

How the Media Shape Our Sense of Community

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Academic Setting

This unit is an exploration of an approach to teaching media literacy, and is targeted toward high school students who may have special academic needs, but it is appropriate to all secondary students. The students I serve range from gifted to developmentally delayed, but all are academically challenged either in some or all subject areas, some due to learning disabilities and some due to cognition or behavior which impedes their ability to learn.

Nestled in the southwest quadrant of the site of the two great transportation arteries of the state is the oldest high school in the city of Albuquerque (the original building was abandoned in the early 1970's). The latest available statistics for Albuquerque High School are from the 1999-2000 school year: of the 2020 students then enrolled, 68% were Hispanic, 20% were Anglo, 5% each were the African American and Native American enrollments, 2% were Asian and the remaining were a mixture of "other." This reflects a higher ethnicity mix than the other ten high schools in Albuquerque Public Schools.

Socioeconomic status descriptions can partially be obtained by looking at the percentage of students who receive free or reduced-cost meals. The higher the percentage of students who need free or reduced lunches, the more likely a school is to have a larger percentage of students with special needs related to poverty. Albuquerque High has 25% of its student population receive free or reduced lunches. However, Albuquerque High School also serves Uptown Park, Spruce Park and other University areas, where many of the doctors, lawyers and university professors reside; many of their children attend their local high school. They represent the upper middle class. National tests such as the Terra Nova reflect this diversity. Although Albuquerque High School has a large number of students below the average range for national percentiles, it also has a significant number who score between the 90th and 99th percentiles. Albuquerque High School is lacking in scores in the average range for these tests, which seems to indicate that a strong socioeconomic middle class is lacking.

The goals and objectives of this unit will be based upon Bloom's Taxonomy and the New Mexico Media Literacy Standards. The

elemental part will focus upon students being able to identify and define the information found in media, grasp its meaning, and use this knowledge in new situations for the first component of the unit. After the instructor measures of their acquisition of this knowledge, the students will need to advance to recognition of hidden meanings, predict and draw conclusions from new data, and evaluate the messages from media. At the end of the unit, students should be able to identify a target audience from a particular medium. In particular, they are to determine what articles in the news are projecting about their communities, and what audience the journalists had in mind when the articles were published. I hope to capitalize upon the students' interests to assist them in learning history, technology, and problem-solving and listening skills, and is making these students want to stay in school.

Context and Background

The rationale for creating a unit on media literacy is that at Albuquerque High School I work in "self-contained" classrooms. The students in these classrooms are "at risk" for dropping out of school. These students bluntly state that they have not found much to excite them in their curriculum. However, these students' interest in media is what I hope to use as a segue into the comprehension of language arts, history and current events. My primary focus is to have them identify the motives generating articles in the newspaper about their communities, and to empower them to reject messages to which they are opposed.

I chose media literacy because of the everyday exposure to media; my students seem blithely unaware of the impact of this daily bombardment and appear to embrace the messages that media send out. Whether a person is at the mall, riding the bus, watching television or a movie, the messages from the media are either latent or forthright. From the moment teenagers awaken to brush their teeth (Colgate? Crest?) to the act of eating breakfast (which has some advertising on the package) these students, even the non-reading ones, are targeted by marketing managers. The approach of media literacy education appears to honor the interests of the students. For better or worse, students are often very responsive to the media. Rather than studying some vague, abstract texts, which do not hold the students' attention, the subject is something in which the students have some expertise. It is intriguing to me that so many students who have great difficulties in comprehending information presented in school or in retaining information from lessons, can recite advertisements and movie plots (complete with dialogue). On a surface level, these students may appear to have auditory memory problems coupled with

an inability to sequence events. However, this cannot be accurate because they quote long songs from memory without the use of visual cues.

The students have expressed interest in the subject matter through their fascination with all communication technologies. It is now my responsibility to translate that into a working curriculum with theories, measurable objectives and a high-interest palate. My ultimate goal is to develop a curriculum around media literacy utilizing the interests of the student population at my school. Media literacy will be the tool utilized to help direct my own students in identifying manifest versus latent messages (see vocabulary terms).

Subject background for Media Literacy

Communication

Communication consists of sending and receiving messages. There is a message source (the sender) who utilizes a medium, or mode, of communication to send the message to a receiver. If the message is received with a clear intent, then the transmission was successful. If the message is not clear, or common modes of communication were not used, then the intent of the message becomes confused. An effect may have been produced, but it may not be the one intended by the sender. Communication is at the heart of the educational process. The student's ability to master the components of communication is instrumental in a successful learning experience.

Mass Communication

Whether the intent of a message is delivered to one person or to many, the above definition of communication holds true. That is, mass communication is a subset within the broad definition of communication. Media communication is represented by a wide range of communication forms whether it be visual (a newspaper or photos), aural (radio), or audiovisual (movies or television, or even the computer). With the telephone, live interaction television, the Internet and the Web we now have true two-way electronic communication; a message may be sent and instantly received, generating a reaction that can be immediately communicated back. Mass communication, whether in the earliest forms of handprints, clay objects, and hieroglyphics or in the more modern form starting with Gutenberg's printing press and proceeding to interactive electronic devices, has helped communicate the culture of every society.

Mass communication theories evolved not just from the field of communication, but borrow from other disciplines such as psychology

and sociology. Mass communication theories are continually in flux due to new developments in media, and are therefore very susceptible to paradigm shifts.

Media Literacy

Media literacy is the ability to analyze and evaluate the media to which we are exposed. Although most of us suffer from sensory over-stimulation from media, most do not have the time or do not take the time, to analyze the consequences of this exposure. Media literacy is a complex subject which revolves around social occurrences that interact with our social systems or our personal and cultural lives. Indeed, media are no longer mere parts of the culture K.A. Conover declares that the media have become "the culture." Media can be seen as social constructions of reality. They may be seen as reflecting the worldview. But as reality is a mere reflection of truth itself, it is more probable that media distort the world view at the same time that media try to create a worldview. This worldview is not the one society intellectualizes, but it is the one we have been encultured to believe (Baran).

Media are things with which we interact to receive the messages. These messages may be direct, or part of the manifest message. These are the messages that media try to project. Indirect or latent effect messages are more subtle; they tap into associations that may not have been intended.

One media scholar, Art Silverblatt, in 1995 developed five fundamentals or characteristics of media literacy (Baran 48-52). These fundamentals will be interwoven into the objectives of the lesson plans for the unit. The five characteristics are:

1. to develop an awareness of media impact (theories, practical examples and historical definitions are useful)
2. to understand the process of mass communication (the process of having a sender, channel and receiver for messages would be explored)
3. to develop strategies for analyzing and discussing media messages: (this could be accomplished through "learn by doing" techniques)
4. to develop an understanding of media content as a text that provides insight into our culture: (The students need to examine what the strategies were to target which audience and to determine the intent)
5. to develop the ability to enjoy, understand and appreciate media content: (the media, themselves, are oriented

towards entertainment) Stanley Baran added two more to Silverblatt's list which also will be incorporated into the lesson plans for this unit:

6. to develop an understanding of ethics and the ethics of production (this explores the moral obligation of media practitioners)
7. to develop appropriate and effective production skills: (this provides a great way of bringing technology into the study, providing creativity for the students and a lot of vocabulary); see vocabulary section

By understanding the characteristics of media literacy, the students are educated and are better able to ask probing questions, participate in discussions and are better empowered to judge the messages sent. These characteristics will be the basis of the curriculum devised for my unit.

History of Media Literacy or Media Education

It can be argued that media literacy began in the late 1960's or early 1970's. At that time it was generally lumped under film studies in high schools and colleges. Even into the late 1980s, few professors were teaching media literacy (Conover, 1996). It appears that the rest of the developed world had surpassed the United States on this front. France has had media literacy programs for over thirty years. New Zealand had leapt to the forefront in producing research-based curriculum units that are used worldwide.

The United States had studies into media literacy; the problem was an application in the public school system. However, being late to use the curriculum does not appear to have set students back irrevocably. Evidence is showing that young people are not just mindlessly watching television. Rather than surfing through channels, the young of today watch programs, but are not passively absorbing the messages, whether manifest or latent. They are gaining the critical skills of recognition, analysis and evaluation to determine the media's messages without the direct intervention of teachers.

Literacy could be increased with good tools to tackle an increasingly complex world. Although media literacy programs are available, more research is needed to support them. Currently, evaluation data on curriculum units are lacking.

History of Mass Communication Theory

There were three distinct phases of research in media influence. The first was the Direct Influence or Mass Society Theory, of the 1920's

to the 1940's, which included the propaganda techniques of WWI and WWII. These theories incorporated the idea of the "magic bullet" or "hypodermic needle" theory, in which one can envision the evil media as drugs or systems that can poison a person (Baran). At this time the public was viewed as a homogeneous mass of isolated individuals. Many theorists assumed one grand theory could encompass all aspects of the media's influence. The transition period was manifest in the live broadcast of "War of the Worlds" by Orson Welles on Halloween Night, 1938. It was presented in the "docudrama" style so well known today. Analysis moved theorists away from the mass society theory. According to direct theory, all or most of the audience should have believed an invasion from Mars was imminent; as only one in six did believe the "news," media were seen as having a more limited influence than earlier believed.

The next time period was the Limited Influence from the 1950's to the 1960's. Here, individual preferences, social groups and individual relationships limited media influence. The first scientific studies of the effects of media emerge, particularly Paul Lazarfeld's methods on polling and survey research. He developed the two-step flow theory of mass media and personal influence and coined the terms "opinion leaders" and "opinion followers." (Barab 321). "Opinion leaders" was the term for those who kept informed through the media, interpreted the media's messages, and passed on their views to opinion followers (people who had little contact with the media). Also part of the Limited Influence Era was Attitude Change Theory. This theory argues that because most people are uncomfortable with information that conflicts with our beliefs or ideas, we use one of three selective processes to screen what information we will be exposed to or retain. Often we only or expose ourselves to information consistent with our ideas or beliefs; we tend to interpret messages that are consistent with what we believe; and lastly, after exposure, we retain messages that are consistent with our own opinions. Selective exposure or attention is part of vigilance or long-term alertness, selective perception can be described as attending long enough to put information into short-term memory, and selective retention is the act of taking the information from short-term memory and committing it to long-term memory. This theory contends that ideas that previously were not studied long enough or sufficiently to enter into short-term memory cannot be stored into long-term memory; many students have huge gaps in their education because of difficulties in selective processes. The entire Selective Process Theory was part of the Limited Effects Theory (Baran). This particular theory resonates with my perception of my students and will be one that I will incorporate into my lesson plans.

The third movement in theories was the Strong Influence under Certain Circumstances idea of the 1970's. These theories attempt to explain how the influence of media is limited. One of the most interesting thoughts that has evolved is that "...the media do not do things *to* people; rather, that people do things *with* media"(Baran 325). This is called the Uses and Gratifications Approach, which stresses the reciprocity needed in a mass communication process: media need an audience and the audience uses media. Contrasted to the Uses and Gratifications Approach, the Affective and Cognitive theories argue that people learn through observation and then apply their ideas to the media. People may go so far as to imitate behavior that they have been exposed to, or may modify that behavior by giving a more generalized or related response of the model.

An enduring theory of the present movement is Agenda Setting. This evolved from ideas that media did strongly influence people and cultures, but argued that the media helped shape what we thought about, even if they did not tell us what to think. (Baran). Agenda Setting is seen as a process, as investigations on an issue or issues. Much scholarly research has been devoted to this theory-over 350 publications have been published-and it seems to have endured the test of time. A good test of a theory of mass communication is whether it is constantly in flux. As new research comes along, the theory of Agenda Setting is readjusted to accommodate new data, and new approaches are established for the ever-expanding world of technology.

The Approach

"Pregnant Teenage Mother Hit by Underage Driver in South Valley," screams the headline. Another claims that "Robber Flees Scene in West Mesa." West Mesa and the South Valley, for Albuquerque, have a high concentration of Hispanics, as evidenced by the advertising seen on billboards and businesses in Spanish for their target audience. Along with the usual community headlines, the local news stations are showing a description of some suspects in a crime. The suspects are listed as male, Hispanic, with brown eyes and black hair, between 5'5" and 5'9", and each "with a mustache." Sigh.

How do the media shape the students' sense of community? To what extent are stereotypes accepted as the norm for the students from a particular community? Do the students recognize that they are the target? If they do recognize that they are the target, do they accept these stereotypes or reject them? Are they hurt by them, angered or merely annoyed? How is a teacher (or a parent) to know how much these stereotypes affect the target group that they supposedly

represent? By applying Silverblatt's characteristics to media and utilizing the attitude change theory of selective processes, the students will gain the critical skills needed to recognize, analyze and evaluate media's influences on them.

Objectives:

1. The student will be able to identify and define the information found in media, grasp its meaning and use this knowledge in new situations.
2. The students will recognize hidden meanings, predict and draw conclusions from new data, and evaluate the messages from media.
3. The student will describe a target audience from a particular medium and evaluate and choose the most effective strategies to deliver communication.
4. The student will analyze the use of language and vocabulary appropriate for a variety of audiences and purposes.
5. The student will evaluate media statements as facts versus opinions

Evaluation

The student will demonstrate the above objectives in pre and post testing and through the completion of teacher-devised tasks.

Pre-Test:

Students are shown a color overhead of an ad and are asked to:

1. Describe the ad in detail.
2. Identify the target audience.
3. Demonstrate the use of attitude or body language or facial expression.
4. Analyze the symbols used and what they represent.
5. Merge the message the ad is sending: the direct or indirect messages.
6. Evaluate the values presented in the advertisement.

Lesson Plans

Day 1: Commercials and how they reflect a community or lifestyle, will be explored. This activity will develop Silverblatt's first fundamental of developing an awareness of media impact. Utilizing the morning ritual of brushing teeth the question of "What toothpaste do you use and why did you use it?" will elicit responses that will be

put on the board. Students will then put the answers in categories of which brand is used most often, and purposes of use for most and least often. Next we will list the brand names of the clothing they are wearing, and why they chose those name brands. The students will be assigned two tasks:

a) bring a brand name item or its advertisement to class. This can be anything: lipstick or lipstick ad, chewing gum or ad, etc.. They will need to write some reason they identify with this item.

b). Students will identify and bring in at least one article from a paper on a local event (newspapers are in the classroom).

Language Arts Standard #1:

Benchmarks: Analyze, evaluate and use a wide range of language resources in order to think, speak and write effectively.

Day 2: The students will develop a sense of community and interpret messages consistent with their own beliefs. Students are given maps of Albuquerque and must identify the area in which they live. The students will identify the boundaries and state, if there are any readily recognized landmarks, and label the north, east, west, and south boundaries (streets, building, fields). In many cities, street gang "turf maps" can be obtained from the gang unit of the local police department. The kids can usually tell the teachers what areas are "wrong" for each section or community; this is a great way to get directionality descriptions. It is also a unique opportunity to have the students "teach the teacher," rather than the teacher seeming to have the knowledge and teaching to the students. The students will define "a community" and summarize what makes a community: people, place, commonality of beliefs, being related, or just living in the same proximity. Sociologists state that every human has a need to belong to a group. The students will illustrate what their group identity is through writing or group discussion.

Social Studies Standard #3

Benchmarks: Recognize that people may describe the same event or situation in different ways.

Evaluate how historical inquiry is influenced by culture and society.

Day 3: Silverblatt's next characteristic of understanding the process of mass communication will be developed through watching others.

Observation (training in description and attributes): one big part of communication is observing your partner(s) while you communicate. Determine fact versus opinion.

Activity: put on all your accessories: earrings, bracelets, necklaces, chokers, broaches, rings, scarves, etc... Next, students will be organized into pairs, study each other, then stand back-to-back to describe every detail of their partner. Invariably, someone makes a judgmental comment. Use this to determine opinions versus fact: Sally has on a "red" blouse is fact; Sally has on an "ugly" blouse is opinion. The factual descriptions can be listed on the board. The rest of the class can give hints (using specific descriptive words such as color or shape) when the partner runs out of observations noticed. After all students have had a turn, go outside and remove your own accessories. Come back in and see how many items the students remember. They can list the items on a sheet of paper to make this really competitive. The student who lists the most accessories actually removed, along with the most accurate description of each accessory, wins.

Language Arts Standard #5

Benchmarks: Express facts, ideas and opinions clearly.

Day 4: Body Language: this can include facial expression. Silverblatt advocates analyzing and discussing messages for his third characteristic of media literacy, but body language is very culturally oriented, which leads to his fourth element of understand media as an insight into our culture. Activity: have students act out action words listed just by their facial expression and body language. Have the other students guess the target word. Communication Workshop Cards by Linguisystems, can be used. This activity is much like the game of Charades. Students like role playing because it gives them a chance to be creative and to move around. In this activity it is easiest to use action verbs, but more subtle actions and even emotions are useful for this activity. For example, "scared" is relatively easy to act out, but even "smug" can be shown through expression. Elicit from the students if they use different body language for different audiences. When do they want to "look cool?" When do they use body language to show disdain? After this has been established, give students magazines to try to get examples of body language and expression. What are the manifest messages versus the latent messages? Erving Goffman's Gender Advertisements may be utilized to see what the latent messages actually are.

Language Arts Standard #5

Benchmarks: Students analyze the use of language and vocabulary appropriate for various audiences and for a variety of purposes.

Day 5: This is a continuation of Silverblatt's third and fourth fundamentals; media messages as seen through our unique culture are explored. Evaluation of values and attitude: It is not what you say, but the way you say it. This is not only true of advertising, but also of teens in general. Activity: students brainstorm ways you can send mixed messages: "Sure, you can call me," and "Oh, you know everything," are two examples. Students read theirs out loud and act out at least two ways of saying each message. Try to have the students act out some values and attitudes with which they do not identify. This can be a continuation of yesterday's activities: Do you use a different attitude in different groups? When do you change attitudes and why? Do you think that people interviewed for an advertisement are using their normal language and attitudes? Do you think people being interviewed for a news story are using their usual attitudes or language? Use magazines to determine which ads are sending mixed messages.

Language Arts Standard #5

Benchmark: Students analyze the use of language and vocabulary appropriate for various audiences and for a variety of purposes.

Day 6: Retelling the message: given the skills that the students now have in communication, they are now ready to react to what they are seeing. McGuire's selective processes theory would state that the student will tend to interpret messages that are consistent with what they believe; therefore, a neutral task is employed. Activity: Put a simple picture (with not too many colors nor too many people or objects) and have each student participate in describing it. Encourage descriptions in colorful terms by promoting attributes, such as color and size, for descriptions that can either be listed on the blackboard or elicited through the help of a card with an attribute word on it. This should help in actually creating a mental picture, a tool they can use in restating material. When the students disagree, discuss how we all have a different view of even simple pictures, and that reality to one person is not the same to another.

Language Arts Standard #5

Benchmark: Students utilize prior experiences, knowledge, culture and home language in written and spoken products for all curriculum areas.

Day 7: On this day, Silverblatt's fundamental of media literacy (that

students need to develop the ability to enjoy and understand media content) will be refined. The students need the item or advertisement that they brought in to express something about themselves. In the past, students have brought in basketballs, make-up ads, perfume, hand lotion, a valentine card and stuffed animals. Students need to write directly on their item or its advertisement about why they identify with this particular brand or object. It can be a statement, a poem, a rap song, etc... Does this item make you look sexier, cleaner, more wholesome or do you just like the taste or look? What message do you get from this product's advertisement? Who do you think the target audience was for this advertisement? Do you think that people from other countries would use this product—why or why not? Would people in ancient Egypt, Rome, the Middle Ages or even one hundred years ago have used this product? Do you think your particular advertisement showed any values? What were they?

Social Studies Standard #4

Benchmark: Analyze multiple historical and contemporary viewpoints within and across cultures while employing empathy and critical inquiry.

Day 8: How better to explore Baran's addition to Silverblatt's list of characteristics of gaining an understanding of ethics and the ethics of production than to employ food? Help the students name ingredients in the foods they eat in an attempt to determine what they put into their mouths and why they like it. Activity: have students look at their favorite wrapped food; the ingredients most often will be listed. Try to analyze what all those ingredients are. The chemistry teacher may be invited in or a nutritionist as a guest speaker. The students will create a chart of the ingredients of their favorite foods. Next, try to analyze what is in the cafeteria food. How many calories? What items can we list from wrapped food previously purchased? Utilize the Food Guide Pyramid from the Department of Health to suggest we are not eating correctly but are eating junk food. *The Fast Food Nation* (2001) offers some good reasons why we succumb to advertisements.

Science (Technology and the History of Science)-Standard #15

Benchmark: Analyze the limitations of science and technology in the solution of human problems and social challenges.

Day 9, 10, 11: These three days will bring to fruition the fundamental principle added to Silverblatt's characteristics; the students will bring appropriate and effective production skills into the unit.

Day 9: The State or County Fair: harvest fairs throughout the United

States occur sometime in late summer or early fall. Show a large picture of a harvest fair, such as Story Connections (Fall) from Communication Skill Builders. Have the students describe it according to attributes. Make certain the fair has some agricultural aspect and some rides and games. The students will explain why they think this is the state or county fair. Have the students describe their favorite ride: rate it according to "Hurlability" or "Yawnability." I have a "hurlometer" that I devised; it is just a cardboard circle with "yawn" at one end for boring rides and "hurl" at the other end for exciting, but stomach-wrenching rides. The students spin the arrow to indicate the excitement level. The students need to discuss whether these "attributes" are fact or opinion. Through ranking, the students will assess what their favorite ride ever was or combine elements to create a super ride. The students can "create," on paper or some other medium, the ultimate theme park. Show Discovery Channel *Thrills, Chills and Spills*. What makes us want a taller, faster or scarier ride? Do you believe the advertisements regarding the thrill of the ride? Persuade the class by stating why or why not. Summarize by concluding: What is the origin of state fairs? What were the organizers trying to promote? Why are games and rides at harvest festivals?

Science Standard #15

Benchmark: Evaluate the influence of science and technology on society

Day 9 continued: Thinking Outside the Box: Read orally some familiar stories (ask which ones the students know) from The Stinky Cheese Man. First have the students retell the original story. What was the purpose of this story? Example: Little Red Riding Hood was a warning for girls to always be accompanied by a friend or family member to avoid coming to harm. In the new story, why do we laugh at the ending? What has changed in society to make the original purpose less relevant...or is it? Have an article ready about some person who was alone and came to harm. Are these articles sensationalist? Read some stories from the *Politically Correct Fairy Tales*. How has society changed so that we feel we need to rewrite stories? Have each student write their own new story based on a familiar tale, or invent a new myth. I usually have a few come to the front of the class to tell one together. I use a hacky sack: each student has to tell their part of a new story until someone else misses the sack. Another way to do this is to let students work in groups, one student being the scribe. These stories may be videotaped.

Language Arts Standard #5

Benchmark: students utilize prior experiences, knowledge, culture and home language in written and spoken products for all curriculum areas.

Day 10 & 11: (Yes, it is September, but the advertisements for Halloween are already out—ask the students why that has occurred). Halloween: write a scary story that can be your own experience, some incident someone told you, or some story you heard. Again, stories can be videotaped to add extra elements of mood. As an attribute, is "scary" a fact or opinion? Why do we associate scary stories with Halloween? Show the History Channel's *Haunted History of Halloween* (history of Samhain) to the students. Why is Halloween the number one candy-selling event of the year? Pick a favorite candy; why is it your favorite? Is that a fact or an opinion? Read news stories about which candies are the most popular. Baecher's article on Halloween candy may be incorporated.

Another Halloween activity is to have the students read from a news story how to decorate your home for Halloween. Which would they choose? Why? Are some truly tasteless? Is that a fact or opinion?

Language Arts Standard #5

Benchmarks: Express facts, ideas and opinions clearly

Day 12: This is the goal activity: analyze the media's messages. Use the assigned news stories about local events (assigned the first day). As an example, one news clip is about a couple who robbed a convenience store. The man was detained. The woman jumped into their car and drove through the plate-glass window to rescue the man. Instead, she ran over the man, he grabbed the muffler and she drove with the car onto the street with him screaming at her. The item was, of course, very high interest and the students were intrigued. I ask them, what was the problem? What else could they have done to obtain their goods, and what other solutions were there to the couple's dilemma? I now want to expand this lesson further: after collecting a variety of these news items, I want the students to tell me the image that is given of their communities and whether or not that image fits their own perception of their communities? Have the students rewrite an article together. Is this how you perceive your community? How is your story different from the original article?

Language Arts Standard #5 variety for audiences and purposes

Benchmarks: Evaluate and choose the most effective strategies to organize and deliver oral communication; use the most appropriate writing skills to fit a particular purpose on a regular basis; express

facts, ideas and opinions clearly, articulately, and appropriately for a specific purpose or audience; analyze the use of language and vocabulary appropriate for various audiences and for a variety of purposes...utilize prior experiences, knowledge, culture and home language in written and spoken products for all curriculum areas.

Follow-up activities: to keep up the selective interest of the students during the year, it is extremely important to keep their awareness of the media active, for them to be aware of "media messages" continuously. One easy way to do this is to incorporate holidays into your activities. Students may not celebrate any of these holiday events, but they surely are aware of the advertising surrounding them. Examples:

- Christopher Columbus discovered America? That would be news to Native Americans...also, it was not listed as "America." Activity: Brainstorm what plants we use that originated in the Americas. What did the Americas have that the Europeans wanted? What did the Europeans trade to the Americans? This is media literacy. Discuss the importance of establishing trade routes.
- Thanksgiving: read the Bathroom Reader Institute's *Myths of Thanksgiving*. Why would advertisers promote selling turkeys, pumpkin pies and potatoes for this event? How are turkeys plucked? Go to the Internet.
- Christmas and other holidays around the world: Why are Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and other holidays celebrated near the same time? Have students read stories about all these festivals. List all "Christmas" festivals and their origins. Discuss Saturnalia in ancient Roman times.
- Valentine's Day: What are the top gifts to give to your sweetie and how much do they cost? Does your chosen even like any of these gifts? Have students guess the prices of various gifts available (use a newspaper to determine local prices). The winner gets some chocolate. Why is chocolate so popular? Really, if the thought of melting it sweet fat is so wonderful, why don't we eat Crisco and sugar with cocoa?
- St. Patrick's Day: Who was he? Where was he born? Was he real? When was he born? Have a contest for this and then list the dates on a timeline. Would he have ever have seen a potato? Add when the potato was discovered to the timeline. A potato chip? Put the approximate date for this on the timeline. What was his most famous trick? Why do we celebrate this day? Describe a leprechaun. What on earth do green, gold and leprechauns have to do with St. Patrick?

Language Arts Standard #3 Students will listen and read for a variety of purposes.

Benchmarks: Listen to, analyze, evaluate and react to all forms of oral discourse delivered live and through technology; find, select and read materials appropriate for specific purposes; increase and refine the use of vocabulary appropriate to specific purposes; evaluate the quality of any given piece of written or verbal information and determine its usefulness for the intended purpose; and use print and non-print sources to apply and evaluate options to solve problems and to help meet the challenges of life.

It is hoped that with these continuous activities the ideas of media literacy will be incorporated throughout the school year, no matter what subject matter is taught.

Media Literacy—Student Vocabulary:

Analyze: to recognize patterns and organize parts; to identify hidden meanings

Attitude: an emphasis on the way we communicate rather than what we communicate

Attributes: characteristics of someone or some object. They are descriptive and can be fact or opinion.

Body Language: communicating nonverbal messages with facial expression and with the body.

Communication: a message that is sent and received; it can be through a variety of symbols or modes of communication, whether in visual, auditory or audio-visual forms.

Community: a group of people with some common bonding such as familial relationship, friendship, location or religious beliefs.

Critical: evaluating with the goal of judging negatively.

Criticism: evaluating or judging another's (the medium's) efforts; can be positive or negative.

Direct messages: this is the message deliberately being sent by the media.

Evaluate: to compare and distinguish between ideas; to judge value of theories and presentations.

Facial expression: communicating nonverbal message with one's face.

Group identification: how a person sees him/herself; this is an idea from social sociology in that every human being has a need to belong.

Indirect messages: messages that are not the overt part of a product being presented.

Issue: a social problem that has received media coverage.

Latent messages: often bad, these are the messages that are associated with the product, such as sickness from cigarettes.

Listening: seeking understanding by receiving the auditory message

Manifest messages: similar to direct messages, but much more complex

Miscommunication: sending or receiving the wrong message, one that was not intended; misunderstanding the intended message. Often the media are unaware of sending the wrong signal. The signal may be interrupted which creates "noise in the channel" (the intended message is misunderstood or never received).

Mixed messages: the signal is one message, such as "smoking is bad for kids", but the other message is that kids want to be sophisticated. One signal is communicating one message, while another signal is sending another, contradictory idea.

Observation: looking at the situation or message before commenting.

Overt advertising: a blatant message being sent.

Problem solving: seeking solutions to the puzzle presented.

Processing time: allowing extra time to think through and formulate information.

Reality: what we call truth or real, is really a perception of reality. Situations are viewed differently by different people. What is one person's truth, may be seen as false to another.

Self-correct: correcting one's errors independently.

Specific: sending ideas that communicates exactly what one does or does not like.

Sincere: sending honest praise (or criticism).

Stereotype: a typical representation of some group or something; often it is negative. It is an exaggeration, or over-generalization when certain traits are ascribed to a group.

Subculture: can be inclusionary (to invite people into the group) or exclusionary (to exclude people from the group by linguistics, skills, etc. with an "us against them" mentality).

Symbols: a sign that stands for something else, such as designs, places, words, ideas, or music which can represent family life, religion, power, nationalism, childhood nostalgia or any other concept. Usually, a smaller symbol is used to represent something larger.

Synthesize: to use old ideas to create new ones and to generalize from given facts, to predict or draw conclusions.

Research Materials

Baran, S (2001). *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture* (2001 Update). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

Very comprehensive. It provides definitions and theories for mass communication and

for the media. Easy-to-read style makes the whole idea of media literacy comprehensible.

Bell, N. *Visualization and Verbalization® Manual for Language Comprehension and Thinking*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Gander Educational Publishing. 1991.

This manual is for those educators who have received the training on the Visualization and Verbalization® method, in which students are given strategies to help them "paint a picture" in their heads of what they are observing. Of particular importance are the various structure words that are the key to recollection. The method is taught after the instructor has been trained in the technique.

Bloom, B.S. ed. *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals: Handbook I, cognitive domain*. Toronto: Longmans, Green. 1956.

This is the standard for Bloom's taxonomy, ranging skill levels taught from basic to evaluative.

Bowles, S. & H. Gintis. (1976). *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Basic Books. 1976.

This book is a bit depressing for a teacher to read. It looks as if we are in a mass conspiracy to churn out rote-memory-taught factory workers. It is interesting as the authors are very methodological and unhurried in their arguments.

Conover, K.A. (1996). *Decoding the media: a growing trend teaches children how to analyze and critique today's media messages*. *Christian Science Monitor*. 1996: 88-96.

This article shows educators and parents how to utilize the media for children's interests. The focus in the article is more on newspapers and television shows, but there is a mention of advertising.

Dearing, J.W. & Rogers, E.M. *Agenda-Setting*. Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage Publications.

This book is much more difficult to read than other media literacy books. It is very much a theory oriented book, but one that is necessary to comprehend the rationale behind media trends. Philosophical in nature, but an excellent reference.

Dodge, E. P. (1994). *Communication Lab*TM. E. Moline, IL: LinguiSystems, Inc. 1994.

This manual describes how to help students identify communication skills through brainstorming techniques and through role-playing. Simple definitions of hard terms for communication are offered and various devices explored to engage the students, parents and educators in a program to help identify good listeners/learners and those who need to fine-tune their communicative skills.

FisherKeller, J. (2000). 'The writers are getting kind of desperate': young adolescents, television and literacy. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. 2000: 43-7.

The article explores the idea that teens are getting more sophisticated about television as a medium. It reflects the view that teens do become animated discussing particular aspects about television and are aware of the advertising efforts aimed towards them.

Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: The Seabury Press. 1970.

This book caused a major paradigm shift for teachers in the 70's. Now we understand that we must collaborate with students to find their interest level, that the students are not disenfranchised people and that they are able to look critically at the world. How fitting these ideas are for media literacy.

Galbraith, J.K. *The Affluent Society*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1958.

This was the breakthrough book about consumer manipulation, about "want creations" that are not driven by consumer need but by Madison Avenue. It is still being reprinted due to its accuracy in looking at American consumerism.

Lester, P.M. *Images that injure: pictorial stereotypes in the media*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger. 1996.

This looks at how minorities are portrayed in American media and the messages that are sent: manifest and latent.

McGuire, W. J. *Persuasion, resistance and attitude change*. In I. de Sola et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Communication*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973: 216-252.

This chapter looks at attitude change theory and its application to media effects.

Shields, C.J. (1993). *Images of fun: is media literacy being left out of the campaign against substance abuse? Curriculum Review*. 1993. 32:5.

The central issue of this article is that advertising for substances is aimed at young people and must not be overlooked.

Wilson, W.S. & Herman, G. H. *American history on the screen: a teacher's resource book on film and video*. Maine 1994.

Students' References

Baecher, C. ed "Halloween Candy Taste Test." Nov/Dec, 1998. *Zillions Consumer Reports*, Yonkers, New York: Consumers Union. 1998

This magazine is the junior version of *Consumer Reports*. It not only is high interest for students, it is very relevant to the times. *Zillions*, in general, could be a very defining magazine for media literacy as it investigates the current fads and trends, even ones about which the adults are not yet savvy.

Caney, S. *Invention Book*. Workman Publishing: New York 1985.

This small book shows that a product was not always created to fit a need, which is what we have been led to believe. Although the occurrence of seeing a need and creating a product often happened with happy results, or even mistakes resulted that fit a need, many times the product was created first and then a marketing niche was devised (for example, Kleenex and Dixie cups). Necessity, as shown by these examples, was not always "the mother of invention."

Garner, J. F. *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co. 1994

Not only race and gender are treated equally, but species are no longer discriminated against in these refurbished fairly tales.

Goffman, E. *Gender Advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row 1976

As the name implies, almost anything that you can think to analyze in an advertisement is examined in this book, based on gender. Beyond the obvious choices of using sexy females to sell "male" products, the use of groupings, of hands, of gazes, etc... are included and analyzed for the message. Literally hours could be spent gathering new advertisements and critiquing them utilizing the methods offered in this book.

Schlosser, E. (2001). *Fast Food Nation*. Colorado Springs: Houghton Mifflin Co. 2001

This may stop anyone from eating fast food again. There is an ingredient made in a chemical plant in New Jersey that makes those French fries so tempting. This book explores not only the chemicals used to make an item taste good, but the preparation techniques that would quell the gustatory desires of the most hungry, junk-food-addicted teenager.

Scieszka, J. & Smith, L. *The Stinky Cheese Man*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1992.

The familiar fairy tale will never be the same after being re-invented by these authors.

Thanksgiving Myths. Uncle John's Bathroom Reader. Bathroom Reader Publishers, 1995:10-11.

This should cause anyone to think twice about Thanksgiving and all the "traditions" surrounding the holiday.

Electronic sources:

Discovery Channel's *Thrills, Chills and Spills*: discovery.com

This is the definitive show about roller coasters

History Channel's *Haunted History of Halloween*: historychannel.com

Candy, ghosts, witches and Samhaim are the themes for this show. The title says it all.

<http://www.nalusda.gov/> Use this cite to download a copy of the food guide pyramid.

Other materials:

*Communication Workshop*TM, published by Linguisystems.

*Story Connections*TM, Series 2, Book 3, published by Communication Skill Builders.