

Media Literacy

(90-120 minutes + assignments)



“He said that politics had become theater and magic, basically, that it was the manipulation of imagery through the mass media that was confusing and hypnotizing the people in the United States, making them accept a war which they really didn’t believe in.”

-Allen Ginsberg on Abbie Hoffman



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(90-120 minutes + assignments)

Objectives: Students will

- analyze and critically view film as text
- discuss in groups and as a class
- exercise collaborative group skills
- practice media literacy analysis
- develop own media products

Skills: Stating and supporting opinions in class discussion and in writing with evidence, critical reading and viewing, note taking, speaking and oral presentation skills

Materials: Media survey, Discussion Guide for Chicago 10 board/overhead, chart paper, CHICAGO 10 Video Modules or full film

This lesson provides students with an opportunity to critically view and analyze media: how images are constructed. Students will hear from the filmmaker himself about his intention behind the film and be able to look at whether or not he was able to achieve his goals. Students will also practice their speaking and presentation skills.

Procedures

1. Have students make their own list of five types of media they regularly interact with. Call on students to share from their list and create a class mind map on the board or overhead. Then, discuss and co-construct a list of the techniques that each type of media uses (for example, magazines use color, images, text and placement on the page).
2. Have students read and discuss seven “Key Concepts of Media Literacy” from the KQED Education Web site (<http://www.kqed.org/education/digitalmedia/key-concepts.jsp>) and the Temple University Media Education Lab’s KNOW TV approach to looking critically at documentary production (<http://mediaeducationlab.com/index.php?page=85>).
3. View CHICAGO 10 Modules 2 & 3: Have students respond using the following prompts:
 - What was the producer’s purpose in making this documentary?
 - How did the producer’s purpose shape the content of this program?
 - How is language used to manipulate the message?
 - How are sound and images used to manipulate the message?
 - What do you think of the producers’ choice to animate the courtroom scenes?
 - What effect do the animated scenes have on the viewer?
 - What effect does the music used in various scenes have on the viewer?
 - What techniques are used to enhance the authenticity of the program?
 - What techniques are used to enhance the authority of the program?
 - How might different viewers interpret this message differently?
 - What techniques are used to attract audience attention?
 - Who makes money from this program?

4. Filmmaker Brett Morgen came up with the vision and intention that drives this film. Have students view the Citizens Summits interview with Morgen from the Takepart.com Web site: (<http://www.takepart.com/citizen-summits>)

In the CHICAGO 10 Discussion Guide, Morgen explains his motivation: “My goal from the beginning has been to reintroduce this chapter of recent history to a new generation, for they are the ones who will hopefully benefit the most from this story.”

Have students also read Morgen’s “From the Filmmaker” introduction from the Discussion Guide for Chicago 10. Discuss using the following prompts:

- Was Morgen successful in achieving his vision?
- How appealing is the film to his target audience—young people? What works and what doesn’t?
- How would you make a historical/political film appeal to a young audience? What techniques, images, music, etc. would you use?

5. Assignment: Media Analysis & Creation

Have students look at a variety of campaign media from a recent election: posters, cartoons, speeches, commercials/ads, slogans and song lyrics. They will use the media literacy questions from steps 2 & 3 to write an analysis paper on the target audience, techniques and the effectiveness of the media.

Have each student select one media example of a message they oppose from the campaign. They should then select a form of media that they would like to use to create their own response. It can be an article, poster, short film, blog/vlog, song, cartoon or similar. Each student will then publish their creation online to Youth Media Exchange (<http://ymex.org>), SchoolTube.com or a teacher-created classroom blog.

Extension Activities:

1. Invite a panel of guest speakers to come into the classroom to address student questions and comments about documentary filmmaking and media making. Include artists, journalists, filmmakers, writers, bloggers, etc. Have students prepare questions for the panel in advance. Follow up in class by discussing what insights students gained from each of the panelists.
2. Select one of the other films (PLEASE VOTE FOR ME, IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA, AN UNREASONABLE MAN) for the students to view and ask them to analyze it using the media literacy framework. Research interviews with the filmmakers to find out more about their intentions behind making the film.
3. Ask students to research news coverage of recent protests and rallies, especially around the 2008 political conventions. Ask students the question: How are they portrayed in the media?
4. Request that students generate a list of characters from the film. Ask them to include minor characters (police men, national guardsmen, African American US Marshals as well as the principal ones. Assign each student a character and ask them to research how the character would have reacted to the situation and then show the research they found that supports that notion. Hold an open forum where the students assume the role of the characters using props, name plates, costumes and similar items. Have the students answer these prompts in character:
 - Did the groups have the right to protest?
 - Were their rights violated?
 - Were they right in their decision to continue to march, even though a permit had not been granted?
 - Take a position and discuss the situation that unfolded in the courtroom with Bobby Seale.
 - Defend/don’t defend the final decision of the court. Have the students generate a paper wherein they describe what they learned from the role playing scenario.