

18 Easy and Fun Classroom Activities for Media Education

Medium: *A form of communication; a storytelling environment.*

Media Education: *An educational approach that gives media users greater freedom and choice by teaching how to access, analyze, evaluate and produce media.*

For best results, use these activities in conjunction with our general principles and persuasive techniques handouts.

- 1. What Are Media?:** Make a list of as many “media” that you can think of. A “medium” is any storyteller or communications environment that transmits a message or tells a story. So, you can list the obvious—television, radio, billboards, books, video games—and then consider the less obvious: a cereal box or a yellow banana with a corporate brand sticker on it. Display, chart, or graph the results. See who can find the most unusual example of a media environment or message—the inside of the top of a soda bottle cap?—as possible. One of the goals here is to recognize that our corporate commercial media culture considers anywhere where people are awake and paying attention as a possible advertising space—splash drains in urinals or the sand on long stretches of empty beach are two places that any reasonable society might consider “off limits.” But no.
- 2. Media and Me Journal:** Keep a daily or weekly journal (include pictures or illustrations!) where you record how many minutes each day or week you spend interacting with various media—TV, radio, movies, mp3 player, books, magazines, newspapers, video games, etc. Compare notes, and write, graph, or chart your results. What personal and community/ classroom trends can you observe?
- 3. Media, Technology, and Me:** Rank different kinds of media—TV, radio, Internet, mp3 players, books, newspapers, magazines, video games, etc.—from favorite to least favorite and explain your choices. What are the specific qualities of each medium that help explain why you like or don’t like it? (For example, a five-year-old kid might explain that “I like books because I can carry them around in my backpack, they have pictures I like, and my parents read them to me at night.”)
- 4. Why Wear It? Ad Saturation Survey:** The average American teenager consumes 3,000 ad messages a day, according to Douglas Rushkoff’s PBS film *Merchants of Cool*. Individually or in small groups, make a list of all the advertisements (logos, brands, symbols, and other distinctive markings that urge the buying and selling of stuff) in any given classroom, school, or community space. Start with logos on clothes, shoes, hats, and other personal items. Graph, chart, or display the results. What might this suggest about our media culture? (We use the word “hyper-commercial” to describe our ad-saturated media world.) Why do people spend more money to buy “name brand” clothes or products that may not be any better than generic? How do people define themselves with brands? All are interesting and useful questions to consider.



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5. **Ad Count:** Count how many ads exist in your school or community, and then figure out how those ads came to be displayed. Are there contracts with corporations? “Free” materials provided? You might have to talk with other community members for answers—a school principal or superintendent, for example.
6. **Feeling Media’s Mojo:** Watch, listen to, or read any media text, and then ask: “How did this media story make me feel?” Happy? Sad? Scared? No particular feeling? And then ask—what specific moments or production techniques helped create that feeling? (Music, which appeals to the limbic or emotional brain, for example, helps shape our feeling towards a media story.)
7. **Me(dia) Trade-Offs:** Whenever we consume any medium or media text, good things and bad things happen. Select any media text, and make a list of all the possible good and bad things that happen when spending time with that media text. Think in terms of time, money, quality of information, etc. For example, watching Extreme Makeover on television may be a fabulous and fun way to bond with family members after dinner once a week, and it may eat up an hour you could spend learning how to do something else like playing an instrument, and you may pick up valuable make-up tips for the prom, and the show might send troubling messages about body image. The point here is to replace the either/or thinking with both/and thinking, and embrace complexity.
8. **Close Eye For the Production Guy:** Watch a short visual media text—TV ads or TV news stories work well—and make a list of all the production techniques used in the text: the number of scenes and edits (each time the scene changes is an edit), camera angles, lighting, music, special effects, transitions, voice overs, fade-ins and fade-outs, etc. Create small groups and have each group try and make as long a list of production techniques as possible.
9. **Print Ad Dissection:** Bring in interesting magazine or newspaper advertisements and, individually or in small groups, dissect them, using our general principles and specific persuasive techniques as a guide. You can print and display your analysis, too.
10. **Video/Audio Advert Dissection:** Bring in interesting television, radio or web advertisements, and individually dissect them, using our general principles and persuasive techniques as a guide. You can print and display your analysis, too. Be sure to view the spot at least three times, so you can soak up the ad’s “mojo” and be able to think critically about it.
11. **Ad Dissection Public Speaking:** Write and deliver a short (3–5 minute) public speech dissecting a media text, using our general principles and specific persuasive techniques as a guide. A good activity for synthesizing critical thinking, media education, and our ACME media education tools.



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- 12. Fantasy versus Reality:** Read, listen to, or watch any short media text, and ask in what ways the text is “realistic” or “like real life,” and in what ways the text is “fantasy” or “unrealistic.” Comparing ads and real life works particularly well—does the sexy advertised burger look like a real fast food burger does? What specific differences are there? Do fashion magazine models look like real life people? Why or why not?
- 13. “You’re Live!” Radio Spot:** Create small groups and challenge yourselves, in 30 minutes’ time (give or take), to create and perform your own short radio spot, using as many of the 24-plus persuasive techniques as possible. Everyone in the group must have a hand in the performance, and encourage everyone else to close their eyes and really listen to the spot, be it an advertisement for a real or imagine product, a PSA, or some other creative use of radio time.
- 14. Untold Stories:** Watch, listen to, or read any short media text—advert, news story, etc.—and make a list of what stories are NOT told in the short media text. Asking the “untold stories” question is always interesting—“absences” are as important as “presences” in the world of media and story-telling.
- 15. Who Owns My Media Faves?** Make a list of your favorite 4–6 media texts—TV shows, movies, popular bands, books, etc.—and then figure out which media corporations, if any, own each of those texts. Chart, graph or display the results. As much as 90 percent of our media content is ultimately owned by one of 6 trans-national corporations. Why might this be important information to know?
- 16. Bad Ad Contest:** Sponsor an essay writing or short video contest in which you have students select and critically analyze an ad or ad campaign they find offensive, demeaning, or dumb—give away prizes for the funniest, most astute, and most from-the-heart critiques. Publish the “bad ad” essays or videos in a school or community newspaper or on web sites.
- 17. Headline Headers:** Look at a prime time newscast, or the front page of any daily or weekly newspaper, and make a list of the three major stories of the day. Ask: Who selected these stories and why? What else has happened during the past 24 hours that might also be considered “newsworthy”? How were each of those three stories presented: images, production techniques, etc.?
- 18. Trade-Offs – Image versus Print:** Compare the same major news story as presented on television versus in a newspaper. Make a list of specific pieces of information discussed in each version of the story, as well a list of images and production techniques— which medium presents a more detailed account of the story? (Typically, print does.) Which medium is more engaging and attractive to consume? (Typically, most say the TV version.)

