

Media Literacy Activity Summaries

The Media Literacy Activities ask students to critically examine and analyze the multimedia projects of others, especially those they find in the real world around them. Frequently the media literacy activities complement production activities where students work on their own multimedia projects, as in the pair Audience Influence (media literacy) and Defining Your Audience (media production). The Media Literacy Activities are intended to help students develop their own high-quality multimedia projects and use them responsibly.

Audience Influence

By defining and then inventing an audience for a media product, students learn about the ways media products are shaped by their audience.

Choosing a Medium

In this activity, students compare the benefits and limitations of various media, and make informed decisions about which medium would be best suited to their project. Students produce mini-proposals to justify their choice of medium.

Looking at Interviews

By examining the conscious construction of an interview in this activity, students are better able to use interviews for the purposes of their project and critically evaluate the interviews they see in other forums.

Multimedia Representations

By looking critically at the ways organizations represent themselves in various multimedia products, students will better understand the ways media are used to shape audience impressions.

Powerful Images

By closely examining images and audience reactions, students hypothesize about how and why images can be powerful.

Responsible Internet Use

After exploring and discussing various ethical issues, students create a checklist for themselves (and others) to use when publishing on the Web.

Style and Purpose

Students examine three different styles of writing to gain a better understanding of how text is tailored to specific purposes. In so doing, students are better equipped to critically analyze the writing they encounter and tailor their own work to their own purposes.

1. Audience Influence

Activity Summary:

By defining and then inventing an audience for a media product, students learn about the ways media products are shaped by their audience.

Materials:

- Students need two or three media products to examine, (videos, web pages or HyperStudio products) ideally in the same medium as their next planned project.

What To Do:

1. In groups or individually, students examine the media product and try to decide who the intended audience is. They describe what they notice, looking carefully at the language used, the images used, where it is found, etc. Students create an "audience profile", describing who the product seems to be aimed at. This might include such factors as age, sex, education level, ethnic background.
2. Students should not remake or do a simple reinvention of a prior designed product. Students describe how the existing media product they are examining might be changed to suit this new audience.
3. Students discuss and try to identify which components are important to certain people and why these components make a difference. Students produce a written or oral description of how the product could differ depending on the audience, and include their speculations on which components could differ depending on the audience the product was designed for.

Notes to Teachers:

1. This activity can facilitate class discussion about which media products the students themselves find particularly appealing or unappealing. When students encounter a media product they just don't like, they can be encouraged to examine their reaction more closely, a useful exercise for both themselves and the teacher.
2. The Defining Your Audience activity asks students to define and answer questions about their own intended audience.

Variations:

Age Variations:

- Younger students: Small children are capable of seeing and understanding who the target audience is for a product, and worksheets can be made to help them more clearly see this fact.
- Older students: By designing a worksheet, followed up by group discussion, examine classification of various products and determine who or what is the group that an appeal is being made for.
- As an additional activity or as a homework project, students can keep a week-long "audience log" where they record various multimedia products they've encountered and the ways these products are targeted towards specific audiences or the ways the students themselves react to the products.

2. Choosing a Medium

Activity Summary:

In this activity, students compare the benefits and limitations of various media, and make informed decisions about which medium would be best suited to their project. Students produce mini-proposals to justify their choice of medium.

Materials:

- Students need access to research material, and ideally access to the medium they are researching.

What To Do:

1. As a class, students plan an upcoming "multimedia convention" where they will have a chance to identify the pros and cons of various media and choose one that best suits their needs. In groups or individually, students choose a particular medium (Video, HyperStudio, Web page, written report, audio presentation, etc.) to research and present to their classmates or potential "consumers" at the convention.
2. In researching their medium, students should consider:
 - a. the advantages
 - b. the limitations (what their medium can't do)
 - c. the cost and availability to students
 - d. the amount of special training required to effectively use the medium
 - e. what types of projects their medium might be especially well suited for.
3. After hearing and seeing the comparative findings of their classmates at the convention, students discuss the content and special requirements of their own project, and choose a medium for their project.
4. Students write a mini-proposal that justifies their choice of medium. It should include: how the medium fits the particular project, a list of advantages to the medium, a justification for any additional expenses, etc.
5. Consider having the students write a budget that will reflect the cost of the medium.
6. Have the students design a document or HTML web page for others to use in future class projects

Notes to Teachers:

The mini-proposals that students submit are good documents for assessment. Choosing an appropriate medium requires a good sense of the overall project and consideration of available time and resources. The proposal requires students to explain the reasoning behind their choices.

Variations:

Age Variations:

1. Younger students can identify which media appeal to them immediately and list reasons/factors which make these media so "instantly" appealing.
2. Older students can integrate the class findings into a spreadsheet format, based on real world formats, so they can compare all the media at a glance. Older students can examine how the medium and the content work together to draw the audience in, leave the audience wondering, etc.

3. Looking at Interviews

Activity Summary:

By examining the conscious construction of an interview in this activity, students are better able to use interviews for the purposes of their project and critically evaluate the interviews they see in other forums.

Materials:

1. A taped interview from a newscast, talk show, or "news magazine show".
2. TV and VCR.

What To Do:

1. Students view a segment of the interview several times, looking for the following components (and others as appropriate):
 - a. Editing. Was the interview cut and edited? How might that change the story for the audience? Did the interview show both the interviewer and interviewee? Who was shown more? Why?
 - b. Interviewing tactics. What types of questions did the interviewer ask? Was the interview planned or spontaneous? What was the "tone" of the interview? Did the interviewee seem to be "put on the spot"? What questions did the interviewer not ask? Where there questions that should have been asked but were overlooked?
 - c. Agenda. Was the interviewer trying to "get at something" or were they asking questions at random? Was the point of the interview to reveal a story? promote something? just have a conversation? How can you tell? Was there an obvious bias on the part of the interviewer? How could you tell?
 - d. Preparation. Was the interviewer familiar with the interviewee and the subject matter? Had the interviewer done research on the subject?
2. Students discuss the implications of their findings. What kind of influence does the interviewer and editor of an interview have over the effect of the overall interview and the way the interviewee gets represented? What are the ethical issues to consider when interviewing in general? when interviewing for student projects?
3. Students may produce a written description of the specific interview features they examined (guided by the questions listed above).

Variations:

Age Variations

1. Young students: The activity can be changed to focus on fewer components of the interview. Appropriate questions for younger students might include:
 - a. Is the interviewer asking questions in a cordially?
 - b. In what way could the questions be rephrased
 - c. How would you like to (and not like to) be interviewed?
2. Older students: An additional written reflection can follow the activity which asks students to synthesize the class findings, their own observations, and the class discussion into a more sophisticated analysis of the interview. Questions for students:
 - a. Is the interviewee being interviewed to find out facts or opinions or feelings? Why one (or more) of these and not the others?

- b. How is the person being interviewed an expert or authority on the subject. What qualifies them to be an expert? What/whom gives the interviewee authority on the subject they're talking about?
- c. How does the interview construct the identity of the interviewee in the minds of the audience?

Media Variations:

1. Video: This activity can be used when students are preparing to conduct and tape interviews.
2. HyperStudio, Web: This activity can be used if students are conducting interviews as part of their research. The activity can also be adapted for use with a written interview, to introduce students to the ways which interviews and verbatim quotes can also be manipulated and edited.

4. Multimedia Representations

Activity Summary:

Students will see how media can be used and manipulated to get a desired response. The students will also determine how to critically evaluate organizations through their multimedia presentation, rather than just accepting what is being stated blindly.

Materials:

- Students will need any media product created to represent an organization in some way:
 - magazine or newspaper ads,
 - TV commercials,
 - web pages,
 - CD ROMs,
 - organization brochures,
 - press releases, etc.

What To Do:

1. As a class, students discuss and explore the idea that media representations, especially ads and commercials, are carefully constructed.
2. Students choose a media representation which depicts or describes an organization (company, sports team, non-profit group, government agency, university, etc). In groups or individually, students examine the images, text, and/or sound of the representation and try to identify the rationale behind the choices that were made in its creation. Students can identify:
 - a. the key points the representation is trying to get across
 - b. the emotions that are depicted or the general "tone"
 - c. the types of people depicted
 - d. the visual layout or sequence
 - e. the icons or logos used and what they are meant to represent
 - f. where the representation was found
 - g. the probable target audience
 - h. what might not have been included when choosing how to represent the organization.
3. Students can discuss which elements seem especially convincing, eye-catching, and powerful, and explore the reasons why. Students can produce a written or oral report on their findings. The class might also compile the media products and their critiques of them into a class resource binder. When designing their own products later on, students could look through the binder for ideas on how to create desired effects using text, images, and/or sound.

Notes to Teachers:

Encourage students to do "hunts" on their own; the variety is almost endless and can be found most anywhere.

Variations:

Age Variations

1. Younger students can look for fewer elements and be given additional structure with a list of components to look for.
2. Older students can take the analysis a step further and look for evidence of implicit messages, cultural values, stereotypes, etc. They might also discuss or reflectively write about the various ethical issues involved in representing an organization to an unfamiliar audience, or representing oneself to strangers.

Media Variations:

1. Video: Students can do the analysis with video footage and concentrate especially on the effects of sequencing, editing, and special effects.
2. HyperStudio, Web: Students can analyze hypertext representations and look especially at layout, hypertext structure, use of images, etc.

3. Powerful Images

Activity Summary:

By closely examining images and audience reactions, students hypothesize about how and why images can be powerful.

Materials:

- Students need magazines (to cut up) or access to the Internet (to download images) and a printer to print the images. The assignment can be constrained to include only images which relate to the content of students' projects.

What To Do:

1. Students discuss/define the idea of a powerful image.
2. As individuals or in groups, students search for and gather images that strike them as powerful. Students select one image or a set of similar images. They discuss and write down ideas of why the image is particularly powerful. Questions for students:
 - a. What does the content of the image make me feel or think?
 - b. What does the composition make me feel or think?
 - c. Is there something powerful about the text that accompanies the image?
 - d. Is there a powerful combination of multiple images?
3. Students develop a hypothesis about why their image seems powerful to them and how other people are likely to react to the image. They may test their ideas by asking other people how they react to the image.
4. Students can produce an article about what they saw, as well as other feedback from other individuals. An image resource binder should be developed for future projects and assignments.

Notes to Teachers:

1. Give students a structure for sharing and collaboration by establishing an "Image Wish List" to post in the classroom. As projects take shape and particular images are needed, students can list what they need and keep an eye out for images their classmates might need.
2. Use appropriate time to work with those who have a multiplicity of images which can overwhelm the readers and cause "eye overload." Although images are needed, white space is needed for the final product that will be produced.

Variations:

Age Variations:

1. Younger students can collect and sort images according to size, content, emotion, color, etc. Using these categories, students can decide which types of pictures they find most appealing and would like to include in their own projects. Students can work on developing a definition of what makes a good image.
2. Older students can work on a more sophisticated analysis of their powerful image(s). They can examine differences in the ways images are used for advertising, journalistic, or other purposes. They can discuss the ethical and intellectual issues involved in borrowing an image, manipulating it, or using it in a different context.

Activity Variation:

As a variation, students can try to communicate an idea by creating a collage of images. After recording their interpretation of their collage, students then display their collage to the class or pass it to another group/individual to collect alternate interpretations of its meaning. Students can compare their original idea with the various interpretations of their audience and reflect on the ways and reasons that people interpret images differently.

Media Variation:

Students can examine images from the Web, HyperStudio products, or video frames or clips and do the same type of close analysis.

6. Responsible Internet Use

Activity Summary:

After exploring and discussing various ethical issues, students create a checklist for themselves (and others) to use when publishing on the Web.

Materials:

1. Access to the Internet.
2. Older students may need primary source materials, op-ed pieces on Internet use, etc.
3. The Getting Releases Activity provides more specific information and release forms to adapt.

What To Do:

1. In groups or as a class, students discuss the content that will be made available to a world-wide audience. Also needing to be discussed are fair, accurate, and understandable representations of the published documents.
2. Students list all the people represented by their Web publication (might include teacher, school district, community, country, etc.), and discuss the responsibilities of representing these groups. Protection of certain individuals needs to be discussed and a plan made to cover special provisions.
3. Students should also be made aware of making a copyright statement for their web pages.
4. The legal and ethical issues of plagiarism must be discussed. It is not permissible just to take images without asking permission. This includes information, images, ideas, and is just as unethical as doing it in a regular research project. The students need to decide what they will do with gaining permission to modify and adapt material from sources. The teacher will also input on what will be done if plagiarism is found to be evident on projects.
5. Following these discussions, students form groups and collaboratively develop a checklist of "Responsible Internet Use" questions that all web publishers should check over and ask themselves before their material is posted on the Internet. These questions should incorporate material from class discussions and serve as a guide for themselves and other students to remind them of their responsibilities as web publishers. The class may produce a master list for future use.

Variations:

Age Variations:

1. Younger students can search the Internet for a specified period of time and try to find the following:
 - a. Web pages from distant locations around the globe
 - b. Unfamiliar organization
 - c. a page in a different language
 - d. a page created by students their age
2. Students can use "show and tell" type formats showing what they have found on various web sites.
3. Older students can supplement their discussion on ethics by researching the legal aspects of Web publishing, borrowing materials, etc. As a complement to their discussions of

responsibilities, students can research and discuss the first amendment and examine their rights as Web publishers.

Media Variations:

The creation of a responsible use checklist can be useful for any medium.

7. Style and Purpose

Activity Summary:

Students examine different writing styles to see and understand how words can be used more effectively in gaining audience appeal. By critical analysis of outside work, the students in their groups will be able to effectively collaborate on what they themselves are capable of producing.

Materials:

1. This activity requires three newspaper articles which cover the same story or topic, but are written in three different styles, such as factual, human interest, editorial (found, for example, on the front page, the "life" section, and the opinions section, respectively).
2. If three articles on the same topic cannot be found, articles on different subjects that use different styles or perspectives will do.

What To Do:

1. Students discuss how even a relatively "objective" source such as the newspaper may include different writing styles and be written for different purposes (e.g. info, entertainment, persuasion).
2. Students read three different newspaper articles and focus on one for a closer examination. They should describe the style and purpose in general terms and can also:
 - a. Describe who the story seems to be written for.
 - b. Brainstorm about how the same story could have been told differently if the author had wanted to.
 - c. Describe how the article is different from the other two that the class has read.
 - d. Find another article in the newspaper with a similar perspective and explain how it is similar in style and purpose.
3. Students are responsible for educating their classmates on the style and purpose of their article. The class can be broken up jigsaw style to accomplish this or student groups can report back to the class as a whole.

Notes to Teachers:

- Depending on the size of the groups, cooperative learning will enable the students to work together in comparison and contrast by sharing their findings.

Variations:

Age Variations:

1. Younger students can discuss and think of examples of the ways that real life events are told differently depending on who the storyteller is, who the storyteller is telling, and why the story is being told. Students can think about a popular story (or a story they've read as a class) and describe how it might change if told by different characters.
2. Older students can try writing their next class assignment using one of the styles examined by the class and seeing how word usage contributes and forms ideas to the entire piece. Encourage students to experiment with different elements in their own work.

Media Variations:

1. This activity can be done with TV news clips, magazine articles, etc.

2. For a more subtle comparison of points of view, students can be assigned to write their version of a familiar story or incident and then explore the similarities and differences between their version and those of their classmates.