

MEDIA LITERACY

UNIT PLAN

RATIONALE: The purpose of this unit plan is to give students the necessary skills in order to actively engage media messages they have been passively receiving their entire lives. This involves utilizing a theoretical framework in order to analyze, evaluate, and produce media, in an effort to better understand the persuasive nature of the media. As media is persuasive, rhetorical analysis of media messages is possible, and imperative. This unit has been designed from a problem-based learning platform. That is, the content and learning activities presented here are focused on teacher facilitation of problem solving skills in regards to the consumption of media messages.

STANDARDS COVERED:

Illinois State Standards: ELA Goal 2, Standard A, Benchmark 2.A.4a. ELA Goal 3, Standard C, Benchmarks 3.C.1b, 3.C.3b, 3.C.4b. ELA Goal 4, Standards A and B, Benchmarks 4.A.1d, 4.B.3b. ELA Goal 5, Standards C, 5.C.4a, 5.C.5a, 5.C.5b.

National Communication Association Standards: NCA Standards 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, and 19. Benchmarks 4-1, 4-4, 4-5, 4-6, 4-8, 4-9, 4-10, 4-11, 4-12, 4-13, 4-14, 4-15, 4-18; 5-1, 5-2, 5-3, 5-4, 5-5, 5-6, 5-7, 5-8, 5-11, 5-12, 5-13, 5-15, 5-17, 5-18; 16-1, 16-2, 16-3, 16-4, 16-5, 16-6, 16-7, 16-8, 16-9, 16-10; 17-1, 17-2, 17-3, 17-4, 17-5, 17-6, 17-7, 17-8, 17-9; 18-2, 18-3, 18-4, 18-5, 18-6, 18-7; 19-2.

OBJECTIVES:

I. Knowledge

1. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to define media literacy.
2. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to understand the relationship between media literacy and persuasion.
3. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to define logos, pathos, and ethos.
4. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to identify propaganda techniques used in advertising.
5. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to identify the differences between media genres.
6. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to identify the elements of cultural production.

II. Behavioral

1. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to analyze and evaluate multiple media messages using Aristotle's Rhetoric.
2. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to analyze and evaluate propaganda techniques utilized in the media.
3. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to explain how media driven stereotypes distort reality.

III. Disposition

1. Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to engage media messages critically and actively.

CONTENT:**I. Ways of Knowing****A. Media is a cultural construction**

1. Definition of Culture

- a. A framework for understanding the world, and creating meaning.

2. Cultural Production

- a. Cultural production is an expression or representation created by or associated with a group of people sharing a common bond and/or communities (Barthes, 1977).
- b. Cultural productions generally emerge from a particular historical context, in which they take on and reflect meanings associated with the group.
- c. They serve a purpose and help to create identities, but also distort them.

3. Media is a Product of Culture

- a. Sitcom – the situational comedy is, in theory, a representation of a portion of the larger culture.

4. Media is also a producer of culture.

- a. These same media texts are also producers of culture.
- b. Examples – “Dawson’s Creek” and the Great Lexicon. “Will and Grace.”

5. Intertextuality

- a. The process in which two (or more) texts speak to each other. That is, the ways in which texts are related to each other within the larger cultural realm. Julia Kristeva.
- b. Parts of texts that are interrelated are called subtexts.
- c. This also implies that media is created by and influences the creation of other texts.

B. Media = Persuasion

1. The objective of all media is to persuade an audience of a particular reality, whether that is a need for a product, or the advancement of a particular ideology or hegemony.
2. Because media is inherently persuasive, theoretical applications dealing with persuasive messages can be applied to the media.

C. Conceptions of persuasion must be broken down

1. What persuasion is not is coercion.
2. Aristotle’s Rhetoric
 - a. Rhetoric is persuasion, and persuasion is the act of convincing an audience of your objective/purpose/point of view.
 - b. The Proofs: Logos, Pathos, and Ethos.

D. Media and Mass Communication

1. The meaning of mass communication has undergone a transformation recently, moving away from the idea that many messages are sent out to many receivers, to the idea that many specific types of messages are being sent out to highly specialized groups of receivers.
2. This process is known as narrowcasting.

II. Genres

A. Television

1. Wide audience.
 - a. Covers many groups and demographics
 - b. Cable television v. Network television is similar to the transition radio and periodicals made over the past forty years.
 - c. This increases the breadth of persuasive modes, while still maintaining specific niche messages targeting certain demographics.
2. Focuses on visual.
 - a. TV engages in fifteen-second visual blocks to maintain attention while still bombarding viewers with a variety of persuasive messages.
3. Most prevalent.
 - a. 99% of households have at least one television, most having more than one.

B. Film

1. Blockbuster vs. Indy
 - a. Predominantly a budget difference
 - b. Purpose of message is also inherently different.
 - i. Blockbuster focuses dominant culture with the express intent of making money.
 - ii. Independent films predominantly draw attention to the inadequacies of the dominant culture.
2. Entertainment driven
 - a. Regardless of purpose, films have the overarching goal of persuasion through entertainment.

C. Periodicals (magazine and newspaper)

1. Holistic vs. specific
 - a. Newspapers target the wider demographic of the area
 - b. Magazines target a specific co-culture within the larger culture.
2. Most informative
 - a. Periodicals have a larger space to explore topics.
 - b. Authorship is more open to the public allowing a wider range of perspectives.
3. Situated Ethos
 - a. Many periodicals have a built-in reputation with the larger population.

D. Radio

1. Intimate
 - a. Radio specifically targets individuals in their cars or using personal stereo devices

- b. This is a drastic shift from the historical goal of radio targeting the family.
 - 2. Niche driven market
 - a. Competition and deregulation has lead stations to target very specific portions of the larger culture.
 - b. Radio messages are geared toward their targeted audience
 - E. Internet
 - 1. Widest audience
 - a. In 1998, 30% of the population had internet access in their homes
 - b. By the year 2015 it is predicted nearly 100% of America's population will have access to the Internet in their homes.
 - 2. No constraints
 - a. Currently legislation regarding the Internet is very limited.
 - b. Anyone can build and maintain a website.
 - 3. Least credible
 - a. Anyone can build and maintain a website.
 - F. News
 - 1. Objectivity vs. Subjectivity
 - a. No news is 100% unbiased
 - b. The aim of news is to be 100% objective
 - 2. TV vs. Radio
 - a. Both have a limited time period to explore a story.
 - b. Both focus on timeliness rather than truthfulness.
 - c. TV focuses mainly on visual images.
 - d. Radio focuses on impact to targeted audience members.
 - 3. Print journalism
 - a. Inverted pyramid is designed to emphasize most important facts about a story to least important.
 - b. Print journalism is written in AP style, meaning grammar focuses on present tense and active voice.
 - c. Arrangement of stories in the periodical reflects the agenda of the individual periodical.
 - 4. Internet: the new kid
 - a. Anyone can build and maintain a website.
 - b. Credibility is the major issue of Internet news (subjectivity).
 - c. The most credible sources are organizations from other media entities that have built archives on the web.
 - G. Ads
 - 1. Advertising is the primary method by which almost any media outlet makes money. Therefore, it is highly invasive.
 - 2. Propaganda
 - a. Techniques are used in advertising to persuade, with the ultimate goal of coercing consumers into agreeing with a particular persuasive message.
 - b. Bandwagon, Plain Folks, Sweeping Generalization (Glittering generality), Testimonial, Repetition, Transfers.

3. Differences within the genres
 - a. Print ads focus on creating language-based (coupled with images) persuasive techniques in order to sway audiences one way or the other.
 - b. Television commercials focus primarily on visual images and audio messages in order to persuade.
 - c. Radio relies strictly on personal and intimate audio messages aimed at specific audiences.
 - d. Internet advertising combines all of these things into one, often chaotic, whole.
4. Stereotyping
 - a. Because advertising relies on shorthand, and often incomplete, cultural cues, interpretations often lead to the development of unrealistic views of outgroups.
5. Placement
 - a. Arrangement and placement of advertising is carefully crafted in order to reach the largest percentage of a target audience.
 - b. Use Group Presentation Activity here.

III. Ethical Considerations

A. Capitalism

- i. Most media's first and foremost purpose is to make money.
- ii. Without money, media outlets cannot survive.

B. Ownership

- i. In a capitalist society, those with the money have the power. Rich people own media outlets, and therefore have the power to dictate agendas, or prime viewers to engage certain messages more than others.
- ii. People that possess wealth of such magnitude comprise only 2% of the entire American population.

C. Globalization

- i. Mass media creates a global village through conglomeration on a worldwide scale, and the perpetuation of a larger dominant global culture.

D. Social Issues/Stereotypes (Choose one or all)

- i. Gender
- ii. Race
- iii. Religion
- iv. Sexuality
- v. Socioeconomic status
- vi. Ageism

IV. Theoretical Considerations (Optional...very optional)

A. Metatheory

- i. Scientific, Humanistic, and Critical
- ii. Limited Effects
- iii. Hypodermic Needle/Magic Bullet Theory

B. Aristotle's Rhetoric

C. George Gerbner's Cultivation Analysis

- D. Social Learning Theory
- E. Spiral of Silence
- F. Agenda-Setting Function

ASSESSMENTS:

Theories have practical applications. Therefore, focusing on the nuts and bolts of the theory does not fully explore the dimensions inherent to each theory. We envision this unit to be designed on a problem-based learning concept. That means the students should be able to apply the theories taught in class to specific media messages and problems rather than testing knowledge of specific quantities in the theory.

We are not providing any specific assessment tools.

Things to remember about assessments:

1. Assessments should be problem-based. That is, the students should be presented a problem and then given a reasonable range of freedom to solve the media problem or analysis.
2. Any assessment involving the creation of media messages is inherently time consuming and potentially problematic.
3. Be very aware of what messages students are producing and your school's policy on subjects regarding "questionable" material.

REFERENCES:

Baran, Stanley J. (1999). *Introduction to Mass Communication: Media Literacy and Culture*. San Francisco, CA: McGraw-Hill

Croteau, D. and Hoynes W. (2000). "Media and the Social World." In *Media society: Industries, images, and audiences* (pp. 3-31). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Hyden, J. S. (1998). *Communicating for Success*. 2nd ed. South-Western Educational Publishing

Larson, C.U. (1998). *Persuasion: Reception and Responsibility*. Wadsworth Pub Co

Attached:

Activity 1: Looking underneath the sheets

Activity 2: PSA

Activity 3: The Interesting Internet

Activity 4: Analyzing a Film

Activity 5: Media Journal

Activity 6: Radio Revolutionized the World

Activity 7: Dear Fellow Aliens

Activity 8: Propaganda Techniques

Activity 9: TV and Violence

Activity 10: Magazine Ads and You

Activity 11: Group Presentation