

Fire and the Media 1

Objectives

Student will understand how media messages are constructed.

Skills

- Student will demonstrate critical thinking about media messages and fire safety.
- Student will understand how media messages are constructed and will begin to ask the key question, “Who created this message?”

The media literacy lessons are based on the framework presented in the CML MediaLit Kit™, produced by the Center for Media Literacy. For additional information, visit www.medialit.org.

Introduction

Why focus on media? Media no longer just influence our culture. They *are* our culture. Providing students with critical thinking skills about media in general facilitates their use of those same skills in all aspects of their lives. To become media literate is not to memorize facts or statistics about the media, but rather to learn to raise the right questions about what you are watching, reading or listening to. Through the media literacy inquiry process, students can develop basic higher-order critical thinking skills such as knowing how to: identify key concepts, make connections between multiple ideas, ask pertinent questions, formulate a response and identify fallacies.

This first unit, along with Unit 6, guides students through the process of developing an understanding that all media messages are constructed. The media lessons focus specifically on the media's portrayal of fire. The final media lesson draws on the content covered in Units 2 - 5 of this curriculum: Fire Science, Fire Prevention, Survival Skills and Responsibility.

Vocabulary (detailed definitions provided in the *Teacher Notes*.)

Action

Camera Angles

Camera Person (Cinematographer)

Dialogue

Director

Editing

Editor

Image Framing

Lighting

Public Service Announcement (PSA)

Scene

Script

Shot

Sound Effects

Storyboard

Producer

A B C

WHO CREATED THIS MESSAGE?

Materials provided:

- *Media Vocabulary Handout*
- *Video Viewing Work Sheet*
- TV commercial video clip
- *The Patriot* video clip



Teacher preparation:

- Review video clips prior to class
- Copies of the *Video Viewing Work Sheet*

B C

- For Lessons B and C, repeat Lesson A, considering the depiction of fire in the media, with the following changes:
- Analyze a different video clip, either using one provided by the curriculum or one that is teacher-selected.
- Or...choose another medium, such as print. Examples of print are magazine and news paper ads and billboards.
- Or...music with fire content could be analyzed.
- Considerations for analyzing advertisements are found in the *Teacher Notes*.

a class discussion and analysis activity

Core Concept

All media messages are constructed.

Key Question

Who created this message?

Introduce students to the core concept and the key question.

Teacher-led discussion

Focus on the building blocks of media messages and that the media messages they experience every day are the result of tremendous effort by teams of people.

Explore the concept of editing: many ideas may be presented during a production, but the final outcome is a carefully constructed (and edited) message.

Use the following question to drive student learning:

- What are some examples of media?
(*film, television, books, video games, radio, billboards, magazines, newspapers, mass mailed flyers, e-mail, internet*)

Using film as the medium to be analyzed, ask students:

1. How many people does it take to make a Hollywood movie? (*hundreds*)
2. What are some of the types of people who work on a movie? (*director, producer, lighting director, camera person [cinematographer], writer, music composer, editor, actors, costumers, sound person, special effects staff, marketing staff, make-up artists, etc.*)
3. Discuss the roles these people have in making a movie.

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WHO CREATED THIS MESSAGE? (continued)

Production roles

Camera person /
cinematographer
Lighting director
Editor
Audio/music supervisor
Special effects coordinator

Small group activity

- Break the class into small groups.
- Distribute the *Video Viewing Work Sheet* to each student.
- Show one film clip.
- After viewing the video once, ask students to make notes on the work sheet about the clip they saw.
- Then assign each group member to a production role.
- Show the clip again and ask students to watch the clip from their “production perspective.”
- In small groups, students discuss what they observed from the different production aspects.
- As a class, have groups share production role observations.
- Ask students what it means to say that “All media messages are constructed.” Encourage them to identify examples from the film clip.

Teacher-led discussion

Discuss the portrayal of fire in the TV commercial and *The Patriot*. Questions to guide the discussion are found on page 4.

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Video Title
TV Commercial

Scene Description

This commercial features a famous basketball player running down the court with a flaming basketball, while the message is about a new hot sauce.

Discussion Notes:

- What is the advertiser's message?
- What does the ball of fire symbolize?
- Why would the advertiser want to use fire in this way?
- Do you think he actually played with a blazing ball? If not, how was the effect created?

Video Title
The Patriot, 2000
(Rated R)
Starring Mel Gibson,
Heath Ledger

Scene Description

After British soldiers set fire to Capt. Benjamin Martin's (Mel Gibson) house, Martin runs into the burning house, goes upstairs, picks up weapons, and then goes down the stairs and exits the house.

Scene contains no gratuitous violence or inappropriate language.

Discussion Notes:

- Compare smoke seen from the outside of the house to the amount of smoke inside when Martin goes into the burning building.
- Can Martin see clearly inside? Would you expect that he would be able to based on the level of smoke on the outside of the building?
- Does the structure seem sound? Compare the level of fire and smoke on the inside and outside of the building. Are they the same?
- The level of fire inside the house seems to be the same inside – both upstairs and downstairs. Could that be possible? Consider also the smoke on the outside of the building.
- Is it likely that ammunition stored in a box next to flames would not explode?
- How hot is it in the burning house?

TEACHER NOTES

WHAT IS MEDIA LITERACY?

Media Literacy is a 21st Century approach to education. It provides a framework to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms—from print to video to the Internet. Media literacy builds an understanding of the role of media in society as well as essential skills of inquiry and self-expression necessary for citizens of a democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Today's multimedia culture provides a nearly limitless resource for real world learning—from how to identify “point of view” by exploring how camera angles influence our perception of the subject being photographed to how to determine whether information on an Internet site is bogus or legitimate. Although mediated messages appear to be self-evident, in truth, they use a complex audio/visual “language” which has its own rules (grammar) and which can be used to express many-layered concepts and ideas about the world.

Whether we are watching the nightly news or passing a billboard on the street, the media message we experience was written by someone (or probably several people), pictures were taken and a creative designer put it all together. But this is more than a physical process. What happens is that whatever is “constructed” by just a few people becomes “normal” for the rest of us; like the air we breathe, it usually goes unquestioned. But as the audience, we don't get to see or hear the words, pictures or arrangements that were rejected. We only see, hear or read what was accepted. Helping people understand how media are put together—and what was left out—as well as how the media shape what we know and understand about the world we live in is a critical first step in helping them navigate their lives through a global and technological society.

THERE ARE FIVE CORE CONCEPTS AND FIVE KEY QUESTIONS TO MEDIA LITERACY.

Core Concept	Key Question
1 All media messages are constructed.	Who created this message?
2 Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.	What techniques are used to attract my attention?
3 Different people experience the same media message differently.	How might other people understand this message differently than I do?
4 Media have embedded values and points of view.	What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented or omitted in this message?
5 Media are organized to gain profit or power.	Why was this message sent?

UNITS 1 AND 6 IN THIS CURRICULUM ARE BUILT ON THE FIRST OF THE FIVE CORE CONCEPTS AND KEY QUESTIONS:

ALL MEDIA MESSAGES ARE CONSTRUCTED (Core Concept 1)

WHO CREATED THIS MESSAGE? (Key Question 1)



PROCESS SKILLS

The media literacy process combines both analytical (deconstruction) skills and creative communications (construction/production) skills. While both activities can happen independently, when theory unites with application, students can discover and express their learning in an interconnected and natural process. The media literacy process teaches and strengthens many different skills which can be summarized under four specific skills 1) Access, 2) Analyze, 3) Evaluate, and 4) Create.

1) ACCESS

When people *access* messages, they are able to collect relevant and useful information and comprehend its meaning effectively. They can:

- Read print as well as multimedia messages with high levels of comprehension.
- Recognize and understand a rich vocabulary of words, symbols and techniques of communication.
- Develop strategies for locating information from a wide variety of sources.
- Select an assortment of types of information relevant to the purpose of a task.

2) ANALYZE

When people *analyze* messages, they are able to examine the design of the message's form, structure and sequence. They can make use of artistic, literary, social, political and economic concepts to understand the context in which the message occurs. For example,

- Use prior knowledge and experiences to predict outcomes.
- Interpret a message using concepts such as purpose, audience, point of view, format, genre, character, plot, theme, mood, setting, context.
- Use strategies including compare/contrast, fact/opinion, cause/effect, listing and sequencing.
- Use knowledge about the historical, political, economic and social contexts in which messages are created and interpreted.

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 **TEACHER NOTES**

3) EVALUATE

When people *evaluate* messages, they are able to relate messages to their own experience and make judgments about the veracity, quality and relevance of messages. This includes being able to:

- Appreciate and take pleasure in interpreting messages in different genres and forms.
- Respond in print and orally to messages of varying complexity and content.
- Evaluate the quality of a message based on its content and form.
- Judge the value of a message based on one's ethical, religious or democratic principles.

4) CREATE

When people *create* (or communicate) messages, they are able to “write” their ideas, using words, sounds and/or images effectively for a variety of purposes, and they are able to make use of various technologies of communication to create, edit and disseminate their message.

- Make use of brainstorming, planning, composing and revising processes.
- Use writing and oral language effectively with mastery of rules of language usage.
- Create and select images effectively to achieve various goals.
- Use technologies of communication in the construction of messages.

Note: The following article is reprinted from The Center for Media Literacy's Web site. The suggested considerations cover many topics. Use them as a guide to develop fire-specific questions for your lessons.

How to analyze an advertisement

Finding ads' hidden messages

There's more to advertising's message than meets the casual eye. An effective ad, like other forms of communication, works best when it strikes a chord in the needs and desires of the receiving consumer — a connection that can be both intuitive and highly calculated. The following questions can help foster an awareness of this process. Use them for class or group discussions or your own individual analysis of ads or commercials. You may be surprised by the messages and meanings you uncover.

- 1 What is the general ambience of the advertisement? What mood does it create? How does it do this?
- 2 What is the design of the advertisement? Does it use axial balance or some other form? How are the basic components or elements arranged?
- 3 What is the relationship between pictorial elements and written material and what does this tell us?
- 4 What is the use of space in the advertisement? Is there a lot of "white space" or is it full of graphic and written elements?
- 5 What signs and symbols do we find? What role do they play in the ad's impact?
- 6 If there are figures (men, women, children, animals) what are they like? What can be said about their facial expressions, poses, hairstyle, age, sex, hair color, ethnicity, education, occupation, relationships (of one to the other)?
- 7 What does the background tell us? Where is the advertisement taking place and what significance does this background have?

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- 8 What action is taking place in the advertisement and what significance does it have? (This might be described as the ad's "plot.")
- 9 What theme or themes do we find in the advertisement? What is it about? (The plot of an advertisement may involve a man and a woman drinking but the theme might be jealousy, faithlessness, ambition, passion, etc.)
- 10 What about the language used? Does it essentially provide information or does it try to generate some kind of emotional response? Or both? What techniques are used by the copywriter: humor, alliteration, definitions of life, comparisons, sexual innuendo, and so on?
- 11 What typefaces are used and what impressions do they convey?
- 12 What is the item being advertised and what role does it play in American culture and society?
- 13 What about aesthetic decisions? If the advertisement is a photograph, what kind of a shot is it? What significance do long shots, medium shots, close-up shots have? What about the lighting, use of color, angle of the shot?
- 14 What sociological, political, economic or cultural attitudes are indirectly reflected in the advertisement? An advertisement may be about a pair of blue jeans but it might, indirectly, reflect such matters as sexism, alienation, stereotyped thinking, conformism, generational conflict, loneliness, elitism, and so on.

MEDIA VOCABULARY HANDOUT

These definitions refer to film and television specifically, but are also applicable to other media.

Action - activity that happens within the script and in front of the camera

Camera angles - various positions of the camera with respect to the subject, each giving a different viewpoint or effect: a *low angle* camera looks up making the subject appear large, powerful, threatening; a *high angle* camera looks down making the subject appear small, weak, inferior, *camera positioned at eye-level* makes the subject appear equal

Camera person (cinematographer) - person who runs the motion-picture camera

Dialogue - language exchanged between one or more actors

Director - person who supervises the actors and directs the action in the production

Editing - the act of putting together shots, audio and effects in order to tell the story

Editor - person who puts shots together into scenes and, in turn, scenes into the movie

Image framing - the visuals contained in the camera lens that will be captured on film: a *Wide shot* captures landscapes, people in their entirety; a *Medium shot* shows representative portions of the whole such as a person from the chest up; a *Close-up shot* shows detail, often reflects emotion or intimacy

Lighting - use of real and artificial light to illuminate the subject matter

Producer - person in charge of the coordination of all details pertaining to the production

Public Service Announcement (PSA) - an advertisement presented to the viewing public for the purpose of informing or educating them

Scene - multiple shots edited together in a sequence, which take place in a specific period in time (e.g. dusk) and in the same setting (e.g. interior, hotel room)

Script - written plan for a production including story, dialogue, direction, sound effects, special effects and notes on action

Shot - an individual, unedited film segment

Sound effects - additional sounds (either real or artificial) added to film for the purpose of enhancing dramatic impact

Storyboard - rough sketches illustrating individual shots that make up the scenes of a production, including dialogue, sound effects, and action

Writer - person who writes the script

VIDEO VIEWING WORK SHEET

Watch a video clip once through without writing anything down.
Then watch a second time and make notes about the questions below.

Exploring Key Question #1: Who Created this Message?

Question	Notes
1. Who is telling the story? Who created the story?	
2. How many people did it take to create this message?	
3. What are their various jobs?	
4. Which technologies are used in its creation?	
5. What are the various elements (building blocks) that make up the whole video clip?	
6. What is the message about fire?	

