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"If students aren't taught the language of sound and images, shouldn't they be considered as illiterate as if they left college without being able to read or write?" George Lucas asked this question in 2004, and it is only more poignant today.

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Media deconstruction lessons and activities help students acquire learning skills which can be applied in any discipline, and also help students become aware of themselves as learners.

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Core Concept #3 is that different people experience the same media message differently. In this MediaLit Moment, your students' responses to a single photograph are likely to be very different. Will they see the same picture?

Theme: Media Deconstruction as an Essential Learning

In a 2004 interview with Edutopia, film maker George Lucas offered his views on the need for media literacy education:

When people talk to me about the digital divide, I think of it not being so much about who has access to what technology as who knows how to create and express themselves in this new language of the screen. If students aren't taught the language of sound and images, shouldn't they be considered as illiterate as if they left college without being able to read or write? Unfortunately, most learning institutions find that idea very difficult to swallow. They consider the various forms of non-written communication as some type of therapy or art. . . .

Lucas argues that visual and media literacy skills should not be relegated to arts courses, and that English Language Arts departments should make way for a new, comprehensive discipline of Communications. His reasoning for the change echoes that of many media literacy educators: non-print media have as much—if not more—power to persuade, sell and influence audiences. Students should be able to analyze and master the techniques used to produce them because these are all fundamental literacy skills.

Moreover, Lucas argues that these skills can and should be assessed:

. . . there are rules for telling a story visually. . .and you can test people on them as well. There is grammar in film, there is grammar in graphics, there is grammar in music, just like there are rules in math that can be taught. For instance, what emotion does the color red convey? What about blue? What does a straight line mean? How about a diagonal line?

Over the course of decades, media literacy educators have discovered that the basic unit of teaching, practice, and assessment is largely the same: deconstruction of individual media texts. Teachers and students using the CML Framework can wield the tools for media deconstruction with many different purposes in mind. The Framework can be used for guided practice, for independent and collaborative practice, to create models for successful demonstration of skills, as a touchstone for discussing and developing criteria for success, and as the tool set which students use to demonstrate their skills to teachers and peers.

Using the Framework also opens a door for students to engage with their own learning. Most media texts are finished products which have been crafted to encourage audiences to suspend their disbelief in the world which the text represents to them. For that reason, attempting a deconstructive analysis can be a daunting prospect. The Key Questions and Core Concepts alleviate that anxiety by providing specific avenues for inquiry. When students feel stuck, they can refer to the five key components of media and use it as a checklist. Instead of supplying information or “fishing” for correct responses, teachers can point students towards specific Core Concepts and engage in brief discussion about the possible significance

of the concept to the text. By working within the Framework, students are able to examine their own thinking processes.

It's worthwhile to dwell a little longer on the topic of assessment. Writing over the last two decades, Rick Stiggins, director of the Assessment Training Institute at Educational Testing Service, has thoroughly documented the value of student involvement in assessment. When students understand the trajectory of skills they are to acquire, understand the criteria by which their work will be assessed, have the opportunity to evaluate anonymous samples, and have sufficient practice in assessing their own work, student motivation increases. Students develop what Stiggins calls "academic self-efficacy," and achievement, especially for struggling students, increases significantly (Stiggins et. al., 2004).

The attraction of students to contemporary media texts is often used as a 'selling point' for the introduction of media literacy education to schools, but once students become involved in the process of investigating the media they use in their daily lives, their motivation for engaging with media is likely to follow from the problem-solving they're engaged in, from the opportunities that are afforded to them to assess their work mid-stream, and from the self-efficacy they gain as they continue practicing with the Framework. All of these activities help students acquire critical thinking skills which are central to learning.

In this issue of *Connections*, we challenge the perceptions of media literacy education which Lucas touches on in his interview---that media literacy is arty, frivolous, esoteric, therapeutic, or an expensive and time-consuming add-on. We take a closer look at the benefits of engaging students in deconstructive analysis, and in the process, we explain why deconstruction fosters the development of skills which are vital to learning in any discipline. We also interview long-time media literacy advocate Frank Baker, who offers a critique of the Common Core standards, and discusses the significance of professional development training to the task of integrating media literacy into standards-based instruction. And in our MediaLit Moment, your students will have a chance to reflect on the role they play as audiences for documentary photographs.

References:

Daly, James. "Life on the Screen: Visual Literacy in Education." Edutopia website, original publication date 14 September 2004. Accessed 26 April 2012 at www.edutopia.org/lucas-visual-literacy

Stiggins, Rick, et al. *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing it Right—Using it Well* (1st ed.). Portland, OR: Assessment Training Institute, 2004.

Research Highlights

Media Deconstruction and Critical Thinking Skills: At the Center, not the Periphery of the K-12 Curriculum

College undergraduates are sometimes given the assignment to explain an argument or theory from some historical figure's point of view, or from multiple perspectives. The assignment asks students to apply high level critical thinking skills--but students need not wait until they arrive at college to develop them. With media literacy education, students frequently explore media texts from multiple perspectives, and the learning which students take away from that experience can happen in any K-12 classroom.

Critical thinking skills, such as the ability to consider multiple perspectives, are rarely targeted in K-12 instruction, largely due to a focus on content knowledge and discipline-specific skills in state standards. Yet these are fundamental thinking and learning skills, and deconstructive analysis of media directly targets these skills with activities appropriate for K-12 students. For example, middle school students might count the number of times that they see images of food presented in food commercials. In doing so, they take the first steps in the task of examining the parts from which media texts are constructed. In subsequent lessons, students can learn more about the function of those images as they learn about the intended effects of food advertisements. All these lessons and activities can easily be integrated with instruction in other disciplines. CML's curriculum on nutrition and food advertising integrates these skills with national common core standards-based instruction in health, educational technology and language arts.

"Counting" and other media observation activities may also be implicated in the development of self-awareness, one of those dispositions essential to successful critical thinking. In a recent implementation and research project, sixth grade students viewed a clip of violent animated content, received instruction on specific categories of media violence and their potential effects on viewers, and were invited to respond again to the animated clip. The results? According to Erica Scharrer, the lead investigator and study author, "The increases in observations of not just overall violence but also specific types of antisocial content, including verbal aggression and crime, as well as the decision by some sixth graders to tally the acts of violence in the clip, suggest an enhanced ability to notice violence in media content. ..." (2006, p.82). Some students directly noted changes in their own perceptions: "It seemed like there was more violence than the first time I saw it"; "I noticed more violence" (p.81).

The close analysis is the definitive observation and analysis exercise. Students view a media clip a number of times and take notes on those things which they directly observe: dialogue, sound effects, lighting, costume, specific images. Only when they have completed this investigation of concrete, observable phenomena are they allowed to make interpretations of

the presentation as a whole. In participating in this exercise, students learn about the difference between fact and opinion, and the difference between evidence and inference as well. Again, why should students wait until they are in college to acquire these fundamental critical thinking skills?

So far we've discussed media construction and media techniques, which are the basis for Key Questions/Core Concepts One and Two, but imagine students' surprise when they learn that, despite the sensory evidence they all have so painstakingly collected, their friends' interpretations of the text may still differ radically from their own. Students have discovered the premise of Core Concept Three. And in this learning environment, examination of multiple perspectives is anything but an abstract exercise—it's an immediate encounter with human subjectivity.

Key Question/Core Concept Four encourages students to apply an inquiring, healthy skepticism to any text. Traditionally, English Language Arts students have been handicapped in this respect because state standards expect students to absorb 'the best that has been thought and said' in the classics of Western literature. Critical evaluation is generally discouraged. Feminist analysis of *The Taming of the Shrew* will likely have to wait until college. With media literacy instruction, the texts selected may or may not be masterpieces, but students will nonetheless be encouraged to fully interrogate them for embedded lifestyles, values and beliefs.

Moreover, it's imperative for students to apply those skills when the media they encounter on a daily basis suggest what they should eat, how they should look, and how they should vote. All state standards include requirements for health and civic education, but in an era of declining funding and high stakes testing in mathematics and language arts, educators are often hard pressed to make adequate provision for instruction. Involving students in deconstructive analysis of relevant texts can help them acquire both critical thinking and essential life skills.

As students work with Key Questions/Core Concepts Three, Four and Five, they address the entire range of contexts in which media are produced. In addition to learning about the purposes for which media are produced, they learn about the relationship between media producers, media products and themselves. Building on the fundamental critical thinking skills they developed through activities such as close analysis, they learn how to synthesize knowledge from multiple domains, and how to apply them in new contexts. These are all higher order thinking skills.

Media literacy education is not simply a 'missing link' between disciplines. The skills which students acquire through media literacy instruction help them better understand the process of inquiry in any discipline, and help them become aware of themselves as learners. Through media literacy education, students acquire—and apply--what can only be described as fundamental learning skills.



E-book Available Online:

[Click here](#) for a free download of the CML e-book for Deconstruction titled *Media Literacy: A System for Learning Anytime, Anywhere Part 2*.

CONSORTIUM for **MEDIA LITERACY**

Uniting for Development

About Us...

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

www.consortiumformedia literacy.org

Resources for Media Literacy

Teaching Tip: Engage your students by doing activities that encourage the counting of certain words or images within a short video clip. Counting games are a fun way to teach close analysis of media messages.

An Interview with Frank Baker

Frank Baker is a media literacy educator and advocate who has been active in the field for over twenty years. His website, the Media Literacy Clearinghouse, features hundreds of articles and lessons on media literacy relating to standards in all disciplines. He has presented media literacy workshops nationwide, and has recently assisted in drafting a strand of media literacy standards for Visual and Performing Arts in the state of South Carolina. He has authored three books on media literacy, including *Media Literacy in the K-12 Classroom*, published in January by ISTE. When he isn't busy presenting workshops, Baker writes a weekly column on media, education and popular culture for the "Teacher's Lounge" at *USA Today*.

In June 2011, Baker co-authored an article for *Education Week* to address the limited role which media and digital literacies play in the Common Core standards. Baker was invited to comment on the Common Core standards for this interview.

CML: Can you tell us more about your involvement with the Visual and Performing Arts standards in South Carolina?

FB: In one of my meetings, I was sitting at the table with teachers from all the arts—drama, sculpture, visual art, theater—and all of them heard me talk about media literacy. And all of them later wrote support documents to encourage other teachers in those disciplines to incorporate media arts and media literacy into what they're already doing. Most arts educators have probably seen the new media arts/media literacy standard, but have not seen the supporting document which is designed to help them teach it. Nor have the majority participated in any professional development, yet. Roll out is the problem area. Getting media literacy standards implemented in the classroom is a difficult process. . . .

Since arts educators haven't received professional development for the new standard, I was encouraged to apply as an artist in residence. I may not have any professional skills as an artist, but I applied, and I was accepted, and it allowed any school to hire me because I was on an official list. . . .At one school I taught a weekend class with 3rd, 4th and 5th graders on storytelling through film. . . .One of the things that I did was to ask students to create storyboards based on their reading of the first two pages of the children's book *Because of Winn-Dixie*. At the start of the book, a little girl is sent to the grocery store by her father to pick up food for that night's dinner. There's a dog loose in the store, and the manager and employees are all chasing the dog. The dog is upsetting the apple cart, the tomatoes, the onions--and then it comes to a screeching halt and starts smiling at the girl. At that point, I ask

students, “What’s going on up in your head?” And I tell them, “You’re visualizing what you’re reading. You’ll be film makers if you take the pictures in your head and put them on paper!” I divide them into three groups and charge them with storyboarding the grocery store scene from the point of view of three different characters--from the point of view of the manager, the dog, and the girl. We had a field day. I’ve been doing this with teachers as well. It’s a crime that storyboarding and scriptwriting are not found in any English Language Arts textbook, though all these media start as writing. One of the reasons that I’m so disappointed with the Common Core standards is that they could have been written in the 60s.

CML: Was there any relevant input on inclusion of media literacy skills in the Common Core standards that was ignored?

FB: One of the problems with the Common Core standards is that not one working classroom teacher was invited onto the committees which drafted the standards. . . If you contacted representatives at Common Core, they’ll say, ‘That might be true, but we sent out a draft of the standards, and teachers had the chance to give feedback on them.’ But if today’s classroom teachers have not been trained to effectively incorporate media, advertising, news, music, movies and all of those things into their instruction, they’re certainly not going to say, ‘Here’s what is missing.’

The Common Core focus on reading, writing, listening and speaking completely ignores viewing. . . .Media and visual literacy and media as representation is totally ignored. . . That’s a crime in the 21st century. . . .In 1999, Robert Kubey and I looked at all 50 state standards and did a content analysis. What we found was that elements of media literacy were in fact evident in English Language Arts standards for almost every state. Forty-six states now endorse Common Core. What we’re doing now is wiping out everything we’ve achieved with previous standards. It’s a huge step backwards, and it’s not a good sign for teaching media literacy in English Language Arts, where it traditionally has been most strongly represented.

Once I contacted representatives at the South Carolina Department of Education to ask if they were considering any additional standards. {States adopting Common Core standards may supplement them with an additional 15% of standards drafted at the state level} They said, ‘Here’s the reason why we’re not adding anything. It costs us money to bring in teachers to write the standards. It costs money to create assessments for those standards. We’re in a recession. We have no intention of doing either one of those things.’ Most other states would say the same thing.

The state of Texas—which has not adopted Common Core--has what I consider to be model media literacy standards. They’ve incorporated media literacy in their reading standards, which include strands for viewing and representing. From a personal standpoint, that’s the perfect place for media literacy.

NCTE has not and will not endorse the Common Core standards, or recommend them. NCTE

has been around since the 1930s, and has been a long-time endorser of using media texts in the classroom. English Language Arts teachers are required to teach to the Common Core standards, but the parent organization of English teachers is still not recommending them.

CML: You said earlier that you're not seeing much media literacy instruction in classrooms.

FB: If you're a young person who likes to take pictures with a mobile phone, or wants to put together a music video, where do you learn how to do that? Definitely not in the classroom. That kind of learning takes place outside the bounds of instruction. Schools are actually afraid to tell them. They say, the kids will cheat, or they'll take pictures that invade other people's privacy. When I talk to schools about cell phones, I ask whether they have a cell phone policy. Usually they do have a policy, and they don't allow cell phones on campus at all. It's unfortunate, because we're having the same discussion that we had about computers twenty-five to thirty years ago. If you can use the technologies properly, be trained properly, and have a code of conduct to follow, you can be successful. A lot of schools are behind the ball on this.

I don't think we're adequately teaching kids to be critical thinkers. We're expecting them to get it by osmosis, and they're not. In workshops that I offer to teachers, I say that kids only know what they see on screen. They only see the final cut. They're not seeing all the steps, the people, the careers, the techniques that are needed to get to the final product. My job, as a media literacy educator, is to pull back the curtain and show them how media are made. When they are shown how media are made, kids much more appreciate the process. I'm a big fan of the Media Spot in New York. It's an organization devoted to production and media literacy skills that works with local schools. They've worked with 4th graders to create a PSA on global warming, and in the film they created, they documented all the steps that they went through--script writing, storyboarding, going to the Internet to find images. Then they show the final cut. I've shown that video in several of my workshops.

CML: If you were a principal, and had a magic wand, what would you do to implement media literacy instruction in your school?

FB: I'd invite someone like Frank Baker in to help teachers understand the connection between media messages and critical thinking. Every teacher who uses a video in the classroom needs to have media literacy training. In one of my recent workshops, I asked a group of secondary social studies teachers if they could teach history without images, and they all said no. When I asked how many of them teach visual literacy, none responded in the affirmative. That led to a workshop on visual literacy. It's not all rocket science, either. In many ways it's such a common sense proposition. Teachers will get it, they will take it, and they will run with it. Invariably I will have a teacher who says that she cannot wait to take what I say and apply it in class. Many teachers will say, I'm doing some of that, or I'm doing a bit of that already. What we need is one teacher in one discipline—hopefully one in every discipline—who can recognize the power and relevance of media literacy instruction.

CML: If you had the power to draft national media literacy standards, how would you integrate media literacy skills into the curriculum?

FB: One of the goals of education today is to graduate informed, competent young people who can communicate. How do we communicate today? We write. We record video. We blog. We post pictures. What are the skills that young people need to have to be employable and successful in a 21st century world? Increasingly, those skills are synonymous with media literacy skills. I would start media literacy instruction in the first grade. In the first week of school, I'd ask them to draw one or two signs in their world. I'd ask them bring in those drawings, and then have a discussion about what a sign is, from the Stop sign to the McDonald's sign. Why do some signs have images, and why do some have words? Why are some red, and some yellow? Why do we find this sign in California, and why do we find this one in Singapore? We need to educate children about communication from the earliest age. . . Kids don't usually get this until high school, if at all.

CML: In the *EdWeek* piece you wrote with Rick Beach, you recommend that schools build on the Common Core standards to develop curriculum and instruction designed to integrate print and media literacies. How would you ensure that this integration of print and non-print literacies includes critical analysis?

FB: The skills of analysis and construction in print media can be applied to non-print media. You just have to show teachers how to do that. Unfortunately, that's usually not a part of their professional development. I think that we have a generation of teachers who use film and video, but the majority of them don't use it adequately. It's one of the reasons why I've been putting together a webinar for NCTE on how to teach the film version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. How can teachers help students be aware of mood, lighting, camera angle, music, composition? All of the objects displayed in the box during the opening credits are symbols used later in the film. Why not teach symbolism in film? It's not a huge stretch. It's just that teachers have not been properly trained in reading non-print texts.

CML: How do you hope to start a national dialogue about media literacy?

FB: The column that I've been writing for *USA Today* is one way to move that discussion along. . . . I've been using it to make a strong connection between media literacy education and classroom instruction. Today President Obama visited Dearborn, Michigan. He went to a museum there, and a photo was taken of him sitting inside the bus that Rosa Parks sat in in 1955. In that photo, he's sitting in the same seat, and looking out the same window. The *New York Daily News* ran a headline that read, "White House Releases Powerful Photograph." Is it powerful to someone who doesn't understand it in context? We make it powerful. We relate to the black and white image of Rosa Parks sitting in that bus. . . . It's what we bring to our reading that's so important.

Med!aLit Moments

When the Story Changes the Picture

Ansel Adams (1902-1984) was a photographer famous for his images of the Sierra Nevada and other iconic Western landscapes. What may be less well known is that Adams spent the fall of 1943 photographing Japanese-Americans interned at the Manzanar War Relocation Center in Inyo County, California, just east of the Sierras. Adams was so moved by the displacement of Japanese-Americans and the living conditions of internees at Manzanar that he published a photo essay, *Born Free and Equal*, the following year. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will view a single portrait taken by Adams during this period—without any mention of historical context. Through this activity, your students will have the chance to note the changes in their perception when that context is revealed.

Ask students to describe the changes in their reactions to a photograph when the social and historical context of the photograph is revealed.

AHA!: Learning about the history of this picture changes the way I look at it!

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

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

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

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

Grade Level: 5-8

Materials: Computer, high speed internet connection and data projector; or overhead projector and transparencies of digital images from the Library of Congress.

Photo analysis worksheet, available at:

www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo.html

A gallery of “collection highlights” of Adams’ photographs can be found on the Library of Congress website at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/anseladams/index.html>

The photo displayed on this page (of Tom Kobayashi) is the portrait for this activity. Click on this photo for a larger image. You may also want to click on the “Essay” link on this page, which will direct you to an electronic copy of *Born Free and Equal*. The foreword offers some insight into Adams’ motivations for undertaking this project.

Activity: Display the portrait of Tom Kobayashi and explain to students that they’re going to get some practice making close observations about a photograph. Pass out the photo analysis worksheet, and explain the difference between observation and inference before students start their work. You could say that students are making their best guesses about the

meaning of the picture after they pay close attention to the details. Skip Question 3B on the worksheet if you wish.

Next, discuss the observations and inferences that students have made about the photograph. You may wish to ask why they think the photographer took this picture.

Now take a little time to explain where, when and under what circumstances the photograph was taken.

Next, ask students how they interpret the photo now. How have their perceptions of the picture changed? Draw students' attention to Key Question/Core Concept #3 during this discussion. Also, what aspects of the photo seem to reflect Adams' purpose?

Extended Activity: Explore the photographs from *Born Free and Equal* at greater length. You may want to devote some time to the two-page photographic spread which frames the title graphic for the book. What techniques are used, and to what effect?

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, © 2002-2011, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>