

Student Name: _____

Date: _____



The **KEY** concepts of media literacy

The following quote is from The Association for Media Literacy, one of the most influential groups in Media Education in North America. The key concepts of media literacy and their application, in addition to resources for educators can be found at www.aml.ca.

1. All media are constructions.

Media present carefully crafted constructions that reflect many decisions and result from many determining factors. Much of our view of reality is based on media messages that have been pre-constructed and have attitudes, interpretations and conclusions already built in. The media, to a great extent, present us with versions of reality.

When analyzing a media text, consider the following questions:

How is this message constructed? How well does it represent reality?

2. Each person interprets messages differently.

People who watch the same TV show or visit the same Web site often do not have the same experience or come away with the same impression. Each person can interpret or negotiate a message differently based on age, culture, life experience, values and beliefs.

When analyzing a media text, consider:

How might others understand this message differently?

3. The media have commercial interests.

Most media are created for profit. Advertising is generally the biggest source of revenue. Commercials are the most obvious means of generating revenue, although advertising messages take many forms, including product placement, (paying to have a product prominently displayed in programs or movies), sponsorships, prizes, pop-up ads and surveys on the Internet, celebrity endorsements or naming a stadium or theatre.

When analyzing a media text, consider:

Who created this and why? Who profits if the message is accepted?
Who may be disadvantaged?

4. The media contain ideological and value messages.

Producers of media messages have their own beliefs, values, opinions and biases. These can influence what gets told and how it is told. Producers must choose what will and will not be included in media texts, so there are no neutral or value-free media messages. As these messages are often viewed by great numbers of viewers, they can have great social and political influence. We need to decode media messages about such issues as the nature of the “good life,” the virtue of consumerism, the role of women, the acceptance of authority, and unquestioning patriotism.

When analyzing a media text, consider the following question:

What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?

5. Each medium has its own language, style, techniques, codes, conventions, and aesthetics.

Each medium creates meaning differently using certain vocabulary, techniques and styles, or codes and conventions. In a movie or TV show, when the picture dissolves, it indicates a passage of time. Hot links and navigation buttons indicate you can find what is needed on a Web site. A novelist must use certain words to create setting and characters, while other media use images, text and sound. Over time, we understand what each technique means. We become fluent in the “languages” of different media and can appreciate their aesthetic qualities. Developing media literacy skills enable us not only to decode and understand media texts, but also to enjoy the unique aesthetic form of each. Our enjoyment of media is enhanced by an awareness of how pleasing forms or effects are created.

When analyzing a media text, consider:

What techniques are used and why?

6. The media have commercial implications.

Media literacy includes an awareness of the economic basis of mass media production. Networks look for audiences to be delivered to sponsors. Knowledge of this allows students to understand how program content makes them targets for advertisers and organizes viewers into marketable groups. The issue of ownership and control is of vital importance at a time when there are more choices but fewer voices.

(Ninety percent of the world's newspapers, magazines, television stations, films, and computer software companies are owned by seven corporate conglomerates.)

7. The media have social and political implications.

An important dimension of media literacy is an awareness of the broad range of social and political effects stemming from the media. The changing nature of family life, the use of leisure time and the results of televised political debates are three such examples. The mass media serve to legitimize societal values and attitudes. The media also have a major role in mediating global events and issues from civil rights to terrorism.

8. Form and content are closely related in the media.

Making the form/content connection relates to the thesis of Marshall McLuhan that "the medium is the message". That is, each medium has its own special grammar and technological bias and codifies reality in unique ways. Thus, different media might report the same event but create different impressions and different messages.