

# Abstracts from Media Literacy: Toward Youth Empowerment in Mass Communication

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## [Empowering Adolescents to be Smart Consumers of Information: Advertisements and News](#)

**Claudia Allen**

Adolescence is described as that time between childhood and adulthood. As a teacher of middle school students who are in the midst of this maturation process, one of my goals in this unit is to equip students with life skills in the world of marketing and advertising. Many of these children are now going to the malls without adult supervision. They are earning a little of their own money, and they need information to help them think about how to spend it or save it. More importantly, I want them to become critical thinkers regarding the consumption of news and consumer information. As a teacher, I see these students especially influenced by peers, television and music. Students need to be aware of reliable sources for information, and that there are less reliable sources. Initially the students will learn the difference between "subjective" and "objective" and will work with point of view activities. The students will be involved in whole class activities such as brainstorming and debating. They will work in groups to create surveys and analyze media advertisements. Individually they will evaluate and analyze what they have learned through poetry and essays. They will also be creating advertisements, letters to the editor, and evaluating books from the list of "100 Most Frequently Challenged Books." They will assess lyrics from different eras and genres. Newspapers and magazines, television, radio, videos, books and lyrics will be included. This unit was developed specifically for a gifted language arts and literature class composed of seventh and eighth graders. In addition, these lessons will address the *Albuquerque Public Schools Language Arts Content and Performance Standards and Benchmarks* as well as the *New Mexico Standards and Benchmarks for Language Arts*, which now includes media literacy.

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**Literacy through Creativity for Social Empowerment:  
A Critical Media Literacy Unit Grounded in the Work of Paulo  
Friere**

**Jessica C. Baca**

The omnipresent status of media in our culture, and their often controversial subject matters and business practices, have made many citizens increasingly concerned about their possible negative effects on our children. Mass media's "perpetual pedagogy" has replaced our schools as society's cultural storytellers. Media's many texts are often non-print in nature and contribute to weakening students' motivation to master reading and writing. With public schools losing ground to mass media, and media's growing potential to define our realities (often in oppressive ways), comes the need for educators to expand their curriculum to include the "cognoscible object" of media's popular culture in order to build students' media and print literacies.

This critical media literacy unit will develop students' awareness of various mass media forms along with a conscious understanding of these as constructions with purposes and effects. In turn, students will see the powerful potential for media influence on their thoughts and behaviors, and this consciousness will provide them with the ability to selectively accept or resist these influences. Parallel to this media consciousness, I hope to contribute to the development of students' artistic, and general creative skills. I believe this will help foster their ability for creativity throughout life, whether in art or other personal constructions, so they may continue to define their own images and realities well into adulthood.

Paulo Friere's work is the unifying thread in this unit's basic fabric along with the building of student empowerment through word and world literacy by means of creative thought and action. His underlying educational theories are reinforced with "Critical Literacy" theory which demands the understanding and production of media artifacts be used for social activism or self-transforming action. "Multiple Media Literacy" theory will provide the outlet for this creative consciousness with an emphasis on print and visual literacy.

This unit will be delivered to sixth grade students, many of whom are bi-literate or are in various stages of acquiring English. I believe, however, this curriculum would be appropriate for any group of learners from fifth through twelfth grades.

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## Teaching Basic Concepts of Mass Communication with the Brain in Mind:

### An "Enriched" Approach to Introducing Media Literacy at the Middle Level

**Tina DiChiara**

Neuroscientists are developing amazing new insights into how the brain is hot-wired to learn. These findings may benefit educators in determining their instruction as they have many applications for building curriculum.

In this unit, the instruction of media literacy is approached keeping many of these new findings in mind. "Brain-based learning" involves using instructional methods that promote the healthy development of the brain, and it offers new insight into what an "enriched" environment could be, with equal access for all.

Media Literacy is key to our students' understanding of the larger world. For this reason, I chose this subject to demonstrate how knowledge of *how our brains learn* can better our instruction.

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

**Charles Kappus**

Schools across the nation are recognizing that media literacy is an essential survival skill as we begin a new millennium. In the latest revision of its *Language Arts Scope and Sequence*, the Albuquerque Public Schools have written media literacy skills into the performance standards, and New Mexico is one of 38 states mandating coverage in the school curricula. I believe this unit will help students recognize the pervasive nature of the media - how Americans are constantly bombarded by media messages - and how each media consumer plays an active role in the communication process through the way they interpret and use media content. I also believe that this unit will be a fun and interesting way to meet the essential competencies of a Language Arts curriculum, namely speaking, listening, reading, writing, and research skills. Rather than focus on a specific medium (such as television) or a specific issue (like gender bias in advertising), this three-week unit will present a broad overview of what the media are and do in order to provide students with a framework for future inquiry.

John 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, reducing learning to a series of disconnected, isolated experiences that deny children the opportunities to ask their own questions and make sense of the world on their own terms. Although this unit begins with direct instruction of dates and facts about communication theory and the history of mass media (the nuts and bolts vocabulary and concepts needed to discuss the topic), it is primarily a student-driven inquiry project requiring small groups to create and present their own media campaigns. Like Dewey, I believe that education should be "a process of living and not a preparation for living." Hands-on projects allow students to learn topics "from the inside out," creating meaning as they proceed, with the "student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach" philosophy governing the process. Working in groups of three or four, students will first pick a topic for their media campaign, with health and civic-minded issues like drug abuse, the privilege of voting, sexual abstinence, and the dangers of smoking among the possibilities. Groups will then devise a media campaign to promote their cause and communicate its importance and urgency. Groups will move from one "media station" to another, writing letters to the editor, designing print ads and billboards, taping radio and television ads, and planning an I-movie (a new Apple Computer program) video. As a culminating activity, groups will present their campaigns to the class as a whole, giving their peers an opportunity to discuss and evaluate each other's work.

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### **Burma Shave to the Beatles:**

### **Television Media Influence in the Golden Age**

#### **Barbara Mraz**

The electronic mass media, particularly television, exert increasing social, intellectual, and emotional influences on middle school students. It is important to teach students skills to deal with the power of television in their lives. Students currently in middle school have grown up with television viewing as a daily routine. It is important that they learn the skills to make informed judgments and decisions when viewing television for entertainment and information.

The class this curriculum is designed for is a U.S. History eighth-grade class. I propose to spend one week on the 1950's, and one week on the 1960's, during which time I will present film and television footage of historic events of the periods, and portions of television episodes portraying the nuclear American family of the period, such as *Leave It to Beaver* and *I Love Lucy*. I will invite speakers who grew up in this time-period to come into the class.

Students will present narrative essays, discuss fads and the culture. Commercials reflecting products of the time will be created incorporating people, events and popular music of the periods. I will oversee classroom discussions of advertising and common propaganda techniques used by business and government then and today. Also, the students will report on an event or person, and dramatize historical events, as well as view visuals, memorabilia, and trivia of the periods addressed.

I would hope that my unit of study will prepare them to be more media-literate as we explore the Golden Age and how it helped TV progress to the indispensable role it plays in our lives today. For students to achieve television literacy, they must be aware of how television programs and advertisements affect them.

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### **Rage Against the Machine: Media and Youth,Cultures of Violence**

**David Salmon Ornelas Jr.**

This media literacy unit is designed to expose and educate young middle school students to the American popular culture that affects their everyday lives.

This is an evaluation of television, music, and cinema as a socialization factor in the development of our young. Specifically, this is a critique of the media as a influential factor in the development and propagation of subculture groups. We will examine the promotion of cliques, gangs, and subcultures within the youth community, along racial, ethnic, class, and product consumption lines. These are divisions further enhanced, endorsed, and exploited by the media.

Students will look at this promotion of stereotypical groupings and "segmented audiences" as corresponding to a media message of violence as a vehicle of expression for all youth groups. This is a cultural evaluation of presented images of our young, and the alleged and expressed violence attributed to our young.

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### **How the Media Shape our Sense of Community**

**Gwen Sanchez**

This is an approach to teaching of media literacy in a self-contained high school classroom. By devising a curriculum around media literacy, the interests of the student population at my school will be utilized for instruction.

Media literacy is the ability to analyze and evaluate the media to which we are exposed; it is a complex subject. 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. Whether a person is at the mall, riding the bus, watching television or a movie, the messages from the media are either subtle or forthright. From the moment teenagers awaken until they retire at night students, even the non-reading ones, are targeted by market managers.

The approach of media literacy 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. Through this interest, I propose to use the communication concept of "selective attention" to attract the attention of the students and to help them analyze ideas through the use of media.

Silverblatt's characteristics of media literacy will be incorporated as an approach to comprehend, analyze and evaluate the media messages. Once the students gain some expertise in these approaches, to help in identifying manifest versus latent messages and identifying the target audience, they will be guided into looking at local news stories to scrutinize the message of the media and to determine if that fits their own self-image.

The students' interest in all media is what I hope to use as a segue into the comprehension of history and current events. It is the students who have expressed interest in the subject matter through their fascination with all communication technologies. I hope to capitalize upon their interest to assist them in learning history, technology, problem solving, listening skills and, making these students in high school want to stay in school.

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## **[Media Literacy: Awareness and Analysis](#)**

### **Camille Vigil**

Elizabeth Thoman from the Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles describes Media Literacy as having three significant stages. First, to be media literate, we must simply be aware of the time we spend with videos, electronic games, film, and various print media. In the second phase of media literacy, we must learn specific tools of analysis. We must learn to question what we see and hear, understand how it is constructed and ask ourselves what might be left out. Finally, we must

explore deeper issues of who produces media and why. We must ask ourselves who is profiting. This stage of analysis looks at how each of us makes meaning from the messages contained in media, both indirect and direct. This curriculum unit will integrate each important phase.

During the unit students will first reflect on the amount of time they spend watching TV, playing video games, and listening to cd's/radio. They will keep a "Media Journal" to help them in this endeavor to be aware. Then students will discuss what other activities might have been amore beneficial use of some of that time. Furthermore, they will tally how many ads they see while driving down an Albuquerque street (billboards, bus ads, ads on bus benches, etc...). I think this type of activity is critical in helping students understand the pervasiveness of the media.

Secondly, students will learn specific tools of analysis so that they can deconstruct advertisements. Being able to deconstruct media gives students great freedom over the choices in their lives because they will question what they see. Students will learn the techniques of persuasion used by advertisers and understand that television ads are made very carefully.

Finally, I want my students to think more critically about the messages contained in the media, especially messages containing gender and cultural stereotypes. Television children are generally portrayed in gender-related roles - the girls playing with dolls, and the boys in sports. In addition, minorities are portrayed stereotypically and almost never as powerful and rich as the white majority. Stereotyping can lead children to form false impressions of various societal groups. Students need to understand that stereotypes give us incomplete and sometimes misleading images of people. I want my students to know the term stereotype, realize how television and other forms of media treat people, recognize how they themselves relate to TV characters, and understand how these stereotypical images can influence their ideas about real people in their communities.

I agree with Thoman' s definition of media literacy. I hope my curriculum unit can guide students and teachers through each stage of media literacy. I want them to be aware of their media habits, analyze media using specific tools, and understand their role in making meaning from messages in the media.

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## **Media Messages, Tactics, and Their Effect on Youth**

**Angie Wanke**

"Media Messages, Tactics, and Their Effect on Youth" is intended for a secondary-level Language Arts class, but could also fit any Humanities, Communications, or other type of English class offered at this level (grades 7-12). Its research is concerned with the amount of time children today spend interacting with the media. Media here means all forms of printed, audio, and visual information: watching television, using the Internet, playing video games, reading books, magazines, and newspapers, seeing movies, listening to the radio and CDs. According to research, children spend four to six hours interacting with some form of media daily. I argue that all this time interacting with media takes the place of "real" interaction with parents, peers, and teachers. This is a real concern with teenagers because they are entering a period of their lives in which they are dealing with a host of new problems of their own—puberty, social interaction, beginning dating, potential gang problems, etc... If they seek or need answers to their dilemmas, they may naturally turn to media and its messages to "tell them what to do." Unfortunately, many of today's advertisements in the media bear close examination. There are some questionable marketing techniques being used. Advertisers are trying to sell their product, and they will use a variety of marketing techniques to do so. Teens are a susceptible group. Teens may not have the tools to correctly identify what these media messages are and could swallow them "hook, line and sinker."

I give examples of how much media surrounds us (especially teens). For instance, the day at school begins with *Channel One*, a hip current events program shown on television. There is a disproportional amount of ads shown during this 12-minute program. While many students are fully aware of some of some of the marketing techniques used in *Channel One*, and sometimes perform mini-deconstructions, other students are unaware of these marketing techniques. I believe we owe it to them to show them marketing techniques, the concept of demographics, agenda setting, and tools with which to deconstruct ads. Teens should be aware of these tactics which directly affect them.

The premise of this unit is that teens ought to be media literate so they can become informed consumers and critical thinkers. I define the elements of media literacy, discuss why teens ought to be media literate, and define some of the tactics used in advertisements. In particular, the concepts of demographics and agenda setting are explored because of their impact on kids. They deserve to learn why and how ads are effecting them.

The lesson plans I developed explore these points. I have begun with some introductory "sponge"-type activities to get the students thinking

about advertising and the extent to which they are surrounded by it. Some students may not be aware of how much they may be influenced by advertising until they actually "write it down." Lessons are outlined that introduce the history of advertising, advertising techniques, demographics, and conclude with one or two major projects that incorporate what the students have learned and apply critical thinking skills. They create their own magazine, complete with ads. In addition, ideas are given for a major paper to conclude this unit.