

Challenging Media
Lynette Will
Linden Academy

Overview
Rationale
Objectives
Strategies
Classroom Activities
Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Overview

The media, as we know it today, is made up of enterprises looking to challenge us and be challenged. In order for someone to grasp the concept of media these days, one must understand the importance of it in our everyday lives. The many different forms of media are there to satisfy the needs of knowing what is happening in our neighborhoods, cities, states, countries, and the world. Media is all around us each and every day. It's there whether we want it to be or not. In many ways, it is the framework of the world itself and how it is run accordingly. Mass media is not only a part of our lives but a necessity. Without the many types of media, some people would lose touch altogether with the outside world.

Mass media has evolved over time. Today, people rely on such things as the Internet for their news and local happenings. The history of media remains pertinent in society as we know it today. In many ways, the general public has helped to change the way media presents itself. This is where the term – challenging media – comes into play. We should continue to challenge the media to deliver news in more ways than one. For example, some people prefer watching the television for their news. So, what has happened? Now, we have channels that only show news, i.e. CNN, FOX News, etc. So, in reality, someone could watch only news from around the world and find out exact, up to the minute information of what's happening thousands of miles away or just a few blocks away. Other people rely on the Internet now to find out their news. It's now possible for an exile or immigrant to follow the news back home every day. Therefore, local, national, and international news stations have succumbed to putting their news and current events on web sites. I believe these examples are just a glimpse of what is to come of the future of mass media. It is our job as educators to pass on the ways of mass media to our students. They are the ones who, already at a young age, are aware of more of their surroundings than otherwise expected.

Another point that needs to be made in terms of educating others on mass media is to understand how the media is a challenging phenomenon. It is challenging for us, the audience, to view and interpret the news in its many forms. The many forms of mass media can be complex at times, which challenges us to be more perceptive and aware of our surroundings. The news in our community is made up of our own lives. It is the way we live. It is the things we do well. It is the things we need to improve. It is success. It is failure. It is fun. It is work. And it is the interesting people who help us, lead us, or inspire us. It makes sense to say that we are, in fact, the consumers of all types of media present in the world today. It is up to each and every one of us to determine the fate of media and how it will continue to develop. I feel if we have a better understanding of what is involved in the media itself, then we can develop a sincere appreciation of how much goes into relaying information. When you stop to think about it, that's all mass media really is. It's transferring information from one form to another. The processes that are involved in getting information out to the general public are something that I want to further investigate and eventually transform into lessons to teach my students.

Rationale

The world we live in today is a multi-media world. That means information comes to us in many different forms. We get information from newspapers, books, and magazines. We get information from TV and cable news. We get information from talk radio. We get information from the Internet, chat rooms and weblogs (blogs). We get information from movies. We even get information from music, theater, and other entertainment. Much of this information is fun and exciting to use. It is loaded with colorful technology, moving graphics, and video clips. It may even come with features that let you talk back to it or interact with other people who are interested in the same subject. There are advantages and disadvantages to each kind of media. To get the most out of these resources one needs to be alert to: what each has to offer, which are based on facts and research, which are widely accepted views, which are opinions pushing a certain point of view, and which are interpretations of facts. This can be a challenge, but it is also exciting. Everyone needs to know how to take full advantage of the new resources out there. Helping my students learn how to do this is what this curriculum unit is all about.

My main goal in developing this curriculum unit is to help make my students more aware of their everyday surroundings through the use of media. The title I came up with – “challenging media” – was the basis for my research in terms of finding out more information about media as a whole. What I mean by this is that the media organizations are looking to challenge us and be challenged. In other words, the word challenging is used as both an adjective and a verb. So,

one way to view this is to say that media is a challenging phenomenon in that it requires us to stay actively informed and keep current with all that is offered. For example, I feel it is important for our young people to know about current events and learn ways they can locate information about any person, place, thing, or idea.

The other way to view this is to understand the ways in which we, the consumers, can challenge the media. Think about the ways in which the general public has helped to change the way media has presented itself over the past decades. We should continue to challenge the media to deliver the news in more ways than one. Think about the way in which you prefer to obtain the daily news. Each one of us has a different preference as to how we get the news. Some people prefer reading the newspaper while others prefer reading it off their Palm Pilot or Blackberry.

As teachers, we know that reading for today's students is so much more. Students are moving into an era in which 80 percent of what they read will be nonfiction text. Information on the Internet, in magazines, in newspapers, and in how-to manuals is just part of what they will encounter in the future. We know that students who can comprehend expository text will have more opportunities in life, as well as better scores on state and national tests. With all of the technological advances and the rate at which technology continues to grow, it is imperative that we, as educators, do the very best job we can to prepare our students for what the future holds in terms of technology and mass media.

The purpose of this curriculum unit on mass media is to educate my fifth graders about the different forms of mass media and how they have evolved over time. First of all, I believe it is extremely important for young people of this generation to learn about and appreciate the history of their culture. They need to be aware of how something got its start and where it came from. What better way to do this through different forms of media. My goal in doing this is to really "kill two birds with one stone," so to speak. Through the lessons and activities I have developed, my students will gain knowledge about an event while learning about where the information came from, all at the same time. This way, they will have the opportunity to become interested in a current event or historical event through research of various forms of media I will provide for them. In order for my students to attain that goal, they will be provided with resources such as current and historical newspapers, magazines, and journals. The Internet will also be a readily available tool with which they are familiar.

I am really focusing on two different aspects of mass media here. I want my students to gain an appreciation for the many different types of media that are out there, many of which they may not even know about. I also want them to gain knowledge about a particular subject area in which they may become interested. I

want my main focus, though, to be on the historical aspect of mass media and how it evolved to what it is today. I plan to inspire my fifth grade students to analyze and interpret the structure of various forms of media and the content they produce. The structure will require knowledge of corporate ownership and evaluation of the source of a piece of information and whether or not it is reliable.

Another goal I have for this curriculum unit is to learn something from my students. I look at this curriculum writing as a chance for me to grow and develop as an educator. In order to do so, I need to look at the big picture and keep in mind that it's not only my students who should be learning. I want to learn from them so that I can better understand the way our culture is viewed through their eyes. I want to put myself in their shoes and find out what it is they hold in their minds as important in terms of past and present events. In doing so, I hope to learn even more about the historical aspect of media and why the types of media changed over the years.

The requirements I have developed for my students are based on the Pittsburgh Public School District requirements integrated into the fifth grade curriculum. My students are required to read 25 books throughout the course of the year. Within this curriculum unit, students will have the opportunity to accomplish many of these required readings. Students are also required to put together a portfolio that includes written documents. These written documents must be in the form of two responses to informational text, two personal narratives, a written response to literature, and an informational report. In order to meet these requirements, students will research topics chosen for the curriculum and report their findings through written documentation. Not only will my students gain knowledge through research and discussion, but they will be able to take with them a means of searching for and locating various forms of mass media.

While doing my research, I found some interesting statistics on the Internet web site, mediaed.org, which goes to show why media education really does matter.

*The average American watches over **4 hours of television per day**.

*56% of children ages 8-16 have a **TV in their bedroom**.

*The average American child sees **200,000 violent acts** on TV by age 18.

*The average American youth spends **900 hours in school & 1,023 hours watching TV** each year.

***45%** of parents say that if they have something important to do, they are likely to **use the TV to occupy their child.**

*Children spend a daily average of **4 hours and 40 minutes in front of a screen** – 2 ½ hours of which are spent watching television.

***97%** of American children ages 6 & under **own products based on characters** from TV shows or movies.

*Children ages 2-7 watch television **alone and unsupervised 81% of the time.**

Objectives

Each of the following objectives will be met through various activities specifically designed for this curriculum unit:

1. Students will use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. Students will read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex text.
3. Students will respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
4. Students will write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform, and persuade.
5. Students will analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
6. Students will exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. Students will listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify the purpose, structure, and use.

8. Students will compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that is designed to persuade, inform, or describe.
9. Students will use the Internet effectively for research and to develop ideas.
10. Students will identify and define both primary and secondary sources.
11. Students will determine the similarities and differences between both primary and secondary sources.
12. Students will define mass media and give examples.
13. Students will describe the effects of mass media on individual thought.
14. Students will read and analyze biographies and autobiographies.

Strategies

Throughout the development of this unit, I will use a number of strategies in order to achieve the objectives I outlined and to assist students in reaching the standards. The strategies I will incorporate into my lessons will help my students with the overall understanding of the media in two different ways. The first group of activities I have organized will give the students a broad overview of the history of mass media. The second group of activities will help the students understand more of how the media have challenged us. And the third collection of activities will give my students the knowledge they will need in order to challenge the media to make them more beneficial. By the end of this curriculum unit, it is my intention to have my students understand how you can view media in two different ways. I want my students to be able to look at media as a helpful tool but at the same time to be aware of all that it encompasses.

The way in which I plan to present my curriculum unit to my students is to ask them to make a list of as many different forms of mass media they can think of. Then, I will ask them to give a definition of their own for each type to see how they view it in its current form. This will not only give me a better starting point as to what direction to take with my lessons and activities, but also to give me insight as to what my students already know. Next, I will have my students list anything they don't understand or would like to know about mass media either past or present. In a way, this list will be somewhat in the form of a K-W-L chart. Therefore, I will be finding out from my students what they already know and what they would like to learn more about.

As the activities progress, I will be asking my students for any input they might have as to different strategies or ideas that would help them learn more about mass media and how it affects the lives of everyday people. Then, somewhere at the end of my unit, I will give the students a survey to see how much they have learned throughout the course of the entire unit and what they feel they will take with them to middle school in order to help them become better students and learners.

The first strategy I will use to accomplish the goals in my curriculum unit on “challenging media” is to have my students develop background knowledge of the content presented to them. The students need to know their history before they can begin to understand and interpret where the various media stand in both the present and the future. In order to do this, the students will choose a type of media source and see how far back they can research its existence. They will be provided with historical copies of “The New Pittsburgh Courier,” “Pittsburgh Tribune-Review,” and the “Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.”

The second strategy I will use is to help my students keep focused on the material covered in the unit. In order to keep focused on the task at hand, classroom discussions and routine group meetings will be held to alleviate the overwhelming effects the media can have on all of us. I will stress the importance of relevance to my students by showing them specific examples of what pertinent information is and what is not. This will help them to further understand the development of mass media and how it has evolved.

The third strategy I will use for the overall implementation of this curriculum unit is to not have a set guideline as to when to incorporate all of the activities. There is no timeline as to when to teach each activity, but the activities will be incorporated throughout the course of the year. It is my intention to begin the curriculum unit at the beginning of the school year and spend the first two months introducing vocabulary and giving my students an idea of the history of mass media. Then, as the school year progresses, I will begin to incorporate each activity into my regular curriculum and spend the rest of the school year doing so until all of the activities have been presented.

One important strategy I will continue to use is to remind my students to separate fact from fiction. This will be especially important when students are researching information and events on the Internet. Also, I will have them practice with fact and opinion before beginning any of the activities. This is just as important as fact vs. fiction because if what you are reading is really fiction or someone’s opinion, then that gives you a whole other perspective on the question at hand. I hope to accomplish this by keeping an open communication line between myself and the students so that no one is left in the dark.

The activities and lessons presented here in this unit will be done as a whole group, small groups, with partners, and individually. My goal in doing so will not only teach my students something new but also how to work well together with others to attain a common goal. I will remind them that the activities we will be doing will help them accomplish their goal of having a portfolio developed by the time they finish fifth grade. I will also help them to understand that all of this is a learning process, and that I will be learning right along with them.

Classroom Activities

Activity 1- Day 1 – Anticipatory Set

On the first day of the curriculum unit, I will ask the students to define the word “media” and then define what “mass media” is. We will have a discussion of some answers given and then I will explain to the students that we will be doing a unit on mass media and learning about the past, present, and future of the media in our culture. Next, I will give them a sort of K-W-L chart for them to fill out the K (what they know already about media) and the W (what they want to learn more about the media). I will also fill one out with them so they can see I will be involved in the learning process with them.

The activities I have planned will be divided into two parts:

- 1) challenging media – looking at the many ways mass media has challenged us
- 2) challenging media – finding ways we can further challenge the media in terms of how information is presented

History

In this section of the curriculum unit, students will develop background knowledge of mass media. They will be given the necessary tools to research different aspects of the media in order to gain a solid base for the implementation of activities in parts 1 & 2.

Activity

Students will be given historical copies of newspapers including, but not limited to the “New Pittsburgh Courier,” “Pittsburgh Tribune-Review,” and “Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.”

*Students will need to become familiar with the time and list what they think were five major events that took place at that time.

*Students will list who they think were three famous people of that time.

*Students will make a list in order to compare and contrast all three newspapers and determine how their styles are different, etc.

Activity

Students will be given historical copies of magazines including “Time,” “People,” and the “Saturday Evening Post.”

*Students will become familiar with them and list what they think were five major themes of that time period.

*Students will list who they think were three famous people of that time.

*Students will make a list in order to compare and contrast all three magazines.

*Students will explain the similarities and differences between the newspaper and the magazine.

*Students will compare/contrast print and visual forms of media.

*Students will compare a current newspaper with an old one such as the Black Chronicle and list as many similarities and differences that they can.

Activity

*After a list of well-known historical people is developed as a whole class, the students will choose one person to research and find out how many times that person was seen or read about in the media. They will also conduct research to find as many facts out about that person that they can and include this in a one-page report. The list might include:

George Washington

Ben Franklin

Abraham Lincoln

Helen Keller

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Rosa Parks

Activity

During Black History Month, students will be given a list of famous African-Americans and will choose one on whom to do a report. They will be required to use at least three different forms of media to find out information on their person. Some people they could choose from are:

Roberto Clemente

Rosa Parks

Oprah Winfrey

Nelson Mandela

Malcolm X

Clarence Thomas

Ray Charles

Dominique Dawes

Activity

*As a culminating activity of the history section, students will choose a partner and research what they think are the top ten events of the 20th century and how they were presented to people through media, i.e. community newspapers, weeklies, and foreign language newspapers. There will need to be a discussion as to what constitutes an event and what kinds of events are significant. Each partner pair will then present their findings to the class in both written and oral form.

Activity

*As part of our continuation of celebrating the 100th birthday of our school, students will be required to gather information on the history of our school. They will be encouraged to include evidence from a variety of media. They will share their information with others in a class discussion. They will analyze and explain why each type of media source is both useful and important when preparing historical facts and figures.

Part 1 – Challenging Media

In this section of the curriculum unit, students will have the opportunity to explore the ways mass media has challenged us. They will gain an understanding of what has changed in terms of the many aspects of mass media.

Activities

*Students will search on the Internet to see how many different local Pittsburgh newspapers they can access. They will be required to write a brief description of each and give their own opinion of which one is the most helpful in finding out the news.

*Students will be assigned a particular news station to watch a segment of the news and report a summary back to the class. In their summary, they must include what topics were discussed and presented and in what order. They must explain how the information presented is relevant or not to their lives and what they may have learned from watching it. Also, they will be asked to analyze individual stories and tell what the story was about. They might include the type of report given (i.e. live, remote, etc.) and how long it lasted. A template will be given to the students to fill out.

*Students will tape a national TV news show that appears around dinner time in the early evening. They must pay particular attention to how the news is presented. The next morning, they must find one of the stories from the Nightly News in the newspaper. Then they must read the story and write a paragraph comparing the newspaper account with the TV account telling what information was the same and what information was different.

*Students will complete a teacher-made survey about how much television they watch and what it consists of. The results will then be put into a tally and used to make a graph of the entire class including myself. I would then have the students write a reflection of the end results and whether they think too much, too little, or just enough television is watched among the viewers in the classroom.

*Students will be required to watch a particular channel on television after being given a particular product to keep track of to see how much advertising is done for that product. They will be required to report their results in both written and numerical form. If possible, the product must be brought in. The student will report on whether the advertising they viewed had any effect on their preference for it and if they would purchase or use it. They must also deduce who the intended audience is for the particular product and how this is reflected in the advertisements, graphics, language, choice of actors, etc.

*Students will be given the same product, as mentioned above, and research to see if that product is advertised in any other media form. For example, the product may be advertised in the local newspaper, a magazine, a billboard, or on the Internet. The student must then compare these different forms of media advertising and explain which one they think is the best in terms of getting the idea out to the general public.

*Students will be organized into groups by birth month and year. They will consult an on-line edition of a newspaper published in the month and year of their births. Each group will compose, organize, and revise a form that lists titles of books, movies, magazines, and television programs that were popular the month and year the students were born. A bulletin board will be created to display the students' findings.

*Students will locate an article in that day's newspaper about a community. They will look for information in the first paragraphs of the story that answer the who, what, where, when, why, and how questions. They will underline the information as they find it. When finished, they will share their article with another student in the class.

*Students will look through the television listings in the newspaper for several days and list all the shows that could provide useful information for a research project. Next to each, they must write a brief description of what would make the show a good source.

Part 2 – Challenging Media

In this section of the curriculum unit, students will have opportunities to develop their own ideas for mass media based on what they learned from the history section and by following through with the activities mentioned in Part 1.

Activities

*Students will think of a “success story” (positive or negative) which involves media and show how it may have improved someone’s life. They will be given the opportunity to interview someone, possibly a local hero, relative, or close friend. This information will be written as a report, and some reports will be shared with the rest of the class.

*Students will choose a television station they prefer to watch and write a persuasive paragraph to try to get others to watch it as well.

*Students will choose a newspaper they prefer to read, or maybe their parents read or subscribe to, and write a persuasive paragraph to try to get others to read it.

*Students will choose a magazine they prefer to read and write a persuasive paragraph in order to try and get others to read it.

*Students will choose an everyday product they like and use, and create a 30-second commercial to advertise it in order to get others to want to buy it. They must also make a list of reasons why television commercials are used to advertise things.

*Students will first have a debate on using technology in the classroom. Then they will use the information learned to prepare scripts for a radio or television advertisement. They must give information about a new commercial art school opening in their community. They must use both compound and complex sentences. They must adjust their scripts in order to fit either a 30- or 60- second spot.

*Students will be assigned a news segment to watch and tally how many different types of stories were reported and report their findings to the class, i.e.:

Local

Government

Sports/Health Education

State

International

Weather

Sports

Arts/Entertainment

*Students will be asked to think of someone in their community they’d like to interview about their favorite hobby. They will use a template provided by the

teacher to conduct the interview. When finished, they will write a news story about the person they interviewed. They will be asked to use direct quotes from the interview in their news story.

*Students will have the opportunity to become editors of their own newspaper. Therefore, various newspapers will be provided and the students will edit these in small groups.

*As a culminating activity, students will develop their own “school” newspaper including activities and assignments completed by the fifth graders in order to show their growth throughout the unit. They will show what they have learned about mass media and explain the effects the media have on them as fifth grade students.

Bibliography/Resources

Brunner, Cornelia. The New Media Literacy Handbook, Anchor, 1999.

Fedler, Fred. Reporting for the Media, Oxford University Press, 1999.

Hamill, Pete. News is a Verb, Deidre Enterprises, Inc., 1998.

Hilliard, Robert L. Writing for Television, Radio, and New Media, Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1999.

Kovach, Bill. The Elements of Journalism, Three Rivers Press, 2001.

Potter, W. James. Media Literacy, SAGE Publications, 2001.

Rhodes, Richard. How to Write, Perennial, 1996.

Zinsler, William. On Writing Well, HarperResource, 2001.

Web site: mediaed.org