

Rules of Conduct:

Media Violence, Dating, and Teenage Behavior



Grades 7–12

Using AIT Products

- *Working It Out Together: Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution*, Student Version
- *The Etiquette Man*

Overview

Media violence is not the sole cause of the increase in violence among teens. It is impossible to isolate a single factor responsible for the escalation in recent years. We can't point to one thing and say, "There's the cause—if we correct that, violence will go away." It is apparent, however, that the increase in violence in all media formats does contribute to aggressive behavior, and certainly students who are already predisposed to violent reactions to conflict gain validation and encouragement from violence in the media, whether at the movies, on TV, or in their music and video-game choices. Educating students in critical thinking and media literacy skills as well as teaching them to consider the rules of society and interpersonal behavior are important steps teachers can take to begin counteracting the influence of these messages.

This lesson has a two-fold purpose: first, to enlighten students about the escalation of violent

events projected by the media daily and second, to put the ideas of civility and social conduct in historical perspective so that students may draw their own conclusions about how conduct may be related to teen violence. They will gather data on violence on television and create a graph or chart to display results, examine society's rules of behavior in two historical periods and compare it to today, and consider dating etiquette as a model for conduct in all social situations.



All television is educational television. The question is: what is it teaching?

—Nicholas Johnson, Former FCC Commissioner

Objectives

- Evaluate how influences which affect behaviors can be altered.
- Define the term *violence* and use the definition to analyze its presence in entertainment media (television, movies, video games, and music lyrics).
- Record, analyze, and interpret data on television violence.
- Compare society's rules of behavior from the 18th century, the 1950s, and today.
- Describe interpersonal communication skills that can be used to build healthy social interactions.

Vocabulary

civility	media
conflict	peers
escalation	perpetrator
etiquette	victim
manners	violence

Preparation

Materials Needed

- AIT video *The Etiquette Man*, entire program (about 23 minutes in length)
- AIT video *Working It Out Together*, Student Video. CUE the tape to approximate time code 00:31 (about 11 minutes in total length)
- Library books on manners (If possible, try to locate a copy of the 1950s-style dating manual called *Boy Dates Girl*, by Gay Head [Scholastic Book Services, 1965]—the inspiration for *The Etiquette Man*. Try libraries or online used-book sites.)

- Access to computers to view the following document from the Papers of George Washington: “Washington’s School Exercises: Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour In Company and Conversation” (Found at <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/civility/transcript.html>)
- Rectangular poster board, at least 14" x 22" (one for each small group)
- Drawing materials, such as markers, colored pencils, or poster paints and brushes
- Optional: old magazines, newspapers, or catalogs; plus scissors and adhesives

Planning Notes

- One or two weeks before the lesson, students gather and record data from nightly television for at least five days.
 - ✓ Conduct a class discussion on the definition of the term *violence*. The definition should list the characteristics of violence: What does it look like? What does it sound like? What is a perpetrator? What is a victim? Is there a victim in every violent event?
 - ✓ Include in the discussion any qualifications to the definition students may wish to make. For example, do any of the following alter the basic definition?
 - ❖ degrees of injury resulting from the violence
 - ❖ relationships between perpetrator and victim (e.g., strangers or acquaintances, family members, and so on)
 - ❖ numbers of perpetrators per victim
 - ❖ whether weapons were involved

- ❖ whether or not the perpetrator was under the influence of illegal substances
 - ❖ whether or not the violence is true-life or part of a fictional program
 - ❖ whether or not the violence is conducted by humans or cartoon/digital characters
 - ❖ whether or not the violence is visual or auditory—how the definition changes for song lyrics and poems
- ✓ Post the final definition agreed on by the class, and ask students how much violence they think might be shown on television in a week.
 - ✓ Have students select one type of television program (news, drama, cartoons, sports, etc.) and watch a program from that genre every night for at least five nights. Have them tally every instance of violence shown on that program while they watch, and list the total incidences found each night.
 - ✓ Collect the totals and save them for Day 1.

Time

This project will take about two 90-minute class periods, in addition to time spent on the pre-lesson activity and homework. (NOTE: This lesson can be used in class periods of shorter duration, but teachers should take into account the fact that the video for Day 2 is 23 minutes in length and plan accordingly.)

Procedure—Day 1

Introduce Topic: Media Violence Data Collection

Return the media violence tallies collected by students one or two weeks before this lesson, and conduct a discussion on what students discovered from their data collecting. Write the

media types that were investigated on the board and discuss each in turn, asking students to describe the number/type of violent incidences they discovered for each.

- Did the events demonstrate the same degree of violence?
- What was the mildest violent event you witnessed, and what was the worst?
- What inferences can be drawn from the activity?
- What media type shows the most incidences of violence?
- Were the results surprising? Before this exercise, were you consciously aware of the number of violent acts you witnessed on TV?
- How do you think TV violence compares to violence in other forms of media, such as movies, video games, and music lyrics?
 - ✓ What would you consider violent on a cartoon? What wouldn't qualify as violent?
 - ✓ How might song lyrics be violent?
 - ✓ What is violent or non-violent in video games?

To close the discussion, share some of the statistics and conclusions about violence on TV and its effect on children provided by The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, “a user-friendly, single point of access to Federal information on youth violence.” (Found at www.safeyouth.org/scripts/faq/mediaviolstats.asp.)

Homework

Assign this homework before moving on to the next activity for Day 1: Based on the collected data, have students graphically represent the instances of violence. Students may choose to do

so with a bar graph, a line graph, or a pie chart. They can use computer software to create the graphic displays, if resources are available, or they can create one on paper.

Introduce Topic: Conflict and Violence

Ask students to explain the difference between “conflict” and “violence.” Do the two always go together? How is it possible to have a conflict but to avoid a violent reaction from one or more of the participants?

Video

Prepare students for watching the AIT video from *Working It Out Together* by asking for volunteers to describe how a conflict might escalate into violence, and how one change in the dynamics might defuse the situation so that violence is avoided. Write the words “peer mediation” on the board and allow students to discuss what they think this process might entail.

Show students the Student Version video, beginning at time code 00:31. Stop the video at approximate time code 11:13, after the scene ends and the screen goes to black. In this clip, a peer-mediation process is used to defuse a situation when two girls are in conflict over a shared locker.

Group Work: Violence in Our Lives

Break the class into small groups and have them discuss the peer mediation video clip as well as their personal experiences with violence. Write the following discussion starters on the board (or duplicate them on a small card for each group) Encourage students to discuss their opinions and beliefs.

- Have you ever witnessed, participated in, or been a victim of violence? (This should be a voluntary exercise only.)
- Do you think peer mediation before the incident became violent would have helped?

- Does every conflict require peer mediation? Describe an example of a conflict resolving itself without outside help.
- Do you think teen violence is different than the violence exhibited by older adults? In what way?
- Do you think the number and degree of teenage violence incidents in the United States is better, worse, or about the same as it was during your grandparents’ day, in the mid-20th century? Why do you think so?
- Do you believe the media—music lyrics, movies, television—have contributed to a rise in violence? Why or why not?
- What is the solution to media violence? What can you do to counteract the influence of these media messages?

Remind students of the homework assignment before class is dismissed.



Saving Private Ryan was probably the illest, sickest movie I’ve ever watched, and I didn’t see anybody criticizing that one for violence.

—Rap singer Eminem, when denounced for the violence in his song lyrics

Procedure—Day 2

Review/Reflection

Review the graphs and charts students created for their homework assignment and discuss the findings. Ask if the graphics change students' opinions about the most violent type of programming on TV. What does this tell them about society? What are their greatest concerns? What would they like to see changed and why?

Introduce New Topic: Violence and Changing Times

Write the following quotation on the board, including the spelling and punctuation shown:

“22d Shew not yourself glad
at the Misfortune of another
though he were your enemy.”

Explain that George Washington wrote out a copy of 110 “Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour In Company and Conversation” in his school book when he was about 16 years old, in 1744. This one is rule number 22 from his list. Many historians believe that Washington valued this list a great deal—he kept his handwritten copy—and he followed the rules all his life. The list played a large role in the development of his character, covering everything from table manners (number 100 tells you not to clean your teeth with your napkin, knife, or fork while sitting at the table), to keeping promises, to the treatment of others.

Point out the odd spelling and capitalization, and then ask a volunteer to explain what s/he thinks this rule of good behavior means, and how it might apply to behavior today. Ask students to define the terms *manners*, *civility*, and *etiquette*.

Video

NOTE: This video is about 23 minutes long, and should be viewed in one setting. If time is too short, wait until the next class period to begin.

Prepare students for watching the AIT video *The Etiquette Man* by asking students how they think the student body at your school would react if George Washington came to an assembly to share his 110 rules of behavior with them.

Explain that the video they’re about to watch tells the story of an odd stranger who travels from town to town as a quirky kind of messenger of good manners—not from George Washington’s day, but from their grandparents’ time, around the 1950s. On this particular day, the Etiquette Man has come to a small-town high school to discuss dating etiquette. Show *The Etiquette Man* in its entirety.

After the Video

Explain that this video was based on a 1950s-style dating manual called *Boy Dates Girl*, by Gay Head, and was discovered by the producer at a thrift shop. Some of the Etiquette Man’s dialogue was taken directly from the book. Although the Etiquette Man visited the school to discuss dating, his advice covered other areas of behavior and manners. Use the following questions to encourage discussion of the messages in this video (taken from *The Etiquette Man* teaching guide).

- Why do you think the Etiquette Man talks to the students about dating?
- The Etiquette Man mostly gave dating advice, but what other messages did he pass along?
- There are some things the Etiquette Man taught and some things he passed on in the way that he behaved. Name some of the things he passed on by how he behaved—character traits he exhibited.

- In the groups that you belong to, what character traits are valued?
- In the movie, did anyone change? If so, how did they change, and why do you think they did?
- The Etiquette Man talks a lot about it being a good idea to ask other people about their interests. Why do you think that is?
- Is there any way that the Etiquette Man might be helpful to people who react violently?

Group Work

Before dividing the class into groups, discuss the differences between the lives of teens during the 1950s and today. For example:

- What types of programs were shown on TV back then?
- How were movies and music different?
- Teens in the 1950s didn't have video games—what did they do for fun? Did any of those leisure activities match some of today's video games for graphic violence?
- Were teens exposed to as much violence in the media back then as they are today?
- What conclusions can be drawn about the role media play in violence today?

Now ask students to compare the rules of behavior the Etiquette Man encourages to George Washington's rule 22 on the board. Did you notice anyone breaking this rule in *The Etiquette Man*? Describe the scene. How would the Etiquette Man say the same thing? Is this a rule of conduct that you and your friends follow—have you ever laughed at someone when he or she tripped or were embarrassed? Why? Are you more likely to laugh at a friend or an enemy? Why do you think George Washington's rule tells

us not to laugh, even at our enemies? What other examples of “good manners” are ignored today? Do you see any connection between having and following a set of etiquette rules and violent behavior?

Divide the class into groups of three or four students and provide them with access to computers and the Web site of George Washington's “Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour In Company and Conversation” (Found at <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/civility/transcript.html>), as well as books on manners and etiquette from the 1950s and '60s (see **Resources**).

Explain that each group is going to create a three-part poster on social behavior and rules of etiquette through the years.

1. Select one of George Washington's 110 rules of civility and decent behavior. The rule you select should be one of behavior and interaction with others, not simply one of his instructions (such as table manners).
2. Search through one or more books of manners from your grandparents' day to find a rule describing the same type of behavior.
3. Turn the poster board lengthwise and divide it into three equal sections. Each section will illustrate the rule of behavior for a different time period:
 - a. The first section will contain Washington's rule, with an illustration of someone in 18th Century dress (you may need to research this on the Internet) following the rule. The drawing can be humorous or a simple illustration of the custom.
 - b. The second section will state and illustrate the equivalent rule as it applied to teens in the 1950s.

- c. The final section should be in the style of a political cartoon. (If necessary, remind students that a political cartoon exaggerates, or pokes fun at something that should be serious). The cartoon will focus on the same rule—in modern language—but focusing on the irony of how teens and young adults today either haven't learned or choose to ignore that particular rule.



Like its politicians and its war, society has the teenagers it deserves.”

—Joseph Priestley

Homework

If needed, allow groups to complete their posters as a homework assignment. Post them in the classroom or the hallway, or create a bulletin board called “Rules of Conduct, Past and Present.”

Assessment

Individual Assessment

Evaluate individual students' knowledge acquisition by examining their graphic representations of TV violence from Day 1 as well as their active participation in all classroom discussions. For an assessment of deeper understanding, assign the essay described in the Extension Activity.

Group Assessment

Evaluate each group's work in creating a poster that connects rules of conduct from the past with a political cartoon about the lack of civility among teens today. Their assessment should reflect evidence of effective participation, collaboration, and consensus, as well as an understanding of the topics of media violence, social behavior as it changed through history, and the possible connection between media violence and teenage conduct.

Extension Activity: Violence—That's Entertainment?

Have students research and write an essay on how and why the entertainment media industry uses violence. Ask students to select one branch

of the industry on which to focus their research: movies, television, music videos, video games, or Web sites, and use examples to illustrate every point. The **Resources** section of this lesson plan provides some Internet sites students may use to begin their research.

Resources

Manners and Etiquette

Find books on etiquette and manners at your local library. Try to get the oldest manners books possible—from the 1950s or '60s if possible. You might begin your search by looking under the following authors or collection names:

- Emily Post
- Amy Vanderbilt
- Miss Manners
- Letitia Baldrige
- Gay Head

Optional: a current book on school manners that students might find interesting is *The How Rude! Handbook of School Manners for Teens: Civility in the Hallowed Halls*, by Alex J. Packer (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 2004).

Media Violence

mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/schoolviolence/links.asp

The National Mental Health Information Center Web site offers this collection of links to agencies that deal with youth and school violence.

www.medialit.org

The Center for Media Literacy provides you with a wide selection of teaching tools, carefully evaluated for their quality and importance to the field. Discover information on media literacy pedagogy as well as practical tips and tricks.

www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/violence/index.cfm

This link takes you to the media violence area of the Canadian Media Awareness Network Web site. Look here for links to seminal articles, reports, and surveys on the issue.

www.safeyouth.org/scripts/faq/mediaviolstats.asp

The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center describes itself as “a user-friendly, single point of access to Federal information on youth violence.”

education.iupui.edu/webquests/violence/index.htm

This Web quest for college students explores teen violence by having groups research the causes and suggest solutions by creating a product such as a newspaper, debate, or a computer-based presentation that outlines their findings.

Other

Tips for Teachers: How to Access AIT Materials without Spending Your Own Nickel(s)

www.ait.net/technos/e-zine/tech_notes/grants.php