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UNIT 1: ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Unit Overview

When students begin asking questions about what they watch, see, and read in the media, they strengthen reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. The activities in this unit introduce students to some basic principles of media literacy, including authorship, point of view, audience, and representation. These activities challenge students to analyze messages in a variety of media—including print and televised advertisements and news articles.

Students make distinctions between fact and opinion in advertising; they detect subtexts, appeals, and target audiences in TV advertising; and they look at two different representations of an athlete to see how point of view is depicted.

Students demonstrate their ability to analyze media messages by designing a poster that compares and contrasts two different media messages.

The “essential questions” of this unit are:

- **How do people distinguish between fact and opinion?**
- **What are the processes involved in constructing a persuasive message?**
- **How does the media present a point-of-view about a person, an idea, or an event?**



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UNIT 1: ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS

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

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1.1 What is Media?

Identify the wide variety of media available for communication today.

1.2 Fact or Opinion in Advertising

Distinguish between fact and opinion in a critical reading activity.

1.3 Subtexts, Appeals, and Targets

Identify persuasive strategies used in constructing advertisements.

1.4 Two Views of Venus

Read and analyze two distinct media messages—a sports news article and an anti-drug advertisement—about tennis pro Venus Williams.

1.5 Asking Critical Questions

Analyze media messages using the key questions of media literacy.

PRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Make a Poster

Students work in a group to create a presentation board or web page that analyzes a media message 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.

MIDDLE SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS

1.8.1	Concepts of Print and Structural Features of Text (all)
1.8.5	Comprehension and Interpretation of Informational Text (#1-4)
1.8.6	Evaluation of Informational Text (all)
2.8.1	Characteristics of Literary Genres (all)
2.8.2	Comprehension, Interpretation, and Analysis of Text (all)
2.8.4	Evaluation of Literary Works (all)
3.8.1	Organization and Focus (all)
3.8.2	Research (#1,3)
3.8.3	Revision and Evaluation of Writing (#3,4)
3.8.6	Informational Writing (#1)
3.8.7	Persuasive Writing (#1)
4.8.1	Acquisition and Application of New Vocabulary (#2,3,5,6)
4.8.2	Comprehension and Application of Standard English Language Conventions (all)
5.8.1	Active Listening Strategies (all)
5.8.2	Comprehension and Analysis (all)
6.8.1	Organization and Delivery Strategies (all)

MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES

1.8.8	Access the credibility of primary and secondary sources, assessing the accuracy and adequacy of the author’s details to support claims, note instances of bias, propaganda, and stereotyping, draw sound conclusions.
1.8.11	Identify topics, ask and evaluate questions, and develop ideas leading to inquiry, investigation, and research.
2.8.5	Interpret patriotic slogans and excerpts from historical speeches and documents.
7.8.1	Describe the influence of the media on political life in the United States. Including recognizing bias in reporting, analysis, and editorializing.

MIDDLE SCHOOL HEALTH

Outcome # 3	Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and practice health-enhancing behaviors and reduce health risks to live safer, healthier lives. (#3.4, 5.3, 1.2)
Outcome #4	Students will demonstrate the ability to effectively use communication skills to enhance personal, family, and community health. (#1.5, 3.5)
Outcome #5	Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal setting and decision making skills to address issues related to personal, family, and community health. (#1.3)

MIDDLE SCHOOL VISUAL ARTS**Content Standards**

Outcome III	Creative Expression and Production: Expectation A, Indicators 1, 2, 3; Expectation B, Indicators 1, 2.
Outcome IV	Aesthetic Criticism: Expectation A, Indicator 2; Expectation B, Indicator 1; Expectation C, Indicator 1.



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.1 | WHAT IS MEDIA?

Small groups of students brainstorm a list of different types of media to understand the diverse array of choices available for expression and communication.

Background

Students use four different categories to organize their responses:

- Media that are used for one-on-one communication
- Media that are used for entertainment
- Media that are used to provide information to a large group of people
- Media that are used to persuade

As an introductory activity, this classroom activity provides an opportunity to introduce some key vocabulary words that will help students talk about the mass media with more precision.

Getting Started

This activity is ideal as a collaborative learning experience. Pass out the activity sheet and ask students to work with a partner or in a small team. Have one person act as recorder for the team. Invite them to brainstorm as many different types of media that can fit into the three categories.

Students may place one of the media in more than one category, if appropriate. Some examples of appropriate answers include:

Media that are used to send a message from one person to another

- Letter
- Telephone
- E-mail

Media that are used for entertainment

- TV shows, like situation comedies and dramas
- Comic books
- Video games
- Movies

Media that are used to provide information to a large group of people

- News programs
- Newspapers
- Radio news
- Websites

Media that are used to persuade

- Advertising
- Infomercials
- Direct marketing (junk mail)
- Telemarketing (phone calls from salespersons)

Extension

Have students find out which of the media on their lists were common during their parents' or grandparents' childhoods. How were these media different when they were growing up? Students may discover that E-mail, telemarketing, direct marketing, and many other forms of communication were not common only twenty years ago.

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.1

WHAT IS MEDIA?

Instructions: See how many different types and forms of media you can identify in the categories below.

Media that are used to communicate to a large group of people:



Media that are used for entertainment:



Media that are used to persuade:



Media that are used to communicate from one individual to another:



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.2 | **FACT OR OPINION IN ADVERTISING**

Students practice evaluating advertising claims by identifying them as facts or opinions.

Background

Students may have already begun to take advertising claims at face value, without critically analyzing the use of language in persuasive statements. This activity helps students determine whether the information in an advertisement is a statement of *fact* or an *opinion*.

Getting Started

This activity is ideal for individual seatwork or as a homework activity. You might review the concept of fact and opinion by encouraging students to ask the two questions identified in the box:

- Is the statement general or specific?
- Can the claim be measured or tested?

You may prefer to use this activity as a whole-class activity, asking students to provide their reasons for making their choice of “fact” or “opinion.”

Questions and Answers:

Facts (F) or opinions (O)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. O | 6. O |
| 2. O | 7. F |
| 3. O | 8. F |
| 4. O | 9. O |
| 5. F | 10. O |

Extension

Ask students to bring in their own examples of advertising slogans and write them on the board. Have students identify whether these slogans are facts or subjective opinions.

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.2

FACT OR OPINION IN ADVERTISING

To determine whether the information in an advertisement is a statement of fact or a statement of someone's subjective opinion, ask these two questions:

Is the statement general or specific?

Statements of opinion in advertising claims often include sweeping generalizations or exaggerations. Facts are often highly specific.

Can the claim be measured or tested?

Factual claims are measurable. They can be tested and proven as either true or false. Opinion claims can't be measured and therefore can't be proven either true or false.

Instructions: Identify each advertising slogan below either as **F** for **factual statement**; or **O** for subjective statement of **opinion**. Write the letter (F or O) on the line in front of each statement.

- ___ 1. You meet the nicest people on a Honda. (Honda motorbikes)
- ___ 2. The ultimate driving machine. (BMW automobiles)
- ___ 3. Bet you can't eat just one. (Lay's Potato Chips)
- ___ 4. Nobody does it like Sara Lee. (Sara Lee desserts)
- ___ 5. New Extra Strength Doan's is made for back pain relief. (Doan's Pills)
- ___ 6. For the adult in you. For the kid in you. (Frosted Mini-Wheats)
- ___ 7. Colgate Platinum. Advanced whitening formula. Plus cavity protection, tartar control, and fresh breath. (Colgate toothpaste)
- ___ 8. Designed to actively penetrate below the gumline with new dual POWER TIP Bristles and soft, end-rounded bristles. (Braun Oral-B ULTRA toothbrush)
- ___ 9. Wear the world. (Mondera.com website for selling diamonds)
- ___ 10. You aren't fully clean until you're zestfully clean. (Zest soap)



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.3 | SUBTEXTS, APPEALS, AND TARGETS

This activity introduces students to three important concepts in analyzing media messages: the subtext of the message, the persuasive appeal used, and the target audience.

This activity uses two worksheets. The first explains three concepts: subtexts, appeals, and targets. The second presents four examples from different types of persuasive messages.

Getting Started

Review the concepts using Activity Sheet, 1.3 (A). Make sure students understand the idea of the three different concepts. You might want to provide examples of subtexts, appeals, and targets using examples from print media, including newspapers and magazines.

Give students a copy of Activity Sheet 1.3 (B) and ask them to read the first numbered paragraph. If you prefer, you may choose to read aloud the descriptions of this ad.

Ask students to come up with a possible subtext for the first paragraph. Students may come up with a number of possible subtexts—although you should review the answers provided below, you should emphasize to students that **a subtext is an interpretation**. There could be a number of different but plausible subtexts for each of these examples.

Still working on the first paragraph, ask students to select one of the three persuasive appeals from Activity Sheet 1.3 (A). Which one of the descriptions seems most like the TV ad that is described in the paragraph? Encourage students to provide reasons for their responses.

Finally, ask students to identify some of the demographic characteristics of the target audience. Who is the target audience for this “Got Milk?” campaign? Encourage students to provide reasons for their answers.

You may choose to do all the examples as a large-group activity, or ask students to work individually to complete the remaining examples.

Questions and Answers:

1. GOT MILK?

Appeal: Slice-of-life.

Subtext: If you run out of milk, something bad is bound to happen. Or, your good health is at risk if you run out of milk.

Target Audience: The humor in the ad will appeal to a wide range of audiences, men and women, young and old.

Although the main *human* character is a little old lady, the audience is families in general.

2. KRAFT FOODS

Appeal: Slice-of-life

Subtext: Serving Kraft foods will bring your family closer together. Or, your family can also be “normal” and “wholesome” if you serve Kraft foods.

Target Audience: Mothers and wives

3. DuPont ON CAR HOOD

Appeal: Testimonial

Subtext: Because Gordon is often in the winner’s circle for car racing, the transference message is that DuPont is used by winners. You can be a winner (or your car can be a winner) if you use this product.

Target Audience: Some students may suggest race fans—both male and female, all ages—are the target audience. Some may argue that the endorsements are appealing primarily to males of driving age.

4. ANTI-DRUG SKATEBOARDING PSA

Appeal: Lifestyle

Subtext: Championship athletes do not use drugs. Or, drugs limit athletic performance.

Target Audience: teens, primarily male.

Extension

Consider enhancing the discussion to explore with students why a company like DuPont would invest in Jeff Gordon. Ask students to guess at what they might have paid Gordon in order to have their name painted on his car and what might happen to their endorsement should Gordon spin out a string of losses.

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.3 (A)**SUBTEXTS, APPEALS, AND TARGETS****SUBTEXTS**

All media messages have a *subtext*, an unstated message that is implied or suggested through the use of symbols—characters, words, images, music, special effects, and more. The author composes the message with a certain subtext in mind. The reader or viewer interprets the subtext by carefully studying the construction of the message.

APPEALS

Ads use a set of common strategies to get the attention of the audience and convince them to accept the persuasive message. Here are three common appeals:

The Testimonial Advertisement: A celebrity or authority figure promotes a product. *Subtext strategy:* If the audience likes or believes the spokesperson, then they will *transfer* that acceptance of the person to the product.

The Lifestyle Advertisement: An advertisement provides a glimpse from a particular lifestyle or way of living. *Subtext strategy:* If the audience desires the lifestyle, then they'll *transfer* that longing to the product.

The Slice-of-Life Advertisement: The advertisement is a mini-story with characters, conflict, and the advertiser's product. *Subtext strategy:* If the audience understands or relates to the characters and the conflict, then they will *transfer* that good feeling from the story to the product.

TARGETS

All advertisements also have a *target audience*. This is the group of people the advertiser hopes to influence—either by shaping opinion or motivating behavior. Advertisers categorize people by their *demographic* characteristics: their age, gender, race, class, and the geographic region where they live. These are some of the categories they use in targeting which types of people will be likely to purchase their products:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> male | <input type="radio"/> Caucasian | <input type="radio"/> rich |
| <input type="radio"/> female | <input type="radio"/> African-American | <input type="radio"/> middle-class |
| | <input type="radio"/> Hispanic | <input type="radio"/> working class |
| <input type="radio"/> 2–11 year olds | <input type="radio"/> Asian | <input type="radio"/> poor |
| <input type="radio"/> 12–17 year olds | | |
| <input type="radio"/> 18–25 year olds | <input type="radio"/> urban | |
| <input type="radio"/> 26–35 year olds | <input type="radio"/> suburban | |
| <input type="radio"/> 35–55 year olds | <input type="radio"/> rural | |
| <input type="radio"/> over 55 | | |

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.3 (B)

SUBTEXTS, APPEALS, AND TARGETS

Instructions: For each advertising example below, identify the type of appeal used in the ad (testimonial, lifestyle, or slice-of-life), the subtext, and the target audience.

1. In this televised commercial, a little old lady lives with dozens of cats—hungry cats. When she discovers she has run out of milk, she mixes up a big batch of powdered milk. The cats hiss and arch their backs. Suddenly, a paw flips off the light switch. “Oh-oh,” the little old lady murmurs. The TV screen goes dark and this question appears: “Got milk?”

SUBTEXT	APPEAL	TARGET AUDIENCE

2. In this televised commercial, a large family gathers for dinner. The sounds of conversation and the music of a fiddle fill the airspace. The grandmother speaks: “Everybody needs to connect as a family. Just a thing as simple as making dinner. Everybody gets a little bit of attention—which I don’t mind giving; I like that.” Images of Kraft packaged foods appear on screen. The final line reads: “Food brings us together. Let’s make something good.”

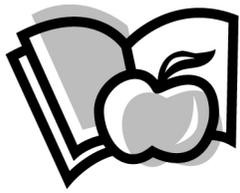
SUBTEXT	APPEAL	TARGET AUDIENCE

3. This advertisement doesn’t appear in a newspaper or on television. You can glimpse it on racetracks where NASCAR driver Jeff Gordon races at speeds of 200 miles per hour. Painted on the hood of his car is this brand name of automotive finishes: DuPont.

SUBTEXT	APPEAL	TARGET AUDIENCE

4. A print ad on the back cover of the WWF (World Wrestling Federation) magazine shows skateboard athlete Andy MacDonald sitting on the floor with his back against a wall. *My idea of getting high* is printed across his image with an arrow pointing to a filmstrip of a dozen images showing him in skateboard competition, soaring against the clouds as he completes a series of loops.

SUBTEXT	APPEAL	TARGET AUDIENCE



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.4 | TWO VIEWS OF VENUS

Students compare and contrast two media messages that feature tennis pro Venus Williams. One message is a sports news article, while the other is an anti-drug public service announcement.

Background

Students might not know the term used to describe commercials they see that communicate an anti-drug or anti-tobacco message. A **public service announcement (PSA)** is the use of advertising techniques to communicate a particular pro-social message, often concerning choices in lifestyle and health. In the late 1990s, the U.S. government spent nearly \$1 billion on a health campaign to communicate anti-drug messages to citizens. Research shows these campaigns do have an impact on people's attitudes about drug use and health.

Getting Started

This activity includes two worksheets: 1.4 (A) includes the newspaper article and the anti-drug print ad featuring Venus Williams. Activity Sheet 1.4 (B) includes questions for students to answer in comparing and contrasting these messages. Students need both sheets to complete this activity.

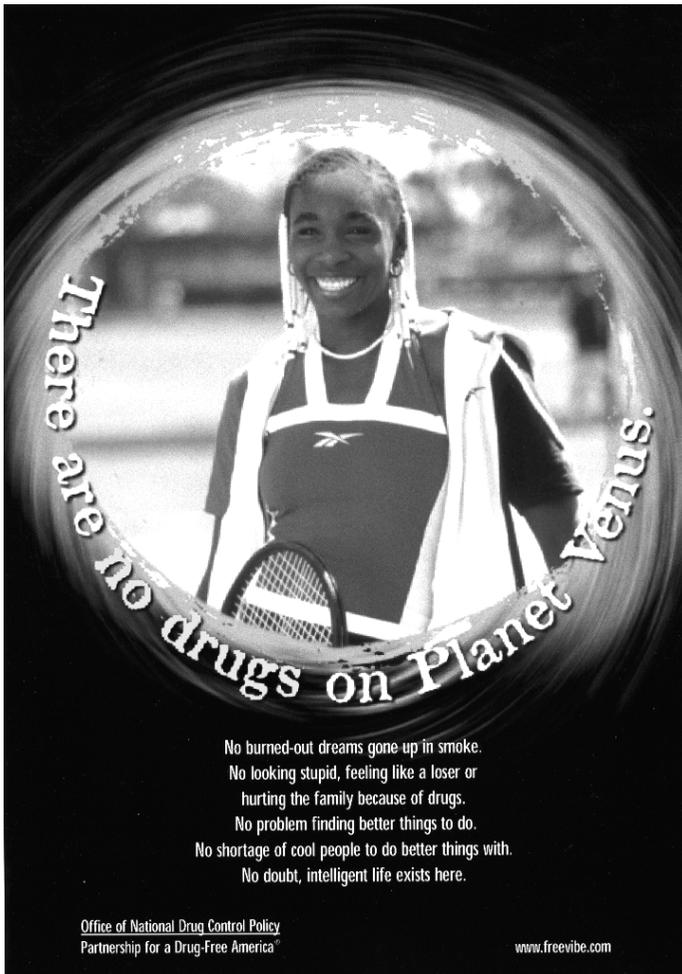
Ask how many students are familiar with Venus Williams. What do students already know about this athlete? Where did they learn this information?

Pass out Activity Sheet 1.4 (A). After students read the short article and look at the image, pass out Activity Sheet 1.4 (B). Ask students to write down the answers to the questions on the activity sheet. As an alternative, you may want to use the questions on the activity sheet for a small-group or large-group discussion.

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.4 (A)

TWO VIEWS OF VENUS

Instructions: Read the lead paragraphs below from a news article on tennis pro Venus Williams. Compare the news media message to the print advertisement, also featuring Williams. Then answer the questions.



UNDERHANDED DEED
Williams forces opponent into desperate serve

New York (AP)—For 40 minutes, Venus Williams blistered the court with serves, volleys and groundstrokes, all of them going a gazillion miles an hour and all of them winners.

That's when Elena Wagner cracked.

Losing 11 straight games to go from a 1-0 lead to two points away from U.S. Open elimination can make a woman do desperate things. So Wagner, down 1-6, 0-5, 0-30, took a gamble—she served underhand.

It didn't work.

On Tuesday night, with Williams across the net in off-the-shoulder, yellow-and-blue splendor, matching hair beads bouncing and an all-star crowd including Olympic track icon Carl Lewis cheering, not much did.
(cnsi.com, 9-1-98 posting)

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.4 (B)

TWO VIEWS OF VENUS

Instructions: Read the paragraphs on the previous page from a news article on tennis pro Venus Williams. Compare the news media message to the print ad, which features an image of Williams.

Questions:

1. Who created each message and who is the target audience for this message?

PRINT AD	NEWS ARTICLE

2. Which message assumes the audience knows who Venus Williams is? _____
3. Which message uses repetition to communicate its message? _____
4. Which message uses vivid verbs to communicate its message? _____
5. Which message uses a comparison to communicate its message? _____
6. Circle the phrases in either the news article or the advertisement that describe Williams’s physical appearance rather than her athletic performance.
7. What is the purpose of each message? To inform, to entertain, to persuade?

PRINT AD	NEWS ARTICLE

8. Whose point of view is depicted in each message?

PRINT AD	NEWS ARTICLE

9. What information or points of view may be missing from this message? On the back of this page, write down one fact or point of view that is missing from each message.



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 1 | ACTIVITY 1.5 | ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Students strengthen critical thinking skills by engaging in active viewing to analyze three different video segments featuring advertising, reality TV, and a situation comedy.

Getting Started

Play the video that opens this segment. It shows a segment from a newsmagazine article and introduces the five critical questions by showing a newsmagazine and the voices of students answering critical questions about the message. After viewing this, pass out copies of Activity Sheet 1.5.

Use the activity sheet to introduce the five questions for analyzing media messages. Show each of the three video segments one at a time and spend time using the activity sheet to make sure that students can answer the questions. You may want to use the first two video segments as a whole-class activity, and ask the students to write the answers using the third video segment to test their understanding.

The three video segments include:

- “We Card” Phillip Morris (advertising)
- Real LAPD (non-fiction “reality TV”)
- City Guys (situation comedy)

These questions help students think critically about purpose, audience, point-of-view, and representation:

1. Who is the author?
2. What is the purpose of this message?
3. What techniques are used to attract and hold your attention?
4. What point-of-view is represented in this message?
5. What information or points-of-view may be missing from this message?



TEACHER NOTES



UNIT 1

MAKE A POSTER

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 explore the five critical questions of media literacy with media messages of their choice.

This is an ideal activity for collaborative learning. You might want students to work with a partner to complete this activity.

Selecting Pairs of Media Messages to Analyze

Explain that students will need to select two different media messages to compare and contrast. 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 on the left margin. Establish a realistic deadline and monitor students’ work during the process.

Materials

Students will need chart paper or posterboard to create their visual displays. Or, you may prefer to help build computer literacy skills by asking students to design this as a website or a simple hypercard stack.

Encourage students to make effective use of graphic design by giving them the following advice about effective design:

- 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.
- Increase effectiveness with creative headlines that use word play.

Evaluation

Review the evaluation criteria shown with students on the Evaluation Rubric 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 157 to learn how you or your students can send completed posters or websites to be published on the *Assignment: Media Literacy* website.

ASSIGNMENT



UNIT 1

MAKE A POSTER

(**ASSIGNMENT:** *Select two different types of information about an object or event and create a presentation board or web page that displays your analysis of the two messages using the five critical questions.*

USE THIS CHECKLIST TO COMPLETE THE ACTIVITY:

First, 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.

Next, 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, slide show, or a web page.
- Send your completed project to the www.AssignmentMediaLit.com web page to publish it.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO INCLUDE:

Who made this message and what is the purpose?

What techniques are used to attract and hold your 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 MAKE A POSTER

Student Team: _____

Sentences use reasoning based on elements in the message.

4	Sentences have answers that are supported using information or clues from the image or language.
3	Sentences have answers that are supported by reasoning from prior knowledge.
2	Sentences have answers that are not clearly supported by reasoning and evidence.
1	Sentences use little reasoning or evidence to support answer.

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, slide show, or web page.
3	Images, sentences, and headlines are placed on the page but more awareness of design or composition would have improved the final product.
2	Images, sentences, and headlines are placed on the page in a sloppy or careless fashion.
1	Images and/or sentences and headlines are missing.

Comments:

Grade: