



AHA!

Med!aLit moments

**27 Media Literacy Activities
for K-12 Classrooms**

**Part I Deconstruction
Part II Construction**

Activities are organized by Key Question and suggested grade level.

CONSORTIUM
for **MEDIA LITERACY**

Uniting for Development

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Introduction

MediaLit Moments are classroom activities that create *AHA* moments by capturing at least one of the Key Questions for media literacy from the perspective of consumers or producers of media. MediaLit Moments activities are quick and accessible for teachers whenever the opportunity presents itself. Integrating media literacy with all subjects is the goal whether it's English, History, Math, Science...We have compiled these particular activities because they offer a wide range of topics, require very little preparation for teachers, and can be accomplished in 15-20 minutes.

MediaLit Moments are based on CML's framework for Questions/Tips (QTIPS™) which provide opportunities for critical thinking from the aspect of consumers *and* producers of media. The Q/TIPS chart appears on the following page; it lists CML's 5 Key Questions and 5 Core Concepts for media literacy for deconstruction (consumers) and construction (producers). Each Key Question and Core Concept has a corresponding key word for quick reference. For more information about CML's framework for media literacy, please refer to www.medialit.org where you will find outstanding resources for teaching media literacy in K-12 classrooms.

Monthly MediaLit Moments are published in our free newsletter *Connections* and posted online. To receive *Connections* in your inbox, sign up at www.consortiumformedia literacy.org.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2012, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>

Media Deconstruction/Construction Framework

#	Key Words	Deconstruction: CML's 5 Key Questions (Consumer)	CML's 5 Core Concepts	Construction: CML's 5 Key Questions (Producer)
1	Authorship	Who created this message?	All media messages are constructed.	What am I authoring ?
2	Format	What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?	Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.	Does my message reflect understanding in format , creativity and technology?
3	Audience	How might different people understand this message differently?	Different people experience the same media message differently.	Is my message engaging and compelling for my target audience ?
4	Content	What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?	Media have embedded values and points of view.	Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content ?
5	Purpose	Why is this message being sent?	Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.	Have I communicated my purpose effectively?

Deconstruction

Key Question #1

Who created this message?

Core Concept #1

All media messages are constructed

The Avatar Shuffle

According to Commonsense Media, many children around the age of 7 or 8 begin to use avatars to visit virtual worlds like Club Penguin or Habbo Hotel (Commonsense Media site, “All About Avatars”). Children have many creative choices to make when they select an avatar to represent them. Depending on the site they’re visiting, their avatar could be an elephant, or a samurai warrior. Within games, they also have choices for customizing the look of their avatar (their clothes or hairstyle, for example). In this MediaLit Moment, your students will get a chance to see how other students perceive the characters they use to represent themselves online. In the process, they’ll become aware of the fact that they are creating a character in the same way characters are created (i.e., constructed) for movies and TV.

Have students react to drawings of online avatars from other unidentified students in class

AHA!: I get to decide who this character is and how he/she looks or feels!

Key Question #1: Who created this message?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed

Grade Level: 2-4

Materials: pencil, marker, crayon or other drawing implements, paper

Activity: Ask students about the virtual worlds they like to visit online, and the kinds of avatars they use to represent themselves in those worlds. Ask them to draw their favorite version of one of their avatars (yes, the one with the bright pink hair will be fine!) Students who haven’t visited a virtual world can make up an avatar for themselves.

Have students number themselves in class. Use any numbering or category system you wish. Ask students to write their numbers on their drawings, and devise your own method for students to shuffle the drawings and distribute them to other students in class.

Ask students to write at least one word on the drawing they’ve received which describes the avatar. You may want to ask students to focus on physical characteristics and emotions. Is this avatar upright and confident? Nervous and shaky? Sad and droopy? Students identify themselves by number, and drawings are returned to the students who drew them. Tell students that the comments they received on their drawings show them what other kids might think about their avatar when they see it online. Are these characters different from who they are in real life? Discuss with the entire class. In discussion, emphasize to students that they aren’t just pushing a few buttons to change something about their avatar, they’re creating a complete character. They’re just like the people who put together animated movies or television shows. They make up characters that viewers can recognize--but they only exist in the world of that movie or TV series.

Who Gave SpongeBob His Square Pants?

Aside from the celebrities who lend their voices to big budget productions by Pixar, voiceover artists are some of the least known people in Hollywood. Yet these are the very people who are so instrumental in the creation of animated characters that we all know and love, from SpongeBob to the Family Guy to Remy the Rat in *Ratatouille*.

In this MediaLit Moment, students get to discover what it takes to create an animated character.

AHA! Somebody had to create this character before he ever came to life! SpongeBob is the result of someone's imagination.

CML Key Question #1: Who created this message?

CML Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed

Grade Level: 3-6

Materials: DVD player, DVD of The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie, or access to Tom Kenny in Central Park at http://spongebob.nick.com/videos/clip/NTV_spo_tomincentralpark_clip.html

Activities: Ask students what they know about the making of cartoons. How are cartoons created? Who decides what the character looks like, what he says, what he wears, where he lives, who his friends are? Who is your favorite cartoon character? Why?

For any of the SpongeBob DVDs, play the special features which discuss Tom Kenny's role in creating the SpongeBob character. Make sure to include live shots of Kenny voicing the character in studio. Or see the link above for Tom Kenny in Central Park.

Ask students questions to assess their comprehension of the feature they've finished watching. Who is Tom Kenny? What does he do? How important is Tom Kenny's voice to the character of SpongeBob? What did Kenny and others do to turn SpongeBob into the character we see on the screen?

Extended activity: Can you draw a cartoon character? What would the voice of your character sound like? CML Key Question # 1 for Producers: What am I authoring?

Materials: "Animatics" special features on SpongeBob DVDs. The animatics features re-play voice tracks from the DVD while displaying just the storyboards for the corresponding scenes. Or go to Inside Nicktoons Studio with SpongeBob SquarePants www.nick.com/turbonick/video. You'll find a link there to a video of an artist drawing the characters.

What Could America's Top Models Be Thinking?

From an audience standpoint, so many fashion advertisements are problematic because they create standards for body shape, size and appearance that can never be attained. What about the models themselves? They represent something generic and standard-ized. Identity, personality--those things which make a person unique--are layered over, airbrushed, and retouched beyond recognition. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will be able to use the power of story to effectively strip away the layers which obscure the real people “behind” the images that they see in magazines.

Credit must also be given to the originators of this activity, “Teen Aware: Sex, Media and You,” a project of the Teen Futures Media Network at the University of Washington. Here’s a link to the original activity: <http://depts.washington.edu/taware/document.cgi?id=53> You can find the Teen Futures Media Network site, “Teen Health and the Media,” at: <http://depts.washington.edu/thmedia/>

Have students write what a model might be thinking during a fashion shoot

AHA! Magazine ads turn models into fantastic, made-up figures that are supposed to make the product more sexy or glamorous, but they tell me nothing about what the models are like in real life!

Key Question #1: Who created this message?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Grade Level: 9-12

Materials: Magazine ads from both men’s and women’s magazines with photographs of top models posed to sell products based on their looks, style and/or suggestive behavior.

Activity: Begin by asking students to tell you something about the men and women they’ve seen in magazine advertisements. What do they look and act like? As students start sketching out the gender stereotypes used in these advertisements, note how impossibly sexy, glamorous or macho they are. Discuss one or more of the techniques (costumes, lighting, photo retouching, etc.) used to turn models into highly stylized images that have little to do with reality—all in service of selling the product.

What do they think these men and women might be like in real life? Ask students to select an ad (or ads) and “re-humanize” the models in them by writing a thought-diary of one or two paragraphs in length which describes the feelings they might have had when the photograph

was created. Ask them to write in first person, from the point of view of the model. This internal monologue can be as simple and mundane as, “My feet are killing me!,” or it could show the model wondering whether working in their occupation is really fulfilling their needs. Have students read their thought diary to the class while displaying the original ad. Generate a discussion about the activity. How does imagining what the real person in the ad was thinking and feeling change the way students feel about the image used in the ad? What do they have to say about the difference between the real person and the image that the photographers worked so hard to create?

Deconstruction

Key Question #2

What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2

Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules

Hats Ahoy!

Costume and makeup are essential elements of cinema and other media today, especially for live action features. In this simple and fun Media Lit Moment, your students will have the chance to learn how costume choices help create the characters they see on screen.

Ask students to compare and contrast two shots of an actor in and out of costume (Johnny Depp as himself, and as Captain Jack Sparrow of "Pirates of the Caribbean").

AHA! It takes a hat and a lot of makeup to make someone look like a pirate!

Core Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules

Grade Level: K-3

Materials: Two images of Johnny Depp as himself and as that dangerous pirate of the high seas, Captain Jack Sparrow

Depp as himself:

<http://www.hollywoodtoday.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/johnny-depp2.jpg>

Depp as Jack Sparrow:

<http://www.moviemobsters.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/JackSparrow300.jpg>

Activity: Display or pass out copies of the two images. Ask students what kind of character Depp has turned into. Is he a fireman? An astronaut? Once they come to consensus that he looks like a pirate, ask, what makes him look like a pirate? What changes were made to make him look like a pirate? Next, start asking questions to help them understand that Depp is an actor playing a character. For example: Do you think he's a pirate all the time? Once students understand that costume and make-up are key to the transformation, you may want to emphasize that the people who make movies spend a lot of time and money doing just this kind of thing to turn actors into pirates, aliens and other fantastic characters.

Extended Activity: Have a hat party!

Key Question #2 for Producers: Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity?

Materials and Equipment: half a dozen colorful, character-y hats; Polaroid-style camera or digital camera, computer and printer

Ask students to take pictures of each other with and without the hats. Students could do so in pairs, but with six hats, you or the students can take four or five group pictures of six students each. Ask students to compare pictures with and without the hats. What changes do they see? What kinds of characters do they look like when they've put on their hats?

How does the Story Sound?

Before the advent of “Star Wars,” musical scores had become some of the most sophisticated special effects available to film producers. A train of European classical composers began arriving on American shores in the 1930s and 1940s, and some, like Eric Korngold and Franz Waxman, wrote grand, symphonic scores that burnished the golden age of Hollywood film. These and other golden era composers also set the standard for writing scores which could vividly communicate and comment on the story unfolding on screen. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to analyze the role which musical scores play in feature films, and an opportunity to interpret a sample score as well.

Have students analyze the narrative function of a film score

AHA! The music doesn’t just keep me watching the movie—it helps me understand the meaning of what’s happening on screen!

Key Question #2: What techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

Grade Level: 6-9

Materials: Television, DVD player, CD/MP3 player; DVD of Tim Burton’s “Alice in Wonderland” (2010), CD of film soundtrack by Danny Elfman, or MP3 file of single track from this score.

Activity: Introduce students to the topic. Do they remember the soundtrack to any particular movies? What did they like about them? Let them know that they’re going to break a movie into separate parts—soundtrack, action on screen, and complete movie with soundtrack, dialogue and action—to help them think closely about how a soundtrack helps tell a film’s story. Play the track “Proposal/Rabbit Hole” from the “Alice in Wonderland” soundtrack for students. You should be able to download a single MP3 file of this track if you wish. Don’t mention the movie title or even the title of the track. Ask students to guess the kind of movie the track is from, and what might be happening on screen during a track like this one. There are two contrasting cues within this track, so you’ll want to ask what might be happening from cue to cue as well. Key Question #3 comes into play here, so have fun discussing the different answers that students come up with. Next, play the corresponding sequence from the film with the sound muted.(In this scene, a young aristocrat proposes to a teenaged Alice in a gazebo, but Alice sees the White Rabbit beckoning to her from behind the gazebo, and decides to run away). Ask students what they believe is happening in the film. How might the music they

listened to “fit” into this sequence? Now play the complete sequence, including soundtrack, action and dialogue. What does the music tell you about the character of Alice, and about the story? How does it do that? Repeat the steps in this activity if needed.

Making of a Model

The beauty and fashion industries spare no expense in transforming models into goddess-like figureheads for company advertising. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will take an inside look at some of the techniques used to make this transformation happen.

Ask students to identify the techniques used to turn a woman into a billboard model

AHA! A lot of people have to do a lot of work to create the image I see on a billboard or in a magazine ad!

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules

Grade Level: 9+

Materials: Computer with internet access, data projector and screen

The goal of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty (<http://www.dove.us/Social-Mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx>) is to "widen definitions of beauty" in an attempt to free women from constrictive beauty stereotypes. The campaign features a number of videos, including the "Evolution" video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=iYhCn0jf46U

This video begins with an initial photo shoot of a woman, then lurches into fast motion as it depicts the application of make-up, hairstyling, and digital enhancements used to turn her into a fashion photo image. The video is just over a minute in length.

Questions for Discussion: What techniques were used to make this woman look so flawless? What changes had to be made to her appearance? Is this type of beauty attainable for the advertiser's audience?

Further Discussion: The video ends with the message: "No wonder our perception of beauty is distorted. Every girl deserves to feel beautiful just the way she is." As you prepare to lead this discussion, consider Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

You may also want to lead students in a discussion of the Campaign for Real Beauty. As you prepare, consider: Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent? and Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Questions for discussion: Why did Dove put together this video? Why would this company, which is also involved in the beauty industry, start a campaign for "real beauty"?

Deconstruction

Key Question #3

How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3

Different people experience the same media message differently

30 Ways of Seeing

In your classroom, all 30 of your students will see 30 different versions of events that happen in class. Such is the nature of individual perception. Likewise, at the movie theater, audience members may see the same images, but that doesn't mean they all "see" the same film. In a way, it's the audience that makes the movie, not the director or the producer.

In this MediaLit Moment, all 30 (or more, or less) of your elementary school students will have the chance to experience firsthand the different ways in which audiences respond to the same media message. This lesson is adapted from a lesson in CML's *5 Key Questions That Can Change the World*. For more lesson ideas, visit the CML site at www.medialit.com

Have students view a silent excerpt from a film which features physical comedy.

AHA!: My friends don't see exactly what I see even when we watch the same movie!

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

Grade Level: 2-4

Materials: DVD Player and DVD of feature film Choose a scene from a live-action film which your students are not likely to be familiar with, but also choose something which makes frequent use of physical comedy. This will help your students make some good guesses about the significance of the action on screen. A scene from a classic such as Frank Capra's *Arsenic and Old Lace* would be a good choice (e.g., the scene in which Cary Grant as Mortimer Brewster discovers a dead body—which the audience cannot see---in the window seat of his aunt's parlor).

Activity: Grab students' attention by asking them questions about their favorite films, especially comedies. Let students know that not everybody sees the same thing when they watch a movie, and that they're going to find out how that happens during this lesson. Play the silent clip for students two or three times so that they get a good "shot" at guessing the meaning of the action on screen. As you discuss the different interpretations that students have of the clip, draw their attention to the distinction between what they actually observed and what they interpreted. And have fun, too. You might want to have students vote on what they think is the most likely explanation/interpretation for what they saw.

Play the clip again with the sound on so that students can discover what actually happened in the scene. In your final discussion, draw from their experience to help them understand that different people everywhere will see the same movie differently.

Using a Smartphone Isn't Always the Smart Thing to Do

In the world of education, teachers, parents and principals worry about what students are doing in class with their cell phones. Are they texting each other and not paying attention? Are they “Googling” answers to tests and cheating? Did you ever imagine that the same sort of malfeasance might pop up in the world of politics? That’s exactly what happened during a Florida gubernatorial debate this fall. In a debate televised on CNN, Democratic candidate Alex Sink received an e-mail on her Smartphone from a campaign aide during a commercial break, violating the rules of debate. Sink’s phone was confiscated, and Republican candidate Rick Scott immediately criticized Sink for breaking the rules once the debate resumed.

On election day, Sink lost to Scott by a margin of 1.2%. We will never know the degree to which Sink’s moment of ‘digital illiteracy’ swayed voters, but we do know that interest in the news stories which followed was high. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to ask—and answer—the same questions about digital ethics that viewers and voters responded to during this race. As they do so, they’ll learn how different audiences, young and old, react differently to televised coverage of politics and the way in which digital media are used. Have students re-enact a particularly tense moment from a televised political debate

AHA!: Breaking the rules by reading a message on her phone might have cost this candidate the election!

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

Grade Level: 6-9

Materials: Computer with high speed connection; data projector and screen; printed copies of news story (optional); phone to use as a theatrical prop. CNN news blog with embedded video of Sink looking at her phone during a commercial break, and Scott responding as debate resumes; accessible at: <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/10/25/florida-debate-foul/>

Activity: Use the CNN story and the embedded video to establish what happened, and explain the reasoning behind the rules for this debate. Discuss briefly with students. Ask for two students to volunteer to re-enact one scene that was left out of the video: the moment when someone from CNN staff actually confiscated the phone from Sink. The two students should have a few minutes to think about how they’re going to react to each other, and you might want to allow other students to help them. Both players should be able to explain why they’re doing what they’re doing on stage.

Once the scene has been re-enacted, keep the volunteers in front of class for a brief moment (unless they’re incredibly embarrassed). Poll students for their reactions. Should this candidate have been punished by losing her phone? Should the CNN staff member have taken it away?

Should the aide who sent the message have been fired? Also, if they had been voting in this election, would they have been more likely to overlook Sink's mistake, or would they have been more likely to 'punish' her at the polls? As you discuss the responses of students and voters, draw attention to Core Concept #3—people respond differently to what they see on television, and in any form of media, including phone, email, and text messages.

Fit-ness is in the Eye of the Beholder

Many school nursing offices still emphasize body mass index (BMI) as a primary indicator of student health. Yet body mass index by itself is never a reliable indicator of health, and adolescent students can readily be labeled as “obese” when they may simply be growing unevenly, gaining weight before growing in height, or becoming more muscular in build due to genetic factors or exercise. Moreover, the practice of measuring BMI can lead schools to focus on individual weight loss rather than the importance of balanced diet and exercise for all students. Doing so makes it difficult for students who fall outside of the “normal” range to maintain a positive self-image, and can even contribute to the incidence of eating disorders among young people.

In recognition of National Eating Disorders Awareness Month, we present this MediaLit Moment in which your students will have the chance to reflect on their perceptions regarding weight and physical fitness, and to think more critically about the values and lifestyles embedded in media images of “fit” people.

Have students analyze their perceptions of a media text that offers an alternative image of fitness.

AHA! This woman doesn’t look like most of the “fit” people I see in movies or TV, but does that mean she’s “out of shape”?

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

Grade Level: 9-12

Materials: Printed image, slide of the same image and slide projector, or computer with broadband access and data projector to display image at the following URL:

<http://adsoftheworld.com/files/images/DOVE-Fat-Fit.preview.jpg> This image is taken from a 2004 billboard for the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, and asks viewers whether the model shown on the billboard is “fat” or “fit.”

Activity: As an anticipatory set to this lesson, you might want to ask students for their definition of fitness. What’s most important? Sticking to a healthy diet? Being able to run a marathon? Come up with a loose definition.

Once you have shown the image, allow some time for students' spontaneous responses, and simply act as a facilitator for discussion. When you feel the class is ready, ask: what inferences (or guesses) can you make regarding this woman's physical fitness just by looking at the image on the billboard? Can you imagine this woman dancing? Running? Skiing? (or any other activity which requires energy, strength, coordination, etc.) If your students confuse the concepts of *thin* and *fit* when discussing fit-ness, call attention to the assumption of thin-ness as a primary indicator of health and how that assumption affects them personally (if time permits, see Extended Activity below).

Next, ask students to write down a list of the "fit" female characters they've seen in the media—in movies, on TV, on the Internet, in video games. What are they like? What do they do? You can expand this prompt by giving students the option to add male characters and/or "fat" characters to their list. How does the woman on the billboard compare with the media images of fit people that they see on an everyday basis? Why do they think the producers of these other media portrayed fit characters in the way that they did?

Extended Activity: Assign a project in which students do some research on what constitutes physical fitness. Or consult with a health teacher and distribute materials (or direct students to sources) on physical fitness that helps them understand that weight is just one indicator of health that should be considered in context with many other factors. Or . . . ask them to interview people they think are fit, and ask them what "staying fit" means to them, and why they believe that is true.

OR:

Key Question #5: Why was this message sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Dove took down the billboards when 51% of audiences responded that they thought the model was "fat." Why do they think Dove took the billboards down, and why do they think Dove produced this billboard in the first place? If you were in charge of this campaign, would you do anything differently? You could also ask students to draw or produce their own billboard (well, something that will fit inside the classroom door. . .).

Deconstruction

Key Question #4

What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?

Core Concept #4

Media have embedded values and points of view

Wordle Processing Provides Perspective

Tweens and teens often know the words to popular songs, but don't always think about them. Wordles, also known as word clouds, make the familiar unfamiliar by scrambling the words in a text. They also magnify the size of words which appear most frequently, which provides the audience with clues for interpreting significant themes or ideas in the original text. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to examine song lyrics from a different perspective, and use powerful new media tools to help them identify the values, lifestyles and points of view embedded within them.

Have students use "word clouds" to analyze the lyrics of popular songs.

AHA!: Songs use the same words over and over to emphasize values and points of view!

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Grade Level: 5-8

Materials: Computer with high speed internet connection, projection screen; documents containing song lyrics which can be copied and pasted to a Wordle document window (which can be accessed at: <http://www.wordle.net>)

Activity: You may wish to break this activity into two parts. On the day before the lesson, you can ask students to write down the name and artist of their favorite songs and submit their selections to you. With this option, you'll need to spend a few minutes selecting from among student choices, as well as finding the lyrics online and copying and pasting the lyrics into a document. Or you can choose one or more of the songs listed below, which were among the 20 most popular songs in 2010 or 2011 (and are free of profanity or abusive language):

Katy Perry, "Teenage Dream"

B.O.B., "Nothin' On You"

Adele, "Rolling in the Deep"

Train, "Hey, Soul Sister"

Many websites provide lyrics to pop songs, but A to Z Lyrics is among the best. Their selection is extensive, the copy isn't cluttered by advertisements or pop-up windows, and the service offers options for printing and e-mailing lyrics. You can listen to audio tracks and and/or purchase mp3 downloads as well. The URL for A to Z is <http://www.azlyrics.com>.

On the day of the lesson, set up your equipment, display the Wordle site, and explain how wordles work. You may also want to withhold the name of the songs that you “wordle process” in class, and ask students to guess the song as each word cloud is generated. Display or distribute copies of the complete lyrics for each song as well. Play the audio track if you wish. With each word cloud, ask students, what is this song about? What do the big words in the cloud tell you about the song? Direct the attention of students to Key Question #4 and ask, what can the larger words tell them about the ideas or values in the song?

More Than A Price Tag

We're so used to advertising, and it comes in so many forms, that we sometimes forget that all commercial messages are asking us to do something. Regardless of whether it's stated or not, all commercials leave us with the message "Buy this product now!" The messages in public service campaigns, by contrast, usually leave little to the imagination. We need to stop smoking, or take action to stop drunk driving. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to discover how the 'call to action' in a public service announcement can be communicated in a variety of ways.

Ask students to interpret the values, lifestyles and beliefs in a PSA delivered in an unconventional format.

AHA! Even a price tag can send a message!

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

Core Concept#4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules

Grade Level: 7-9

Materials: high speed internet connection, computer, projection screen

Activity: Have students watch a PSA created by UNICEF for one of its campaigns against child labor. You'll find the PSA at the following link:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQCo0_RvuZk

The initial frames of this video show what looks like a sneaker with a price tag attached. But the price tag is actually a small flip book. As the pages of the flip book are turned, the bar code transforms into an image of a child gluing the sole of a shoe. The final two pages read "The real price is paid by others," and "Stop Child Labor," followed by the UNICEF logo and website address. Play this video for students at least one more time, then ask for their reactions to the PSA. As discussion progresses, work with Key Question #4 and ask, "From UNICEF's point of view, what do regular price tags leave out that potential buyers should know about?" You might need to briefly explain why child labor has become a cause for concern: in many countries outside the United States and Western Europe, young children work alongside adults in factories under poor working conditions, receive subsistence pay (or may receive no pay at all), while the shoes and other products they make are sold at a substantial profit. Discuss UNICEF's call to action. What might UNICEF like potential buyers of these shoes to do in response to this message? If you get the chance, work with Key Question #2 as well. Explain

that these flip books were given to groups of activists who entered shoe stores and quietly replaced regular price tags on shoes with these books. Ask, why do you think UNICEF would focus on price tags to attract attention to their message?

The "Franken-Foods" Debate

Since the late 1990s, heated debate has swirled around the introduction of genetically engineered strains of staple food crops such as rice, corn and soybeans. Proponents argue that these strains are resistant to cold and drought, can reduce pesticide use, and that some strains, like “golden” rice, can stave off malnutrition among human populations largely dependent on a single crop. Critics argue that the safety of these foods for human consumption has not been completely established, and that unintended interbreeding with adjacent indigenous crops could threaten the biodiversity of our food supply. While genetically engineered foods are now an industry standard, controversy has continued apace. In 1997 and 2003, the European Union passed legislation requiring labeling of genetically modified (or GM) foods, and calls for labeling to continue in the United States.

Many anti-GM foods activists dubbed them “Frankenfoods,” and some newspapers, such as Britain’s *Daily Mail*, conducted entire campaigns against them. The editorial cartoon included here is from the pages of the *Daily Mail*. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will discover the power of visual humor to deliver a political message.

Ask students to identify the point of view represented by a political cartoon.

AHA! This cartoon isn’t just funny, it’s asking me to take sides in a political argument!

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Grade Level: 10+

Materials: Political cartoon -- to access click here for PDF of Science newsletter (page 12).

Note: Questions for Discussion and Further Questions for Discussion are partially adapted from material in *Developing Scientific Literacy: Using News Media in the Classroom*, reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

Questions for Discussion: What issue is this cartoon about? Do you think the cartoon is in favor of GM food or against GM food? Why do you think this? Is the cartoon fact or opinion? What opinion or viewpoint is the cartoon communicating?

Further Questions for Discussion:

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Tell students that this cartoon was part of a newspaper campaign against GM foods, then ask students: why would a news source create a campaign for or against an issue? Do you think it's possible for an editorial cartoon to show readers different sides of an argument?

Extended Activity for Science Teachers (from Exemplar in Scientific Literacy, pps. 130-134)

Students are reminded that in both the article and editorial cartoon, the newspaper provided us with information that supported only or predominantly one side of the argument in the GM debate. However, if we are to make up our own minds we need to seek out and consider all sides of the argument. How might we find out the arguments both in favor of and against growing GM crops and selling GM food? Working in groups, students explore one or two information sources relating to GM food (interesting examples may be drawn from scientific societies, environmental groups, the BBC, etc.) and compile a list of advantages and disadvantages of growing GM crops for food or other purposes. As a class, they collate the results of their research. Finally, in whole-class discussion, students evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the diverse resources they consulted as sources of information.

Deconstruction

Key Question #5

Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5

Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Who is renting my eyeballs?

The Product Placement Counting Game

Product placement is an increasingly common practice whereby advertisers pay media makers to use or display their products as props in movies, television shows and video games. Here's a "teachable moment" to help students recognize who is renting their eyeballs when they watch their favorite shows or movies.

Have students count product placements in media programs: TV shows, videogames, social networking sites all provide great resources.

AHA! My media is full of hidden advertisements. I'm being influenced without realizing it! And sometimes these product placements affect how the story is being told...the advertisers are renting my eyeballs and often, I'm paying them for the privilege!

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Grade Level: 3 – 12

Materials: Video or DVD of a current film, videogame or television clip appropriate to your age group that contains multiple product placements, DVD/VCR player, paper or chalk board, internet access.

Resources: <http://www.brandchannel.com/> tracks product placements in the week's number one film and includes archives from past years.

Activity: Have the students talk about advertising in general. What were some examples of products? Where do you see most advertisements? How do you know if you are viewing an ad? When you see the specific name of a product being used in a TV show or movie, do you consider that an ad? Why or why not? Have you ever heard the term "product placement?"

Show the media piece or the video clip twice. First, look at it through without stopping or commenting. Then look at it again and have students note (or call out) when they recognize a specific product being used. List all products on the board in front of the class. How many products did the students count?

Guiding Questions for additional discussion: How can viewers know when a product is used for artistic or narrative reasons and when it is simply a paid product placement? Who benefits from product placements and who is hurt by it? Is it unethical if money is paid for an ad that is never identified as advertising? Why are product placements not listed at the end of a TV show or movie? Are there times when product placements are useful or helpful?

Have the students go online to media industry web sites to see examples and read how the industry describes product placements.

Bringing the Audience into the Loop

Causal loop diagrams, like those used by the Systems Thinking in Schools Project (see our main research article in July newsletter) can help students more readily grasp the dynamics of complex relationships, such as the relationships between audiences, producers, and media texts. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will work with a causal loop diagram to learn how the act of consuming advertising involves them in the system of media production.

Ask students to describe and analyze the relationships between video game producers, advertisers and themselves.

AHA! My interest in video games sets everything else in motion!

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Grade Level: 5-8

Materials: Computer, data projector, projection screen, high speed internet connection (optional)

Activity: Begin by asking students what they like about their favorite video games. Next, show them the box art or the game trailer for *Outland*, a sword and fantasy game released last year. Links are given below:

Outland box art <http://www.agreenmushroom.com/2011/06/outland-impressions.html>

Outland game trailer <http://www.gametrailers.com/video/rogue-launch-outland/713337>

Ask, does the box art or trailer make them want to buy the game? Why or why not? Next, draw a circle or a triangle on the board (or interactive white board, if you have one). Mark three points on the figure, and add the following labels: Advertisements produced, You, and Video Games sold.

Now ask students to come up with some educated guesses about the relationship between themselves (You) and Video games sold and Advertisements produced. You might want to ask them what they do when an advertisement begins to interest them in a game.

Complete the causal loop diagram with your students by adding arrows to connect the three points and explain that Video game producers create ambitious ad campaigns for new products. The advertisements catch the eye of new potential buyers like themselves. Their interest eventually leads to increased video game sales, increased sales of the product lead to more advertisements for the game, and the advertisements attempt to keep them “hooked” on the game and attract more potential buyers (especially their friends!) to the game. In finishing this activity, remind students how essential they are to all these relationships.

What Does It Mean To Be Green?

According to a Cone Consumer Environmental Survey conducted this year, 34% of Americans indicate that they are more likely to buy environmentally responsible products today, and another 44% indicate that their environmental shopping habits have not changed despite the current economic climate (<http://www.coneinc.com>). Not surprisingly, environmental marketing campaigns have also been on the upswing.

And there is no doubt that a significant number of deceptive (or “greenwashed”) advertisements and product labels have been riding the tide of these campaigns. Terra Choice Environmental Marketing published a “Sevens Sins of Greenwashing” report this year which asserted that 98% of products reviewed violated at least one of their rules for making legitimate environmental claims (<http://sinsofgreenwashing.org>). In fact, this year’s report adds an additional “sin” not included in the 2007 report--“the sin of worshipping false labels,” a practice by which companies give the impression of third party environmental endorsements for their products where no such endorsement exists.

But enough of the bad news. The good news is that “green” advertisements and labels provide a great springboard for teaching across nearly all disciplines. By analyzing these advertisements, students can increase their consumer, health and financial literacy.

In this MediaLit Moment, your high school students will have the chance to consider the moral, social and ecological ramifications of an activity they are becoming familiar with---shaving--against the environmental claims that a major auto maker makes for its cars.

Have students analyze and evaluate a “green” advertisement’s appeal to them, as well as the message it conveys about their lifestyle choices.

AHA! They’re trying to tell me that buying a fuel-efficient car from them is more important than saving resources at home!

Key Question #5: Why was this message sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Grade Level: 10-12

Materials: computer with high speed internet access, data projector, projection screen, GM E85 (ethanol fuel) car advertisement, accessed at YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv9xgHiBPWw>

Activity: Have students watch the commercial at least a couple of times. After the first showing, ask students, what makes this commercial funny? And also ask, what kind of audience do they think GM was trying to target with this ad? (According to our research, this ad aired only on MTV).

After the second showing, ask students about the environmental claims of this commercial. What is the carmaker trying to say about the corn-based fuel that the car uses (ethanol) and the water students (boys *and* girls) use to shave?

Next, ask them how they feel about the fact that the advertisement is trying to persuade them that their personal consumption habits matter less than the decision to invest in a new Chevy vehicle. Are they embarrassed when they think of how much water they use? Are they annoyed by the comparison? Are they “sold” on the product? Does the advertisement simply make them laugh? Can they explain why they feel the way they do?

Extended Activity:

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently

Ask your students to rate the environmental claims of this commercial. Are the environmental benefits of driving a Chevy E85 presented in a credible and appropriate way? Did GM “fudge” the facts a little? Is this ad a good example of greenwashing? For example, does the ad present an “apples to oranges” comparison that “sounds” right but cannot be readily substantiated? Also, is ethanol really a “gas friendly” alternative fuel, or are the claims that GM makes about ethanol and their ethanol-compatible vehicles overblown? Place students in pairs or teams and ask them to prepare presentations based on their research. Or organize a debate. . .or a forum.

Here are some sources that you may want to use to prepare study guides, or to assign to students in their entirety:

Greenwashing

US Federal Trade Commission guides to environmental claims in advertising:
<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/grnrule/guides980427.htm>

Recent Federal Trade Commission testimony to Congress on attempts to regulate the “virtual tsunami” of recent green advertising: <http://www.ftc.gov/os/2009/06/P954501greenmarketing.pdf>

Understanding and Preventing Greenwash: A Business Guide, by BSR and Futerra Associates
http://www.bsr.org/reports/Understanding_Preventing_Greenwash.pdf

Consumer Reports evaluations of “green” products at <http://www.greenerchoices.org>

Terra Choice 2009 report on greenwashing at <http://sinsofgreenwashing.org>

The Ethanol Debate

The Debate on Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Impacts of Fuel Ethanol by Michael Wang, Argonne National Laboratories <http://www.transportation.anl.gov/pdfs/TA/347.pdf>

“Ethanol Can Contribute to Energy and Environmental Goals,” by Farrell, Plevin, Turner et al., *Science* magazine, January 27, 2006 (volume 311), pps. 506-508. Accessible online at: <http://rael.berkeley.edu/EBAMM/FarrellEthanolScience012706.pdf>

Construction

Key Question #1

What am I **authoring**?

Core Concept #1

All media messages are constructed

DIY Sandbox Game

Video games are one media form which may be difficult for children and adolescents to produce. Many will learn how to use “cheats” or learn how to modify (“mod”) a game, but creating a game from scratch requires programming skills which few have at their disposal. However, just as drafting storyboards can help students become reflective producers of comics, film and video, creating initial game designs can help them become reflective producers of video games. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will be able to try their hand at some of the essential tasks involved in games design, and they’ll also learn how to recognize the values implicit in their designs.

Have students create a basic design for a “sandbox” video game

AHA! I’m not just making a world, my design choices also “say” something about my values and point of view!

Key Question #1 for Producers: What am I authoring?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Key Question #4 for Producers: Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?

Core Concept #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

Grade Level: 6-12

Materials: Pencils, paper, imagination. Larger sheets of paper if students want to produce sketches of their game worlds.

Activity: Rather than restricting players to singular goals or storylines, “sandbox” games allow large groups of characters to more or less freely explore the environment of the game. Second Life and SimCity have helped to define the genre, but there are plenty of sandbox games which have been targeted towards children and teens, such as Club Penguin, Whyville, and Habbo Hotel. Begin the activity by asking students what sandbox games they’re familiar with, and discussing some of the essential characteristics of these games.

Next, organize students into groups of two or more, and let them know that they’ll be creating an initial design for a sandbox game of their choosing. Ask them to come up with a theme for their game. If SimCity is ‘about’ urban planning, what might interest them? Marine conservation? Aviation? Musical theater? If students mention the Grand Theft Auto series, you may want to affirm that criminal activity should not be a primary theme of the game. Students will also need to ask themselves, what are some of the most valuable or important things that player characters can do in this game? Once they’ve answered that question, they should decide how characters are awarded points or other benefits for experience and/or tasks completed.

Once students have had time for collaboration, ask them to share their design concepts with the rest of the class. This is also the time to ask “Why?” questions. Why this theme? Why were certain roles or professions important? Why did they decide on their particular reward “mechanic” for the game? Direct their attention to Key Question #4 for Producers. How did they frame values through their work?

Extended Activity: Depending on time, grade level or sophistication of your students, ask them to answer a few more questions. Are there any important places within the game? What purposes do they serve? If they’re cities or geographical regions, what are the most notable characteristics of the place and the people there? Ask them to create a sketch. Is there some sort of economic system within the world of the game? What goods and services are traded? Again, once they’ve completed the work, ask questions to call attention to the values, lifestyles and points of view framed within the games.

Street Art Smart

Say the word “graffiti,” and most people think of young men tagging their territory in the middle of the night, and of thousands of dollars spent to cover the tags over. Yet artists from Jean Michel Basquiat to Banksy (of the 2010 movie “Exit Through the Gift Shop”) practiced their craft on the street before their work was exhibited at any major museum. “Street art” might best describe art that is painted in a public space rather than on a piece of canvas. Moreover, a simple written message which appears in a public space (such as a stencil) might not always be considered graffiti.

Here’s a good example: <http://boingboing.net/2010/08/26/snapshot-bike-lane-i.html>

Really, this is a piece of street art which delivers a message which nearly anyone in any community in the United States would be willing to rally around. In this Media Lit Moment, your students will be challenged to re-think their conceptions of art which appears in public spaces, and they’ll also have the opportunity to work on the initial stages of a piece of street art which could grace the wall of their own school.

Ask students to write or illustrate a concept for a piece of street art which delivers a public service message.

AHA!: I can create art in public spaces that makes a positive difference in my community!

Key Question #1 for Producers: What am I authoring?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Key Question #4 for Producers: Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Grade Level: 7-9

Materials: pencil, paper, imagination

Activity: Start a discussion with students about the differences between tagging and street art. As you do so, you may want to share additional examples: A mural with a message in Milwaukee:<http://scaryideas.com/content/9108> or others you might find online.

After you finish this discussion, ask students to write a creative concept for a piece of street art which is also conceived of as a service to the public. This could be as simple as coming up with some creative lettering for a message, or it could involve sketching out a piece of

representational art (like a mural). Also, their concepts don't necessarily have to call for the use of permanent materials. Chalk art on a playground with an anti-bullying message could also fit the bill.

To Be or Not to Be? That is the Social Networking Question

According to a recent MacArthur Foundation study, teens typically use social networking sites to “hang out” with friends. Teens also put together personal pages as an expression of their style, creating something to make an impression on other teens who “hit” their site out of curiosity. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will explore the difference between personal pages they use primarily to communicate with friends and pages they design primarily to make an impression on people they don’t know. In the process, your students are likely to discover that they create different personas for themselves from page to page.

Have your students create a personal home page designed to impress someone they would like to meet.

AHA! The “me” I show to my friends is different from the “me” I show to somebody I don’t know!

Key Question #1 for Producers: What am I authoring?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Grade: 9+

Materials: Computer, data projector, screen, high speed internet connection. OR printed screen shots of students’ home pages and the new pages they’ve created.

HOMEWORK: Ask your students to start a home page which they would use to introduce themselves to someone they would like to meet. See the suggestions below for possible scenarios.

If they wish, students can create this as a subsection of their home page. If students do not yet have an account with a social networking site provider, this may be an opportunity for them to get started, though they could draw a plan of their new site as well.

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS/TOPICS: You’ve been asked to host a foreign exchange student in your home. Put together a page which tells the student about the US, the city you live in, and about yourself. Or, let’s say you would like to be a foreign exchange student in another country. Create a page in which you introduce yourself to a potential host family.

What’s your dream job? What would your dream company be like? Now imagine that this company is looking for entry-level employees. Put together a page that might impress the people at this company.

Create a page or profile to send to a group (offline or online) that you might like to join.

Is there a college or school you hope to attend in the future? Work on a page that you would like to send to that school.

Create a page for someone who's an expert at something you would like to learn more about (examples -- a comic/graphic novel illustrator, a fashion designer, a local musician).

IN CLASS: When students return to class, ask them to compare old and new pages. Ask them to complete the following fill-in-the-blank response: The _____ (student's name) I see in my new page is _____ (personal qualities--for example, organized, scary, serious, laid-back, knowledgeable, etc.)

In small groups, or as a class, discuss the differences between students' pages, (especially the different kind of people they appear to be from page to page).

Extended Discussion:

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

In small groups, students talk about their design process as well. What kinds/categories of items did they place in the new page that they did not have "up" on their old page? Why?

Construction

Key Question #2

Does my message reflect understanding
in **format**, creativity and technology?

Core Concept #2

Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules

When a Scroll is Really a Scroll

Today, many of us scroll through tens or hundreds of pages of content each day. Scrolling is an activity or feature, and the pages themselves don't seem to be worthy of much attention. Yet we are often captivated by visual media in which scrolls or papers play a large part. We're right there with Charlie, gazing with rapt attention as he discovers the last Golden Ticket to Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory: "In your wildest dreams you can not imagine the marvelous SURPRISES which await YOU!"

In this MediaLit Moment, your students will learn why papers and scrolls attract the attention of media audiences. They'll learn about the media genres in which they appear and the purposes for which they are used; and they'll learn how to capture the attention of audiences with their own scrolled message.

Have students write and read aloud a scrolled message with attention to genre, purpose and intended effect on the audience.

AHA!: When I see a scroll used on screen, it means that the words are important, and a lot of people should hear them. If I create my own, I can make audiences think I'm important and powerful, too!

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #2 for Producers: Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity, and technology?

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Key Question #5 for Producers: Have I communicated my purpose effectively?

Grade Level: 5-8

Materials: DVD, computer, data projector and screen; or computer with high speed internet connection, data projector, and screen. DVD of "Star Wars" or access to opening sequence from film on YouTube. Butcher paper and markers.

Activity: Play the opening "crawl" of the movie, and briefly pause the sequence when the words fill the screen. Ask, why do you think the director of this movie decided to use this format rather than a voiceover, or a "flat" paragraph, or even just action on the screen to make it clear who was fighting whom? What does it suggest about the message that is being delivered? Direct their attention to Key Question #2. You may also want to work with one or more additional clips.

Here are a few suggestions: a reading of the Declaration of Independence in which the written document figures prominently; the scene from “Amazing Grace” in which William Wilberforce unfurls a massive popular petition against slavery before Parliament; the scene from “Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory” (1971) or “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” (2005) mentioned above; a scene from a Harry Potter movie in which a proclamation from Hogwarts or the Ministry of Magic is read aloud.

Next, ask students, what kinds of messages tend to be delivered in this format? For what kinds of purposes? Direct their attention to Key Question #5. An extremely wide variety of documents could be included on this list, from jury verdicts to messages bestowing an award.

When a substantial list has been generated, it’s time for students to demonstrate their understanding of purpose and format by producing their own scrolled messages with markers and butcher paper. Consider assigning students to teams. Do ask students to read their work aloud.

Extended Activity: If students are feeling confident in their understanding of this format, encourage them to experiment with genres, or use humor and satire. For example, students could write their personal declarations of independence.

Story Selling

In the realm of literature, alluding to other stories within the main story is a sign of the author's virtuosity and skill. In the world of popular media, telling several stories within a single story is a means for multiplying the potential appeal of a media product to audiences. But it doesn't just end there. Music, games, and toys can all be linked together within the same story to attract audiences. The formal term for this is "trans-media narration." In other words, media producers tell stories across multiple formats and genres to sell their product.

In this MediaLit Moment, your students will learn to recognize this storytelling technique in popular media, and explore the ways in which these techniques attract and hold their attention.

Ask students to list and discuss all the stories, products and characters which are alluded to in a movie trailer.

AHA! The producer tried to grab my attention with this trailer by throwing in everything viewers my age like!

Key Question #2: What techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Grade Level: 10-12

Materials: Computer, data projector, projection screen, high speed internet connection

Activity: Ask students to tell you what they know about toys and games that have been 'turned into' movies. Next load and play the trailer for "Battleship," a movie based on the Hasbro game of the same name, available at www.battleshipmovie.com Please note: this movie was unrated at the time of publication. Prior review recommended.

Ask, what do they like about turning this game into a movie? You may want to discuss references to the game within the trailer (e.g., a patrol boat, one of the five types of ships in the game, is sent out to investigate the unknown vessel; at the end of the trailer, someone asks "which weapons" should be fired). The Hasbro game is no longer just a board game, but is available online, and as a smartphone game application, so students are likely to have some familiarity with the game concept.

For a little more background on the film, you may want to read this Yahoo blog post. It's short enough for you to share with your students as well:<http://movies.yahoo.com/blogs/movie-talk/battleship-changes-game-first-trailer-premiere-162012802.html>

Play the trailer two or three more times, and ask students to write down any movies, TV shows, and even toys or other products that the trailer might remind them of. Here are some possible leads: Who is the actor playing Alex Hopper, the main character, and what kind of character has he played before? (Taylor Kitsch, who played 'bad boy' Tim Riggins on "Friday Night Lights") Does the alien ship remind you of anything else you've seen? (It moves like it's jumping out of the water, and could be a reference to the Transformers, another Hasbro product, but that's not certain). Does the global view of the action, in which a white light shoots up and creates a bubble around the battle scene, remind you of anything else you've seen? What does it seem to be telling the audience? (global threat, aliens vs humanity, etc.)

As you discuss the references that students came up with, ask them why those references might attract them to the film. Continue to review Key Questions 2 and 5 with students.

Construction

Key Question #3

Is my message engaging and compelling
for my target **audience**?

Core Concept #3

Different people experience the same media message differently

Prepare for Pandemic or Pass the Kleenex?

See Extended Activity for Construction

In 1976, an epidemic of swine flu was expected in the United States, and the federal government took bold action, releasing public service announcements over television airwaves and vaccinating 45 million Americans, an unprecedented number at that time. The epidemic never came, but three elderly Pittsburgh residents died soon after receiving their vaccinations at the same clinic. Though scientists believe the deaths were coincidental, some news reports suggested the vaccine had killed them. “Press frenzy was so intense it drew a televised rebuke from Walter Cronkite for sensationalizing coincidental happenings,” writes Dr. David J. Sencer, then-director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (McNeil, “Don’t Blame Flu Shots for All Ills, Officials Say,” *New York Times*, September 28, 2009). In 1976, the CDC did not hold news conferences, and it took five days to respond to the deaths in Pennsylvania.

Fast forward to the spring of 2009: A global pandemic of H1N1 swine flu takes off suddenly. Though the initial fatality rate is low, the rate could easily climb depending on the ways in which the virus mutates over time. The US government orders 250 million doses of H1N1 vaccine. A small but influential movement of anti-vaccine activists has raised concerns about infant and child vaccinations. To stave off rumors which could circulate easily on the Internet and on 24-hour television news outlets, the CDC creates a “flu.gov” website, posts updates on Facebook and Twitter, and assembles a media “war room” in its Atlanta headquarters. News conferences are held there almost daily, all of which are posted to the CDC website (McNeil, op. cit).

In 2010, the communications of health agencies deserve study because those agencies must make creative decisions about how to frame messages about health risks in a media environment which can encourage panic as well as complacency and even denial. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to compare two health-related PSAs to understand the purposes for which they were created, and to recognize the differing points of view they present with regard to comparable risks.

Have students compare two public service announcements to demonstrate their understanding of purpose and point of view.

AHA! Different strategies for talking about health risks can really change the end product!

Key Question #5: Why was this message sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Grade Level: 8-10

Materials: computer with broadband access and data projector to display YouTube videos at the following URLs:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASibLqwVbsk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zT9fxhrjoQc>

The first link is for two 1976 PSAs produced by the CDC in anticipation of a swine flu epidemic. The second PSA, which shows the spread of the virus from person to person, is generally the best for comparison. The second link is for a PSA produced by the UK Department of Health at the height of the H1N1 epidemic. This is a humorous PSA which shows how easily any germ can be spread in public spaces.

Activity: As always, show videos more than once. As students give you their reactions, make sure to ask them “What?” questions to compare the content and techniques of the two ads. What happened? For example, the CDC message shows one infected person travelling to a variety of destinations, while the UK Department of Health ad shows one infected person in an enclosed space (an elevator). Also ask, What made the first ad scary? What made the second ad funny? Questions about purpose come next. Why did the two agencies produce these ads? What were these agencies hoping that people would do in response to them? And ask why the ads were presented in such different ways. Why did the CDC produce a scary ad, and why did the British government decide to make their ad funny? What messages were they trying to send about the risks involved in spreading swine flu virus? Next, divide the class into pairs or small groups, and explain that they’ll be adding something to their ads or changing them slightly to show what they know about the purpose behind them. Work to ensure that a roughly equal number of groups choose each PSA. Give your students the choice to write a title for their ad, or to write a different ending or “tag” line for the announcer. Their lines can be goofy or even make fun of the ad itself, but they still have to demonstrate the purpose of the ad. When students have finished their work, share and discuss the alternative versions of the ads as time allows.

Extended Activity: Key Question #3 for Producers: Is my message engaging and compelling for my target audience? Ask students to come up with their own concepts for an influenza PSA, and ask students to consider the following as they prepare their PSA concepts: Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota said that criticizing the government for its aggressive response to the threat of the H1N1 virus is like criticizing officials for building dikes in New Orleans to withstand a Category 5 hurricane when only a Category 3 storm comes ashore (Stobbe, “Is the Swine Flu Epidemic Over?”, AP, February 5, 2010).

Ask students if they were health officials who were uncertain of the threat of mortality posed by the virus, but knew that it could be devastating, what kind of PSA would they produce?

Have students consider this information as they decide on strategies for getting the attention of their audience: In late September 2009, swine flu cases rapidly increased across the country. The H1N1 vaccine became available in mid-October, and people waited in lines--sometimes for hours--at clinics offering the vaccine. By mid-December, the epidemic seemed to be waning. By the end of January 2010, only a fifth of Americans had received the vaccine, according to data released by the CDC. A poll taken in late January by the Harvard School of Public Health also found that most Americans had assumed the pandemic was over and thought the threat was overblown (McNeil, "Most American Think Swine Flu Pandemic Is Over, a Harvard Poll Finds," New York Times, February 6, 2010).

When this newsletter was published, some health experts still expected a "third wave" of H1N1 in fall of 2010. In 1976, vaccines were enthusiastically welcomed. Many parents or grandparents still remembered children dead of smallpox, measles and polio. Today, anti-vaccine activists reach a wide audience on the Internet, and many concerned parents believe that vaccines may cause health problems in children. Among parents surveyed in the Harvard poll, many cited fear of side effects as a reason why their families did not receive the vaccinations.

Space Alien Lands Audition on American Idol!

It's common to speak of tabloid news writing as a kind of journalism which can be easily separated from any other kind. From this point of view, all other news publications uphold journalistic standards which tabloids do not begin to meet. And there's some basis to the argument. For example, tabloid writers—in flagrant violation of the rules of attribution--fabricate quotes from fictitious “sources” or “insiders” to pique reader interest in their stories. But in one essential respect, tabloid and mainstream news publications are more similar than they appear to be. They share the same set of news values—the criteria by which news organizations select stories to be published (as listed later in the activity). In this MediaLit Moment, we take advantage of that essential similarity: your high school students will not only have fun producing their own tabloid news, they'll learn something about the way in which all news is constructed.

Ask students to write a tabloid news headline and identify the news values they reflect

AHA! The crazy headline that I wrote follows the rules for writing any good news story!

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Key Question #2 for Producers: Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity and technology?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #3 for Producers: Is my message engaging and compelling for my target audience?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

Grade Level: 10-12

Materials: Sample tabloid newspapers or headlines; paper, pencil, imagination

Activity: Ask students about their knowledge of and experience with tabloid news. Do any of them like reading tabloid newspapers? Why or why not?

Next, tell students that they're going to learn something about tabloid news by writing their own tabloid news headline. Students should write something they find entertaining, but it needs to be something appropriate for the general public to read. Distribute sample stories or headlines if you wish. Once they're finished, have fun sharing headlines in class. You may want to ask a few students about the thinking behind the headlines they wrote.

Next, display or distribute a list of the news values which editors use to select stories which are likely to appeal to readers. Here's our list:

- Currency – Has the story just happened? Is it of interest right now?
- Relevance – Does it relate to your life, your family or your community?
- Impact – Does the story affect a large number of people? Are the consequences serious?
- Proximity – Did the story take place nearby or does it relate to local concerns?
- Prominence – Does the story deal with well-known or powerful people or countries?
- Clarity – Will most people be able to understand the story?
- Personalization – Is it a human interest story about an individual person (or animal?)
- Conflict/Controversy – Does the story deal with an issue about which people strongly disagree?
- Emotion – Does the story produce strong emotions such as fear or suspense?
- Uniqueness/Unexpectedness – Is the story about something unusual, unsuspected or odd? Is it about something wonderful or awesome?
- Extension – Is there a relationship with other news stories?

Next, ask students which news values their headlines reflect. Many will fall under the heading of “prominence” or “personalization.” Many will fulfill more than one news value. Did any of them think about these values as they came up with their headline, or did they just churn out a headline without having to think much about it? Which headlines do they think a tabloid editor might have found especially appealing?

Extended Activity: The celebrity news in tabloids often “shadows” the coverage found in more reputable weeklies devoted to celebrity news such as People and Us. Ask students to compare the different treatments of the same story in each kind of publication. How do news values drive the tabloid version of the story?

Construction

Key Question #4

Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my **content**?

Core Concept #4

Media have embedded values and points of view

What's in a Map?

As the authors make clear in *Seeing Through Maps* (see review in Maps Newsletter, Oct. 2009), people who read maps are audiences, and maps usually have something to “say” to their readers. For example, a tourist map that shows the locations of downtown businesses says “Shop downtown!” But how often do people get to read a map that says something they want to hear about themselves or their community? In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to create a map that expresses their feelings about the community in which they live, as well as their thoughts about the things in their community that they might like to see change.

Have your students create a “current use” map of their community

AHA!: In this map, I’m not just telling people where places are, I’m also telling them about my community!

Key Question #4 for Producers: Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Grade: 4+

Materials: colored markers (we suggest red and blue), and a base map to distribute to students. The choice of area for the base map depends on your location and the demographics of your student population. If your school is in a rural location, you may need a map which focuses on a county-wide area. If your school is located in an urban area, then your map should focus on one or more neighborhoods. If your students commute from long distances, you may want to make the school the focal point of your map.

Because the map that your students make will include the public places they go on a daily basis, you should use a base map which gives students a frame of reference by indicating the location of public places and municipal services such as hospitals, fire stations, libraries, schools, etc. Students will be making sentence-length notes on these maps, so a map which only includes arterial streets may be the best for this activity. Your local planning agency will probably be the best source for these maps, but you may be able to use Google Maps for this activity. The base map from Open Street Maps (<http://www.openstreetmap.org>) may also be useful.

Size may be the biggest challenge in assembling your materials. Students should have plenty of room to write on these maps, and this activity is best conducted in groups of 4 or more so that students will be able to easily compare notes. If possible, print your maps 20” x 20” or larger and post them on the walls of your classroom.

Activity: First, ask the class how people use maps, especially city maps. What kind of information do people usually get from these maps?

Introduce the base maps that students will be using for this activity. These are the kinds of maps that you've just been talking about. Let them know that they're going to create a "user" map that will help make the original map better. To help students orient themselves, and to help them understand the kind of information they will add to the maps, ask them to circle one or more of the public places already printed on the map with pencil or plain ink and check for understanding.

Next, ask your students to mark the locations of public places they use everyday -- streets, bus stops, malls, businesses, parks, playgrounds, supermarkets. Ask them to mark these in pencil or plain ink. Ask them to draw them in if they don't already appear on the map. Students do not need to make an exhaustive list.

Next, ask your students to locate and mark one or two of their favorite public places with a blue marker, and to write a sentence at each marking which explains why this is one of their favorite places. Is there something they like to buy there? Is it a place with a lot of room to play? Finally, ask your students to locate and mark one or two public areas that they have some problem with. Is it a place where they avoid riding their bikes? Is it part of their school playground that should have another yard duty? Is it a barrier to access to part of their favorite park? A library with internet stations that are always full? Ask them to mark the locations with a red marker, and to write one sentence which describes the problem.

When students have finished, ask your students questions to help them understand the kind of map they've created. Is the information in their "favorites" and "problems" markings different in some way from the service information on the base map? How is it different?

Students are ready for the AHA! (or turning point) of this lesson once they begin to understand that they've added information that is evaluative as well as factual. At that point you can let students know how important their opinions really are. Their maps of public places don't just document their personal preferences. Their maps are an invaluable source of information to other community members (For example, a librarian would definitely want to know about students' frustration with the relative lack of internet access. Many store owners would want to know whether students felt welcome at their store).

As you lead this discussion, keep a list of the people who might want to see their maps, and use this as a potential list of real-world contacts for future lessons.

DIY Zombie Apocalypse

A single film, George Romero’s “Night of the Living Dead,” with its legions of ‘undead’ mass murderers, has created one of the most enduring archetypes in pop culture history. Since then, all of us have become familiar with the attributes of the modern zombie--blank stares, a slow, jerky gait, subsistence on an all-protein diet. Zombies are also a trope or figure of speech. “Ted, you really shouldn’t be working those ten hour days. You look like a zombie!” Most importantly, zombies are tropes with a social significance. They come in packs and herds, and they raise the question, why are they so mindless, and what are they following?

The answers which film producers have given to that question have been very different. Released in 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War, “Night of the Living Dead” has been dubbed “hippie horror” for its apparent commentary on the terrors of a war without purpose. In 2004, “Shaun of the Dead” featured many characters in “dead-end” jobs who seem little changed by their transformation into zombies. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will be able to unleash their social imagination as they answer the ‘zombie question’ for themselves.

Have students write their own version of the zombie apocalypse

AHA!: When I write about the future zombie invasion, I’m saying something about the kind of world we live in now!

Key Question #4 for Producers: Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

Key Question #2 for Producers: Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity and technology?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Grade Level: 5-12

Materials: paper, pencil, imagination

Activity: Discuss the social implications of zombie film and fiction with students in the way it’s been introduced above. Perhaps the single best example to give students is the Resident Evil series. It’s not just a video game. The Umbrella Corporation featured in the movie and video games treated all its employees as expendable—and they all became zombies as a result. Present sample clips, or excerpts from novels and/or graphic novels if you wish. Ask, what kind of people in the world seem like zombies to them now? Why? Next, ask students to use their answers as inspiration (and perhaps as characters for) for the zombie apocalypse story they are about to write. Students can sketch out apocalyptic scenarios instead, but these should be

detailed enough to “flesh out” their social commentary. Assign students to work in pairs or groups as you wish. Once students have completed the openings for their stories, compare, discuss and enjoy the variety of social worlds they’ve created.

Construction

Key Question #5

Have I communicated my **purpose** effectively?

Core Concept #5

Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

What Would Scooby Do? Branding Children's Television

See Extended Activity for Construction

Some images, sounds and words retain a strong hold on the American popular imagination for generations, and children's animated television certainly has its share. Who can forget the long-haired slacker in the pale green shirt who says "Zoinks!" and cowers in fear while a large, slobbery, talking dog holds him in his hands, er, paws? Frodo lives, but Scooby Doo, *Where Are You?*, one of the most popular animated series in American history, lives on and on, its shelf life extended indefinitely through decades of branded merchandising. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to discover how iconic television images are used to enhance the appeal of everyday consumer products through the process of product branding. The activity included here will also help your students learn how marketers of branded products use creative techniques to attract the attention of a wide range of potential customers.

Have students use popular images from a children's television show to design a concept for a branded consumer product.

AHA! The company that produces Scooby Doo puts words and pictures from the show on things that people buy—which makes it more likely that people will buy them!

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

Grade Level: 4-6

Materials: overhead projector, transparencies, access to computer and color printer, and the following images downloaded through Google images:

Scooby Doo's dog tag by itself: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/4/48/SDtag.png>

Scooby Doo with tag: http://www.profilebrand.com/imgs/layouts/30tv-shows/1296/1296_L-scooby-doo.jpg

Scooby Doo party products:

<http://images.celebrateexpress.com/mgen/merchandiser/42113.jpg>

Mystery Machine van without any passengers: <http://www.vectorjunky.com/gallery/s/Scooby-Doo-Mysterymachine-001.jpg>

Mystery Machine van with Scooby Doo characters:

http://media.giantbomb.com/uploads/0/3093/1080384-mystery_machine_large.jpg

Activity: The activity begins with a teaser. Show the image with only the dog tag and ask students if they have any idea what the tag represents. Give them verbal clues if you like—that it's a dog tag, comes from an animated show, belongs to a talking dog, etc. Or show them the image of the Mystery Machine without any passengers. Or keep giving them clues until you show them one of the images that clearly reveals the source. Draw attention to the fact that students can quickly recognize the significance of the images with just a few clues. Next, show them the images of the Scooby Doo branded products. The words and images from the show that were so easy to recognize are now being used to make everyday objects more interesting. The things people buy are called products. So, the company 1) uses those easy-to-recognize words and pictures to attract people to the product, and most importantly 2) makes money off of the product when people (called customers) buy it. You can also tell students that putting these words and pictures on products to attract customers is called branding.

Extended Activity/Production: Key Question #2 for Producers: Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity and technology?

Key Question #3 for Producers: Is my message engaging and compelling for my target audience?

Before starting with this activity, you may want to ask students to come up with a list of words and pictures that they remember from the show and that other people are likely to remember, too. *Rut Roh!*

Next, tell students that they're going to act like they're part of the company that puts all the words and images (branding) on the products that customers buy. The company is looking for new products for the Scooby Doo brand. Ask them to create a concept for a Scooby Doo consumer product that no one has seen before. (Stick with consumer products rather than media products, since students may easily conflate media products with brand images). What combination of words and pictures would be good to use to attract customers to this particular product? Possible ideas to get them started: Shaggy Hair Care, Daphne's Fashion Accessories. Depending on the interests and abilities of your students, you can ask them to come up with anything from short descriptions to fully designed logos and illustrations. In addition, tell students that they need to be able to answer one question when they've finished their concepts: What exactly did they do to attract customers to this product? In this case, you're asking students to talk about creative techniques, and possibly about ways of targeting

an audience as well. It isn't enough for students to say that customers will like the product just because they see Scooby Doo on it. For example, if the product is a men's tie (a product that already exists), a man who works at an office (maybe even their Dad) might like the product because a talking dog is just so silly that it might make his boss and co-workers laugh.

Extended Activity:

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

The history of Scooby Doo's initial development may also help to explain the show's broad and long-lasting appeal to audiences. In the mid- to late 1960s, CBS and Hanna Barbera Productions were under pressure from parent's television groups who objected to the gratuitous violence of Johnny Quest and other Hanna Barbera action cartoons. Fred Silverman, executive in charge of CBS children's television programming, looked to two sources for inspiration: I Love a Mystery, a 1940s radio program which followed the pulp fiction adventures of three detectives bent on solving mysterious crimes around the world, and the 1959-1963 television sitcom The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis, about a scatterbrained teenager and his friends. Scooby Doo would reference the suspenseful and supernatural elements of the radio show, but with Dobie Gillis as a touchstone, violence was left out of the new series, and so were the masculine stereotypes reinforced by earlier animation action heroes. In the extended activity, help students learn more about Core Concept #3 by having them compare Scooby Doo with a children's show that does feature action characters or superheroes. The second show should also have a large product line and a successful history of branding products. Iron Man might be a good choice. Students should ask questions about the likely audience(s) for each show, and how these shows appeal to their audiences. They should also ask questions about the creative techniques and audience strategies that marketers would use to sell products from each product line.

Image Builders

In the 1930's, Franklin Roosevelt used the new medium of radio in an attempt to win voter support for his New Deal policies. And seventy years later, Barack Obama is using a variety of web tools to attract support for his policies. On the [Whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) website, you'll find transcripts of press briefings, blogs, and photos, all of which can be exported to a variety of social media applications. The site also includes videos of our President at various town halls and events, and frequent video addresses in which Obama makes his case directly to voters. The material on this site is selected by someone in the White House and is posted to create a positive image of our country's leadership. More and more, politicians are understanding how the use of media can positively impact public image and help gain support among voters. Take a look at this image of President Obama at the recent Summit of the Americas:

<http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/gallery/2009/04/summit-of-the-americas-behind-the-scenes.php?img=21>

The social environment conveyed in this photo is casual, yet Obama is clearly a leader who has ideas to discuss with the Congressional delegation in the photo. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will take a stand on issues they care about, and also learn how to create an image of themselves as leaders taking action on those issues.

Have your students create a "photo opportunity" at school which projects an image of leadership.

AHA!: A picture showing me "in action" can inspire other people to support my cause!

Key Question #5 for Producers: Have I communicated my purpose effectively?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Grade Level: 8+

Materials: any camera, whether personal, disposable, or digital

Ask your students to think about an issue they feel deserves attention. It could be the school's lunch policy or the need for a gymnasium or theater program. Or students could identify an individual or group whom they believe deserve praise for their contributions to the campus community.

Next, ask your students to think of a photo opportunity for themselves which could also help draw popular support for the issue or person they've chosen. They could be presenting an award. They could be having a serious discussion with the principal. They could be "caught" in an act of service. You may wish to use photos from [Whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) to discuss the kinds of scenarios which are typically used to project images of leadership.

Students should also produce some writing for this activity which helps to establish the purpose of the photo-op. At a minimum, students should write a caption which helps to frame the importance of the scene which has been captured in the photograph. With more time allotted to this activity, students could write a blog, a position statement, or a plea for support.

If at all possible, give your students the opportunity to use the photo as a presentation tool as they discuss their issue before the class. Doing so should help ensure that students choose an issue which is of genuine concern to them.

The way in which photo opportunities are created and displayed depends on your students' technical sophistication, the sophistication of the equipment you have available, and the imagination of you and your students.

Through the Electronic Looking Glass

Many of us go through life wondering how much information is “out there” about us, but don’t make the effort to find out. In the meanwhile, an electronic mosaic of personal identity is quietly assembled from all corners of the web. The mosaic is made of information pieced together from public and commercial directories, newspaper articles, school announcements, and blog and social media posts, including our own.

In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have a chance to look beyond the virtual “looking glass” of the world wide web to understand how information is gathered about individuals, who gathers it, and for what purposes. In the process, students will learn that much is at stake in the way that their information is gathered and circulated, and they will learn how to negotiate their relationships with information publishers to meet their own interests and needs.

Have students conduct a Google search to gather personal information about themselves.

AHA! I’m just looking at stuff when I surf the web, but once I see what people have posted about me online, I want to know what they’re doing and why they’re doing it!

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Grade Level: 9-12

Materials: Computer with high-speed internet access and classroom data projector; or access to school computing lab; whiteboard or interactive whiteboard, if available.

Activity: Begin the class by placing students in the role of gumshoe detective. If they “Google” somebody, where will most of the information they uncover likely come from? Here’s a sample: Facebook posts, Twitter posts, YouTube videos posted by friends and family, local newspapers, announcements of events, public recognitions and awards, blog posts and comments on blog posts. In fact, once they learn more about the person they’re investigating, they could even begin to incorporate these sources within their search terms: “NameX Springfield American Cancer Society.” Demonstrate by conducting a search on yourself.

Make sure to conduct a few initial searches on your own so you can screen results you would rather not display to students!

Depending on whether you have 1:1 (or at least 1:2) computer access, ask students to conduct a Google search on their own name in class, or as homework. Ask them to answer two basic questions as they complete their searches: 1) From what kinds of sources did they find information about themselves? 2) What kinds of reactions did they have to the information? How did their reactions differ from what they might have felt if they had simply been searching for their favorite movies or games?

Begin the next class with a short discussion of their reactions to their searches. Use this discussion to pique their interest in the activity as a whole. Next, ask students to describe the sources for their information. Were they family? Friends? Commercial sites? Ask for one or more examples of information/content posted by individuals, or from sites with URLs ending with “.org” or “.edu” Why do they think these people or organizations posted the information? Next, ask for one or more examples from commercial publishers. Why do they think they posted the information? (The objective is not to separate ‘good guys’ from ‘bad guys’ so much as to briefly contrast differing purposes.)

If you’re familiar with how social media sites work, and a social media example hasn’t already been given, ask for one. Discussing how social media service providers and their advertising partners use audience/user information is a great way to illustrate to students how important their data is to online commerce. You may also want to use the white board to outline the relationships involved. Here’s an example:

Audience (YOU)

Get the service that allows you to share messages, games, links and more with your friends.

Give to service providers and their advertising partners: Your Attention to ads, Personal information from your profile, Usage data (places you visit, links you click, etc.). User-Generated Content (what you write and create).

Advertisers

Get a lot of information from you that makes it easier for them to figure out the kinds of things you like to buy.

Give you ads based on what they think you like. They send ads to your home page and other places. They cross their fingers and hope that you will buy their product.

Service Providers

Get paid \$\$\$ by Advertisers for the information you’re giving them.

Give you the pages/sites to use (Facebook, MySpace, etc.)

For a more detailed outline of this scenario, see the theme article for this issue (October 2010, Online Privacy)

In discussing user-generated content, you can use the example of an event (such as a party) that they post. The service provider and advertisers take relevant details from the event posting to start building a profile of their consumer interests. If you have an interactive white board available, students can add examples of the kinds of information, content, and/or links that the service provider and advertisers might be able to use.

Next, ask students to begin working in pairs. Ask them to focus on those search results that they were unhappy or dissatisfied with in some way. Working in pairs gives students a chance to share their reactions to these results without having to broadcast their content to the rest of the class. Students should also discuss what would they like to see happen with the information, and what steps they could take to make that happen. You may want to allow time for students to simply share their reactions before asking them to discuss their responses to the organizations and/or individuals who published the information. Finally, bring the whole class back together to discuss possible plans of action. A whiteboard or interactive white board may be useful here. Student comments are likely trend towards two topics--privacy issues, or audience relationships with advertisers and service providers (or media producers) at commercial sites.

Here are some possible questions you can ask students during this discussion: Audience relationships with producers, service providers, advertisers --What should they expect from them? More services? Better services? Better prices? Where will they take their business if they don't get what they want? Privacy— Should the producers, service providers and advertisers give users better options for privacy? Should individual users take responsibility for things they posted online? Should publishers feel responsible because they made the information/content available? Why? If they should be responsible, what should be done?

Extended Activities: Wish List -- Since interactive advertising is a pretty new field, what do you think advertisers, producers and service providers should be offering you in the next ten years? This activity allows students to use both creative and critical thinking skills.

If you would like to discuss the relationships between students, commercial sites and online advertisers in somewhat simpler terms, you may want to review these two minute videos on the uses of cookie files posted by the Harvard Berkman Center on Internet on Society.

The prize-winning video by Clayton Miller does an excellent job of explaining how advertising networks use third-party cookies to acquire information about individual consumers. The “Got Cookies?” video is very entertaining and should be accessible to freshman students.

<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/cookiecontest/>

Also, if the parents of your students don't mind the task of deleting cookies once the project is completed, students can learn about the pervasiveness of third-party tracking cookies by clicking on online advertisements and noting the types of advertisements that begin to follow them from one web page to the next.