RETA Curriculum
Media Investigations

Tools and Techniques for Critically Analyzing Today's Media

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General Lesson
Media Investigations

Introduction
The Media Literacy curriculum offers learners the tools and techniques for critically analyzing today's media. From magazines to the nightly news, media controls information, images, and events. The lessons contained in the following units are designed to increase your students' awareness of the media's perspectives and to evaluate the messages promoted through those perspectives.

"Media Literacy education seeks to give media consumers greater freedom by teaching them to analyze, access, evaluate and produce media."

- New Mexico Media Literacy Project

Summary
Below are the anticipated outcomes of the Media Investigations training sessions. They are based on the New Mexico's Standards and Benchmarks, the National Educational Technology Standards, and the New Mexico Teacher Competencies.

Outcomes
Upon successful completion of this unit, the learner will:
1. understand the basic tools for media literacy.
2. have in-depth knowledge of the tools for analysis/techniques of persuasion and their application.
3. evaluate web resources for validity, bias and hidden messages.
4. discuss issues regarding media literacy and its effect on teaching and learning.
5. develop an awareness of current and future trends of media use in the classroom.

Content Standards and Benchmarks

National Educational Technology Standards
2) Social, ethical, and human issues
3) Technology productivity tools
5) Technology research tools
6) Technology problem-solving and decision-making tools
New Mexico's Standards and Benchmarks

Mathematics
1) Students will understand and use Mathematics in Problem Solving.
4) Students will understand and use Mathematical Connections.
7) Students will understand and use computation and estimation.

Visual Art
2) Students will apply elements of art and principles of design to communicate ideas; and use subjects, themes, and symbols when expressing ideas in art works; and, describe how specific works of art can communicate an idea or elicit a variety of responses through the use of selected media, techniques, and processes.

Science
15) Students will know and understand the impact between science and technology in society: b) analyze the impact of culture, gender, and other factors on an individual's choice of science as a career.

Language Arts
3) Students will listen and read for a variety of purposes: c) use print and non-print sources to apply and evaluate options to solve problems and to help meet the challenges of life.
MEDIA LITERACY: Media Investigations Teacher's & Trainer's Guide

RETA General Lesson

Media Investigations

Introduction
Media Investigation looks at the construction of print advertisement specifically aimed at teens. In the activities, students critically examine the content, form and subliminal messages of print media. Stations are set up at different computers to allow several groups to work on different tasks at the same time.

Technology Use
- Word Processing program
- Draw/Paint program
- Spreadsheet program (MS Excel, ClarisWorks)
- Desktop Publishing software (such as Microsoft Office, PageMaker, ClarisWorks)
- Database program (Claris, MS Access, FileMaker)
- Web Browser
- Printer (if available)

Resources
Media Literacy http://www.kqed.org/cell/ml/home.html
"Inquiring minds want to know: What is Media Literacy?" This site is developed by KQED Center for Education and Lifelong Learning, who is committed to the exchange of ideas and resources in partnership with the community. The web site pertains to K-12 grades and features media education organizations, teachers' resources: texts with description, address of publisher, and price; production resources--video and audio, periodicals with descriptions, prices, and address of publisher; video resources about teaching media, and several articles that can be read on the site. Also available are articles and descriptions of books for parents who are interested in this topic.

The On-line Visual Literacy Project http://www.pomona.edu/visual-lit/intro/intro.html
Pomona College in Claremont, California developed this site to describe and give examples of visual literacy. Included are the basic visual elements--graphics, explanations, and some animation.

Media Literacy Organization http://www.medialit.org/
This site, produced by the University of Southern California's communication department in collaboration with The Center for Media Literacy, includes K-12 book reviews, articles, educational materials, and updates on conferences being held at USC or Southern California.

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Process

Tips
1. This set of activities is designed for use together.
2. Activities may be done at the same time or spread out over several class periods. For Professional Development use, we suggest that these activities be done during one inservice.
3. Set up Stations in advance and have class discussion away from the Stations to encourage students to listen to and/or participant in the discussion.
4. Learners vary widely in ability, learning styles, and cognition. Be aware of the following:
5. There will be varying degrees of expertise with technology. Encourage seasoned users to assist the newer users.
6. No one has all the answers - including the instructors.

Materials
- New Mexico Media Literacy Project CD-ROM (available through NMLP http://www.nmmlp.org/ for cost)
- Teen Magazines (Students and instructor bring some).
- Copies of the 'Specific Tools for Analysis' for all students.
- 1 Coca-Cola (can or bottle). Paper and tape to cover label.
- 1 Pepsi (can or bottle). Paper and tape to cover label.
- 1 Generic Cola (e.g., Smith's, RC Cola, etc.). Paper and tape to cover label.
- Three small cups per each participant
- Copies of Light bulb sheet (one per group)
- *Four computers with Desktop Publishing software, a Spreadsheet program, a Database program (Claris, MS, FileMaker), and a paint/draw program.
- At least one of the computers should have Internet access,**
- Copies of the Scavenger Hunt Questionnaire for all students

*Four computers if doing all Stations simultaneously.
**If no Internet access, copy the hoaxes pages and distribute one set to each group.
Preparation
1. Make copies of all needed handouts.
2. Set up Stations with necessary materials, software and handouts.
3. Make sure software applications are running properly.
4. Divide students into small work groups (3-5 members)
5. Determine amount of time to be spent at each Station. 30-50 minutes is acceptable.
6. Give complete instructions: Students will have [30-50] minutes to complete the tasks at each Station. At the end of the set time allotment, groups move to next Station. When all groups have completed all Stations, each group will present its products.

Tasks
**Please see handouts on stations.
STATION 1: Deconstructing and Constructing Magazine Covers
STATION 2: Media Literacy CD Exploration
STATION 3: The Great American Soda Taste Test
STATION 4: Internet Hoaxes
STATION 5: Consumer Database

Assessment
When all groups have cycled through all Stations, bring them back together as a class. Have each group present its findings to the others. Some of the ways to assess learners during and after this set of activities include:
- Presentations of portfolios
- Student produced skits
- Discussion groups
- Explanation (written or verbal) of 'Tools for Analysis'
- Research the New Mexico Media Literacy Project and discuss its application to the classroom.
- Rubric
Discuss what motivated the creation of these products and how this set of activities has impacted students' way of looking at media.

Extensions
Suggestions for discussion:
1. Show how to graph the "Favorite Soda" spreadsheet.
2. Discuss the percentage of students who chose the wrong soda. Why did this happen?
3. Discuss the use of this type of learning management for limited technology in a classroom setting.
Station 1: Deconstructing and Constructing Magazine Covers

What is Advertising telling teen-agers and young adults?

At this Station you will look at teen magazine covers searching for a common thread used in their design and construction. You will have four major tasks:

1. Using the Analysis Sheet, carefully observe, evaluate, and discuss the similarities that occur on teen magazine covers with the other members of your group.

2. Determine the formula used in the production of teen magazine covers by completing the form entitled "Closely Analyzing a Piece of Media."

3. Once you have discovered and identified what you believe the formula is, work independently to create your own Teen Magazine Cover on a desktop publishing application using text and clip art. This cover can be realistic or can be a "spoof cover" which makes fun of teen magazine covers.

4. Print your magazine cover and be ready to present it in the discussion and showcase portion of our session.
At this Station you will explore the use of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project's CD-ROM in the classroom. When you finish this activity you should have at least one lesson plan idea that you could use in your classroom.

1. In the upper left corner of the main menu screen is a Red M.

2. Place the cursor over the red M to get the menu bar.

3. Go to Tools of Analysis.

4. Explore both General Tools and Specific Tools.

5. After you explore for a few minutes, brainstorm some ideas for using these tools in your classroom. When your group has come up with some good examples, write them in the light bulbs on the Light Bulb handout.

6. Continue exploring the CD until you are given instructions to move to the next Station.
Station 3: 
The Great American Soda Taste Test

1. Using the Spreadsheet example form included at this Station, write the number of your favorite soda in the correct corresponding box.

2. Taste each of the disguised sodas and place the number of the soda you liked the best in the correct box in the "Favorite Soda" spreadsheet. You will use this spreadsheet in another activity when all groups have cycled through this Station.

3. Open up a spreadsheet program on the computer. Save it as "Soda Results."

4. Use what you learned at other Stations, from your RETA instructor, and from the spreadsheet Help that is part of the software program (on top menu bar) to help you set up a spreadsheet to estimate:

5. (example)
   1. How much you spend on sodas a week?
   2. How much you spend on sodas a month?
   3. How much you spend on sodas a year?
   4. How much you spend on sodas in a 20-year period?
   5. How much money you would have made if you had invested this amount of money in an average mutual fund earning 8% for another 20 years?
Station 4:  
Scavenger Hunt of Hoaxes

Answer these questions about the following site:  
Hoax (http://www.nonprofit.net/hoax/)

1. What is the name of the web site?
2. What visitor number are you?
3. Locate the "Urban Legends, Myths and Stories" section and find "The cookie story;" double click on the title. Read through the recipe and find out how many cups of blended oatmeal are needed.
4. How much did Neiman-Marcus charge for the cookie recipe?
5. Under the "Famous Hoaxes," locate "The kid who wants postcards before he dies." How old was the boy from England?
6. According to Margot Brown, spokeswoman for the Schaumburg-based Electronics Company, how many employees work for Motorola in the state of Illinois?

Now press the back button to return to the Don't Spread that Hoax" web site and locate "Evil Companies & Products"

7. What is the name of the web site?
8. What is it about?
9. What is the phone number for the Proctor and Gamble?

Now press the back button to return to the "Don't Spread that Hoax" web site and locate the "Recent Hoaxes."

10. What is the most recent hoax that has been posted?

Extended Exercises:
1. Continue exploring the "Don't Spread that Hoax" Recent Hoaxes site and familiarize yourself with as many hoaxes as possible.
2. Use the search engine of your choice and type in "Internet Hoaxes" to see what sites you can find and list the addresses below.
Tips on Hoaxes

Recently, the Internet community has endured a wave of email hoaxes and pranks, exploiting users' unfamiliarity with how the Internet, and computer systems in general, work. With the explosive growth of the Internet and its popularity, more and more new users are "getting online" and becoming targets for pranksters. "Ancient" myths, like the cookie story, are just waiting for a critical mass of people who have not been exposed. There is no technical solution to this problem. It seems that all users of the Internet will encounter a certain amount of nonsense. Right now, these messages are just annoyances, but it is only a matter of time before someone's reputation, career, or bank account is ruined by some hoax.

Experienced users call these problem messages 'Junk-mail Viruses' because they act like other computer viruses but are passed by humans instead of programs. Users of the Internet must learn to be skeptical and to think carefully before spreading a message to other users. Here are some simple things you can do to avoid being a carrier for Junk-mail Viruses:

- If you get a message, or see a posting on usenet that seems like it should be shared with LOTS of people, **DON'T SEND IT** unless either you KNOW the message is true, you can authenticate their identity (through PGP or some other system), or you know the sender personally. The more urgent it sounds, the more skeptical you should be. Even if you think it might be true, let someone else spread it.
- If you really want to send it, **ALWAYS CHECK WITH THE ORIGINATOR** before forwarding it! This is the best way to tell a hoax or a prank. Just reply to the first sender and ask him/her if it is true. If they can't tell you, then don't send it! Most pranks and hoaxes have forged headers and signatures. When you try to verify the validity of the message, you will find that the address is not valid. If the originator is the prankster and tells you to go ahead, s/he can be caught and punished. If checking out a message is a bother, then it must not be important, so don't send it.
- If the message tells you to do something, especially involving changing your account or sending a file or message over the network, *CHECK WITH SOMEONE YOU CAN TRUST.* Imagine receiving a package in your home mailbox asking you to place your house keys in the return envelope provided and mail them to a post office box. Would you comply? People fall for the computer version of this kind all the time.
- If you see or get something that really makes you angry, remember **YOU CAN'T BE SURE WHO SENT IT!!** It is very easy to frame someone with an email message or usenet post. All someone has to do is sit at a computer when its owner is away. But hackers can be much more sophisticated. They can forge any message to make it appear authentic.
- Chain email and Pyramid posts on usenet are a scam, and, most often, they are a crime. ANY SCHEME THAT INVOLVES REAL MAIL CAN BE ILLEGAL. If you forward one, you will be blasted with hundreds of angry messages in reply. But if you see one, remember that you can't be sure who sent it!
- Finally, note that when April 1st comes up, the 'Net will be awash in phony messages, forged return addresses, pranks, and general amusing nonsense. The best thing to do is to read them and have a good laugh. Ignore any message from anyone you don't know and ignore any message from anyone that asks you to do something.
**Station 5:**  
Consumer Database

**THIS SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BEFORE BEGINNING STATIONS**

Enter the following information in the database:

1. First Name  
2. Favorite Color  
3. Favorite Animal  
4. Favorite Music Type  
5. Favorite Leisure-time Activity  
6. Favorite Shape/Object

Be sure to save the database often. If there are not at least 10 respondents, enter "fake" responses until you have enough.

**ACTIVITY**

1. You may want to make a copy and save the database in another file.  
2. The **FAX handout** sets up your problem  
3. Practice sorting and searching through the database to collect information about target audience.  
4. Use paint/draw, word processing or any software available to you to create the products.

****NOTE TO TEACHER / TRAINER****

Set up a new database at Station #5 that includes all the needed fields. As students/students arrive, have them enter their information in the database at Station #5.
Station 1
Closely Analyzing a Piece of Media:
Magazine Covers Evaluated

1. Who paid for this piece of media? Why did they pay for it?

2. Who is being targeted? How do you know? (A target audience is the group that advertisers are hoping to capture as present and future consumers.)

3. Describe at least six messages or values this piece of media seems to be promoting.

4. What dominant techniques are used to get the attention of the target audience? (See Specific Tools for Analysis: Techniques of Persuasion).

5. Outline a possible formula that teen magazines may have used in constructing their covers.

6. Evaluate this piece of media in terms of positive/negative influences. Is it a healthy or unhealthy promotion? Briefly explain your conclusions.
Sodas R Us

To: Participant
From: Your Boss
Date: Today
Re: URGENT!
CC: Your Principal

Dear Participant,

Your principal owes us a favor so you have just been recruited as a marketing design director for our company. We have a meeting in 40 minutes with our new billion-dollar soda company. We have sent over a database of information about the target market for this new soda. We need you to design the new soda can to increase sales in this target market. Good luck and get busy!!

President of the Company
Station 4
Scavenger Hunt Key

1. What is the name of the web site? "Don't Spread that Hoax!"
2. What visitor number are you? Answers will vary with session.
3. Locate the "Urban Legends, Myths and Stories" section and find "The cookie story;" double click on the title. Read through the recipe and find out how many cups of blended oatmeal are needed. Five (5) cups of blended oatmeal.
5. Under the "Famous Hoaxes," locate "The kid who wants postcards before he dies." How old was the boy from England? Six (6) years old.
6. According to Margot Brown, spokeswoman for the Schaumburg-based Electronics Company, how many employees work for Motorola in the state of Illinois? 20,000 employees

Now press the back button to return to the Don't Spread that Hoax" web site and locate "Evil Companies & Products"

7. What is the name of the web site? Evil Capitalists
8. What is it about? Companies and supposedly publicly declares something extraordinarily controversial. Proctor & Gamble being run by the Church of Satan, Liz Claiborne donating its profits to the Church of Satan, and Tommy Hilfiger confessing racism on Oprah.
9. What is the phone number for the Proctor and Gamble? 1-800-331-3774

Now press the back button to return to the "Don't Spread that Hoax" web site and locate the "Recent Hoaxes."

10. What is the most recent hoax that has been posted? Answers will vary.
Station 2
Light Bulb Handout
Station 3
Sample "Favorite Soda" Spreadsheet

1. Use an X to indicate each participant's soda preference.
2. After tasting the disguised sodas, mark the number of the participant's favorite under Taste Test.
3. When all the groups have entered their data, unveil the sodas and mark an X in either the Correct or Incorrect box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Coca Cola</th>
<th>Pepsi</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Taste Test</th>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.D.</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clint</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Making Graphs

To make a graph of Favorite Sodas, use the mouse to highlight the first three boxes in the total line and the three soda titles (including the word Totals). From the Options menu, choose Make Chart and follow the directions.
Stations 1 and 2: Specific Tools for Analysis
Taken directly from the Media Literacy CD-ROM, New Mexico Media Literacy Project

**SYMBOLS**: are larger than reality, usually emotional, idea-conveyances; symbols can be words, designs, places, ideas, music, etc. They can symbolize tradition, nationalism, power, religion, sex or any emotional concept. The fundamental principle of persuasion is to rub the emotional content of one thing onto another. Thus, a beautiful woman can be used on TV to promote lust, romance, killing of police, or Snickers' nutrition.

**HYPERBOLE**: is exaggeration or "hype." Glittering generalities is a subset of hype that utilizes impressive language. Vague and meaningless, it leaves the target impressed emotionally and, therefore, more susceptible to the next sales pitch. For example, "The greatest automobile advance of the century..."

**DEFENSIVE NATIONALISM**: uses fear (usually of an enemy) although it can be a political opponent sickness or any threat. For example, calling statements "McCarthyism" or "communism" brings up fear of demagogues and dictatorship.

**SCAPEGOATING**: is a powerful subset of defensive nationalism that blames many problems upon one person, group, race, religion, etc.

**HUMOR**: is a powerful emotion. If you can make people laugh, you can persuade them.

**LIE (BIG)**: Most people want to believe what they see. Lies work, on cereals boxes, ads and on television "news." According to Hitler, people are more suspicious of a small lie than a large one.

**MAYBE**: Outrageous claims are fine, if preceded by "maybe, might, or could." Listen to the infomercials.

**TESTIMONIAL**: uses famous people or respected institutions to sell a person, idea or product. They need have nothing in common. A dangerous trend: We seem to be increasingly conditioned to accept illogic as fact.

**REPETITION**: drives the message home many times. Even unpleasant ads work. Chevy trucks are "like a Rock," and smoking Marlboro can make you tough and independent (Fact: it used to be a cigarette for girls.

**PLAIN FOLKS**: promotes oneself or one's products as being of humble origins, common -one of the gals/guys. It is very popular with advertisers and politicians. Unfortunately, plain folks reinforces anti-intellectualism (a common tendency of all electronic media), implying that to be "common" is good (an' hit ain't, dude, ya no?)

**NAME-CALLING** or **AD HOMINEM**: is frequent. It can be direct or delicately indirect. Audiences love it. Our violent, aggressive, sexual media teaches us from an early age to love to hear dirt. (Just tune in to afternoon talk TV). Name-calling is frequently combined with hype, truth, lies, etc. Remember, all is fair in love, war, political dirty tricks and advertising, and suing for libel is next to impossible!
DIVERSION: seems to tackle a problem or issue, but, then, throws in an emotional non sequitur or distraction. Straw man is a subset that builds up an illogical (or deliberately damaged) idea, which one presents as something that one's opposition supports or represents. Then one proceeds to attack this idea, reducing one's opponent.

NOSTALGIA: people forget the bad of the past. This is a nostalgic setting makes a product "better." Forrest Gump!

FUHRERPRINZIP: (first used in this manner by Josef Goebbels) means "leadership principle." Be firm, bold, strong; have dramatic confidence, frequently combined with plain folks. Many cultural icons emphasize the strong, yet plain, superhero (Clint Eastwood, Bruce Willis, Segal, Schwarzenegger...). Some think this role modeling leads to a great deal of male "aloneness," and, perhaps, less ability to cooperate.

FLATTERY: is telling or implying that your target(s) is something that makes them feel good or, often, what they want to be. And, I am sure that someone as brilliant as yourself will easily understand this technique.

Bribery: seems to give something desirable. We humans tend to be greedy. Buy a taco; get free fries.

DENIAL: Avoid attachment to unpopular things; can be direct or indirect. My favorite example of indirect denial was when Dukakis said, "Now I could use George Bush's Willie Horton tactics* and talk about a furloughed federal (the President's jurisdiction) prisoner who brutally raped a mother of five children, but I would not do that."

CARD STACKING: is to provide a false context, so that they give a false and/or misleading impression -telling only part of the story. Read the quotations from the critic's in any movie ad.

BANDWAGON: insists that "everyone is doing it." It plays upon the universal loneliness of humankind. In America with our incredible addiction to sports, it is often accompanied by the concept of winning. "Wear Marlboro 'gear'."

SIMPLE SOLUTIONS: avoid complexities (unless selling to intellectuals). Attach many problems to one solution.

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE: uses the paraphernalia of science (charts, etc.) for "proof" which, of course, often is bogus. A classic example is Chevy's truck commercial chart of vehicles on the road after then years.

GROUP DYNAMICS: replaces that "I" weakness with "we" strength. Concert, audiences, rallies, pep rallies.

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS: get the target "agreeing," saying "yes," building trust; then try to sell them.

TIMING: can be as simple as planning your sell for when your target is tired. In sophisticated propaganda it is the organization of multiple techniques in a pattern or "strategy" which increases the emotional impact of the sell.