8 KEY CONCEPTS OF MEDIA LITERACY

These concepts provide an effective foundation for examining mass media and popular culture. The concepts teachers use are on this side of the page. A translation that is easier for middle school students to understand is on the back!

ADVANCED VERSION

1. All media are constructions
The media do not present simple reflections of external reality. Rather, they present carefully crafted constructions that reflect many decisions and result from many determining factors. Media Literacy works towards deconstructing these constructions, taking them apart to show how they are made.

2. The media construct reality
The media are responsible for the majority of the observations and experiences from which we build up our personal understandings of the world and how it works. Much of our view of reality is based on media messages that have been pre-constructed and have attitudes, interpretations and conclusions already built in. The media, to a great extent, give us our sense of reality.

3. Audiences negotiate meaning in the media
The media provide us with much of the material upon which we build our picture of reality, and we all "negotiate" meaning according to individual factors: personal needs and anxieties, the pleasures or troubles of the day, racial and sexual attitudes, family and cultural background, and so forth.

4. Media have commercial implications
Media Literacy aims to encourage an awareness of how the media are influenced by commercial considerations, and how these affect content, technique and distribution. Most media production is a business, and must therefore make a profit. Questions of ownership and control are central: a relatively small number of individuals control what we watch, read and hear in the media.

5. Media contain ideological and value messages
All media products are advertising, in some sense, in that they proclaim values and ways of life. Explicitly or implicitly, the mainstream media convey ideological messages about such issues as the nature of the good life, the virtue of consumerism, the role of women, the acceptance of authority, and unquestioning patriotism.

6. Media have social and political implications
The media have great influence on politics and on forming social change. Television can greatly influence the election of a national leader on the basis of image. The media involve us in concerns such as civil rights issues, famines in Africa, and the AIDS epidemic. They give us an intimate sense of national issues and global concerns, so that we become citizens of Marshall McLuhan's "Global Village."

7. Form and content are closely related in the media
As Marshall McLuhan noted, each medium has its own grammar and codifies reality in its own particular way. Different media will report the same event, but create different impressions and messages.

8. Each medium has a unique aesthetic form
Just as we notice the pleasing rhythms of certain pieces of poetry or prose, so we ought to be able to enjoy the pleasing forms and effects of the different media.
STUDENT’S VERSION
adapted by Jayson Stewart, 2006

Media (plural)
A means of mass communication, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, internet, advertising, billboards, fashion or television. Eg. “Print media is one of the oldest forms of mass communication.”

Medium (singular)
A single way of communicating such as a newspaper, a magazine, a radio program, a website, an advertisement, a billboard, a shirt logo, or a television show. Eg. “Blogs are one of the fastest growing medium on the internet.”

1. All media are constructions
All media are carefully made by someone to create a specific version of reality. The OC, for example, is a show that creates a reality that isn’t our reality…but is one that we can still identify with. Media are the result of a series of decisions and we must look at media and mentally take them apart to understand why and how they were made. That is, we need to look beyond the surface of a medium.

2. The media construct reality
Even if we don’t like to admit it, media is responsible for the majority of our understanding of the world and how it works. Media, to a great extent, give us our sense of reality.

3. Audiences negotiate meaning in the media
The media provide us with a lot of the material upon which we build our picture of the world around us. Everyone "negotiates" or comes up with their own personal idea of reality according to individual factors: personal needs, fears, interests, dislikes, racial and sexual attitudes, family and cultural backgrounds, religion, etc.

The best way to think of this...a Canadian, basing his understanding of what’s “real” to him has a different reality than someone living in, say, Cambodia or Japan. You might feel this shift in reality whenever you travel and everything seems “different” or “new” or “weird”

4. Media have commercial implications
Simply enough, media has money making and a money spending elements. You’re encouraged to think about how media and pop culture are influenced by money. You’ll find that a small number of individuals control what we watch, read and hear in the media.

5. Media contain value messages
Your “values” are your beliefs. All media products advertise beliefs and ways of life. An ad may value young, thin women. A TV show may value violence. A political campaign may value Conservative values.

6. Media have social and political implications
The media have great influence on politics and on forming change in our society. Television can greatly influence the election of a national leader on the basis of image. The media involve us in concerns such as civil rights issues, tsunami victims, and the AIDS epidemic. They bring the world to our doorstep.

7. Form and content are closely related in the media
Different types of media will report the same event or issue or idea, but create different impressions and messages. For example, a children’s storybook would take a different angle on homelessness than an in-depth news program would.

8. Each medium has a unique aesthetic (beautiful) form
We can be critical of media but we also need to realize (and admit to ourselves) that we find joy in the forms and effects of different media. We need to understand that, though we may not like certain things (soap operas, reality TV, radio news, Paris Hilton, etc.) there are those who do and we can’t fault them for what they enjoy.
ASSIGNMENT

The 8 Key Concepts of Media Literacy are basic rules enabling us to look at media texts such as websites, tshirt designs, album covers, newspaper articles, product designs, animated films, etc.

Choose ANY SPECIFIC media text (a specific movie, a specific advertisement, a specific viral video, a specific meme, etc.) and write a one page journal responding/relating that product to at LEAST three of the 8 Key Concepts.