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**Judith A. McHale**  
President and Chief Operating Officer

Dear Educator:

Congratulations! By utilizing the enclosed materials on media literacy education, you are embarking on one of the most successful approaches to establishing a student community of savvy and intelligent media consumers.

Over the past six years, Discovery Communications, Inc. has researched and developed a variety of educator materials and nationwide training conferences designed to address the complexities surrounding the information age. As we move into the new millenium, we must ensure that all educators are provided the most comprehensive tools available to equip their students with these skills. Starting at a very young age, all of us tend to get the majority of our information from the media, including television, movies, magazines, the Internet, video games, music, books, videos and all forms of advertising. While all of these media outlets offer us opportunities to learn and to be entertained, we must be skilled at interpreting the images and messages conveyed within them. Media literacy education can help us with these skills. To be media literate means to be able to decipher and decide what elements of the media are useful and meaningful to our lives.

At Discovery Communications, Inc., our mission is to provide educational and enlightening opportunities to lifelong learners. We are proud to be able to make these media literacy education materials available to the Maryland Public Schools System through our partnership with the Maryland State Board of Education.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Judith A. McHale". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Judith A. McHale  
President and Chief Operating Officer



Nancy S. Grasmick  
State Superintendent of Schools

200 West Baltimore Street  
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Dear Colleague:

I am pleased with the collaboration between the State Board of Education and Discovery Communications, Inc., on the media literacy curriculum package. Furnishing Maryland's students with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about the barrage of media messages they receive on a daily basis is a goal we all share.

I encourage you to utilize these materials as a stepping stone for engaging dialogue on how to interpret the images and messages students encounter. We often hear so much about the negative side of the media's influence on students. This program contributes to our efforts to graduate critical thinkers in Maryland by equipping students with the background to make sound choices. Armed with these tools, more and more students will be able to utilize the media for its beneficial attributes rather than being influenced in a negative way.

I appreciate the resources and dedication Discovery Communications has provided to make this media literacy program a reality. I hope that you share our enthusiasm for this unique program and that these materials prove helpful to you in the classroom.

Sincerely,

Nancy S. Grasmick  
State Superintendent of Schools



## **ASSIGNMENT: MEDIA LITERACY**

**A classroom resource to build critical thinking  
and communication skills for life in a media  
and information society.**

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<http://www.AssignmentMediaLit.com>  
Call our educator support line at 1-888-734-2328.

# OVERVIEW

It's never been a more exciting or exhausting time to be a teacher. Our students come to us with so much more access to information than ever before, from television, videos, newspapers, books, magazines, radio, computer software, the Internet, and more.

But do children have the reasoning and critical thinking skills to analyze the information they receive? Have they the ability to sort out the quality from the junk? Do they have the competencies needed to understand, analyze, and use information to solve problems? Are they active, not passive, consumers of media? Are they effective in communicating messages to a wide variety of audiences and for different purposes?

*Assignment: Media Literacy* is, a set of curriculum resources designed to help K-12 teachers integrate these skills into their curriculum. The program consists of three levels: elementary, middle school, and high school.

Here are the important features of the resource materials:

## **Aligned with MSPAP Content Standards**

Each activity is designed to develop the key learning standards developed by the State of Maryland. Many of the activities are modeled upon the structure and formats used in the MSPAP tests for language arts and social studies. You'll find these standards identified in the front of each instructional unit.

## **Across the Curriculum**

*Assignment: Media Literacy* is designed to connect to many subject areas, including language arts, social studies, math, health, and fine and performing arts. These lesson plans provide versatile and interdisciplinary approaches to the subject areas.

## **Print Literacy Emphasis**

Effective reading and writing skills are the single most valuable component in helping children grow up to be life-long learners. The *Assignment: Media Literacy* activities provide rich opportunities to strengthen reading and writing skills alongside the development of critical viewing and critical thinking skills.

## **Character Education**

Many of the topics in *Assignment: Media Literacy* provide ideal exploration of Character Education concepts, including responsibility, respect, loyalty, sharing, and fairness. Children get the opportunity to reflect on some of the important public debates about the role of the media in society and connect these issues to character and values.

### **High-Interest Topics and Collaborative Hands-On Learning**

The themes and topics explored in *Assignment: Media Literacy* are high-interest issues for children and youth, sure to intrigue and motivate learners. Each of the six units includes a creative Production Activity that encourages “making and doing” through teamwork and collaboration. Among the projects, students get to make a public service announcement, develop a history web, create a poster, and design a non-violent sporting event for the future.

### **School—Home Connection**

*Assignment: Media Literacy* includes activities that promote healthy communication between children and families. Children interview family members about their attitudes about issues concerning technology and media use. These learning experiences provide opportunities for both parents and children to reflect on the role of technology and media in the home.



# ASSIGNMENT: MEDIA LITERACY

## MIDDLE SCHOOL UNITS

### 1. Asking Critical Questions



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

### 2. The Art of Slapstick



Discover what makes physical humor such an important tradition in storytelling, learn the secrets of creating comedy characters, and invent your own comedy character using the character wheel.

### 3. What's Real and What's Reel?



Explore what makes a media message seem “realistic” or “unrealistic” and learn how realism affects a reader’s or viewer’s emotional response.

### 4. History and Media



Explore the way artists, photographers, journalists, musicians, and historians have shared their understanding of the Civil War, one of the most important events in American history.

### 5. Entertainment Warriors

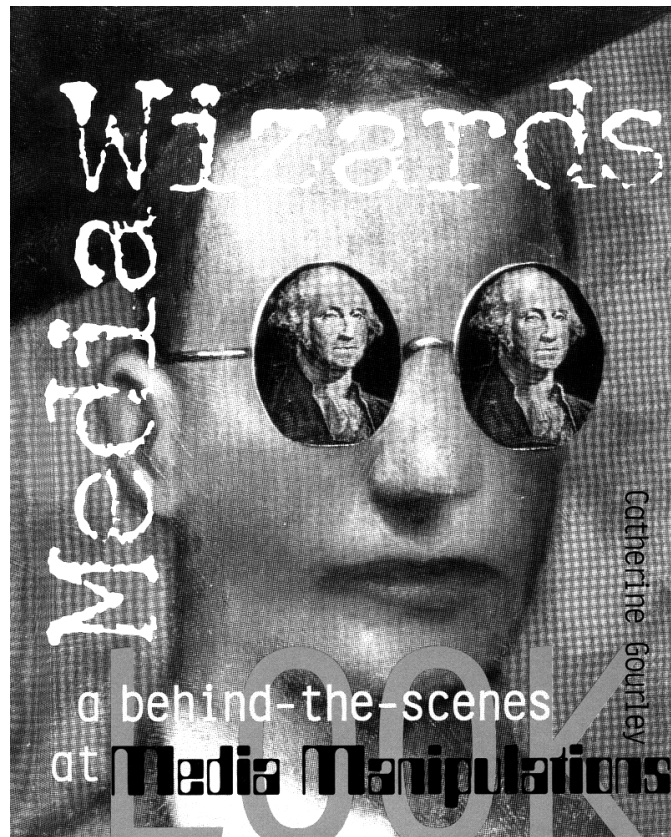


Examine the role of violence in contemporary sports, reflect on gender stereotypes in professional wrestling, and imagine a sporting event that will be popular fifty years in the future.

### 6. Media Mania!



Reflect on your own media use habits, including the role of video games and other media in your life.



***A Review from Horn Book says:***

*Media Wizards* is “a fascinating look at how journalists, advertisers, and television producers frequently use fabrications, metaphors, and emotional appeals to manipulate public response.”

**By award-winning young adult author Catherine Gourley**

A complimentary copy of the book is included in your  
*Assignment: Media Literacy* kit.

# Key Concepts of Media Literacy

**These ideas are the main principles of media literacy: they are central concepts that help organize the process of analyzing media messages.**

## **1. All Messages are Constructions**

Messages are created by authors who select the ideas, images, words, sounds, and music to convey meanings. We don't always notice the way in which authors carefully make choices about each story element, each word in a book, and each image in a TV commercial. Constructing a media message takes creativity, planning, teamwork, and persistence.

## **2. Messages are Representations**

Messages provide us with information about people, places, events, and ideas. But because media messages are selective and incomplete, they can't provide an accurate picture of reality in all its complexity. Media messages about families, for example, leave out many important elements of ordinary family life. Detecting stereotypes is one way to explore how media messages may distort, mislead, and oversimplify.

## **3. Messages have Economic Purposes**

Media messages that rely on advertising must attract large audiences—newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, and the Internet use advertising to subsidize media products. The industry's economic goals of reaching large audiences affect us as consumers. Financial goals shape the content, quality, and the diversity of media messages we receive for both entertainment and information.

## **4. Individuals Interpret Messages Differently**

People find meaning in media messages when they can connect the message to their life experiences and their understanding of the world. It's important to respect people's unique interpretations and pleasures as they read, view, and listen.

## **5. Media have Unique Characteristics**

It's not fair to say that some forms of communication are inherently better than others. Each form of media has strengths and weaknesses, depending on your purpose, point-of-view, and goals as a communicator. People should be able to use a wide range of symbols, tools, and technologies for self-expression and communication.

# Instructional Strategies

Teachers can incorporate media literacy concepts and activities into language arts, social studies, health, science, and fine arts subjects. The activities and readings provided in the *Assignment: Media Literacy* curriculum work best if you keep in mind the following ideas about effective instructional strategies in media literacy education.

## Creating Media Messages



Media literacy is more than just analyzing media messages—it's learning to create them as well. Each of the units in *Assignment: Media Literacy* includes a Production Activity. These assignments are designed to involve students in creating complex real-world media messages. Some of these activities are best accomplished by individual work, and other activities work best as small group projects. You'll see that each activity lists a checklist for students to use in completing the activity and an evaluation rubric that identifies the qualities that students should strive to include in their messages. You may want to use the evaluation rubric yourself or ask students to complete this for peer evaluation or self-evaluation when their projects are completed. Production activities are a valuable component of the total learning experience.

## Promoting Meaningful Discussion



Students are aware that adults and teachers watch different kinds of TV shows, read different magazines, and use the Internet. Students may have expectations about how teachers will respond to their media use—some students fear that teachers will demean or trivialize their interests in certain kinds of TV shows, websites, musicians, and movies. They may be aware of some beliefs or attitudes that teachers and adults have about the media and attempt to imitate those attitudes. To explore media issues in an authentic way, students need to feel “safe” in sharing their genuine pleasures and dissatisfactions with media and technology. You can support this by providing a balance of both support for students' ideas and observations and questions that provide insight on your interpretation of media messages. This blend of support and challenge helps deepen the level of discussion.

## Supporting Critical Reading Skills



The reproducible activity sheets help students to strengthen their reading and problem solving skills. You can make use of a variety of different methods of eliciting student responses to enhance reading skill development. You may want to use “read-aloud” with whole group discussion. You may want to ask students to read and then invite them to complete the activities or discuss the questions in a small group. You may want to check on students’ reading comprehension by asking them to summarize the arguments they encounter in the readings. You may want to have students identify the point of view of the writers, critically analyze the arguments presented, and provide your own interpretation and point of view about the issues explored in this curriculum.

## Encouraging Collaborative Problem Solving

Many of the activities involve students in small group problem solving. You can maximize the instructional value of these activities by ensuring that all students are clear about the task and the deadline. Students work best in groups when they have clearly defined roles, and you may find that it’s effective for you to assign the roles of taskmaster, time keeper, scribe, and researcher. Some roles for the media production activities may include director, talent, technology manager, writer, and graphic designer.



# MIDDLE SCHOOL VIDEOTAPE

## Synopsis of Video Segments

### *Introduction*

A video montage showing middle-school teachers and students using the *Assignment: Media Literacy* curriculum.

### *Table of Contents*

#### *1.5 Asking Critical Questions*

Students answer five critical questions of media literacy using a print newsmagazine article. Three video clips are provided for students to analyze, including a public service announcement, a reality TV show, and a situation comedy.

#### *2.1 The Art of Slapstick*

Montage of slapstick introduces basic questions about this form of humor.

#### *2.2 Oops!*

Three scenes help explore how physical humor is constructed

- Actors demonstrate how pratfalls are planned, rehearsed, and staged so nobody gets hurt.
- Actors demonstrate how timing, camera angle, and staging are important.
- How actors use props for physical humor.

#### *2.3 Character Wheel*

Short scene from *The Nutty Professor* used to analyze the character of the professor.

#### *3.1 What's Real and What's Reel*

Watch a middle school teacher and students explore how people determine what's realistic or unrealistic.

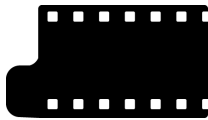
#### *3.2 Reality Check*

Game show activity to evaluate the levels of realism in different media messages, using four video clips from TV news, teen ninja film, promotion for *The King and I*, and a TV ad.

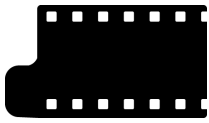
#### *3.3 TV Teasers*

A montage of four newsmagazine opening sequences.

**This list of video segments will help you make effective use of the video materials provided in the ASSIGNMENT: MEDIA LITERACY kit.**



**Look for the film symbol to see when to use a video segment.**



### ***3.4 Blood and Guts in the ER***

Promotion for a TV documentary about the life of an emergency room doctor.

### ***3.6 Listen Up***

Learn the vocabulary of TV production presented along with visual examples of such words at treatment, reenactment, B-roll, archival footage, and more.

### ***4.1 Mediated History***

Instructional video on the role of media in shaping our understanding of history. Two scenes about Sherman's march on Atlanta: one from the film *Gone with the Wind* and the other from the documentary *The Civil War*.

### ***4.4 Music and Emotion***

Listen to four sound clips from the film *Glory*. Students describe how each sound segment conjures up a variety of emotional responses.

### ***5.1 Rage in a Cage***

Instructional video on the controversies associated with professional wrestling.

### ***5.2 Violence in Sports***

Learn about the issues and concerns about the impact of sports violence.

### ***6.1 Media Mania***

Watch a realistic docudrama depicting a high school boy's fascination with video games. How do video games affect his life? Opens student debate about a number of topics such as media's influence, health issues, and interpersonal relationships, to name a few.

### ***6.5 Kids and Media @ the New Millenium***

Instructional video summarizing a new study on the role of media in the lives of children and young people.



Dear Family:

We are beginning an exploration of the role of the mass media in our society using a new curriculum called *Assignment: Media Literacy*. Your child will be learning how to think critically about the media, including print and TV journalism, advertising, films and entertainment programming, and even documentaries.

Some activities your child may participate in include:

- Learning to identify how different points of view are found in news, advertising, infomercials, situation comedies, documentaries, and reality TV programs;
- Exploring the history of slapstick comedy and physical humor and learning how careful actors are as they rehearse and practice scenes that look simple;
- Evaluating different levels of realism and making judgments about which messages are realistic and which ones are not;
- Evaluating the role of entertainment warriors in sports and comparing and contrasting professional wrestling with ancient Roman gladiatorial games;
- Learning about how media shapes our understanding of history by looking at different films about the Civil War and how each is constructed with a specific point of view;
- Reflecting on the addictive qualities of video games and their impact on homework, social relationships, and problem solving.

These classroom activities have been designed to strengthen students' writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills, in addition to other language arts skills, including vocabulary development and critical-thinking skills. In addition, this curriculum provides opportunities to strengthen skills needed for success on the MSPAP tests.

Because most of our children's media use occurs in the home, we hope you'll take the opportunity to talk with your child about the media during this time. I've enclosed a brief list of suggestions for activities that you can do at home to strengthen your child's critical viewing skills and promote communication about what your child sees on television.

Thank you for your continued support of your child's learning!

## **ASSIGNMENT: MEDIA LITERACY AT HOME**

More than ever before, children and young people are surrounded by a complex and increasingly diverse collection of messages—television, radio, videotapes, the Internet, magazines, video games, and more. To be a competent citizen in a media-saturated society, it is essential for students to ask questions about what they watch, see, and read.

**Try these activities at home to help your child build critical thinking skills about media and technology.**

### **Play “Spot the Target Audience”**

As you watch TV, see if your child can identify the target audience for a TV show or a commercial. Help him or her to recognize that some media messages are for adults and others are designed for young people.

### **Use the Mute**

While you’re watching with your child, use the mute button on the remote control and ask, “What do you think is going to happen next?” Encourage your child to make predictions.

### **Use the TV Guide**

Use the TV guide to read the program descriptions. Try to pick out a show that will appeal to all family members and watch it together.

### **Watch Their Shows**

Watch one of your child’s favorite shows. Ask why he or she likes it and have your child explain more about the characters.

### **Watch While They Surf**

Watch as your son or daughter takes you on a “virtual tour” of his or her favorite websites. Ask why he or she likes these special sites and ask for an explanation of special activities.

### **Try a Media Fast**

For one day, use no media or technology in your home—no car radio, no Internet, no TV, no books or magazines. What do you notice about the role of these media in your family’s life?

