

Media Literacy

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What is Media Literacy?

Media literacy is the ability to critically analyze and interpret the messages that we come across every day in the media. Spotting and decoding these messages is an important skill for youth to possess in this consumer society where advertisements and hidden messages permeate. As our world becomes more media-saturated, the definition of literacy is expanded. Literacy is not just about being able to read and write print, but about being able to access, deconstruct, and communicate messages in a variety of media. According to Jane Tallim, the Director of the Media Awareness Network, media literacy is “about asking pertinent questions about what’s there, and noticing what’s not there. And it’s the instinct to question what lies behind media productions—the motives, the money, the values and the ownership— and to be aware of how these



factors influence content” (“Media Literacy”).

Chris Worsnop of Wright Communications in Toronto asserts that media literacy is the expected outcome of media education and media study. Media education refers to the broad learning that takes place in a media-oriented classroom in any subject, such as English or Geography, while media study involves a session or sessions focusing specifically on the study of the media (“Media Literacy”).

Media Messages

Media education and media study raise awareness about the types of techniques that producers of media employ to persuade consumers. Such techniques include **technical codes**, in which camera techniques, framing, lighting, exposure, and juxtaposition are carefully planned in order to convey certain meanings. In **symbolic codes**, meaning is manipulated by things like colours, clothing, object, settings, and body language. **Written codes** refer to language style, captions, and headlines, and are also used to convey

meaning (Abdullah). For example, words like "amazing", "improved", and "save", are especially effective in advertising.

It is a goal of media education and media studies to educate youth about the biases and stereotypes that are created and reinforced in the media. Advertisements often rely on stereotypes to get messages across in the shortest amount of time. For instance, when we see a man wearing a white lab coat and stethoscope, we may assume he is a doctor. Portraying a teenage girl with big glasses and out-of-fashion clothes is a quick way for advertisers to tell us that she is smart and nerdy (Graydon 37). A media literate teenager should be able to deconstruct the ways that the media portray these untrue stereotypes and the reasons for which they do it.

Reality is often altered in media by editing and using certain codes that the audience can identify with, but are still presented as reality (Abdullah). For example, in many magazines, photographs of models are airbrushed in order to make them look extraordinarily slim and beautiful. Often interviews are altered to include select

words to change the meaning of a phrase, so it appears that the person said something that he or she didn't say. It is the goal of Media Literacy Education to make people aware of such alterations.

Works Cited

- Abdullah, Mardziah Hayati. "Media Literacy." *ERIC Digest* D152 (2000).
- Graydon, Shari. *Made You Look: How Advertising Works and Why You Should Know*. Toronto: Annick Press, 2003.
- "Media Literacy - Overview." *Media Awareness Network*. 2005. <<http://www.media-awareness.ca>>.



Resources for Media Literacy

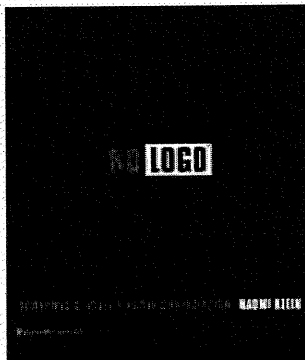
Education

Books:

Graydon, Shari. *Made You Look: How Advertising Works and Why You Should Know*. Toronto: Annick Press, 2003.

This book aimed at the 8-14 age range, is an interesting and engaging look at advertising and consumer culture. Cartoon illustrations and side bars with quick facts, are dispersed throughout the text. The book ranges in topics from language that advertisers use to make their products more appealing to what young adults can do to make a difference in advertising practices, always giving relevant and interesting examples.

Klein, Naomi. *No Space, no Choice, no Job, no Logo: Taking Aim at Brand Name Bullies*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000.



This notable work discusses how corporate branding influences our lives, and will be of interest to older teens and adults. Klein's exposé of corporate dominance shows the negative impact of a culture of increasing

consumerism and globalization. Of particular interest to educators and teens is Klein's discussion of branding in schools.

Lasn, Kalle. *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of*



America. New York: Quill Inc., 2000.

The founder of Adbusters Magazine wrote this book about the branding of America, and suggests ways in which people can resist the media messages through culture jamming. Recommended for older teens and up.

Ontario Association for Media Literacy.
Media Literacy Resource Guide.
Harcourt Brace Canada, 1989.

This guide for educators includes lesson plans and ideas for student activities, serving as a resource for introducing teens to media literacy.

Quart, Alissa. *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*. Cambridge, Mass: Perseus Publication, 2003.

Quart provides background information on and insights into, the strategies that marketers use on teens and the effects that these can have.

Worsnop, Chris M. *Assessing Media Work: Authentic Assessment in Media Education*. Mississauga: Wright Communications, 1997.

Aimed at educators, this resource discusses the value of media literacy education and provides a framework to assess the value of media education.

Worsnop, Chris M. *Screening Images: Ideas for Media Education*. Mississauga: Wright Communications, 1999.

Suitable for teens and adults, this book suggests approaches to media education, and suggests ideas for projects about, and the promotion of, media literacy.

Video:

Frontline: Merchants of Cool. WGBH Educational Foundation, 1999.

This PBS documentary is an excellent examination of the tactics, techniques, and consequences, of the creators and sellers of popular culture to teens. This video can be purchased on DVD and video, and can also be seen via the PBS website at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/>.

Scanning Television. Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Co., 2003.

This series consists of over 50 video clips and documentary films concerning issues related to media literacy for teenagers. Themes and key issues are explored, such as the construction of media, representation in the media, the global impact of the media, and selling images and values.

Websites:

Media Awareness Network. <http://www.media-awareness.ca/>

The Media Awareness Network (MNet) is a Canadian non-profit organization formed in 1998 for the development of media literacy programs. MNet provides a comprehensive collection of media education and Internet literacy resources, with over 300 lesson plans for educators, professional development resources for librarians and teachers, information for parents, and a database on reports, research, and articles about media literacy issues.

Media Education Foundation. <http://www.mediaed.org/>

The Media Education Foundation is a non-profit organization that produces and distributes a range of educational videos concerning a variety of media literacy issues. Their website also hosts several study guides focusing on various videos, designed for teachers and educators.

