



PISCATAWAY TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

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Media Literacy

Content Area: English Language Arts

Grade Span: 9-12

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Description

Media Literacy is a year-long course that helps students recognize that they passively consume countless media messages each day, messages which shape the world in which they live in and help define their role in it. This course will help students become media savvy critics who will actively identify, analyze, and thoughtfully respond to these messages. It will also empower students to utilize communication strategies and 21st century technology tools to create their own powerful and engaging media messages that can positively affect their community.

Goals

The primary goal of this course is to help students utilize inquiry to actively identify, analyze, and thoughtfully respond to the media messages that envelop them. It will also empower students to utilize communication strategies and 21st century technology tools to create their own powerful and engaging media messages that can positively affect their community.

By the end of this course, students will know:

- *What Media Literacy is and why it is important to be media literate*
- *Who creates the media that we consume and why do they create it*
- *What techniques are used to create media*
- *How media is utilized to construct reality*
- *How media can be used to reinforce or challenge hegemonic values*
- *How to evaluate the authenticity of information*
- *How much of modern technology is constructed to stifle critical thinking*
- *How to think more rationally by identifying logical fallacies and cognitive biases*
- *How to create their own media to actively participate within a democratic society*

Scope and Sequence (36 weeks)

Unit	Topic	Length
1	<i>What is Media Literacy and Why is it Important?</i>	4 Weeks
2	<i>How Does Media Shape Our Reality?</i>	4 Weeks
3	<i>What is the Grammar of Media?</i>	4 Weeks
4	<i>How is Media Used to Persuade?</i>	4 Weeks
5	<i>How Does Media Convey Social Values and Messages?</i>	4 Weeks
6	<i>Who Controls the Media?</i>	4 Weeks
7	<i>How Can I Tell if Information is Trustworthy?</i>	4 Weeks
8	<i>Is Technology Working for or Against Me?</i>	4 Weeks
9	<i>Final Project</i>	4 Weeks

Course Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). *Media Literacy: Questioning the Media*. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- <https://www.kqed.org/education/media-literacy> - This site, a collaboration between KQED, PBS, and NPR aims to offer resources that educators can use to teach media literacy in the classroom.
- <https://namle.net> – *The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE)* aims to make media literacy highly valued and widely practiced as an essential life skill.
- <https://www.poynter.org/mediawise/> - The *MediaWise* project empowers people of all ages to become more critical consumers of content online. They teach people digital media literacy and fact-checking skills to spot misinformation and disinformation.
- <https://newslit.org> - The *News Literacy Project* provides programs and resources for educators and the public to teach, learn and share the abilities needed to be smart, active consumers of news and information and equal and engaged participants in a democracy.
- <https://thecrashcourse.com/courses/medialiteracy> - A series of 13 short videos that cover critical media literacy concepts.
- <https://www.humanetech.com> – This site helps educate viewers about the potential individual and societal harms of social media platforms.
- <https://openmindplatform.org/library/> and <https://youarenotsosmart.com> – These sites provide resources to help students reflect on their own thinking and improve their communication skills.
- <https://mediaeducationlab.com> – A site that creates free multimedia curriculum materials to help learners advance media literacy knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- <https://www.medialit.org> - The *Center for Media Literacy (CML)* is an educational organization that provides leadership, public education, professional development and educational resources nationally and internationally.
- <https://mediasmarts.ca> - These K-12 resources cover a wide-range of issues in “traditional” media and also address the unique issues arising for digital media.
- <https://www.frankwbaker.com> - This site has resources on many media issues. It is the personal website run by one of the country’s preeminent media educators, Frank Baker.
- <https://www.common sense media.org> - Filled with strong recommendations on age-appropriate media for children and teens (apps, movies, websites, etc...) It has a separate section just for educators which includes such resources as a tool to find apps that are aligned to common core standards.

UNIT 1: What is Media Literacy and Why is it Important?

Summary and Rationale

This unit introduces students to idea of Media Literacy and to the theorists most responsible for its development. It helps students explore the history of media technologies and how those changes have affected society. Finally, it helps students realize how ubiquitous media is in their daily lives and encourages them to reflect on the role it plays in their own lives.

Recommended Pacing

L1: Why is understanding media important? What effect does it have on us and on society?

- Students reflect on their favorite music, shows, games, and films – why are we so drawn to these shows? How closely do our media choices mirror those of my peers? What role does this media play in my identity?
- Examine the Nielsen ratings for the week of television / Movie revenue lists / Netflix top 10 / NYT bestseller list. Why are these films, shows, and books the most popular? What does this tell us about our society? Are any of yours on this list? What might account for this?
- Working collaboratively, students brainstorm how many ways they could ask another student to the prom. Can they come up with 50 ways in 10 minutes?
- Working collaboratively, students research and present on a pioneer of Media Literacy (McLuhan, Foucault, Klein, Hall, Chomsky, Barthes, Said, etc...)

L2: What is Media: how has media changed over time?

- Introduce body language as the first medium. Discuss body language; Examine how the introduction of televised debates influenced the election of 1960. Watch excerpts from [“Body Language Decoded”](#) or [Former FBI Agent Explains How to Read Body Language](#)
- Working collaboratively, students create a collaborative timeline presentation and present on how the introduction of one medium dramatically affected history and culture (writing, TV, printing press, internet, etc...) Students pay careful attention to the accelerating pace of new media (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat).

L3: What are the pros and cons of each type of media? (audio/visual/print)

- Investigate how material changes when the same messages are presented through different media. For example, how does a Coca-Cola ad change when it is in a magazine, on the internet, on the radio, etc...
- Read an excerpt from *Harry Potter* and compare the excerpt to the same scene from the film (example: the boggart in Professor Lupin’s office scene). How are the two experiences different? Which do you prefer? Why?

L4 - Students will become aware that they are constantly barraged with ads each and every day (and that these ads, if effective, can shape their thoughts and actions)

- Create a “media diet” journal by charting time spent interacting with different types of media over three days; compare and discuss results with classmates. Interview various family members - do you

notice any generational differences? Why might different people consume different types of media? What media do you choose and why? Create and share an infographic that explores your findings.

Summative Assessment for Unit 1

- Working in groups, students identify a target demographic and create a multi-media advertising strategy for a fictional product. What forms of media will be most effective in reaching their audience? They then pitch that strategy to a fictional board of investors that is (preferably) comprised of experts.

State Standards

Standard:

NJSLSA.SL1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
NJSLSA.L6	Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.
NJSLSA.R7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
NJSLSA.W7.	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects, utilizing an inquiry-based research process, based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Instructional Focus

Unit Enduring Understandings

- Media construct how most people perceive themselves and the world around them, but that does not mean that those constructions are necessarily accurate.
- Many forms of media can be overlooked, but media surround us in various shapes and forms.
- Media constantly change due to technical, cultural, and societal changes.
- The introduction of new media technologies can have a profound impact on societies.
- Each form of media has its own specific strengths and weaknesses

Unit Essential Questions

- How and why do we communicate?
- What is a medium and how have media changed throughout history? How have changes in media technology affected human communication and civilization?
- Why is being media literate important?
- How does the medium used affect the message?
- Why do I make the media choices I do?

- How does media affect our perception of society and of ourselves? How does it affect our perception of our place in society?

Objectives

Students will know:

- Students will be more aware of not only the importance, but also the scope and intensity of the media messages surrounding them.
- Students will identify as many types of media as possible, and will understand how each form of media has specific benefits and limitations.
- Becoming media literate will help students examine their world and their places in it in a more critical manner.

Students will be able to:

- Critically analyze a communication issue and use target demographic strategies in order to select appropriate media for the delivery of various messages.
- Utilize body language strategies to improve their presentation skills.

Key Terms: Demographic, media & medium, hot & cold media, market research

Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). Media Literacy: Questioning the Media. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- [“Body Language Decoded” / Former FBI Agent Explains How to Read Body Language](#)
- Harry Potter (book & film excerpts)

UNIT 2: How does Media Shape our Reality?

Summary and Rationale

Human beings develop expectations about reality from what they see, watch, read, and experience through media. If students develop more awareness of how media are constructed and how they convey these expectations, they will be less likely to utilize media representations to form expectations about real life.

Recommended Pacing

L1 – Understand Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”, where Plato posits that individuals in power utilize media to construct and define many elements of society.

- Watch and discuss Plato’s [“Allegory of the Cave”](#)
- Watch excerpts from *The Matrix* (1999) and be able to articulate how the “Matrix” is a metaphor for the “Cave”

L2 – Watch *The Truman Show* and reflect on the elements of our lives that feel like they have been “scripted” in some way.

- Watch *The Truman Show* and journal while viewing.
- After watching *The Truman Show*, participate in a Socratic Seminar and respond to questions about the issues raised in the film.

L3 – Consider the role that Google search plays; it presents a different world that is tailored to each user. How does it select the information that is shown to each user?

- Students search for the same keywords, analyze how their results differ, and discuss the repercussions of different realities being composed for each individual

Summative Assessment for Unit 1

- Working collaboratively, students utilize a non-traditional form of media (no essays or powerpoints) to teach other students about Plato’s theory of “The Cave”, and show how that theory can be applied to a constructed aspect of contemporary life (education, life goals, beauty, relationships, fears, etc...)

State Standards

Standard:

NJSLSA.W6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
NJSLSA.SL1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

NJSLSA.SL4	Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
NJSLSA.SL5	Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

Instructional Focus

Unit Enduring Understandings

- Media is used to construct many elements of our reality
- It is possible to break out of the “cave”, but it involves education, practice, and a dedication to critical thinking

Unit Essential Questions

- How do we break out of our “caves”?
- Who constructs the shadows on the wall, and why do they construct them?

Objectives

Students will know:

- What elements of our reality are constructed?
- What are some ways to identify these elements and see past them?

Students will be able to:

- Utilize non-traditional forms of media to convey information
- Apply the concepts introduced in *Truman* and *The Cave* to their own lives

Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). *Media Literacy: Questioning the Media*. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- Plato’s Allegory of the Cave: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQfRdI3GTw4>
- Film: *The Truman Show* (1998)
- Film: *The Matrix* (1999)

UNIT 3: What is the Grammar of Media: How Do They Create it?

Summary and Rationale

Although students have been practicing traditional literacy - reading and writing - for years, many of them have not been schooled in audio and visual literacies. This unit will introduce students to those concepts, and then they will practice constructing media using those techniques.

Recommended Pacing

L1 – Visual Design: How color theory, font theory, and layout design affect the overall effectiveness of media.

- Take pictures of objects that resemble letters (example: flagpole = “l”). Using <http://canva.com>, create a creative collage that uses these pictures to spell your name.
- Transpose a favorite poem of yours (fonts found on <http://dafont.com>; poems found on <http://poemhunter.com>) using at least three creative fonts. Fonts should augment poem’s meaning.
- Use www.colormatters.com to research the symbolic properties of color. Work collaboratively to present on each color - what logos utilize these properties to convey ideas about their companies? What are examples of advertisements that utilize these properties?
- Create a personal logo using logogarden.com - what does it convey about you? Add this to your school profile.

L2 – Photography & Film: How composition, color, lighting, and framing affects the message. What is lighting, editing, storyboard, framing, and scripting? Students will experience and reflect on how framing focuses the eye and influences the meaning we make from visual images. They will also deepen their comprehension about the choices involved in the construction of visual media texts (composition).

- Select Pulitzer Prize winning photographs and examine what makes them so powerful. Present to the class.
- Analyze a commercial or short film shot by shot. Possible examples: Sofia Coppola’s short film “Lick the Star”, Spike Jonze’s “Sad Lamp” commercial for Ikea, the animated film short “More” (all available on YouTube).
- Take photographs that showcase their understanding of framing, lighting, and composition.

L3 – Audio: How music and sound effects help tell a story or convey a mood. Students will apply their understanding of the relationship between visual images and sound by adding sounds to their own writing.

- “Close read” music from well-known films (what mood is conveyed? How do musical elements such as tempo, melody, and instruments used accentuate theme? characters?)
- Analyze a song used for a recent film or a commercial. Why has the company chosen this song?
- Use the free programs such as Anchor.fm, Audacity or Garageband, to create an audio file to accompany the reading of a favorite poem of theirs. The file must include music as well as sound effects. Conversely, students can create a 5 minute audio diary (including sound effects) entitled “this is my day”, (see *This American Life* series on NPR).

Suggested Summative Assessments for Unit 2

- Using iMovie or comparable software, working in groups, students use their knowledge of color, film techniques, and music to script, storyboard, direct, produce, and edit a short 5 minute film of their own creation.
- Use Canva or comparable design program to create a poster that utilizes color, shape, layout, and font to portray deeper meaning in a song lyric or poem stanza.

State Standards

Standard:

NJSLSA.R5.	Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
NJSLSA.SL2	Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
NJSLSA.SL5	Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
NJSLSA.W2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
NJSLSA.W6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Instructional Focus

Unit Enduring Understandings

- Non-written forms of communication (images, sound, proximity, color) can be just as effective and convey information as well (if not better) as written communication can.
- Many small choices are made during the construction of a media text that can have a significant effect on the end product.
- Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Unit Essential Questions

- What are the different ways that I can create meaning without using words?

Objectives

Students will know:

- The basic concepts of design, film-making, graphic art, and sound.

Students will be able to:

- Utilize basic design theory and 21st century technology tools like Canva to create visual and auditory media artifacts (such as an infographic) that convey media messages in a powerful and engaging manner.

Key Terms: Rule of thirds, dominant, white space, “Z” layout, beat, saturation, tint, volume, melody, pitch, mise-en-scene, cinematographic terms, negative space, leading lines, contrast, proxemic patterns

Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). Media Literacy: Questioning the Media. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- [Cinema Cartography Channel](#) on Youtube
- [Studio Binder Channel](#) on Youtube
- [Intro to Color Theory](#) on Youtube (Flow Studio)
- [Composition for Beginners](#) on Youtube (Flow Studio)
- [Canva.com](#) for media creation; Canva tutorials (<https://designschool.canva.com/tutorials/>)

UNIT 4: Persuasion and Propaganda: How is Media used to Influence Behavior?

Summary and Rationale

Advertising can almost be considered a form of propaganda, as viewers are shown carefully curated - and potentially misleading - information that is created to elicit specific emotions and behaviors from the viewer. In this unit, students will explore the many techniques that can be utilized to influence viewers.

Recommended Pacing

L1 - Advertising strategies - Students will become acquainted with the basic techniques of persuasion (humor, nature, beauty, happiness, individuality, use of “experts” etc...) and respond critically to advertisements that utilize these techniques.

- Read excerpts from Martin Lindstrom’s *Buyology* or *Brandwashed*; working in groups, each group reads a section and presents to the class.
- Perform a close reading (examination of art, text, and messages) of multiple advertising campaigns including Mastercard’s “Priceless” and the DeBeers “Diamond is forever” campaign.
- Create a collage explaining a specific method of persuasion (happiness, individuality, etc...).

L2 - Product Placement - Students will identify and respond critically to product placements they see in TV programs and movies.

- Identify product placement in contemporary TV shows and films. Example: Transformers, E.T.
- Examine sponsorship of current stadiums, concerts and events in the area.
- Identify product placement in sporting event broadcast (ads digitally broadcast, billboards, etc...)

L3 - Targeted Advertising - How do companies utilize market research and other strategies to target their ads towards specific audiences?

- Examine targeted advertising strategies directed towards different ages, races, and ethnicities. Special focus on teenagers and young children. Example: Joe Camel, Supermarket Cereal Boxes, etc... Discuss the ethical issues that confront advertising targeted towards children.
- Analyze how internet and mobile technologies have advanced the practice of targeted advertising. Where does the ethical line lie where privacy is concerned?

L4 – Logos, Lifestyle marketing & Branding – What is lifestyle marketing and branding. How do corporations use logos and symbols to evoke strong emotions and convey attitudes about their products?

- Reflect about how you make your purchases - is it because these items are the best quality/price of what is out there or because they “believe” in them? What words or feelings do you associate with certain brands?
- Perform close readings of clear “lifestyle” ads: what makes a “Marlboro Man”? A “Mitchum Man”? What is “The Pepsi Generation”?

- Perform close readings of corporate logos: what ideas are companies trying to convey by using certain colors and symbols?
- Visit a store and take a closer look at what type of lifestyle they are promoting: sales associates, ads, music, colors, lighting, etc... (example: Abercrombie and Fitch).
- “Re-brand” a company – Use creative tools to create an advertisement that changes the target audience from one group to another.

L5 – “Viral” marketing – What is viral marketing and how should we respond to it?

- Discuss if it is ethical for ads not to identify themselves as ads. What about when agents are hired by advertising companies to mingle amongst the public and recommend products during conversations?
- Examine the New York Times’s “T-Brand” <https://www.tbrandstudio.com> – how can you identify the line between journalism and paid promotion?

Suggested Summative Assessment for Unit 4:

- Working collaboratively, students will complete a formal “deconstruction” on one of the ads used in the Super Bowl. Students examine media techniques, persuasive techniques, as well as values conveyed through these commercials. Students present their findings to the class.

State Standards

Standard:

NJLSA.R4	Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
NJLSA.R5	Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
NJLSA.R6	Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
NJLSA.R10	Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently with scaffolding as needed.
NJLSA.L6	Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

Instructional Focus

Unit Enduring Understandings

- Every media artifact is created with a specific purpose, and its effectiveness is usually measured by its success in achieving that purpose (usually profit or power based).
- In media, the purpose helps drive the form: most media are created to persuade, entertain, or inform.

- Thinking about who creates media, and why they are creating it will help the consumer better evaluate the message.

Unit Essential Questions

- How and why do media try to influence our thoughts and actions?
- The more we use technology, the more corporations and organizations know about us, and the more this information is used in advertising. What are the benefits and potential issues with this scenario?

Objectives

Students will know:

- Students will grow comfortable examining media messages critically and understanding how and why they are trying to persuade.

Students will be able to:

- Students will be able to identify - and guard themselves against - the most prevalent persuasive techniques used in advertising (fear, bandwagon, celebrity, etc..).

Key Terms: Ethos, Pathos, Logos, Propaganda, Multiple terms used to identify persuasive techniques (testimonials, bribery, humor, intensity, etc...)

Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). *Media Literacy: Questioning the Media*. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- Excerpts from *Buyology* and *Brandwashed* by Martin Lindstrom
- [Studiobinder video on Ethos / Pathos / Logos](#) on Youtube

UNIT 5: Social Values and Messages: What Messages are Embedded in Each Media artifact?

Summary and Rationale

In unit 2, students were introduced to the idea that media constructs reality for much of society. In this unit, students will explore what embedded values are reinforced through media, who creates those values, and how those values can be used to create stereotypes and reinforce power imbalances within society. Students will also explore how media can also be used to disrupt the status quo.

Recommended Pacing

L1: Media Messages: How media helps to define society's values, interests and expectations

- Examine recent political ads, music videos, teen shows, product ads, films, foreign ads, and video games. What type of values does each ad attempt to extol?
- View commercials, excerpts from TV programs from the 50s-00s. What social values and/or messages do the ads convey? Present collaboratively on the social messages conveyed by a decade of commercials from the 1950s to the 2000s (commercial compilations available on YouTube).
- Learn about and apply the Bechdel Test (does the film have well developed female characters?) to current films and other forms of media.
- Watch excerpts from *Miss Representation / The Mask you Live in* - discuss how the media shapes gender identity in contemporary society by using a Socratic seminar.
- Explore YouTube videos on photo retouching and understand how the fashion industry often creates a distorted standard of beauty.

L2: Differing Perspectives: analyzing how media messages may be perceived from multiple perspectives

- Explore how a person's own perspective has an effect on how they perceive media messages
- Watch a half-hour of network television, chart the numbers of ethnicities, races, gender, ages, and compare that to census data.
- Watch a few commercials that have been criticized in the past for being unintentionally tone-deaf (example: the 2014 Cadillac "work" electric vehicle commercial). Analyze how different groups might perceive the message. What can be done to make the ad more inclusive or sensitive?

L3: How can media create and reinforce stereotypes and biases?

- Take a [Project Implicit](#) test to identify personal biases. Reflect on the role media has played in creating these biases

Suggested Summative Assessment for Unit 5

- Watch the film *Pleasantville* and discuss how media is used to reinforce or challenge the values of Pleasantville in a Socratic seminar.

State Standards

Standard:

NJSLSA.R1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences and relevant connections from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
NJSLSA.R2	Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
NJSLSA.R8	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
NJSLSA.SL2	Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Instructional Focus

Unit Enduring Understandings

- Media not only reflects, but also plays a large part in helping shape individual and societal norms.
- Various individuals/groups may experience the same media message very differently.
- Media can broaden individual perspectives or it can reinforce stereotypes.
- It can be extremely challenging to understand how many different people will interpret the messages you create, but it is worthwhile to do your best to consider this as much as possible.

Unit Essential Questions

- What messages does each media artifact send out?
- How does the media help define our values, interests and expectations?
- How can media either reinforce stereotypes or widen perspectives?
- Does media shape my individual behavior? Does it tell me who I am?
- How do other audiences other than the intended audience respond to a media message?
- Do I harbor any unconscious biases?

Objectives

Students will know:

- That media can broaden individual perspectives or it can reinforce stereotypes.
- What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, each message.

Students will be able to:

- Use close reading to extract deeper meaning from media artifacts and will be able to present critically on their findings.
- Analyze media messages through multiple points of view.

- Identify their own potential biases and reflect on the role media has played in establishing them

Key Terms: Subtext, hegemony, close reading, ideology, dominant/other; insider/outsider, choice/agency, Bechdel Test, stereotype, unconscious bias

Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). *Media Literacy: Questioning the Media*. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- Film: *Pleasantville* (1998)
- [The Bechdel Test; No Film School](#) (Youtube)
- Film: *Miss Representation* (2011)
- Film: *The Mask You Live In* (2015)
- [Project Implicit test](#) (Harvard)

UNIT 6: Who Controls the Media, and why is that Important?

Summary and Rationale

In this unit, students will learn that it is necessary to examine who ultimately owns a media artifact as critical step in analyzing that media message. Students will explore how corporations can utilize slant and bias to further specific agendas, and they will reflect on who ultimately decides what stories are told and what news is shared.

Recommended Pacing

L1: What role does the “news media” play in society? What is “news” and who decides? How do media outlets act as “gatekeepers”?

- Mimic a newspaper room and decide which stories get precedence and how they will lay out their information
- Analyze various news programs: local vs. national vs. international vs. online (channel 5 vs. Newsline vs. BBC vs. Vice) and compare the stories they are running.
- Compare national vs. international covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. What do these covers say about what is important to various groups?
- How valid is *Wikipedia*? Is it more or less valid than other sources? How effective is crowdsourcing? Students will research the answer to this question using a variety of internet and database searches.
- How have citizen journalists changed the news game?

L2 – What makes something popular? Who decides what is popular?

- Research the “Payola” scandal of the 1950s and compare/contrast with itunes & YouTube
- How do algorithms recommend entertainment for us? How effective are they?
- How do news aggregators select what to show me? Are these algorithms better or worse than human gatekeepers?

L3: What are the ways in which media can be manipulated to further an agenda?

- Read an excerpt from Orwell’s *1984* that details the job that Winston, the protagonist, has - “revising” history
- Research famous historical events that were affected by media manipulation (WWII propaganda posters, Stalin’s photo manipulation, Iraqi “Mission Accomplished” poster, etc...)
- Read excerpts from *Techniques of Propaganda and Persuasion* and identify the techniques used in the examples .
- Visit <https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com> and practice identifying at least 10 logical fallacies; watch excerpts from *Thank You for Smoking*, and identify the logical fallacies used by the characters in the film

L4: What effect does the news media have on the public?

- Closely examine quotations and “sound bites” Do they tell the whole story? Can they be manipulated? View examples of selective editing.

- Discuss the #iftheygunnedmedown hashtag - how does media “frame” the story?
- Research McCarthyism; watch excerpts from *Good Night, and Good Luck*; what historical role does the CBS program *See it Now* play during this period?

L5: Who owns the news: the dangers of corporate consolidation

- Working collaboratively, students create a presentation that explores the media holdings of the largest media companies (Fox, Disney, Amazon, Paramount, Time-Warner, etc...)
- Discuss the benefits and dangers of deregulation and corporate synergy.

Suggested Summative Assessment for Unit 6

- Working collaboratively, create a satirical propaganda poster that criticizes something overtly wholesome (kittens, spinach, reading, etc..)

State Standards

Standard:

NJSLSA.L5	Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
NJSLSA.R4	Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
NJSLSA.R6	Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
NJSLSA.R8	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
NJSLSA.R9	Analyze and reflect on how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Instructional Focus

Unit Enduring Understandings

- Students will understand that the process of “looking behind the curtain” - identifying the owner or producer of each media artifact and analyzing the intention of said owner - will allow them to more critically consider and evaluate the messages presented in the artifact.
- Identifying and questioning our own personal biases can help us produce more impartial media artifacts.
- Owners can determine the ideologies and values produced by media outlets, which has great cultural power, especially in an age of unprecedented media consolidation

Unit Essential Questions

- Why is it important to identify and reflect on who creates media?
- Who benefits from the transmission of each media message?
- What effect does media have on our thoughts and actions?
- Do I make my own media choices (news, music, etc..) or are those choices made for me?
- What role do the news media play in society? What standards are they held to?
- Does the media that I produce have a bias as well?

Objectives

Students will know:

- Students will be able to identify the producer of a media artifact and understand the relationship that this has with the overall message.

Students will be able to:

- Students will practice identifying media ownership and applying that information to help evaluate the validity of a media message.
- Students will learn to identify and react critically towards specific propaganda techniques and logical fallacies.

Key Terms: Bias, slant, media consolidation, context, manipulation, agenda, propaganda, synergy, gatekeeping, citizen journalism

Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). Media Literacy: Questioning the Media. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- <https://yourlogicalfallacyis.com>
- *Techniques of Propaganda and Persuasion* by Magedah E. Shabo
- [Sinclair's Soldiers in War on Media](#) (Deadspin / Youtube)
- [Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics](#)

UNIT 7: How Can I Tell if Information is Trustworthy?

Summary and Rationale

In an era when many media consumers have a difficult time differentiating between true, fake, and “fake” information, this unit will provide students with tools that they can use to critically assess the information they access through media.

Recommended Pacing

L1 – Identify and understand the primary political ideologies in contemporary America

- Students explore left/liberal and right/conservative values by watching [Crash Course: Political Ideology](#)

L2 - Use bias ranking sites to identify the ideological leanings of major media outlets

- [AdFontesMedia Bias Chart](#) and [AllSides Ratings](#). Examine how the rankings sites create their rankings.
- Use the sites to explore how multiple websites portray similar issues.

L3 – Use fact-checking sites to help identify disinformation and misinformation

- Watch [Crash Course Media Literacy: The Darker Side of Media Literacy](#). What is the difference between misinformation and disinformation and why are they used?
- Watch excerpts from [Fake: Searching for Truth in the Age of Misinformation](#) to gain an overview of the topic.
- Explore the Poynter teen fact-checking videos here: <https://www.poynter.org/teen-fact-checking-network/>. Working collaboratively, create a fact-checking video that proves or debunks something you heard about online.
- Explore [Politifact](#) and [Factcheck.org](#) and present to your peers on a mistruth that was spread through media.

L4 – Fact vs. opinion

- Students practice identifying facts vs. opinions in news broadcasts.

L5: Identifying Bias – Practice identifying bias in corporate news

- Examine multiple media organization pages on the same day. Analyze how headlines, story placement, photos, images, and colors can all convey bias.
- Explore media watchdog sites such as [Mediamatters.org](#). What important biases have they uncovered regarding contemporary media issues?

Suggested Summative Assessment for Unit 7

- Working collaboratively, read two partisan (and one non-partisan) articles or video clips that detail the same news story. Identify the facts vs. the opinions. Which words are charged? How do the included headlines and pictures “slant” the message in each article? Present your findings to the class.

Key Terms: Misinformation, Disinformation, Bias

State Standards

Standard:

NJSLSA.R4	Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
NJSLSA.R5	Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
NJSLSA.R6	Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
NJSLSA.R7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
NJSLSA.R8	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
NJSLSA.R9	Analyze and reflect on how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
NJSLSA.W8	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
NJSLSA.SL1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
NJSLSA.SL2	Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
NJSLSA.SL3	Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Instructional Focus

Unit Enduring Understandings

- Various media organizations can have different motivations, which can strongly influence their content.
- All human beings are biased, as their perspectives and lived experiences color their understanding of the world.
- Being a media literate person requires constantly taking in information with a critical eye, regardless of the source.

Unit Essential Questions

- Why do various media outlets convey the same ideas so differently?
- How can I evaluate if information is truthful or not?
- What media organizations are more trustworthy than others?

Objectives

Students will know:

- How biased media affects society
- How to fact-check online
- Why differentiating between facts and opinions is critical in evaluating information
- How to read laterally

Students will be able to:

- Utilize lateral reading for fact-checking
- Differentiate facts vs opinions
- Identify examples of misinformation and disinformation

Key Terms: Lateral reading, misinformation, disinformation, cognitive biases,

Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). Media Literacy: Questioning the Media. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- <https://yourbias.is>
- [AdFontesMedia Bias Chart](#) and [AllSides Ratings](#)
- [Crash Course: Political Ideologies](#)
- [Snopes.com](#)
- [Fake: Searching for Truth in the Age of Misinformation](#)
- [Poynter Teen Fact Checking Network](#)
- [Politifact](#) and [Factcheck.org](#)
- [Crash Course Media Literacy: The Dark Side of Media Literacy](#)

UNIT 8: Is Technology Working for Me or Against Me?

Summary and Rationale

Many of the largest FAANG technology companies (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, and Google) have built their fortunes on monetizing personal data and creating conflict through spreading mis- and disinformation. The focus of this unit is for students to realize that they are not the consumers – they are the product. What are the strategies these companies use to influence human behavior and make themselves as addictive as possible? How can students insulate themselves from these dangerous mechanisms and instead positively utilize these technologies to further their own goals?

Recommended Pacing

L1 - How does social media help create and perpetuate echo chambers?

- Students explore [allsides](#), [theflipside](#), and [Ground News](#) as resources to use to explore stories from multiple perspectives. Working collaboratively, students present their findings to the class.
- Explore how Google search is tailored for each user, and discuss the issues that arise with that behavior.

L2 – How do social media companies “hack” human behavior to manipulate their behavior and negatively affect their users?

- Students visit the [Center for Humane Technology](#) and complete a webquest to explore ways that social media affects their brain and society as a whole. The site also introduces students to techniques they can use to begin to break free from social media addiction and manipulation.

L3 - How can students explore their own minds and challenge themselves to think more purposefully?

- Students will reflect on how their values have been constructed and they can keep an open mind as they explore multiple perspectives. Students will [utilize videos and other resources](#) from the *Open Mind Platform* to help guide them
- Students reflect on their own thinking by [listening to the “You Are Not So Smart” podcast](#), [reading the book](#) or visiting the [yourbias.is](#) website. This book and podcast have over 200 strategies to help students reflect on their thinking and decision making. Students select one concept and teach it to their peers.
- Know Thy Self; Students explore the [16 Personalities](#) site to understand their strengths and weaknesses. Reflect on how to use this information to more effectively interact with others. Students practice creating groups that leverage their own individual strengths.

Suggested Summative Assessment for Unit 8

- Students watch [The Social Dilemma](#) to explore how apps and social media sites are optimized to capture their attention and direct their thoughts and actions by the very people who designed them. Students discuss in a Socratic Seminar.

State Standards

Standard:

NJSLSA. W7	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects, utilizing an inquiry-based research process, based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
NJSLSA. SL1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
NJSLSA. SL4	Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
NJSLSA. SL5	Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

Instructional Focus

Unit Enduring Understandings

- Many technology companies are profiting off of potentially unethical mechanisms that can lead to harmful human behaviors.
- False information often spreads more forcefully and quickly than the truth on social media.
- Each active participant on social media has the ability to either contribute to spreading mis- and disinformation or the ability to help stem it.
- Intellectual curiosity, self-reflection, and humility are critical components of having productive dialogues with others.

Unit Essential Questions

- How does social media help create and perpetuate echo chambers?
- How does social media encourage the spread of false and harmful information?

Objectives

Students will know:

- Why it is important to break out their own echo chambers.
- What their strengths and weaknesses are when working with others.
- How fast and slow thinking differ (Kahneman) and when each should be used.
- How social media companies are profiting off of their users.

Students will be able to:

- Identify and maximize their own abilities when working with others.
- Break out of their echo chambers.
- Reflect on their own critical thinking.
- Take back more control over their devices and use them more productively.
- Have more productive interactions with people with different viewpoints online.

Key Terms: Echo Chamber, heuristics, cognitive biases, fast vs slow thinking

Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). *Media Literacy: Questioning the Media*. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- <https://yourbias.is>
- Documentary: *The Social Dilemma* (2020)
- <https://www.16personalities.com>
- You are Not So Smart, David McRaney
- [Allsides](#), [theflipside](#), and [Ground News](#)

UNIT 9: Final Project:

Summary and Rationale

Students have spent the majority of this year analyzing media messages, but being media literate also involves being able to effectively create media messages using various media tools in such a way that empowers individuals to actively participate in our democratic society. This final project challenges students to utilize everything they have learned during the course of the year and provide evidence that their work has had a positive effect on their community.

Recommended Pacing

L1 - Research the history and mission of the *Ad Council*.

- Analyze some of the campaigns that they have produced. Use as a model to begin thinking about your own campaign.

L2 - Create an advertising campaign with a positive message (anti-drinking, anti-peer pressure, anti-bullying, etc...)

- Using multiple forms of media for a film or product, students will need to identify an audience, create a logo, create multiple ads using multiple forms of media, be aware of differing perspectives, and finally, reflect on their effectiveness.

State Standards

Standard:

NJSLSA.SL2	Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
NJSLSA.SL4	Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
NJSLSA.SL5	Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
NJSLSA.W6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
NJSLSA.W7	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects, utilizing an inquiry-based research process, based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
NJSLSA.W8	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
NJSLSA.W9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Instructional Focus

Unit Enduring Understandings

- Becoming media literate will help students compose effective media messages and empower them to positively affect their community.

Unit Essential Questions

- How do all of these media elements work together?
- How can I utilize the skills I've learned to shape the world around me?

Objectives

Students will know:

- How to utilize the skills that they have attained throughout the year to compose an authentic media campaign centering on a contemporary social issue.

Students will be able to:

- Communicate effectively and initiate positive change through the use of multiple media technologies.

Resources

Core Text: Hobbs, Renee (2021). Media Literacy: Questioning the Media. Rowman & Littlefield

Suggested Resources:

- Adcouncil.org