

Media Literacy: History or Hollywood
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Overview

In the 21st Century students are bombarded with information. Radio, television, films, and other forms of electronic media influence our children's thoughts and perceptions. Educators and parents must pay particular attention to the pervasiveness of mass media. Recognizing, that newspaper articles, television programs, movies, commercials, and even religious functions have agendas, or hidden motivations for presenting material in a particular way. It is our responsibility to provide children with the tools necessary for critically evaluating various sources of

information. The overall objective of this unit is to do just that- demonstrate to students the impact of the media on their everyday lives and impress upon them the importance of becoming critical consumers of information.

Since most of what today's students know (or think they know) about the world, they've learned not from reading, but from television and other mass market electronic media, this unit will focus on these forms. In particular, since I teach high school social studies and since movies are a significant means of presenting history, the unit will center on historical films. To be even more specific, students will analyze "Hollywood's" effect on their own interpretation of history.

The lessons found in the unit will use the technique of comparing secondary sources, specifically major motion pictures, to evidence found in primary sources such as diary entries, personal letters, television footage, news articles, radio recordings, police records and more. The results of the comparisons will then demonstrate to students that historical films may intentionally or inadvertently present an altered interpretation of actual events. This will then confirm the necessity to research before accepting "Hollywood's" interpretation of history as authentic history. Once students realize the impact of the movies and television on their personal thoughts, they will have a desire to develop the strategies needed to become independent thinkers in the information superhighway.

Phase II:

Since we are a "blame" society, I expect many students to criticize and blame the media or the government for not acting more responsible. Some students will make claims that the government should step in and control the media, or find some other way of placing the responsibility on someone else other than himself or herself. At this time, we will discuss media ethics and responsibility.

This section will begin by first establishing what is stated in the first amendment of the Constitution. Then using historical Supreme Court cases students will see how freedom of speech/press (expression) has evolved over time. Next teachers will lead students toward a discussion on government censorship versus freedom of expression. It is extremely important, that students understand the delicacy of freedom of expression. Through this unit they will recognize freedom of speech/press as the foundation to a democratic state. They will be able to describe the negative effects on our society, if this freedom were not protected. Students will begin to realize the harm that can come from too much governmental control; and they will be taught that it is their civic duty to be educated and responsible consumers of information, and to not rely on others to be responsible for them. Thus bringing us full circle- back to the importance of being "critical thinkers" in the age of electronic mass media.

Rationale

The initial motivation behind the development of this curriculum unit is my experience with students immediately accepting what they see and hear as fact. They tend to repeat anything and everything some "self-proclaimed expert" has uttered. Students simply repeat statements from television or the newspaper as if it were gospel, never questioning or evaluating the source of the

information. It could be a journal article, a web page, an HBO special, their parents, or even their teachers. Students absorb everything without question. If and when they do question, it is often nothing more than regurgitated information that they incidentally consumed earlier. Rarely do their questions come from true critical thinking.

Bill Walsh, an English teacher and writer for The Center for Media Literacy, says that "if real democracy means anything to us, if active participation in the dialogues of daily life is really important to our society and country, then we need to learn how to use each new communication tool that's introduced. To fail to do so, of course, surrenders two-way communication to a scenario where we are only the receivers of what others want us to see, hear, or read."¹ In turn, opening us up to a future, where independent thinking will be rare occurrence.

In recent years, this has become particularly important because the television and movie industry is now being controlled by a small number of mega-companies, limiting the mass media from being a free marketplace of ideas. It is clear we must equip students with the proper techniques to prevent their minds from being easily molded and controlled by the media. Through this curriculum unit teachers will encourage students to express their own ideas, to draw their own conclusions, and to support and challenge the reasoning of others, thereby developing independent thought.²

Another motivating factor for this unit is Hollywood's treatment of history and its ultimate effects on society. The movie and television industry has a job, which is to keep people in their seats- they must dazzle. Confronted by gaps in the historical record, Hollywood fills them with paste; when dulling ambiguities and complexities mar the story, Hollywood polishes them smooth. The final product gleams, and often it sears the imagination. Who can forget George C. Scott as Patton, or Ben Kingsley as Gandhi? Even Malcolm X, is hard to fix in memory after we have seen Denzel Washington's electrifying portrayal of him.³

Movie production companies' ability to hold audiences in their seats is exactly why students look forward to watching movies. For the learner who does not appreciate history, this is often their main source of historical information. Hollywood's presentation of history naturally captures their interests. This is why I chose to focus on this medium of mass communication. But we must not forget that the success of film narrative often depends on compressing time and simplifying historical situations. Changes are often made to advance a story and distortions designed to mislead the public. For example Director Roland Jaffe's Fat Man and Little Boy twists events of the development of the atomic bomb into a cinematic pamphlet for the antinuclear movement.⁴ This is why it is even more important for media literacy to be a part of the curriculum. The apathetic learner, who only pays attention to the movie, is the learner who does not realize that the history they are observing is not authentic.

Although the duty of the media is to know that freedom of expression is not absolute, that it's conditional upon acceptance. If the media systematically panders to vulgarity, sensationalism, or degradation of the human race, it has forfeited its moral right to freedom of expression. Unfortunately this does not occur, companies continue to pressure for boosted revenues at any cost. Therefore the duty lies again with the individual, not the media moguls.

What made my final decision to create this unit, was a concern I had regarding our schools attempt to celebrate African-American history month. In February, the school decided to show Norman Jewison's, The Hurricane, a movie about an African American boxer who was wrongly convicted by a racist judicial system. The movie was, without a doubt, a great movie. However, after careful research, I must doubt the appropriateness of using this movie as a tool to honor African-American achievements and contributions in history. The following paragraphs will supply greater depth.

Background: Rubin "Hurricane" Carter

Introduction

Rubin Carter was a professional middleweight boxer who acquired the name the "Hurricane" for his speed and agility. In 1966, he was convicted, along with his friend John Artis, of a triple murder in his hometown, Paterson, New Jersey. Carter claims he was wrongfully convicted, making him the victim. He believes he is only guilty of growing up a poor African-American who became a successful boxer in a racially charged town. At the same time Carter's critics claim that he is a murderer; a product of leading a life filled with hate and violence. He is a man who after two trials by jury was found guilty. His opponents believe true justice had been served, and society was being protected from a killer by the name of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, who was and is deserving of a life in prison. And so the controversy begins.

The Story of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter

Rubin Carter was born in Delawanna, New Jersey, a small suburb in Passaic County; a town, where it was hard to be black. Carter was what we would call a bad kid. Around the age of eight he joined a neighborhood street gang, and his run-ins with the law began. The first incident was when he stole some clothes for his brothers and sisters. His father, a strict minister, came home and found his children in new clothes. Knowing that the clothes were stolen, Carter was whipped and turned in to the police by his father. He was sentenced to two years probation.

Approximately three years later, Carter had a second run-in with the law, this time a bit more serious. According to Carter, he and a couple of neighborhood friends went down to a local swimming hole. While there, a man in a nice suit, called over to one of the boys and offered a look at his expensive gold watch. As the gentleman showed the kid his watch, he began touching the young man in a sexual manner. Witnessing this, Carter attacked the man by clubbing him with a glass bottle. The man grabbed Carter, and held him over a steep cliff. Quickly, Carter grabbed his pocketknife and stabbed the man. When the police later picked him up, he was accused of trying to steal the man's watch and stabbing him. Labeled a "menace to society", he was sentenced to ten long years in a state home for juvenile delinquents.

In his new home, Carter kept his nose pretty clean. In fact, he was up for release based on good behavior. But an unfortunate event prevented his early release. The warden who liked Carter was suddenly transferred. Fully disappointed he along with two friends escaped.

After escaping, Carter enlisted in the army, which is where he discovered his talent as a boxer. He completed two successful years in the army and would return home a free man, or so he thought. After being home for only a few days, two policemen arrested him. They took him directly to Annandale Reformatory, practically a slave jail. There he was to serve the time he had skipped. Surprisingly, Carter cooperatively served his time, and vowed never to return to prison again, once released

Unfortunately, Carter's trouble with the law was not over. He and his friend John Artis would be taken in and questioned for the slayings of three white victims in a local establishment called Lafayette Bar and Grill. This is where a significant amount of discrepancy begins between Carter's story and those of his opponents. Mainly he speaks of a racist policeman who had it in for him, leading to the corruption and abuse of the justice system.

The Movie and the Controversy

Rubin Carter's story has gained the support of many, including the likes of famous songwriter Bob Dylan, who was a committed activist to the civil rights struggle. After reading Carter's autobiography titled The Sixteenth Round: From Number 1 Contender To #45472, Dylan was so moved by the story that he wrote a song titled the Hurricane; exposing the story to a broader audience.

Then in 1980 a young man named Lazarus Martin also stumbled across Carter's autobiography. After reading the story the sixteen-year-old was compelled to organize a group of his wealthy Canadian friends. They took it upon themselves to lead a crusade to free this "innocent" man.⁵ With the help of Carter's new Canadian supporters; his lawyers were able to convince a federal judge to overturn the conviction. By 1985, after twenty-two years in prison, Carter was exonerated and became a free man.

This twenty-year struggle attracted writers Arny Bernstein and Dan Gordon to write a screenplay, which became the basis for Norman Jewison's major motion picture, entitled The Hurricane. According to Universal Pictures, the movie is based on the "Inspirational True Story of a Champion," whereas critics argue that the movie is full of distortions and outright lies. Columnist Larry Elder summed up the opposition's view when he stated "The 'TRUE STORY' of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, the lead brilliantly portrayed by Denzel Washington, represents perhaps excellent moviemaking, but at great cost—to the truth"⁶ The making of this movie stirred up the long history of controversy surrounding the boxer's innocence.

A former reporter, named Cal Deal, had covered the story in 1974 when Carter was seeking a retrial. He first approached the story assuming that Carter was an innocent man who had been railroaded by a prejudice justice system. It was not long before Deal's own research convinced him of Carter's guilt. In fact, Deal's unwavering feelings supporting Carter's conviction, lead to the creation of a web site entitled Hurricane Carter: The Other Side of the Story.⁷ Deal expresses

his concern about the movie's portrayal of the events. The ex-reporter makes no claims of objectivity. He flat out tells visitors to his site: "This is not intended to be a balanced presentation, just an accurate counterweight to the Hollywood Justice System." Deal presents an almost overwhelming amount of documentation to bolster his argument. He has pages and pages online covering decades of testimony, evidence presented at trial, news articles, graphics and testimonials.⁸ The site even contains a point-by-point analysis about how Deal feels the public has been misled by Hollywood's version of The Hurricane.

Curriculum Rationale

This unit is designed for a high school social studies course. Initially the curriculum unit will be developed for an advanced eleventh or twelfth grade United States History course. In addition to United States History teachers, I recommend that Civics/Government teachers, as well as Language Arts teachers, take a look at the unit and see what could be tailored to meet the needs in their classrooms. It is my intention to develop the curriculum unit in a teacher friendly flexible format. Where the unit can easily be broken down into daily, non-consecutive, lesson plans. Teachers will have the freedom teaching all of the unit or only two days of the unit. In addition, the content and learning objectives will span a number of Social Studies courses, as well as grade levels and learning abilities.

Objectives

History versus Hollywood

The purpose of my curriculum unit will not be to convince students of Rubin's innocence or guilt. Rather, it would be to teach students how to evaluate the movie's portrayal in comparison to primary documents and draw their own conclusions. Truthfully, after weeks of research, I still am uncertain what Carter's fate should have been. One thing I am certain about is that the movie The Hurricane portrays the events in Carter's favor, without hesitation. Consequently, it is my purpose to make students aware of how easily they accepted the films portrayal of the story as fact.

Most moviegoers are completely unaware any controversy exists surrounding The Hurricane, even though numerous magazine and newspaper articles have documented it. It has been my experience that if a movie claims to be based on a true story, the general public will believe all aspects of the movie to be fact. Young viewers in particular do not understand that a claim to be based on a true story still gives the writers and producers license to stray far from the facts.

My goal is to have students walk out of a theatre asking themselves, "History or Hollywood". It is my experience that a majority of the people who saw the movie The Hurricane did not even think to ask that question. They simply assumed that the facts were presented, but presented "Hollywood style". Unfortunately, the 21st century audience doesn't understand that "Hollywood style", is a license to distort the truth. It is my goal for students to be fully aware that "Hollywood is not History". They should be prepared to view a film, by knowing what questions

they should be asking. Enabling them to evaluate the legitimacy of the information being presented. Students will learn how to separate the facts from interpretation. They will be able to challenge the movie, as well as challenge the critics of the movie.

It is important that the readers of this curriculum unit understand that my goal is to neither discredit nor dismiss the breadth and depth of the legal injustices that may have occurred regarding Carter's case. In fact, as a social studies teacher, it is my responsibility to ensure that all students learn the severity of legal injustice throughout our American history. The discriminatory manner by which our legal system has been applied must not go unrecognized. It cannot be forgotten, under any circumstances, out of fear of history repeating itself.

Our children must be taught, but not through a "Falsumentary", as Deal calls it? Presenting and discussing cases like the Scottsboro Boys from Alabama or the life and death of Martin Luther King seems a more appropriate tool to honor African-American history. They have historical accuracy, whereas "The Hurricane" is simply entertainment. In order to use The Hurricane as an educational tool, students must have already developed the skills to critically view movies, especially those movies claiming to be based on true stories. Once students become critical viewers and thinkers, a teacher will be able to apply many of the ideas in this curriculum unit to other historical films.

Freedom of Expression, Artistic License and Democracy

America is a country founded on first amendment freedoms, which include the freedom of speech and press. It is our responsibility to uphold this amendment, even if it means agreeing with the movie writers' right to free speech and artistic license. It is also our responsibility to encourage independent thinking. In our public schools students must be taught that it is their responsibility to develop critical thinking skills.

In order for the first amendment to work as intended, listeners of free speech must be able to evaluate the source of information. Many people tend to forget that there are not just two sides to every story, but actually many sides. The mass media audience needs to determine which side is telling the story in order to gain the proper perspective. To do this, they must know what questions to ask. This unit will prepare students to ask the proper questions. They will be able to evaluate the source of the information before allowing their thoughts to be easily controlled. Students will learn strategies to determine the validity and the reliability of information. Then they will be able to weigh each piece of information against others. Finally allowing them to draw their own conclusions, and preventing them from being slaves to the mass media.

In summary the objectives are:

- Define mass media
- Describe the effects of mass media on individual thought
- Explain the importance of critical thinking
- Explain freedom of speech and describe its relationship to democracy
- Define and give examples of Primary Sources and Secondary Sources
- Develop Strategies for evaluating a source

- Draw conclusions by evaluating evidence and provide supporting details
- Additional Objectives will vary based on the content of the historical film selected

Strategies and Classroom Activities

Unit on History versus Hollywood

Overall Unit Objectives:

Students will learn to discern between the media interpretations of history and the actual events. They will learn to distinguish and recognize poetic license in historical representation and explore the role of the media in creating popular history. It is very important that you do not relay the media literacy objective to your students. Often teachers explain too much at the beginning of the lesson. This unit is designed to promote learning through individual student discovery.

As for the history objectives, teachers will provide their own because they will vary depending on the event/film selected.

Note to Teacher:

For the purpose of this unit, I will give general instructions to applying these lessons to any historical film. To provide concrete examples, I will refer to the movie The Hurricane.

Standards

Citizenship Standards 1,3,4,5,7,8
(Refer to Appendix 2 for List of Citizenship Standards)

Suggested Activities

Select Topic and/or Event to be covered and Select the Movie

Teachers first select a historical movie that pertains to an event or topic they intend to cover (in depth). Make sure the topic is a major event in history, in order to ensure the availability of primary sources, which is imperative to the success of this unit.

View Movie

Students will be required to view the movie in full. A teacher can either devote class time or assign it as homework. If the later option is selected simply require the students to rent the movie, but be sure to give them ample time to do so. Be considerate of parents' busy schedules. Another alternative is to offer an after school viewing opportunity in either your classroom or the schools auditorium.

Immediate Follow-up Activities

At this time I would recommend some sort of writing activity. Ask students to write a short synopsis of the film to demonstrate that they have in fact watched it. Teachers may want to require students to take notes during the film. Depending on the level of the learner, you may want to even provide a study guide that includes:

(1) Vocabulary terms, (2) Film characters/events (3) Guided questions, etc.

Once all students have viewed the film, I would follow with an open discussion, with questions prepared to review the events of the film.

Next select one portion of the film that distorts the truth, or clearly demonstrates bias. At this time, do not reveal to students that it is distorted. Remember we want students to discover this on their own when they begin comparing evidence in the movie to evidence found in primary resources. Keep the discussion simple. The objective is to get students to agree with the event as *portrayed* in the film. If possible the teacher should ask students to provide evidence from the film that supports this "distorted" point of view.

Note: It is not important to point out each "falsehood". The optional group work section of this unit will allow all students ample opportunity to dissect the film.

Example:

In the movie The Hurricane, the filmmakers portray Carter as a poor black kid, who is guilty of normal boyhood mischief. They go through a couple of scenes where he gets in trouble. In those scenes he encounters the same policeman, who appears to have a personal vendetta with Carter

Suggested discussion questions:

Does Carter seem like a normal young man to you? (a majority of students will respond yes) Can you tell me how the movie supports that?

How strong of a case does the film make that Carter's guilt was a result of racism and a corrupt justice system? What are the strongest points of evidence in the film supporting this?

At this point, virtually all of the students agree Carter was wrongly convicted.

Suggestion: Have the students jot down their answers to these questions and collect them. At the end of the unit, after careful research many of the students will change their answers to these same questions. These papers will provide visual proof that they have changed their way of thinking in some respect or another, because they did a little investigating.

Primary Sources and Secondary Sources

Instruct students on the difference between primary sources and secondary sources. They should be able to define and list examples of each. Explain to students that they will be comparing

primary sources with a secondary source (the film being the secondary source), and draw conclusions based on the results.

A *Primary Source* is material that is contemporary to the events being examined; gives the words of the witnesses or the first recorders of an event.

Such sources include, among other things, diaries, letters, newspapers, magazine articles, tape recordings, pictures, maps, manuscripts, archives, photographs, articles of clothing and speeches.

Secondary Sources are descriptions of the event derived from and based on primary sources; they are accounts of the past created by people writing about events sometime after they happened.

The line between primary and secondary sources is often indistinct; for example, a single document may be a primary source on some matter and a secondary source on others.

Some primary sources may be judged more reliable than others may, but every source is biased in some way. As a result, historians read sources skeptically and critically. They also crosscheck sources against other evidence and sources. Historians follow a few basic rules to help them analyze primary sources.

See Appendix 1 for Tips on Evaluating Primary Sources and Secondary Sources.

Presentation of Findings

Group Research Project and Oral Presentation:

Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students. The size of the group should depend on the depth of the research topics assigned to the students. All research will be conducted by searching for primary resources and comparing them to the movie's portrayal of events. Of course information will overlap, but this should not create any problems.

Example of Hurricane Topics:

1. *Research and describe Rubin Carter's life. Events which would be significant to determining his character.*
2. *Writ of habeas corpus. Explain the background leading to the development of this writ. Explain its meaning and significance. Relate this to Carter's case.*
3. *Analyze the prosecution's evidence, or lack thereof. Be sure to discuss the vehicle in question, eyewitness testimony, etc.*
4. *Analyze the defendant's evidence.*
5. *Describe the time period during which the events unraveled. Research the political and economic climate, emotional climate, trends in education. What other significant events were happening during his arrest.*

6. *Describe the time period during which the events unraveled. Research the political and economic climate, emotional climate, trends in education. What other significant events were happening during his arrest.*

Each piece of evidence should be listed on note cards- one per card. On the note card the source of the information should be listed and then categorized as primary or secondary. They will also write a statement describing the reliability and validity of the source. Students may need these terms explained to them.

Groups can present their findings to the class in several ways or a combination of them. I recommend some degree of oral presentation, combined with some visual stimulus. Teachers could require groups to design charts comparing information etc.

For The Hurricane I would prefer to create a bulletin board. Basically all of the groups would combine their findings into one visual presentation. They would create one bulletin board. Information would be sorted into categories and delineated in order of importance. Then as evidence is linked to other evidence have the students use yarn to demonstrate the link. Be sure the links are numbered, for reference and discussion purposes.

Concluding the Analysis of the Movie

Follow each group's presentation with a brief discussion of the new information that was relevant to interpreting the film. Eventually teachers should guide the discussion through how their initial interpretation of the film has changed. Then bring closure to this portion by introducing the importance of investigation and research.

Alternative suitable for The Hurricane:

Once the groups have gathered enough information they should each have time to spend evaluating all the evidence presented. Each student will write an essay explaining whether they think Carter is guilty or innocent and give reasons supporting their conclusion. Once those essays have been collected, pass back the answers to the questions asked at the beginning the unit. Not all students will have changed their minds, but I think its safe to say that all students will have changed their perception of the events to some degree. Students who still believe that Carter is innocent acknowledge that the film is misleading in its presentation of available evidence. Remember the objective is for students realize that they failed to question the events of the movie in the first place. That without careful research they would have never known conflicts existed between the movie's portrayal and authentic history. The writers of the movie initially wrote history in the students' minds. Now they can write their own interpretation of history based on critical thinking.

Students come away with a number of important lessons from this exercise. They see how easy it is to be fooled by slick media presentations and artful flimflam. They recognize how important it is to be on one's guard against those for whom truth is secondary to considerations of profit, entertainment, self-promotion, or political success. They find themselves asking: If I could be so

easily taken in by this, what else---in politics, education, advertising, the media--might have deceived me? In sum, they see that critical thinking can make a real difference, both in one's own life and for society as a whole.¹⁰

Mass Media: Freedom of Speech, Ethics, and Responsibility

Overall Objectives

Students will be able to define and provide examples of the mass media. Regarding the first amendment freedoms, they will understand the importance of individuals setting limitations and the harm that can result from the government setting the limitations. Students will be lead back to recognizing the need to take responsibility and become critical thinkers.

Recommended Activities:

Define and provide examples of Mass Media

Mass Media- A means of communication capable of reaching a large audience simultaneously, through which something is accomplished, conveyed, or carried out

Introduction to Freedom of Expression

First have students read the first amendment. Ask them to write an essay describing their interpretation of what is written. How literal is the statement? When should it be limited?

History of its Interpretation

Have students explore the history of freedom of expression and how it's meaning has changed over time from the initial writing of the Bill of Rights to present day. Use famous Supreme Court cases. This will also demonstrate how valuable freedom of expression is to a democratic country, which ultimately can lead into a discussion on the effects of limiting freedom of expression. Remember, although students need to understand that there are times for freedoms to be limited, the teacher must stress the importance of individuals limiting themselves.

Government Censorship versus Individual Responsibility

Have students analyze and interpret a quote by philosopher John Stuart Mills (1806-1873) and or poet John Milton (1608-1674)

"Let all with something to say be free to express themselves. The true and sound will survive. The false and unsound will be vanquished. Government should keep out of the battle and not weigh the odds in favor of one side or the other." (Milton)

Basic Principle:

- People have the right to unlimited access to the ideas and thoughts of others, in order to exercise their own talents of critical thinking.

"If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person was of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind. The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it robs the human race, posterity as well as the existing generation. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity to exchange error for truth; if wrong, they lose what is almost as great a benefit - the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error." (Mill)

These four basic principles should be derived from the quote:

- If we silence an opinion, for all we know, we are silencing truth
- A wrong opinion may contain a grain of truth necessary for finding the whole truth
- Commonly held opinions tend to become prejudices unless forced to be defended
- Unless commonly held opinions are contested from time to time, they lose their vitality¹¹

Additional Activities Suggestions:

- Ask students to write an essay answering the question, "Is a fair trial possible in this day and age of mass media?"
- Have students define the term "impartial jury". Ask them if it is possible to have a purely impartial jury. Have them explain the importance of an impartial jury.

Evaluating Sources

Overall Objectives

My objective for this segment of the unit is for students to gain the skills of a responsible reader, viewer, consumer, and, as a result, true thinker and speaker. I will begin to prepare them with the tools to analyze the sources of information. The questions they need to ask when evaluating the integrity of what they are reading or watching.

Media Literacy- The combination of knowledge and skills required to access, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms.

Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Each form of communication newspapers, TV game shows or horror movie has its own creative language: scary music heightens fear, camera close-ups convey intimacy, big headlines signal

significance. The media, because they are constructed, also carries a subtext of whom and what is important. Remember the media are primarily driven by a profit motive. Even newspapers depend on advertising dollars. They lay out their pages with ads first; the space remaining is devoted to news.

Learning how to evaluate media sources helps us to be less susceptible to manipulation.¹²

Recommended Activity:

Select various forms of media and use the following tips to evaluate the source. They are designed more towards the written text, this does include movies and television, teachers may need to modify the language a bit.

Tips for Evaluating a Source

Learning how to quickly determine the relevance and authority of a given resource for your research is one of the core skills of the research process.

Evaluating Media includes newspaper articles, magazines, film, television and radio scripts.

Author: (Suitable for most form of media)

Most important is evaluating the author or source. Who is doing the speaking? Who is the Author? What are the author's credentials--institutional affiliation (where he or she works), educational background, past writings, or experience--in this area? Is the book or article written on a topic in the author's area of expertise? Have you seen the author's name cited in other sources or bibliographies? Respected authors are cited frequently by other scholars.

Date of Publication: (Suitable for most forms of media)

Is the source current or out-of-date for your topic? Is the timeliness relevant? How do events occurring at the time it was created effect the result?

Purpose and Intended Audience: (Suitable for most forms of media)

All forms of media have a purpose or reason for being created. Readers and viewers must first consider the purpose, such as to inform, to persuade, to educate, to entertain. Who owns the medium? Discuss the author's purpose in communication? What type of audience is the author addressing? Whose viewpoint is not heard?

Objective Reasoning: (Suitable for most forms of media)

Is the information covered fact, opinion, or propaganda? It is not always easy to separate fact from opinion. Facts can usually be verified; opinions, though they may be based on factual

information, evolve from the interpretation of facts. Skilled writers can make you think their interpretations are facts. Assumptions should be reasonable. Note errors or omissions. Is the author's point of view objective and impartial? Is the language free of emotion-arousing words and bias?

Evaluative Reviews: (Suitable for most forms of media)

Locate critical reviews? Is the review positive? Is the source under review considered a valuable contribution to the field? Does the reviewer mention other sources that might be better? If so, locate these sources for more information on your topic Do the various reviewers agree on its values or attributes; or has it aroused controversy among the critics?

You should always explore enough sources to obtain a variety of viewpoints!!!

Cornell University Library also offers information on how to evaluate web sites and periodicals.¹³

Endnotes

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Resources on Rubin "Hurricane" Carter:

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Video Resources

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© 2001 A&E Television Networks

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Zeinert, Karen. *Free Speech from Newspapers to Music Lyrics*. Springfield, N.J.: Enslow, 1995.

Electronic Resources

Idaho University Library <http://www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html> A Repositories of Primary Sources

Middle Web <http://middleweb.com/PrimarySources.html>

A Social Studies teacher resource which includes information of primary sources

MegaLinks on Criminal Justice O'Connor. 2001. <http://faculty.ncwc.edu/toconnor/>

Discusses issues regarding Freedom of Expression

Annenberg Public Policy Center <http://www.appcpenn.org/>

A communication research institute of the Univ. of Pennsylvania. Areas of research: media and politics, children's television, health communication, information technologies.

Cornell University Library References Services Division

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/skill26.htm>

Video Resources

The History Channel www.historychannel.com

HISTORY VS. HOLLYWOOD explores the real-life basis for some of the most famous films ever made, drawing on interviews with the actors, writers and directors, as well as commentary and analysis from scholars and others outside the movie industry. Extensive clips from the films and real life highlight the differences between the dramatized tales and their inspirations.

Appendix 1: Tips on Evaluating Primary Sources and Secondary Sources

Historians analyze historical sources in different ways. First, historians think about where, when and why a document was created. They consider whether a source was created close in location and time to an actual historical event. Historians also think about the purpose of a source. Was it a personal diary intended to be kept private? Was the document prepared for the public?

Some primary sources may be judged more reliable than others, but every source is biased in some way. As a result, historians read sources skeptically and critically. They also cross-check sources against other evidence and sources. Historians follow a few basic rules to help them analyze primary sources. Read these rules below. Then read the questions for analyzing primary sources. Use these rules and questions as you analyze primary source documents yourself.

Time and Place Rule

To judge the quality of a primary source, historians use the **time and place rule**. This rule says the closer in time and place a source and its creator were to an event in the past, the better the source will be. Based on the time and place rule, better primary sources (starting with the most reliable) might include:

Direct traces of the event;

Accounts of the event, created at the time it occurred, by firsthand observers and participants;

Accounts of the event, created after the event occurred, by firsthand observers and participants;

Accounts of the event, created after the event occurred, by people who did not participate or witness the event, but who used interviews or evidence from the time of the event.

Bias Rule

The historians' second rule is the **bias rule**. It says that every source is biased in some way. Documents tell us only what the creator of the document thought happened, or perhaps only what the creator wants us to think happened. As a result, historians follow these bias rule guidelines when they review evidence from the past:

Every piece of evidence and every source must be read or viewed skeptically and critically.

No piece of evidence should be taken at face value. The creator's point of view must be considered.

Each piece of evidence and source must be cross-checked and compared with related sources and pieces of evidence.

Questions for Analyzing Primary Sources

The following questions may help you judge the quality of primary sources:

1. Who created the source and why? Was it created through a spur-of-the-moment act, a routine transaction, or a thoughtful, deliberate process?
2. Did the recorder have firsthand knowledge of the event? Or, did the recorder report what others saw and heard?
3. Was the recorder a neutral party, or did the creator have opinions or interests that might have influenced what was recorded?
4. Did the recorder produce the source for personal use, for one or more individuals, or for a large audience?
5. Was the source meant to be public or private?
6. Did the recorder wish to inform or persuade others? (Check the words in the source. The words may tell you whether the recorder was trying to be objective or persuasive.) Did the recorder have reasons to be honest or dishonest?

7. Was the information recorded during the event, immediately after the event, or after some lapse of time? How large a lapse of time?

Taken from Middle Web at <http://middleweb.com/index.html>

Appendix 2: Citizenship Standards

1. All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States and other nations, and describe the patterns of historical development.
2. All students demonstrate understanding of themes and patterns of geography, know the location of major bodies of water, land masses and nations, and describe the relationships between geography and historical, economic and cultural development.
3. All students describe the development and operations of economic, political, legal and governmental systems in the United States, assess their own relationships to those systems, and compare them to those in other nations.
4. All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation and world by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.
5. All students develop and defend a position on current issues, confronting the United States and other nations, conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations.
6. All students explain basic economic concepts and the development and operation of economic systems in the United States and other nations, and make informed decisions about economic issues.
7. All students demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating and cooperating with others.
8. All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.
9. All students demonstrate an understanding of the history and nature of prejudice and relate their knowledge to current issues facing communities, the United States and other nations.
10. All students demonstrate an understanding of the various roles they can play as citizens through participation in a community service project.
11. All students demonstrate the ability to resolve conflicts in peaceful ways, including but not limited to peer mediation, anger management, interpersonal skills, and problem-solving.