

Lundstrom, Meg. "Media-Savvy Kids." Instructor 114.4 (2004): 16-61.

This article explores the possibilities of media literacy to enhance our students' critical thinking skills. According to the author, because children are spending so much time immersed in media—videogames, television, internet, magazines, etc—we must teach them the tools necessary to “deal” with this information that it presented to them. The real danger in children spending so much time with these forms of media is that they often take all messages as truth. Lundstrom suggests that we must teach them to be critical thinkers so that they do not believe *everything* that is presented to them. The article suggests five questions that we must teach our students to ask whenever they encounter any form of media. The questions are: 1. Who created this message? 2. What creative techniques are used to get my attention? 3. How might different people interpret this message? 4. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are in this message? What was left out and why? 5. Why is this message being sent? As students become better able to answer these questions, they will become better researchers and better viewers of media. Furthermore, this author suggests that media literacy helps students to understand the importance of perspective and how it affects our understanding. I found this article to be very helpful because it gives some very practical reasons that our students *need* to have media literacy taught in the classroom. If for no other reason but that it helps them to become better critical thinkers, media literacy should absolutely be taught in an English classroom. I feel, after reading this article, that media literacy is essential and should actually be taught in *every* classroom.

Williams, Bronwyn T. "Action Heroes and Literate Sidekicks: Literacy and Identity in Popular Culture." Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy 50.8 (2007): 680-5.

One major difference that I noticed between this article and the others is that this article explicitly says that teens *do not* automatically accept whatever is presented to them in the media. The main focus of this article is exploring examples of literacy in media. That is, examining times when characters in media utilize literacy or demonstrate that they are literate. He suggests that through careful examination, we can begin to understand and create an identity for literacy. After analyzing several examples from TV and movies, the author concludes that action heroes are always very literate; however, because their masculine, action-based characteristics are most significant to the plot, they often have a side-kick who is less masculine, more bookish and extremely literate. As I was reading the article, I was becoming very concerned about the message that teaching this type of media literacy would send to our students, especially to our male students. In general, it seems that males are less likely to be “big readers” and less likely to be excited about school literacy. In my opinion, the *last* message that we should portray to these adolescent boys is that literacy is feminine and not cool enough for the action hero. However, my concerns were reconciled at the end of the article when the author commented that life is not always like the movies (and that’s a good thing). This caused my thoughts to reflect back to the beginning of the article and realize his perspective. Though the movies suggest these stereotypes and identities about literacy, teens, luckily, do not automatically accept what is presented to them. Therefore, perhaps by exploring these identities of literacy in class, they will be able to form their own conclusions and not blindly accept the non-masculine, less-essential nature of literacy that is sometimes portrayed in the media.

Jonathan Ostenson 4/14/09 8:45 PM

Comment [7]: Better critique—still I would suggest adding in more about how this article might help combat those who would argue against the need to teaching this in English classes (such as how these critical thinking skills might transfer to other kinds of thinking).

Jonathan Ostenson 4/14/09 8:47 PM

Comment [8]: EXCELLENT critique—I love this detail and the way you explore your own reactions to the ideas from the article.

Reflection

After reading these articles, I feel that I have a better understanding of what media literacy is and the reasons we should teach it. Three of the four articles stressed the need to teach media literacy so that students will learn to decipher between reliable and unreliable texts that are presented to them on the screen. The first article approaches media literacy from a strictly internet perspective. It emphasizes that students need to be taught media literacy so that they will be capable of maneuvering their way throughout the internet—especially for research purposes. The second article discusses the influences, both subtle and direct, that modern media (specifically television and movies) has on its audience. The author of the second article encourages teachers to facilitate a Socratic dialogue among their students. Allow them to discuss what is positive and what is negative, how it affects them, and the message that it sends. I think that my favorite article is the third one, *Media-Savvy Kids*. I really like this one because it provides an example objective that we should have for our students as we are teaching them media literacy. She lists five questions that students should ask themselves, and hopefully be able to answer, as they encounter different types of media. At one point, she suggests that by teaching students to question media messages and not automatically accept them, benefits will extend into the future. She even provides the example that if students learn in their early years to be critical of media, they will be more critical in the future—even as it extends to tobacco and alcohol ads. In my opinion, there are a plethora of reasons that we should teach media literacy, but this one in itself should be motivation enough—to help teens withstand (or at least question) negative media influences in the future. I like the fourth article because it provides somewhat of an alternate view of the issues at hand. It does not really contradict anything said in the other articles, but it does provide quite a different approach. In this article, the author focuses on the portrayal of literacy through media. One comment that really stands out to me is his suggestion that teens do not automatically accept whatever is presented to them on the screen. The other three articles seem to have a different opinion (expressed either blatantly or indirectly). One of the main reasons to teach media literacy, as suggested by other articles, is to *teach* students not to blindly accept what is presented on the screen. This necessity to teach teens suggests that they may not yet have a full mastery of the concept. I think it is possible that some teens accept media without much question and that other teens are more critical. It is also possible that these articles are referring to different age groups—or different ends of the “teen spectrum.” Regardless, I feel that it is our responsibility as teachers, at least to some extent, to include some type of media literacy instruction in our classroom. I think for 7th grade, the most important aspect of teaching media literacy would simply be exposure. This is probably one of the first exposures they will have to media literacy in the school setting, and teachers should be careful not to overwhelm them. Aside from basic exposure, I think the most important skill for them to learn in 7th grade is to decipher the reliability of texts for their research papers. I look forward to learning more about this field of media literacy and to incorporating it into my classroom next year.

Jonathan Ostenson 4/14/09 8:47 PM

Comment [9]: Good connection

Jonathan Ostenson 4/14/09 8:51 PM

Comment [10]: I'd combine these sentences—this transition is a bit awkward (maybe use “by allowing them” to bridge the two).

Jonathan Ostenson 4/14/09 8:47 PM

Comment [11]: Do any of the other articles suggest similar things?

Jonathan Ostenson 4/14/09 8:48 PM

Comment [12]: Good engagement in the discourse between the articles and their ideas.

Jonathan Ostenson 4/14/09 8:49 PM

Comment [13]: I think there's still a lot of debate about this—whether or not violence on the screen encourages violence in behavior is a popular question that is constantly debated in social science circles. The jury's still out as to whether there's a direct correlation, but I think you make a compelling case here for media literacy regardless.

Jonathan Ostenson 4/14/09 8:49 PM

Comment [14]: Good point—there's still lots of time for kids to continue to explore these issues.