week three; campaigns will be presented to the class on Wednesday and Thursday of week three, followed by a unit test on the final Friday. The six media stations require students to write a script for a one-minute television ad (and perform it for the class), plan a storyboard for a short movie using *I-movie* (an Apple computer program that shows kids how to make multimedia presentations combining sound, pictures, and text), write a letter to the editor or a newspaper-style editorial design a one-page print ad, design a billboard; and write a one-minute radio advertisement. At each media station, students will learn the vocabulary of that medium, examine a professionally-done example, discuss the industry norms for production, then follow a step-by-step procedure that will help them create the product. Students will be evaluated on the creativity, correctness, and effectiveness of their products (and how skillfully they are presented to the class), their media vocabulary notebooks, and their ability to remember important concepts on the unit test.

I realize this unit has an extremely broad scope; what it sacrifices in deep understanding of any one medium it gains in a broader understanding of the far-reaching extent of the media and their influence in our lives. This calendar - and the lesson plans that follow - are designed for blocked classes scheduled for 70-90 minutes per day. (My own Humanities classroom combines - or *blocks* - Language Arts and Social Studies into one 92-minute class meeting five times per week; many schools block Language Arts and Literature in a similar manner). Teachers on different schedules would need to adjust these plans accordingly.

I believe this unit can be modified to meet the needs of different classrooms and different schools. The topic or thrust of the media campaign can be anything the teacher finds appropriate to his or her classroom content. I'm going to introduce the concept of public relations by having all of the possible topics for the student campaigns fall within the scope of public service announcements. Students can choose to mount a media campaign to discourage smoking, say no to drugs and alcohol, recycle to conserve the planet's resources; or practice safety and courtesy at school. In this way, I feel I'm underscoring the responsibility of the media to help make the world a better place. Teachers of other disciplines might use this unit to promote other causes such as Black History Week or Take Your Daughter to Work Day. The important thing is to provide a framework for understanding the media, design work stations that set up the parameters by which different media are made, and encourage student creativity and expression in the development and sharing of student media campaigns. Briefly, these are my goals for each week, with the appropriate state content standard listed for each activity:

Week One (The background and history of the mass media) --
Students will:

- Take notes on communication theory (I/II)
- Practice verbal and non-verbal communication in classroom activities such as charades and a partner obstacle course (I/II).
- (For homework) List all the media messages a student encounters in a 24-hour period (I/II/III).
- Make a media history timeline (I/II/III).
- View a television commercial critically, using techniques of media deconstruction (I/II/III).
- Write a short news report about a staged "event" that happens in the classroom (I/II/III).
- Take notes and discuss: the rights and responsibilities of a journalist; the governing principles of Media Literacy (Keith);

and the five functions of the Mass Media (Rivers) (I/II/III).

Week Two (Choose a topic for a media campaign and make media products) -- Students will:

- Read background information about a variety of civic-minded issues (I).
- Discuss choices with group members and choose a topic for a multi-faceted media campaign (I/II/III).
- Analyze and discuss professionally-made media products (I/II/III).
- Discuss the norms of production for a variety of media and how these contribute to the effectiveness of a media message (I/II/III).
- Become familiar with new vocabulary words for different media and begin to use these words when discussing and making media products (I/II/III).
- Design and make media products in a cooperative learning group (I/II/III).

Week Three (Complete and present media campaigns; unit test) -- Students will:

- Organize a class presentation of their media campaigns (I/II/III).
- Present a media campaign to the class (II/III).
- Discuss and evaluate the work of their peers (I/II/III).
- Review important concepts of media literacy and take unit test (I/II/III).

Implementation

The lesson plans that follow use an abbreviated version of Marylin Burns' five-step lesson plan and include these components: objectives (goals), focusing activity, instruction, guided practice, and independent practice. It should be noted that one media station requires at least one computer (several Apple computers equipped with the I-movie program will be necessary later if students are to produce the *I-movies* they plan in this unit). Materials and preparations -- and a vocabulary list -- are noted on a day-by-day basis. An assessment rubric follows at the end of the implementation section.

Week One (Communication theory and the background and history of the Mass Media)

Day One -- Objectives: Students will learn the basics of communication theory and practice various verbal and non-verbal techniques to enhance communication. **Vocabulary:** communication, message, sender, receiver, encoding, decoding, feedback, media, medium, manifest (surface) message, latent (subconscious or hidden) message.

Materials/Preparation: Teacher will set up an obstacle course in the classroom, an area marked off with tape perhaps twenty feet long with a turn and obstacle (such a can) to negotiate. Students pairs (one blindfolded) will take turns leading their partners through the course using very specific verbal messages (e.g., "take one tiny step to the left"). Teacher should also have notecards made for charades activity.

Focusing Activity: Teacher will begin class by talking to students in a very soft whisper. What communication issues come to the fore?

Instruction: Students will take notes on a lecture about communication theory, defining all the vocabulary words above. Student volunteers will then be invited to practice non-verbal communication skills by miming a specific act given to them on an index card (for example, make a sandwich or plant a tree). Class will try to guess what is being acted out. **Guided practice:** Students will then work in pairs to practice verbal communication as they lead each other through the obstacle course, with the goal of not stepping outside the taped boundary lines or touching one of the obstacles. This activity underscores many of the important concepts of communication theory. **Independent practice:** For homework, students will make a list of all the advertisements they encounter from the time they leave class until the time they return the next day (including all media -- TV, radio, print, billboards, etc.).

Day Two -- Objectives: Students will make a timeline outlining important events in media history, discuss the pervasiveness of the mass media, and become familiar with some of the "techniques of persuasion" advertisers use to promote products. **Vocabulary:** Gutenberg printing press, daguerreotype imaging, telegraph, broadcasting, Internet (from timeline); symbols, hyperbole, humor, testimonial, repetition, plain folks, flattery, bribery, denial, band wagon; scientific evidence, nostalgia (from Techniques of Persuasion). **Materials/Preparation:** Instructional CD *Media Literacy For Health* (available from the New Mexico Media Literacy Project), a computer/projector set up to show students examples of print ads and television commercials found on this CD, information for timeline (see Rationale section), Techniques of Persuasion handout and Deconstructing an Advertisement handout (see NMMLP website/free materials link -- these can be downloaded). **Focusing**

Activity: On the chalkboard, make a class list of the advertising messages individual students recorded for homework. What medium and products were most represented? Discuss the technology that made these media messages possible. **Instruction:** Point out that before the mass media technologies were invented, communication and learning took place primarily through the oral tradition, with scribes and clergy often being the only members of a society who could read and write. Then present students with important events and innovations in the history of mass media, from the development of the printing press to today's World Wide Web (students record these on a timeline in their notebooks). The techniques of persuasion handout should be distributed next to give students some (but not all) of the strategies advertisers use to sell products. After reviewing these, teacher will show students advertisements from the CD and the class will try to identify which strategies were used in each ad. (The CD contains a variety of ads grouped into six categories: tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, relationships and sexuality, violence prevention, nutrition, and physical activity; the teacher may pick and choose among these to suit specific needs). **Guided practice:** After discussing a few ads as a class, have each student write their own response to an ad. Remind students that the more intelligently they can analyze these ads, the more *media literate* they will become. **Independent practice:** For homework, have students choose one ad -- either from print or electronic media -- to "deconstruct" using their list of persuasion techniques. Students should be able to summarize the ad and mention one or two techniques of persuasion it uses.

Day Three -- **Objectives:** Introduce students to the concept of "freedom of speech and expression" under the First Amendment and discuss the rights and responsibilities of a journalist. **Vocabulary:** John Peter Zenger (briefly review his 1735 libel case to define), First Amendment, objectivity, bias, slander, libel, reporter, editor, editorial. **Materials/Preparation:** Copy of The Bill of Rights, a plan for a staged incident to be acted out at the beginning of class, clipped articles from various newspapers and tabloid magazines. **Focusing Activity:** Begin the class with a staged incident (for example, have one student "steal" another's books, leading to a mock confrontation. Then ask every member of the class to write a one-paragraph news story about what they witnessed, trying to identify the facts as they know them (the five w's and 1 h may be introduced here as students identify the who, what, when, where, why, and how). **Instruction:** Have students read their news accounts of the staged incident aloud. Compare their stories by discussing point of view, accuracy, and objectivity. Then present today's vocabulary list, using these words as a springboard for a discussion of print journalism and the rights and

responsibilities of a journalist. Then we can look at last night's homework assignments and ask the question: Do advertisers have the same responsibility to be truthful as journalists? After discussing some of the advertisements students have deconstructed, it should be clear that advertisers use a variety of strategies to sell products, some of which are misleading and sometimes even immoral. At this point, it would be helpful to discuss the reliability of news sources. Do tabloids use sensationalism to attract readers in the same way ads use sex to sell products? **Guided practice:** Compare a news story from a daily newspaper with a story from a tabloid such as the *National Enquirer*. What are the differences? Which provides more reliable information? **Independent practice:** Working in partners, students read and analyze a news clipping. Students should be able to identify the five w's and one h, write a one-paragraph summary, and state why they think the account provides reliable information (or not).

Day Four -- **Objectives:** Students continue to use tools of analysis skills to discuss and deconstruct media messages. Today we will review vocabulary words already presented, introduce RuAnn Keith's five concepts of media literacy (found in the Rationale section of this unit) and apply them to advertisements we examine as a class.

Vocabulary: media, medium, media literacy, interpret, decode, literal, inferential, values, conventions. **Materials/Preparations:** The five concepts of media literacy, an overhead projector, the *Media Literacy for Health* CD, and a computer/projector (or 12-15 full-size magazine ads). **Focusing Activity:** As a class, brainstorm a list of the top ten TV commercials currently airing; select ads that are funny, memorable, or creative. Ask students if these ads are easy and inexpensive to produce. The truth is, they are sometimes very expensive to produce and are often more carefully constructed than the shows they appear on. **Instruction:** Since we have presented a good deal of new vocabulary words already, we will begin by reviewing these in a game. Put a grid of numbers on the board - one for each new word - and have students pick a number to play. The numbers correspond to the teacher's vocabulary list (for example, number five could be "editor"), so the teacher may read the word after the number is chosen and wait for the definition. If the student defines the word correctly, his or her team gets a point and the word is erased. If it is missed, the number stays up on the board and students may call the same number when it is their turn. (Spelling can be added for an additional point per word). After the game, present the new vocabulary words and the five concepts of media literacy, pausing to discuss each one as students copy them in their notebooks. Each concept poses a question; we will answer these questions as we view media today. **Guided practice:** Have the students leave their notes out as we play

the commercials on the CD. Begin with the first questions: What are the literal (surface) and inferential (subconscious or hidden) messages being sent; Go on to questions about how the advertisement is made. **Independent practice:** After guiding students through the five concepts, challenge students to analyze one ad on their own. Have them number one through five in their notebooks and write at least one sentence for each question when presented with an ad (such as the Marlboro Country campaign). Compare student responses and discuss. For homework, students should study their vocabulary words to prepare for Friday test. Note: Teachers without computer/projector equipment may use full-page magazine ads for analysis activity.

Day Five -- Objectives: Students will be tested on the vocabulary presented so far, learn about the five functions of mass communications (see Rationale section), and watch a video about media literacy. **Materials/Preparation:** A list of popular advertising slogans ("We do it all for you", "Taste the rainbow"), Vocabulary list, William Rivers' five functions of mass communications, TV/VCR, and video (either *The Ad and The Ego* or *Just Do Media Literacy* -- available from the NMMLP). **Focusing Activity:** For fun, see if students can identify the products associated with their advertising slogans. The teacher reads the slogan and takes volunteers who try to guess the product. **Instruction:** Begin with the vocabulary test, then present an abbreviated version of William Rivers' five functions of mass communication. Afterwards, students write these in their notebook and brainstorm examples for each of the five functions (either as a class or in small groups). For example, MTV transmits American culture (function #3) throughout the world by presenting new ideas about dress, make-up, hairstyles, attitudes, and sexual mores. The teacher will then discuss the schedule of our unit, pointing out that the video we will show next will complete our brief introduction to media literacy, and next week we will begin working on our media campaigns to promote social causes our school deems worthy.

Week Two (Choosing a topic for a media campaign and making media in small groups)

Day one -- Objectives: Present students with examples of public service ads, arrange students into groups of three or four, and allow groups to pick a topic for their media campaign using background information provided. **Vocabulary:** public relations, public service advertisements, corporate image. **Materials/Preparation:** Examples of public service ads (for example, the "Just Say No" to drugs campaign or Adbusters campaigns poking fun of the Marlboro Man or

Joe Camel); age-appropriate literature on the topic choices: anti-tobacco, anti-drugs, Character Counts, recycling, and school safety. **Focusing activity:** Show students examples of regular advertising and public service advertising, contrasting the two and providing definitions. Tell the students that since we are not in the business of selling products, the focus of our media campaigns will be public service-type ads to encourage our fellow students to be better people and make healthy choices. **Instruction:** Present students with the five choices available for the media campaigns (more advanced students might be able to choose their own topic if they could do their own research). Divide students into groups of three or four (groups will make one media product per day for the next six days) in a way that will (ideally) blend students with different talents and levels of achievement. Groups should first assign roles to each member, then do background reading on the topic(s) they find interesting. Roles for group members are:

- Teacher/group liaison -- Presents any questions to the teacher and voices concerns about how media products should be made. Mediates differences between group members before asking for teacher intervention.
- Production coordinator -- Gathers all materials for products and makes sure every member is contributing in some capacity; reads background information aloud at each media station.
- Writer/recorder -- Makes daily notes at each media station and takes the lead role in putting text down on paper (although content input comes from all members).
- Artist -- Takes the lead role in creating graphics, illustrations, and product designs.

After roles are assigned, students read background information on topics, then choose one as the focus of their media campaign. **Guided practice:** As teacher circulates to monitor groups, students brainstorm a list of possible ideas for media products. For extra credit homework, students should watch one television program with a parent or guardian, then write a two-paragraph response; one paragraph should summarize the reaction of the student and the other should summarize the reaction of the parent. Instruct students to pay attention to ads they see, and look for techniques and ideas they might apply to their campaigns.

Day two -- (Note: plans for the next six days will outline the instructions for the six media stations. Groups should be able to create one product per day, but if they don't finish during class, that product becomes homework for the group). **Objectives:** Teacher will present

examples of six finished products that groups will make at the six media stations: a letter to the editor (or editorial), a print ad, a billboard, a radio ad, a television ad, and an *I-Movie* (like a music video) storyboard. Students will be encouraged to be creative and do quality work, for the teacher plans to put their products on display. Students will begin their campaign by completing work at the first media station. **Station One -- Writing an editorial or a letter to the editor. Vocabulary:** editorial, letter to the editor, fact, opinion. **Materials/Preparation:** Samples of letters to the editor and editorials clipped from newspapers, vocabulary list, instructions for this station. **Focusing Activity:** Ask students to read their television show responses, then ask if anyone discovered new ideas they could use for their campaign. **Instruction:** (For each media station, students should first look at samples provided, read background information and instruction sheet, then begin work on their product). Students look at examples of a letter to the editor and editorials. How are these different than other newspaper stories? Group members then brainstorm a list of points to be made in their editorial or letter to the editor. Students then use these ideas to create a product outline calling for three paragraphs (and a Roman Numeral for each paragraph). Products should contain an introduction paragraph stating the problem (such as the negative effects of smoking), a body paragraph presenting steps toward a solution (such as taking an oath to be tobacco free), and a conclusion paragraph challenging others to also take action. **Guided practice:** Using their outline, students write a rough draft, then have this checked by the teacher before making revisions and producing a final copy.

Day three -- Station Two -- Creating a Print Ad. Objectives: Students will plan and design a print ad using basic production strategies. **Vocabulary:** Classified ad, display ad, headline, visual, text, catch-phrase or slogan. **Materials/Preparation:** Examples of print ads clipped from magazines, construction paper, markers and art supplies, vocabulary and instruction list for this station. **Instruction:** Students should look at examples of print ads and construct an ad with these major components: A headline to grab attention with large text, a large visual or graphic, a catch phrase or slogan, information about the topic that will persuade the reader (for example, the benefits of being drug free) and a call to action (for example, "Do your part to keep our campus free of graffiti."). Examples should point out these production standards: a clean, uncluttered appearance, a clear and simple message, a good balance of text and graphics, and a good use of "white space." Students should first brainstorm a list of three or four possible ideas, choose one, then create a rough draft or "dummy" that can be discussed and revised. **Guided practice:** Students receive

input from teacher after creating their rough draft, then go on to their final product.

Day four -- Station three -- Creating a billboard. Objectives:

Students will construct a large-scale print advertisement designed to send a message quickly without much detail. **Vocabulary:** outdoor advertising, target audience, consumer. **Materials/Preparation:** Examples of billboards copied from books or downloaded from the internet, vocabulary and instruction sheet for this station, poster board, markers, and art supplies. **Instruction:** The instructions for this station are almost the same as those for the print ad; the differences are that, since billboards are seen and passed by quickly by motorists or passers-by, they should contain less text and a greater concentration on a dominating headline (usually a slogan like "This is your brain on drugs") and visual (for example, a plate of fried eggs). Students should again brainstorm a list of ideas and draw up a rough draft on paper before moving on to poster board. **Guided practice:** Teacher should approve a group's rough draft and make suggestions before a final product is constructed.

Day five -- Station four -- Writing and recording a radio ad.

Objectives: Students will write a script for a one to two-minute radio public service ad and record the final product on a cassette tape.

Vocabulary: script, sound effects, characters, narrator, voice inflection, tone. **Materials/Preparation:** Cassette player with four sets of headphones, a cassette tape recording with a variety of radio advertisements, blank cassettes, vocabulary list and instruction sheet for this station. **Instruction:** After listening to samples of radio ads, students will brainstorm a list of possible script ideas for their radio ad. Students will then write a script and adjust it to meet the one to two-minute time frame. Guidelines for performing and recording the script should include these reminders: speak in a loud and clear voice, keep the microphone in a central location to improve recording, practice lines to improve timing, voice inflection, and intonation.

Guided practice: Before recording the ad, teacher will check their scripts for clarity of message and appropriateness.

Week Three (Finishing media stations, classroom presentations, and final test)

Day One -- Station five -- Writing and recording a television

commerical. Objectives: Students will write a one to two-minute public service advertisement for television, rehearse it several times, and record it using a video camera. **Vocabulary:** focus, zoom, fade in/out, camera angle, sound bite. **Materials/Preparation:** Video

camera, blank VHS tape, vocabulary list and instruction sheet for this station. **Instruction:** Students will begin by brainstorming a two-column list constructed as follows: For column one, make a list of five memorable television commercials and the products they sold; in column two, identify the strategies used for each corresponding commercial (for example, humor, get on the bandwagon, etc...). Then students will pick a strategy for their public service ad and begin to formulate a script. **Guided practice:** Students should have their scripts checked by the teacher for clarity of message, correct time, and appropriateness before beginning to record. Students should also receive a brief lesson about the basic operation of the video camera and how to record effectively.

Day two -- Station Six -- Planning an I-movie by making a storyboard. **Objectives:** Students will plan to make an *I-movie*, a multimedia product that combines music, text, and pictures (and/or movie clips) like a music video. **Vocabulary:** multimedia, storyboard, frame, transition, dissolve, credits. **Materials/Preparation:** Apple Computer with *I-movie* software, examples of student *I-movie* projects (available through Apple Computer's website), four pieces of small posterboard (one for each movie frame), markers and art supplies, vocabulary and instruction sheet for this station. **Instruction:** After viewing examples of student *I-movie* projects on the computer, students will begin to plan their own *I-movie*. The rough draft of the plan can be a three-column chart, with columns labeled text, pictures, and sound. Students must decide what will be the three components of their movie for each of four frames (for example, the first frame could include the text title "Drugs Kill", a sound clip from the song "Waterfalls" by the group TLC, and pictures of famous people who were victims of drug abuse like Jimi Hendrix and Elvis Presley). Each frame should be twenty to forty seconds long, and the frames should transition like the sentences of a persuasive paragraph. Although there is no set formula for such a creative medium, frame one could provide the title and topic, frame two could define a problem (like unsafe hallways), frame three could propose a solution or response, and frame four could sound a call to action. After deciding on the movie contents, students should sketch the way each frame might look on paper by placing text and visuals for maximum effect. **Guided practice:** Students should have their paper-version storyboard checked by the teacher before moving on to the final posterboard version. Note: If appropriate computer facilities are available, students could use these plans to make their own *I-movies* in the school's computer room if extended periods of time (at least one week of blocked periods) are available for production.

Days three and four -- Student presentations and peer feedback.

Objectives: Student groups will present their media campaigns to the class, and the audience will provide feedback by filling out a response sheet for each group (except their own). **Materials/Preparations:** All products must be completed in order to receive a grade. Students not presenting should make a two-column response sheet for each group, listing at least one positive comment for each product presented (column one) and one suggestion to possibly improve the product (column two). A video camera should be ready to record part or all of the presentations (especially the TV commercials). **Focusing activity:** Teacher will remind students that an advertising campaign is an orchestrated effort using various media for selling a product or influencing public opinion. Teacher will remind students to be respectful when viewing group presentations and providing feedback -- plenty of effort and energy went into these projects! **Assessment:** Teacher can grade these products as presentations are made, at the same time looking for opportunities to underscore the important themes of media literacy.

Day five -- Final exam and viewing of taped projects. Objectives:

Although the major part of this unit's grade will come from the media campaigns themselves, students should also be assessed regarding how much they know about the vocabulary, major concepts, and controversial issues regarding media literacy.

Materials/Preparations: A three-part exam including vocabulary words, short-answer questions about media sources and media literacy, and an essay requirement posing the question "What is Media Literacy?" or "Why is Media Literacy Important?" **Assessment:** After the test, students can relax (perhaps enjoy refreshments), and watch the tape of their media campaign presentations from the day before. Graded peer response sheets can be returned and shown to each group.

Assessment Rubric

- Obstacle course participation 10 points
- Homework list of media messages 10 points
- Vocabulary list in notebook 10 points
- Timeline of mass media history 10 points
- Advertisement deconstruction 10 points
- News story about staged news event 10 points
- News story summary 10 points
- Partner activity analysis ad using five principals of media literacy 10 points

- Vocabulary test 20 points
- Television show parent activity 20 pts. (extra credit)
- Six media campaign products (20 pts. each) 120 points
- Peer Response sheets 30 points
- Final exam 50 points

Grading scale: (for a total of 300 points) 270-300 points = A; 240-269 points = B; 210-239 points = C; 180-209 points = D; 179 points and lower = F.

Documentation

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Internet resources

The New Mexico Media Literacy Project. <<http://nmmlp.org/>> (Teachers may order CD-ROM, Video, and other educational materials through this site).

The PEW Center for Civic Journalism. <www.pewcenter.org> (Information and classroom materials about the Civiv Journalism movement).

Blowing Smoke. <www.blowingsmoke.arizona.edu> (Student-driven site dedicated to exposing strategies of tobacco companies to place their products in the media).

The Media Literacy Online Project. <<http://interact.uoregon.edu/MediaLit/HomePage>> (Produces a bi-annual online resource for educators called the *Media Literacy Review* (MLR)).

Adflip. <www.adflip.com> (The world's largest archive of classic print ads).

Adbusters. <www.adbusters.org> (Wages war against corporate misrepresentation and abuse in advertising).

Teen Health and the Media Web Site. <<http://depts.washington.edu/ecttp/default.html>> (Provides information and ideas for teaching teenagers about issues including suicide, body image, tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs).