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UNIT 1: ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Unit Overview

This unit introduces students to media literacy, which consists of “asking questions about what you watch, see, and read.”

Students learn how to ask critical questions about media messages, including questions about authorship, point of view, audience, and representation.

They practice answering these questions using a variety of media, including music reviews, advertising, product placement in film, documentaries, and entertainment programming.

Students explore the history of public relations and examine how tobacco has been advertised to women and minorities. They create a presentation board or web page that analyzes two different media messages using critical questions.

This unit provides an opportunity for students to explore important concepts in Character Education, including **responsibility** and **fairness**.

The “essential questions” of this unit are:

- **How does an awareness of the construction of a message shape the reader’s or viewer’s understanding of it?**
- **How does persuasion work to affect people consciously or unconsciously?**
- **How does the history of public relations help us understand contemporary society?**



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UNIT 1: ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Ask questions to discover the purpose, point of view, target audience, and the subtext of different types of media messages.

1.1 Questioning the Media

Analyze media messages using the key questions of media literacy.

1.2 Triumph over Billboards

Read Dick Gregory's critique of alcohol and tobacco billboards in urban communities.

1.3 Product Placement in Film

Learn how tobacco advertising was placed within an entertaining movie.

1.4 What's Up with Billboards?

Compare and contrast the two readings about billboard advertising.

1.5 The Herd Theory

Read about Edward Bernays and the history of public relations in the 1920s with comprehension and critical thinking questions.

PRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Create a Visual Display

Students work in a group to collect and analyze two or three different types of information about an object or event and create a presentation board or web page that analyzes the messages using the five critical questions.

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UNIT 1: ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS

CONNECTIONS TO MARYLAND STATE CONTENT STANDARDS

The *Assignment: Media Literacy* curriculum has been designed to align with Maryland State Content Standards. Many of the activities and lessons are modeled upon the structure and format used in the MSPAP tests for language arts and social studies.

For each unit, the standards are listed for each subject area. The numbers at the end of each line refer to specific instructional goals identified in the Maryland Content Standards.

Use the chart below to identify the specific instructional objectives developed in each unit of the program.

HIGH SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS

1.12.1	Concepts of Print and Structural Features of Text (all)
1.12.5	Comprehension and Interpretation of Informational Text (all)
1.12.6	Evaluation of Informational Text (all)
2.12.1	Characteristics of Literary Genres (#1,3)
2.12.2	Comprehension, Interpretations, and Analysis of Text (all)
2.12.4	Evaluation of Literary Works
3.12.1	Organization and Focus (all)
3.12.3	Revision and Evaluation of Writing (all)
3.12.5	Practical Writing
3.12.6	Informational Writing (all)
3.12.7	Persuasive Writing (all)
4.12.2.	Comprehension and Application of Standard English Language Conventions (all)
5.12.1	Active Listening Strategies
5.12.2	Comprehension and Analysis (all)
6.12.1	Organization and Delivery Strategies (all)

HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES

1.12.2	Analyze how change happens; that change is complicated and affects not only technology, economics, and politics, but values and beliefs.
1.12.3	Interpret past events and issues within the context in which an event Unfolded rather than solely in terms of present-day norms and values.
1.12.7	Analyze an author's implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions And beliefs about a subject.
1.12.8	Synthesize information from multiple source and make distinctions between Sound generalizations and misleading oversimplifications.
1.12.9	Explain how various historical interpretations vary according to prevailing orthodoxies of the period of their writing.
1.12.11	Use clear research questions and coherent methodology to elicit and present Evidence from primary and secondary sources using available library, electronic, and human resources.
7.12.1	Evaluate the ways in which the public agenda is shaped and set, including the influence of political parties, interest groups, lobbyists, the media, and public opinion.

HIGH SCHOOL HEALTH

Outcome # 1	Students will demonstrate an understanding of health promotion and disease prevention concepts. (# 2.4, 2.3, 7.4)
Outcome # 2	Students will demonstrate the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate health information, products and services in order to become health literate consumers. (#3.2)



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.1 | QUESTIONING THE MEDIA

This activity introduces students to a set of critical questions for analyzing media messages and provides three different video segments to study.

Getting Started

Ask students if they watch television. Of course they do, but do they carefully note how media messages are constructed? By actively asking questions about what we watch, see, and read, we discover how media messages are constructed and can identify their biases and points-of-view.

Play the video that opens this segment. It shows a segment from a newsmagazine program and introduces the five critical questions.

Analyze Each Video Segment

Explain to students that they will be seeing a small segment of video. Using the images and sounds shown, students make educated guesses about the five critical questions shown on Activity Sheet 1.1. These questions provide a framework for analyzing media messages. Show each of the video segments individually and work through the critical questions using the activity sheet. You may want students to write responses, followed by discussion—or you may prefer to use large-group or small-group discussion only.

These are the video segments provided on the tape:

- Ben Franklin documentary
- Hanes underwear ad
- Dramatic scene from *Dangerous Minds* TV show

Additional Critical Questions

Here are some additional questions, organized to show the major ideas and concepts that can be explored:

Purpose and Audience

Who is the intended audience for this message?

Who makes money from this message?

Construction

How were image, language, and sound manipulated in this message?

Form

What type of message is this?

What are the characteristics of this genre and medium?

Interpretation

How does this message connect with your life experience?

How does this message compare with other media messages you've received?

Representation

How are stereotypes (or fixed ideas about things, people, or events) evident in this message?

These questions can be applied to any kind of "text," from a textbook to a magazine article and more. Encourage students to ask these questions whenever they encounter a message—it changes the way they think!

Extension

Ask students to bring in a short media message from the Internet—can students use the same critical questions with a web page as they can with a TV show?

QUESTIONING THE MEDIA

Media Message: _____

Questions:

1. Who created this message? List the types of jobs of people involved in the construction of the message.

2. What is the purpose of this message?

- to inform self-expression
 to persuade to teach
 to entertain to make money

Mark your choice and explain your reasons for your choice.

3. What techniques are used to attract and hold attention?

4. What point-of-view is represented in this message?

5. What has been left out of this message?



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.2 | TRIUMPH OVER BILLBOARDS

This critical reading activity is an excerpt of an essay by Dick Gregory, which presents the argument that billboard advertisers unfairly target African-American and Latino city neighborhoods.

Background

One of the most important controversies of the 1990s was the debate about tobacco advertising and its influence in promoting unhealthy behavior. That debate is still continuing today.

Collaborative Problem-Solving

This reading activity can be used alone or as a collaborative learning experience. Students can work together to compare and contrast readings found on Activity Sheets 1.2 and 1.3. Activity 1.4 shows more details about how to organize this approach to critical reading.

Split the class into two groups. With half of the students, review Activity 1.2, the essay by Dick Gregory. With the others, review Activity 1.3, a memo about the placement of tobacco advertising in a Hollywood film. Students should work individually on this activity.

After students have completed, ask students to partner with someone from the other group. One partner has read the Gregory essay and the other partner has read the product placement memo. See the Teacher Notes for Activity Sheet 1.4 which invites students to analyze the similarities and differences between Gregory's essay and the product placement memo.

Extensions

You might ask students to count the number of billboards they see on their way from home to school. Or you might want them to bring in slogans they see from billboard ads to analyze.

Research the restrictions on tobacco billboard advertising that were enacted as part of the tobacco settlement in 1998.

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.2

TRIUMPH OVER BILLBOARDS

Instructions: Read the message below, then answer the questions.

This is an excerpt of an article published by the Marin Institute on their Internet website (www.marininstitute.org).

Triumph over Billboards

by Dick Gregory

We are taking them down. In the foreseeable future, alcohol and tobacco billboards will be just a bad memory, a sad reminder of the alcohol and tobacco industries' predatory marketing practices.

When I say "we," I mean the predominantly African-American and Latino communities in the inner cities of this country. It is mostly in these communities that the tobacco and alcohol industries use billboards to push their drugs. Study after study has shown that this visual pollution occurs primarily in African-American and Latino neighborhoods. The industries would not dare install in suburban areas the ads with which they paper the inner cities, because they know it would not be tolerated. . . .

The ads tell a cruel lie. They tout alcohol and tobacco as sources of happiness, good sex, success and power. Their imagery includes scantily-clad women, musicians, tigers and

other fierce creatures, and genial frogs and penguins. Yet the truth is that alcohol and tobacco cause untold suffering, death and despair, particularly among our young people, and rob our communities of their strength and vitality.

Our children are subjected to this "litter on a stick" every day. We cannot turn off billboards, cannot turn the page. They tower over our homes, playgrounds, schools, and businesses . . .

The news that cities across the country are taking action is indeed heartening. First Baltimore, then Chicago, started the ball rolling.

. . . When we the People come together, our power is awesome. In our confrontation with the alcohol and tobacco industries, they represent darkness and we represent light. To know how much power we have over darkness, go into a dark room and turn the light on. Darkness vanishes. Darkness never wins over the light.

1. Who is taking down the billboards in cities across the country and why?

2. According to Gregory, how is a billboard advertisement different from a magazine or television advertisement? In what paragraph does he make this comparison?

3. Explain why you do or do not agree that billboards are "litter on a stick." Write your answer on the back of the page.



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.3 | PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN FILM

This activity explores product placement in Hollywood films—the financial agreements that film producers make with different companies to feature their products or logos in a film.

Background

When you see the main character eating a bag of Doritos in a movie, it is not an accident. It is a marketing practice called *product placement*. **Product placement** is a strategy used to promote a product by making financial arrangements with a film producer to feature the product or logo in a film or television program. Companies pay film producers to place images of a product or advertising or product logos in key scenes of a film. Advertisers expose viewers to a product's name or image without the viewers realizing that the product was placed in the film deliberately for promotion purposes.

Collaborative Problem Solving

This reading activity can be used alone or as a collaborative learning experience. Students can work together to compare and contrast readings found on Activity Sheets 1.2 and 1.3. Activity 1.4 shows more details about how to organize this approach to critical reading.

Split the class into two groups. With half of the students, review Activity 1.2, the essay by Dick Gregory. With the others, review Activity 1.3, a memo about the placement of tobacco advertising in a Hollywood film. Students should work individually on this activity.

After completing this activity, ask students to partner with someone from the other group. One partner has read the Gregory essay and the other partner has read the product placement memo. See the Teacher Notes for Activity Sheet 1.4, which invites students to analyze the similarities and differences between Gregory's essay and the product placement memo.

Getting Started

You might want to ask students if they can remember seeing examples of products or logos in a movie they've seen recently.

Pass out copies of the activity sheet and ask students to read and complete the questions. Discuss the responses with students.

Questions and Answers:

- 1. What was done?** Film producers agreed to display a billboard depicting a Marlboro cigarette advertisement for the sum of 20,000 sterling pounds (\$30,000).
- 2. What is the meaning of the word "detrimental" in the context?**
In the context of this memo, "detrimental" means "unattractive" (c).
- 3. Why are size and illumination important?** Both size and illumination will draw moviegoers' attention to the advertisement placed within the movie.

Extensions

Discuss whether the people who make movies want a product placement to be noticeable (or not). Do the people who market products want the product placement to be noticeable? Why or why not?

Ask students to search the Internet to research the history of product placement in film. When was this practice first used in Hollywood movies? Who is most critical of this practice? Who is supportive?

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.3

PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN FILM



Instructions: Read the message below, then answer the questions.

MEMO TO PHILIP MORRIS

This excerpt is from a memo to the Philip Morris Company from the British film production company filming the movie *Superman II*.

Dear Sirs,

This letter confirms the agreement that has been reached between our two companies whereby we have agreed to include in our feature film currently entitled "Superman II" (the film) exposure of the Marlboro brand name (the material) on the following terms and conditions:

1. The exposure of the material shall be effected in a major scene in the film involving "Urea," "General Zod," and "Superman." The size of the billboard referred in the relevant scenes will be approximately 20 feet by 10 feet and will be illuminated . . .
2. We shall have absolute discretion as to the final content of the film . . .

3. In consideration of our agreement set out above, you hereby agree and undertake that:
 - (a) You will provide to us without any charge all necessary material and art work
 - (b) . . . You agree to pay us the sum of £ 20,000 (twenty thousand pounds sterling).
4. If there is any reference in the edited footage of the whole film that might reasonably be construed as detrimental to the Marlboro brand name, we shall remove all exposé of the material from the release print of the film.

1. What do the British filmmakers agree to put in their movie, *Superman II*, and how much are they charging the Philip Morris Company to do this?

2. Based on context clues in the sentence, "detrimental" means:
 - (a) praiseworthy
 - (b) costly
 - (c) unattractive

(Circle the answer.)

3. Why is the billboard size and its illumination an important part of the agreement?



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.4 | WHAT'S UP WITH BILLBOARDS?

Students compare and contrast the essay by Dick Gregory with the memo from the film production company to Philip Morris company.

Background

This activity invites students to look for connections and analyze differences between the ways two different texts present the subject of tobacco billboard advertising. To explore these questions, it is essential to have completed activities 1.2 and 1.3.

Collaborative Problem Solving

This reading activity can be used alone or as a collaborative learning experience. Students can work together to compare and contrast readings found on Activity Sheets 1.2 and 1.3.

Review the Teacher Notes for the previous activities. After students have completed these, ask students to partner with someone from the other group. Students will need to create a partnership where one partner has read the Gregory essay and the other partner has read the product placement memo.

First, ask the partners to get together and read the short passages and student responses to activities 1.2 and 1.3. This will familiarize the partners with each other's previous work. Then pass out Activity 1.4 and ask students to work together to complete the activity sheet.

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.4

WHAT'S UP WITH BILLBOARD ADS?

Message A: Triumph over Billboards by Dick Gregory (1.2)

Message B: Memo to Philip Morris (1.3)

Instructions: After reading the two messages, answer the questions below.

1. Both messages are about billboard advertisements. How do the billboard ads in Message A differ from the billboard ad described in Message B?

2. In Message B, who is likely to see *Superman II* and therefore might also see the Marlboro billboard in the movie?

3. In Message A, Gregory accuses the alcohol and tobacco industries of using persuasive imagery on billboards. What imagery does he use in the last paragraph of his media message?

4. What "behind-the-scenes" information does the *Superman II* memo reveal?



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.5 | THE HERD THEORY

Students learn about the history of public relations and the ways in which women were persuaded to become smokers by appealing to their interests in feminism and freedom.

Background

Some scholars and journalists estimate that up to forty percent of the news we see has been generated by the efforts of public relations practitioners. Public relations, as the merging of information and persuasion, is increasingly present in all forms of mass media—especially in news and information we find on the Internet.

Getting Started

You might ask students if they have heard of the phrase “public relations.” **Public relations** is a company’s attempt to get attention for their product or service by placing articles or stories in the media. Public relations persuades through “free media” whereas advertising persuades through “paid media.”

You might ask students if they have seen any results of public relations. One example is the practice of reviewing movies on local TV news. These reviews have been generated by a public relations initiative—a film company sends out elaborate print and video materials for local TV stations to use.

Pass out Activity Sheet 1.5 (A) and ask students to read. Then pass out the questions on Activity Sheet 1.5 (B) and ask students to complete them. If you prefer, you can use this activity as a read-aloud and use the questions for large-group discussion.

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.5 (A)**THE HERD THEORY**

By Catherine Gourley

Excerpted from *Media Wizards*

“The human being—male or female—is a herd animal,” wrote Edward Bernays in his 1923 book titled *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. “Man is fearful of solitude . . . He is more sensitive to the voice of the herd than to any other influence.”

According to Bernays, the goal of the public relations expert is to influence opinion. The way to do that is to create in the individual a desire to be like everybody else. In other words, get them to follow the herd. That is exactly the approach Bernays took when the American Tobacco Company hired him in the late 1920s.

At the time, most women were not smokers—at least not in public. Society frowned upon women who smoked. They weren’t ladies, they were . . . well, something cheaper than a lady. Because half the population in the United States was women—and that was a very large herd indeed—changing society’s attitude about women smokers was necessary if cigarette makers were to increase sales and profits.

Bernays went to work. The first step in developing a public relations campaign, he said, was to understand the client’s aim. His client was the American Tobacco Company. Their goal was to sell cigarettes to women. The company had even developed a special brand just for women—Marlboro.

The second step in the campaign was to understand the client’s target audience. Women’s lives were changing in the opening decades of the 20th century. In 1919 women suffragists, who for years had marched with linked arms in parades to demand equal rights, had finally won a key victory—the right to vote. More women were now working outside the home, in factories and mills and businesses offices. A growing number of doctors, lawyers, and scientists were also women.

Even those who didn’t work, the daughters of socially prominent families, were changing. These debutantes, as they were called, had raised their hemlines and bobbed their hair. Bernays saw all these changes in women as a demand for independence and equal rights. That became the key message in his campaign.

Aim, target, campaign—the code words of public relations use language often reserved for war. Bernays welcomed the battle, and on Easter Sunday, 1929, Edward Bernays set out to capture the women of America.

He called cigarettes “torches of freedom.” Women had fought for the right to vote and they had won. But they still were not free to smoke in public. Believing that most women, like most men, were herd animals, he created an over act, or phony event, to catch the attention of the public and especially news reporters and photographers. The Easter Parade was a New York City society event. Bernays hired a number of debutantes to march in that parade, dressed in their finest clothing, of course, but also smoking their “torches of freedom.”

The women marched. The press pounced, as Bernays had hoped. Photographs and articles about the women’s rebellion appeared in newspapers beyond New York City. Bernays had succeeded in showing the society herd smoking. Soon, hundreds of thousands of women followed the herd’s example. Cigarette sales among women soared.

Of course, Bernays was not the only person working hard to sell smoking to women. And of course, not all women followed the herd. But the publicity from the Easter Parade had ripple effects across the century . . . ripples that continue even today.

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.5 (B)

THE HERD THEORY

1. What is “the voice of the herd” as described in the opening two paragraphs?

2. Why was it important for tobacco companies to appeal to women smokers in the earliest decades of the 20th century?

3. For whom did Bernays work while planning his “torches of freedom” campaign?

4. What cause-and-effect link did Bernays identify between women and their changing role in society?

5. The purpose of Bernays’s “torches of freedom” campaign was to:

- (a) convince the debutantes of New York City to smoke
- (b) persuade society in general that women should have rights equal to men
- (c) get press coverage of women smoking cigarettes (Circle the answer.)

6. In planning or constructing his campaign event, why did Bernays hire New York City debutantes rather than lesser-known women?

7. In planning or constructing his campaign, Bernays decided to call cigarettes “torches of freedom.” In what way is this misleading? Write your answer on the back of this page.



TEACHER NOTES



UNIT 1

CREATE A VISUAL DISPLAY

Collect and analyze two different types of information about an object or event and create a presentation board or web page that analyzes the messages using the five critical questions.

This activity provides students with the opportunity to create a visual display using posterboard or graphic design software to explore the five critical questions of media literacy using media messages of their choice.

You might want students to work with a partner to complete this activity. Here are some examples of appropriate pairs of “texts” for students to analyze:

- A TV ad and a print ad for the same product
- A newspaper article and a magazine article about the same news event
- A website and a TV news program about the same issue
- Two reviews of a film or a TV show from different publications

Review the Checklist

Pass out the Production Activity worksheet and review the steps in the process needed to complete the activity. Encourage students to check off the steps by using the circles in the left margin. Establish a realistic deadline and monitor students’ work during the process.

Making Effective Use of Graphic Design

Students will need chart paper or posterboard to create their visual displays. Or, you may encourage students to complete this project as a web page or hypercard stack.

Students can make more effective use of graphic design if you give them the following advice:

- Use a word processor for creating headlines and creating answers to critical questions.
- Avoid cluttering the poster with too much to look at—white space is important in a poster.
- Don’t use more than two different fonts or more than three different colors.
- Use word play to create more effective and creative headlines.

Evaluation

Review the evaluation criteria shown with students on the evaluation form early in the production process. You might want students to evaluate each other's work using this evaluation sheet or you might want to use this as an evaluation tool yourself.

Publishing Student Work on www.AssignmentMediaLit.com

See the Resources section on page 183 to learn how you or your students can send completed posters to be published on the *Assignment: Media Literacy* website.

ASSIGNMENT



UNIT 1

CREATE A VISUAL DISPLAY

(**ASSIGNMENT:** Collect and analyze two different types of information about an object or event and create a presentation board, web page, or hypercard stack that analyzes the messages using the five critical questions.

CHECKLIST TO COMPLETE THIS ACTIVITY:

Select two different media messages and analyze using questions.

- Find an image or picture or draw something to represent each of the messages you select.
- Write paragraphs (in complete sentences) responding to the questions below. Analyze each message individually. Be sure to use description and reasoning in your responses.

Create a presentation board or web page to display your analysis.

- Arrange these short paragraphs around your images. Write a headline for each paragraph. Create your display as a poster, web page, or hypercard stack.
- Send your completed project to the www.AssignmentMediaLit.com web page to publish it.



- **WHO MADE THIS MESSAGE AND WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?**
- **WHAT TECHNIQUES ARE USED TO ATTRACT AND HOLD ATTENTION?**
- **WHAT MEANING DOES THE MESSAGE HAVE FOR YOU? HOW MIGHT OTHERS INTERPRET IT DIFFERENTLY?**
- **WHAT POINT-OF-VIEW IS REPRESENTED IN THIS MESSAGE?**
- **WHAT INFORMATION OR POINTS OF VIEW MAY BE MISSING FROM THIS MESSAGE?**

EVALUATION



UNIT 1

CREATE A VISUAL DISPLAY

Student Name: _____

Sentences use reasoning based on elements in the message.

4	Sentences have answers that are supported by reasoning using information or clues from the image or the media message's context.
3	Sentences have answers that are supported by reasoning from prior knowledge.
2	Sentences have answers that are not clearly supported by reasoning.
1	Sentences use no reasoning to support answers.

Sentences are well written.

4	Sentences are written in complete sentence form with no spelling or usage errors.
3	Sentences have some spelling or usage errors.
2	Sentences are not written in complete sentence form.
1	Sentences are not written in complete sentence form and have spelling or usage errors.

Display is designed effectively.

4	Images, sentences, and headlines are arranged thoughtfully and attractively on the page.
3	Images, sentences, and headlines are placed on the page without awareness of design or composition.
2	Images, sentences, and headlines are placed on the page in a sloppy or careless fashion.
1	Photo and/or sentences and headlines are missing.

Comments:

Grade:

