

Find the Hidden Message:

Media Literacy in Primary Grades



Grades K–2

Using AIT Products

- *Letter TV II: Consonant Combinations*, (each program is approximately five minutes in length): Program 1, “SL,” Program 2, “CH,” Program 5, “BR,” Program 6, “CR,” Program 7, “SP,” Program 8, “NT”
- *Letter TV III: Reading Rules*, program 2, “Alternate Sounds of A” (five minutes in length)

Overview

A recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation¹, found that 68 percent of children ages two and younger spend an average of two hours a day in front of a screen, either television or computer. Children under six spend as much time in front of a screen as they do playing outside—and three times as much as they spend reading or being read to. And although they use the media for entertainment purposes, they are also being bombarded with advertisements, news, and viewpoints that will color their own outlook unless they are given the critical thinking skills to evaluate the flood of information that inundates them on a daily basis.

The purpose of this lesson is to give teachers in the primary grades some tools to teach children

¹ ©2006 *The Media Family: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers and Their Parents*. Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) (downloaded on October 17, 2006 at www.kff.org/entmedia/7500.cfm)

how to access, analyze, and evaluate that incoming communication. Using six programs from the AIT series *Letter TV II: Consonant Combinations*, the activities follow the Center for Media Literacy’s *Five Core Concepts* and *Five Key Questions*² of media literacy:

1. All media messages are “constructed.” [Who created this message?]
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules. [What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?]
3. Different people experience the same media message differently. [How might different people understand this message differently than me?]

² ©2005 *Five Key Questions* of media literacy. Center for Media Literacy (CML) (downloaded on October 17, 2006 at www.medialit.org/pdf/mlk/14A_CCKQposter.pdf)

- Media have embedded values and points of view. [What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?]
- Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. [Why is this message being sent?]

Objectives

- Access media messages through listening (e.g., radio), viewing (e.g., TV, film, live performances), and reading (e.g., newspapers, books, magazines, billboards), and compare and contrast print, visual, and electronic media.
- Analyze and evaluate media messages by identifying the author's purpose and point of view, drawing conclusions, making inferences, reasoning, and identifying fact and fantasy.
- Recognize strategies used by the media to influence thoughts, feelings, and buying behaviors (e.g., special effects, language, and illustrations).

Vocabulary

ads	media
advertisements	movie theaters
advertising	newspapers
billboards	radios
commercials	special effects
false advertising	television
magazines	

Preparation

Materials Needed

- All AIT *Letter TV* video programs listed in the overview. *NOTE: Each Letter TV program is about five minutes long. For this reason, it isn't necessary to jump to a specific clip.*

- Examples of media for display purposes (see Planning Notes)
- Brown, Marc. *Arthur's TV Trouble*. New York: Little, Brown Young Readers, 1997. *NOTE: This book is still in print and should be available at most elementary school or public libraries.*
- Drawing paper
- Crayons, colored pencils, or markers
- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Old magazines for cutting out ads (see Planning Notes)

Planning Notes

- Media Genres, Introduction:** Gather examples of media for display purposes, including a magazine, a newspaper, a VHS cassette, a DVD, and pictures of a billboard, a movie theater, a radio, and a television (*NOTE: If you have a radio and/or TV in the classroom, you don't need pictures of those.*)
- Media Genres, Activity 1:** Gather old magazines containing colored ads. You will need at least three magazines for each small group.



"In general, my children refused to eat anything that hadn't danced on TV."

—Humorist Erma Bombeck

- **Truth in Advertising, Previewing Activity:** One copy of *Arthur's TV Trouble* by Marc Brown
- **Truth in Advertising, Activity 2:** Record four or five TV commercials targeted to young children. For example, tape one or two hours from a children's cable channel or Saturday morning children's programming segment, and then edit the tape or make note of the time codes for specific commercials.

Time

This project will take about three one-hour sessions, but the topics stand alone well and don't have to be taught consecutively. The lessons fit language arts, social studies, or health curricula.

Procedure—Day 1

Introduce New Topic: Media Genres

Display where all students can see them a newspaper, a magazine, a VHS cassette, and a DVD, as well as pictures of a billboard, a movie theater, a radio, and a television (*NOTE: If you have a radio and/or a TV in your room you won't need pictures of them*). Ask:

- What is each of these items called, and what does each do?
- Who can tell me how these items are alike?
- What information can you get from each of these things?

Explain that all of the items are *media* (for older students, write the term on the board or chart paper), and media is what we call anything we use to communicate with others. Ask: How can we use each of these types of media to communicate? (Allow students time to share their ideas.)

Video

Prepare students for watching the AIT video from *Letter TV II* by explaining that some media

work better than others for different types of communication. In the program they're about to see, Mark Question and Peri Od each use a different type of media to learn about a race. Students should watch carefully to decide which media work best in different situations.

Show students program 1, "SL," from *Letter TV II*. (Because this program is only five minutes in length, the entire video can be shown.) In this story, Comma Commentator reports on the annual slug and sloth race in Sleepyville. Mark Question, Peri Od, and May Point discuss the race as Mark watches the event on TV and Peri reads about it in the newspaper.

Discuss the video

- What was Peri able to understand about the race from the newspaper that Mark didn't get from the TV coverage? What other things can a newspaper do better than TV?
- What was Mark able to understand about the race from TV that Peri didn't get from his newspaper? What other things can TV do better than a newspaper?

Activities

1. **Compare print ads to billboards.** Divide the class into small groups of three to five students and provide each group with drawing paper, coloring tools, scissors, tape or glue, and several old magazines. Have the groups follow these step-by-step instructions. *NOTE: For younger students, if possible, assign an older student or adult volunteer to each group, or stagger the groups so that you can assist them.*
 - Fold the drawing paper in half and lay it in front of them like a book, with the halves side-by-side.
 - Then they should work together to locate and cut out colorful advertisements—one

for each student, and paste them to the left side of the drawing paper.

- As a group, discuss the magazine ads: Why is a magazine a good medium for colorful ads like these? How much text is in the ads? How do the advertisers hope to get you to buy their product?
- Discuss how a billboard ad for the same product might be different from a magazine ad: Would a billboard have as much text to read as this magazine ad? Why not? What other things would an advertiser have to think about when designing a billboard?
- Have students draw a large rectangle on the right half of their paper, and create a billboard ad for the same product as their magazine ad. Post the papers in the class and discuss the differences between print ads and billboards.

2. **Compare entertainment media.** Two *Letter TV II* programs focus on other media genres: program 8, “NT,” discusses TV versus stage plays; and program 5, “BR,” describes details of set design. Select either or both of these programs to share with students and discuss the media literacy associated with each genre.



“Television is a new medium. It’s called a medium because nothing is well-done.”

—Comedian Fred Allen, on the radio program
“The Big Show,” Dec. 17, 1950

Procedure—Day 2

Introduce New Topic: Truth in Advertising

Read aloud the book *Arthur’s TV Trouble*, by Marc Brown.

Book Description from *School Library Journal*:

After a television ad convinces Arthur that his puppy, Pal, needs a Treat Timer to dispense dog biscuits, he finds that he can think of little else. Arthur works to earn the \$19.95 (nonrefundable), then buys the Treat Timer (some assembly required), but its lights, noises, and rocketing treats frighten Pal. The money’s gone, the gadget’s a dud, and Arthur’s learned his lesson—or has he?

Discuss the story with students, using the following questions to guide the discussion:

1. What is an advertisement? What’s another word that means the same thing? What is an *abbreviation* (shorter word) for “advertisement”?
2. What are some examples of commercials you’ve seen on TV? Did those ads make you want to buy the product?
3. Where did Arthur see the advertisements for the Treat Timer—what kinds of media did they show up in?
4. Who created the advertisements Arthur saw? Why did they make the ads—what were they trying to do?
5. How were the different types of ads alike? How were the advertisements different?
6. How did the advertisements attract Arthur’s attention?

7. Would the advertisements have been as attractive to everyone as they were to Arthur? Who wouldn't have been interested in the ads?
 8. Was Arthur pleased with his purchase? Why not? (For older students, discuss the term *false advertising*.)
 9. What does "All sales are final" mean? Did Arthur think about what that meant before he bought the timer?
 10. When you want to buy something, what are some things should you think about first? (Accept any answers. You may want to write some of the students' ideas down on the board or chart paper and come back to them after they've watched the video.)
- How did Mark try to convince viewers to come to his restaurant?
 - What was wrong with what he said?
 - Mark said his advertisement wasn't really wrong because he didn't exactly say he had crabs and crawfish. Why would you call this an advertising "trick"?
 - Who was especially angry with Mark's false advertising? (Write the term *False Advertising* on the board or chart paper.)
 - Do you think anyone would be happy at Mark's restaurant? Who?
 - Why is it important that people who make advertisements tell the truth?
 - Write "Truth in Advertising" next to "False Advertising."
 - These terms contain opposites. What are they? (For younger students, you may need to point out the connection between the words *truth* and *true*.)
 - If you wanted to buy an item, would you want the ad to use true or false advertising? Why?

Video

Prepare students for watching the AIT video from *Letter TV II* by explaining that many times the information we think we're getting from commercials or advertisements isn't exactly true. In the video students are about to see, Mark Question from the Letter TV gang makes a commercial for his new restaurant, and he doesn't understand why everyone gets so angry with him.

Show students program 6, "CR," from *Letter TV II*. (Because this program is only five minutes in length, the entire video can be shown.) In this story, Letter News takes you to Crazy Critter's Crab House, where Mark Question makes a misleading commercial about his crab and crawfish restaurant. Crows and cranes are angry that Mark wants to sell them croissants instead of crab and crawfish.

Discuss the video

- Who made the advertisement? What was he trying to do?

Activities

1. Show the four or five child-centered television ads you recorded earlier, one at a time, and have students analyze them. Begin with the following question prompts on the first one or two, but gradually allow the students to take over the discussion:
 - Who made this advertisement?
 - What are the advertisers trying to do?
 - What "tricks" are they using to make you want to buy this ____? (Use this question to encourage children to look for advertis-

ing gimmicks, such as peer pressure, using “new and improved” to describe the item, including a prize in the package, using celebrities, or actors that are cute or “popular” looking, etc.)

- Would everybody feel the same after watching this ad? Who wouldn’t want to buy this item?
2. Pass out drawing paper and coloring supplies. Have students create a new advertisement for Crazy Critter’s Crab House, using drawings that tell what Mark Question really has to sell. *NOTE: Ask volunteers from a higher grade to come in and work with younger students. Older students can write words for their partners and make suggestions for adding to the drawings, show them what a “croissant” looks like, and so on.*

Procedure—Day 3

Introduce New Topic: Special Effects

Ask students to name some scary movies they’ve seen or heard about. Have them describe the scariest parts. Use students’ answers to guide a discussion about fact versus fantasy. For example, if students describe monster movies, discuss whether monsters are real, how movie producers make them look scary with costumes and makeup, and so on. If students describe disaster movies, ask if the storms, fires, or vehicle crashes shown in the movie are really happening, how producers could make them look real, and so on.

Discuss the words *fact* and *fantasy* (or use the terms *real* and *make believe*, if you prefer), and explain that the people who create media like movies and television use special tricks to make things look real. Ask students to explain why a producer would try to make a monster or a tornado look real, and continue with a discussion about the *author’s purpose*: to entertain people or to get them to do something. (If you have

used the activity from Day Two, remind students that in the *Letter TV II* video “CR,” Mark Question’s purpose was to get people to come to his restaurant.)

Video

Prepare students for watching the AIT video from *Letter TV II* by explaining that Mark Question learns another lesson in the next program. He’s frightened by a giant chicken he saw on TV until he finds out about some media tricks that make things look different than they really are.

Show students program 3, “CH.” (Because this program is only five minutes in length, the entire video can be shown.) In this story, Mark Question is confused. He thinks the chicken he sees on TV is huge, when it’s really only a small chick. May Point explains that things aren’t always as they appear on TV. She shows Mark that by using different camera angles and zooming in and out, we can change the way something looks.

Discuss the video

- Is there such a thing as a chicken that is larger than a building? Would you call a giant chicken *fact* or *fantasy* (or *real* or *make believe*)?
- The chick in the video was made to look like a giant chicken by using something called *special effects* (for older students, write the term on the board or chart paper). Special effects are tricks of sight and sound, usually created by combining technology and creativity. How did May make the chick look big?
- What did May do differently to make the chick look small again?
- Why might a producer want to make a chick look bigger than normal? (Hint: Think about how Mark felt when he saw the “giant” chicken.)

- Why did Mark think there was just as much cheese as chocolate chips?
- Why might a producer want to use special effects to make the pile of cheese look small?
- If you were going to draw a picture of something small, but you wanted it to “look” big, what might you do?

Activities

1. On the board or chart paper, draw something small (such as a ladybug, a penny, or a box of crayons). Then draw another object beside it that is usually very big (like a tree, a house, or a car), but draw it the same size as the small item. Discuss:
 - a. Does the small object look very big, or does the big object look very small?
 - b. How can we make sure that people see our special effect the way we want? (Possible answer: add more background details to add to the effect.)
 - c. Provide students with drawing paper and coloring materials, and have them create a scene that shows most things the normal size, but one object much bigger or much smaller than it is normally.



“Whoever controls the media . . . controls the culture.”

—Allen Ginsberg, poet and author

2. Another *Letter TV II* program focuses on special effects. Show students program 7, “SP,” and discuss the special effects that make the Spectacular Spies appear to fall to the ground. Ask students to think of other things they’ve seen in movies and on TV that looked real because of special effects.

Assessment

Individual Assessment

Evaluate student understanding of the media literacy concepts from this lesson by examining their individual drawings and products:

- **Media Genres, Activity 1:** The comparison of a magazine ad with a billboard advertising the same item; the billboard should show larger images and little text.
- **Truth in Advertising, Activity 2:** An ad for Crazy Critter’s Crab House that features croissants, rather than crabs or crawfish.
- **Special Effects, Activity 1:** The drawing of an everyday object, made to look much bigger or smaller than normal by its surroundings and other items drawn nearby.

Group Assessment

Show students program 2, “Alternate Sounds of A,” from *Letter TV III: Reading Rules*. In this program, Peri Od hosts a special episode of *Letter TV*, which consists of nothing but television advertisements. Have students use what they’ve learned to conduct a small-group discussion, analyzing these ads for truth in advertising. Observe each group’s interactions, looking for evidence of effective participation as well as the ability to take turns and listen politely.

Resources

Five Key Questions that Can Change the World

www.medialit.org/pdf/mlk/02_5KQ_ClassroomGuide.pdf

A resource for teachers, this is an innovative collection of 25 cornerstone lesson plans—five for each of the *Five Key Questions* of media literacy. Developed by the Center for Media Literacy, it's a ready-to-go resource that will help you help your students build a firm foundation in the skills of media literacy. This link will take you to the free PDF download of the collection.

Privacy Playground: The First Adventure of the Three Little CyberPigs

www.media-awareness.ca/english/games/privacy_playground/index.cfm

In this game, designed for ages 8 through 10, the CyberPigs play on their favorite Web site and encounter marketing ploys, spam, and a close encounter with a not-too-friendly wolf. The purpose of the game is to teach kids how to spot online marketing strategies, protect their personal information, and avoid online predators.

Freaky Flakes! Design a Cereal Box

http://pbskids.org/dontbuyit/advertisingtricks/cerealbox_flash.html

This site from *PBS: Kids Go*, “Don’t Buy It—Get Media Smart,” offers children of all ages information, games, and interactives to teach them about advertising gimmicks and tricks. This link takes you to an interactive that allows students to design their own cereal boxes. *NOTE:*

Although the flash animation is easy enough for all ages, younger children will get more from this activity if an adult or older child reads the information on each step to them.