

How Media Messages Influence

Analyze & Evaluate · 30–40 minutes · Grades K–12 · Any subject

The practice: Students identify the many different choices that creators make and consider how the design of media messages may influence people's feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors.

Media artifact: A short persuasive message rich in design choices: an ad, PSA, music video, poster, or social media post.

Why it matters

This lesson demonstrates:

- **The value of noticing how messages work on us.** Naming choices helps students respond thoughtfully, not automatically.
- **How design shapes feelings and actions.** Students link choices like music, color, and words to their effects.
- **How media literacy supports health and wellbeing.** Spotting persuasion helps students make their own choices about food, products, and behaviors.
- **How to reason about cause and effect.** Students explain how a choice produces an effect and back it up with evidence.

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Identify specific **choices** a creator made in words, images, sound, and design.
2. Explain the possible **effect** of each choice on an audience's feelings, thoughts, beliefs, or behaviors.
3. Recognize common **persuasive techniques**, such as emotional appeals, repetition, and testimonials.
4. Predict how **changing a choice** would change the message.
5. Reflect on how a message may **influence them personally**.

Choosing a media artifact

A good artifact is short, connected to your unit, and full of visible design choices. Check it against these criteria:

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| ☐ Short: 30 seconds to 2 minutes of video or audio, or one page, image, or post | ☐ Persuasive: it is clearly trying to change how people feel, think, or act |
| ☐ Connected: it relates to content you are teaching this week | ☐ Rich in choices: music, images, color, wording, or people are used on purpose |
| ☐ Traceable: students can find clues about who made it | ☐ Relevant: connects to students' life experience |
| | ☐ Appropriate and accessible: suitable for the age group, with captions or a transcript |

 **PRO-TIP:** Play a video once with the sound off and once with only the sound. Music and visual choices become easy to spot.

Classroom process (35–40 minutes)

Step	Min.	What the teacher does	What students do
1. Set the purpose	3	Ask: "Has a message ever made you want to buy or do something?" Creators make choices on purpose	Share an example from their own lives

Step	Min.	What the teacher does	What students do
2. First encounter	4	Show the artifact once, without stopping	Note how it made them feel and what it wants them to do
3. Choice hunt	12	Replay with pauses. Post categories: <i>words, images, color, sound, people, layout</i> . Ask: “What choice was made? What effect might it have?”	Fill in a two-column chart: <i>Choice → Effect</i>
4. “What if” groups	8	Give each group one choice to change (new music, a different person, one word removed)	Predict how the change would alter the message’s effect
5. Share and connect	5	Chart group predictions. Ask who benefits from this influence. Link to the unit content	Explain how choices shape feelings, thoughts, beliefs, or behaviors
6. Exit ticket	3	Hand out the exit prompt (see Assessment)	Answer individually

Teacher stance: being influenced is normal, not a failure. Help students notice how messages work so they can decide for themselves, and reward careful reasoning and original interpretations.

Customizing for grade level and subject

By grade band

Grades	How to phrase the questions	Adjustments
K–2	How does this make you feel? What does it want you to do?	Whole class; focus on one choice, like music or color; use a toy or snack commercial
3–5	What choices did the creator make? How do they make you feel or want to act?	Pairs; three-row Choice → Effect chart; starter: “The ____ makes me feel ____ because ____”
6–8	Which choices shape feelings, thoughts, beliefs, or behaviors, and how?	Name persuasive techniques; use the full “what if” activity
9–12	Same as 6–8, plus: who benefits from this influence, and how might it affect different audiences?	Students analyze a message from their own feed

By subject

Subject	Example artifacts	Subject	Example artifacts
English language arts	Book trailer, persuasive speech, movie poster	Health	Snack or energy drink ad, influencer post
History & social science	Political ad, propaganda poster, campaign speech	Arts	Film scene with a score, album cover, music video
Science & engineering	Public health PSA, climate campaign video	World languages	TV commercial in the target language
Mathematics	Ad featuring a statistic or a chart with a misleading scale	Digital literacy & CS	App notification, autoplay feed, game reward screen

Assessment

Exit ticket: “The creator used ____ to make the audience feel, think, or do _____. One way this message influences me is _____.” (K–2: draw the part that made you feel something.)

Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Extending
Describes the message but not the choices behind it	Names one or two choices, with general effects	Links several specific choices to likely effects on the audience	Explains how changing a choice would change the effect, or who benefits

Next step (optional)

Create Media: students use two techniques they identified to create a short message for a cause they care about.