

Messaging, Media and Substance Use

Making Informed Decisions

GRADES 9–10

60–75 MINUTES

Lesson Overview

This lesson explores how messaging and media influence people's choices and beliefs about substance use. Students review and discuss examples of messaging and media related to substance use. Through discussion and reflection, they examine how messaging may be directed toward historically underrepresented groups and targeted toward young adults. The lesson emphasizes critical thinking and responsible decision-making.

Essential Questions

- How do I critically review media and messages from social media, direct marketing and entertainment?
- How do media and messaging influence my choices about using substances and my beliefs about people who use substances?

Student Learning Goals

- I understand the strategies used by the media to influence people's actions and beliefs.
- I can use the media responsibly as a tool to stay informed.
- I can identify relevant information from credible sources.

Related Standards

Health Standards

HS.SUB.3 Access valid and reliable health information on short- and long-term effects of substance use from print and electronic materials that are available from credible health organizations.

HS.SUB.7 Analyze reasons why individuals use or do not use alcohol, marijuana/cannabis, tobacco, and other drugs, including the influence of family, peer, school, community, culture, and social norms on personal values, beliefs, and behaviors.

HS.SUB.12 Access and analyze the validity of information related to alcohol, marijuana/cannabis, tobacco, and other drug use, misuse, and abuse prevention.

Transformative SEL Standards

Standard 4: Relationship Skills & Collaborative Problem-Solving Establish and maintain healthy, supportive relationships and effectively navigate diverse settings in order to collaboratively solve problems.

Standard 5: Responsible Decision-Making & Curiosity Demonstrate curiosity and analysis of oneself and society in order to make caring choices that impact personal, social, and collective well-being across situations and environments.

Lesson Materials

- Slide deck
- Facilitator notes
- Board, screen or chart paper
- [CRAAP test](#) (Meriam Library, California State University)
- CRAAP test handout
- Media examples (use samples provided or identify new samples)
 - [420MEDIA Takes Cannabis Education to Primetime TV!](#) video
 - [JUUL Flavor Review](#) video
 - [Flintstones brought to you by Winston Cigarettes](#) video

Lesson Plan

Preparation

Determine if the messaging and media examples align with the class context and students' backgrounds. Select the most relevant examples or locate new examples that are better aligned. Consider if the examples

- illustrate biases or messages that your students are grappling with;
- represent decisions that are relevant to your school, with your families or with your community; and
- spark the curiosity your students need to engage fully in the lesson.

This lesson allows students to collaborate with their peers on important issues. Establish norms and expectations to support students safely engaging in these conversations. Before the lesson, revisit the norms and expectations to ground the conversation and ensure a safe space for all students, including a reminder about confidentiality. You may also want to remind students to share only their own information and that they are not required to share anything if they do not want to.

Print out the CRAAP test handout to use for Activity 5.

Depending on your context, this lesson may take 60–75 minutes and can be divided into multiple lessons.

Learning Sequence

Share the essential questions and learning goals with students. Remind students there is no singular correct answer.

Activity 1: Activating Schema: Think/Pair/Share | 10 Minutes

The lesson connects students with their decision-making process. In this warm-up, students explore the information they use to inform their decisions and consider the reliability and validity of that information.

1. Set the scene. Inform students that they are making an important decision. They need to decide whether or not to try a new energy drink (Slide 4). Ask students to think about this decision and brainstorm how they would find information to inform their decision. For example, they might ask a friend or look at the ingredients.
2. Ask students to share their lists with their partners (Slide 5).
3. Ask students to rank their source lists—with one being the most reliable and working their way down.
4. Have students share some of their reliable and unreliable sources. Write them down on the board, screen or chart paper. Expect overlap between reliable and unreliable sources. Acknowledge the overlap, but avoid validating a source being on either list.
5. Share Slide 6. Let students know that there are reliable, credible sources that they can go to when they have questions related to health, especially substance use. If there is an overlap with some ideas students generate, point them out. If not, ask students why these sources may be good places to find information. Highlight the following examples of credible resources with class:
 - The [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) provides science-based information about drug use, addiction and prevention.
 - The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) offers reliable information on public health issues, including substance use, mental health and prevention.
 - The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) provides information on substance use treatment, prevention and mental health services.
 - The [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) provides research-based information on alcohol use, risks and treatment options.
 - The [Truth Initiative](#) focuses on tobacco prevention and educating youth about the risks of smoking and vaping.
6. Ask students to return to their partners and discuss the following questions (Slide 7):
 - Why do you need to know where your information comes from?
 - How can inaccurate information on substance use be harmful?
7. Ask some students to share with the entire class.

Activity 2: Ask Why It Matters | 5 Minutes

Transition students from the hypothetical energy drink example toward looking at substance use. Provide time for students to process the portrayal of substance use in media and consider how it impacts decision-making.

1. Share the following quotes (Slide 8).

- “Drugs are present in nearly half of all music videos, including alcohol (35%), tobacco (10%) and illicit drugs (13%).”¹
- “More than 1/3 of all drinking scenes on television shows are humorous, while less than 1/4 of drinking scenes show any negative consequences.”²
- “A total of 73 studies, which covered 15,905,182 substance-related posts on Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok and Weibo, were identified. A total of 76.3% of all substance-related content was positive in its depiction of substance use, with 20.2% of content depicting use negatively. Sentiment regarding opiate use however was commonly negative (55.5%).”³

2. Have students pair and reflect on the following questions (Slide 9):

- How might seeing substance use in media influence someone’s choices or beliefs about drugs and alcohol?
- What other factors—like family, friends or cultural messages—might affect how people interpret these media messages?

3. Capture students’ ideas by walking around as the students talk. Take a moment to summarize what you heard students say without identifying individual students or partners.

Activity 3: Build Background Knowledge | 10 Minutes

Provide time for students to uncover why substance use is positively portrayed while those with substance use disorders are rarely portrayed positively.

1. Give students about 1 minute to brainstorm fictional characters (books, movies or television shows) who have or had substance use disorders and are positively portrayed (Slide 10). Define that positive means characters that are not selfish, able to recover and not associated with criminal behavior.

2. Pause and ask the following questions:

- How difficult was this task?
- Is it easier to brainstorm characters that are negatively portrayed?
- How does the negative portrayal impact how people think about substance use disorders?

¹ Quoted from <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/blog/entertainments-influence-on-addiction>. Original source: Gruber, E.L., Thau, H.M., Hill, D.L., Fisher, D.A., & Grube, J.W. (2005). Alcohol, tobacco and illicit substances in music videos: a content analysis of prevalence and genre. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 37(1), 81–83

² Quoted from <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/blog/entertainments-influence-on-addiction>. Original source: Greenberg, B.S., Rosaen, S.F., Worrell, T.R., Salmon, C.T., & Volkman, J.E. (2009). A portrait of food and drink in commercial TV series. *Health Communication*, 24(4), 295–303.

³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10087142/>

Activity 4: Develop Media Literacy | 10 Minutes

1. Share the definition of media literacy (Slide 11) and provide time for students to consider why it is important to be able to navigate media relating to substance use. Review the meaning of each verb: access, analyze, evaluate, create and act.

Definitions according to Merriam-Webster:

- **Access:** To make use of
To obtain or retrieve information, resources or data.; it involves finding, reaching or gaining entry to something (such as a source or a piece of information)
- **Analyze:** To study or determine the nature and relationship of the parts of something by analysis
To examine something in detail by breaking it down into parts to understand it better, identify patterns or draw conclusions; it often involves looking critically at data or information
- **Evaluate:** To determine or fix the value of
To assess or judge the value, quality, or significance of something based on criteria or standards; it involves forming an opinion after considering evidence or factors
- **Create:** To bring into existence
To bring something into existence or design something new, whether it's an object, idea, piece of art or solution; it involves original thought or making something that didn't exist before
- **Act:** To do something for a particular purpose or to deal with a situation
To take action or do something in response to a situation, often involving a decision or behavior that leads to a specific outcome; it can also mean performing or behaving in a certain way

2. Ask students to pair and discuss the following questions (Slide 12):
 - How does engaging in social media benefit you? What are the risks?
 - What are the benefits and risks in entertainment (music, TV, movies, commercials, etc.)?
 - What misleading information or misinformation do they provide about substance use?
 - What are other sources of misleading information or misinformation about substance use?
3. Take a few minutes to debrief with the class.
4. Share the steps to be a savvy media consumer and discuss each step (Slide 13). Review each step, sharing definitions for key terms and explaining why each step is important.
 - Look at the message source.
 - Look at how the message gets your attention.
 - Look at the message itself.
 - Consider how the message can be interpreted.

Activity 5: Practice Being Savvy | 20 Minutes

Provide an opportunity for students to practice using a resource to review media.

1. Introduce the CRAAP test (Slide 14). Explain that it is a method and provide a list of questions to evaluate the nature and value of the information you find. Read through the components of the CRAAP test on the slides.
2. Provide key term definitions (Slide 14).
3. Ask students what they are familiar with. What is new?
4. Model using the CRAAP test and steps of being a savvy media consumer with the first video (420MEDIA Takes Cannabis Education to Primetime TV!: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uRu3R9MUPA>) on Slide 15 (or substitute your example).
5. Review the first minute of the next video (JUUL Flavor Review: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dm_pZxzH3ys) on Slide 16 (or substitute your example). Complete the CRAAP test together. Instruct students to use their handouts to fill out their answers as they complete the test as a whole group.
 - Watch the introduction of the video (0:00 – 1:00), then complete the CRAAP test. If needed, also review how to be a savvy consumer.
 - Prompt students to respond to each consideration and share why they are reaching their conclusions.
6. Have students watch a third video (Flintstones brought to you by Winston Cigarettes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LW0m5Gym4ys>) on Slide 17 (or substitute your example) in pairs or triads. Instruct the student groups to fill out a handout for video 3 as they review it.
7. After students complete their small group review, have each group share how the process worked for them and what decision they made. If some assessments are far apart, take a moment to allow students to share why they came to different conclusions. Recognize it isn't a matter of right and wrong, but consider what each group paid attention to. Acknowledge that students may have different assessments based on their experience and background knowledge. Possible reflection questions to use (Slide 18):
 - What factors influenced your group's decision to answer the CRAAP test questions? What stood out to you the most during your review?
 - Did your group members initially agree, or did you have different perspectives? How did your background knowledge or personal experiences impact how you interpreted the information?
 - After hearing other groups' perspectives, would you change or adjust any part of your decision? Why or why not?
8. Ask students to reflect and look forward (slide 19). Use the following prompts to guide reflective journaling or small-group discussions:

- What role do you play in shaping societal attitudes toward substance use?
- What changes would you advocate for in future drug policies or education?

Activity 6: Wrap-up | 5 Minutes

1. Review the key ideas (Slide 20).
2. Provide students the opportunity to complete exit tickets and collect them.

Formative Assessment Opportunities

Listen for students noticing different aspects of media and making connections between personal experiences and being a savvy media consumer.

Exit ticket

- What are at least two media strategies that influence people's actions?
- Name at least two things you should review to determine if a source is credible.
- Rate your ability to use media responsibly to make decisions.
 - 1 – I use media responsibly to make decisions.
 - 3 – Sometimes I use media responsibly to make decisions.
 - 5 – I don't use media responsibly to make decisions.

Additional Resources

- [Addressing Stigma and Bias Across Care Settings](#): A 75-minute presentation from Care Oregon that focuses on the role of stigma in youth with substance use disorders and the intersection of stigma with historically marginalized communities.
- [Common Sense Education](#): The website provides a K–12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum. It was designed and developed in partnership with Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and guided by research with thousands of educators. Each digital citizenship lesson takes on real challenges and digital dilemmas that students face today, giving them the skills they need to succeed as digital learners, leaders, and citizens tomorrow.