

# Media Literacy

## Oak Meadow Coursebook

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Item #?

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# Introduction

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Does what you think, what you believe, how you act, and what you want out of life all come from you? Were you the driving force behind the formation of who you are and what you believe? Without giving it much thought, you might answer this question with a resounding YES, of course. Or you might acknowledge the powerful role your parents, family, and friends play in shaping your life. And yet, given the amount of time we all spend online, watching TV, videos, movies, texting, and listening to music, you might wonder just how much these sources of information also shape who we are. Could it even be said that these media are so pervasive that they play a primary role in shaping who we are? Is there even a YOU in you? That is a compelling question to keep in mind as you engage this course.

Media Literacy is about learning how to critically engage and make sense of the media we are inundated with nonstop. In addition to introducing you to the history and use of media, this course will help you develop analytical tools that you can use to examine its content, intent, context and subtext. In a media studies context, the word *text* includes not only written words, but also visual or audio messages, and includes everything from books, magazines, newspapers to the TV we watch to the logos on our clothes to the songs we hear and the popups we see when viewing a YouTube video.

Media literacy, or media education, is also a global movement to make better, more critical, sense of the media. In this course, we will be focusing on what and how we learn from the media. How and why do media texts target young people? How do media fit into our lives? How do media shape our perceptions in regard to race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, and education? As you explore how the media operates in society, you will gain the tools of media literacy, allowing you to make more informed choices as an active audience.

## Introduction

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Finally, media literacy is about social activism—it is inherently an activist method of study. When we study our media critically, we are compelled to make change. That change may be within ourselves, as our personal viewing, reading, and listening habits may change once we begin paying closer attention to media. The change may be within our family and community, fueled by our discussions with family and friends. Or the change may be within the context of the wider world as we support media that carries a proactive message and boycott media that spreads negative, overly violent, or otherwise harmful messages. By learning to be critical scholars, we can develop a sense of objectivity about media and become more active audiences and independent thinkers.

## Key foundation concepts of media literacy

David Buckingham (*Media Education: Literacy, Learning, and Contemporary Culture*, 2003), a global leader in media literacy, identifies four key concepts that will serve as the foundation of this course:

**Production:** All media texts are consciously manufactured.

**Language:** All media texts use a combination of languages to communicate meaning. Languages are the codes and conventions familiar to us that help us make sense of our media texts.

**Representation:** Media production involves selecting and combining moments to make stories and create characters. Representation invites us to see the world in particular ways.

**Audiences:** All media texts are made for an audience. To study the audience is to study our role as media producers and consumers.

We will explore each of these concepts and unpack how each works and what each means.

## Course materials

This coursebook contains all the instructions and assignments for this course. In addition to this coursebook, the following textbook is used in this course:

*Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences* by David Croteau and William Hoynes (Sage Publications, 2014)

This is an excellent, comprehensive book. Although we will only be reading selected passages, you are encouraged to read further, choosing any sections or topics that are of particular interest to you.

## How the course is set up

In this single semester course, there are 18 lessons, each designed to be completed in one week (working approximately one hour per day). When completing your assignments, try to be concise, and answer any questions completely using full sentences. If you are expected to write more than one or two sentences, it will be specified in the assignment. Make sure to address all the elements of an assignment—many pose multiple questions or require you to follow several steps.

In some of the lessons, you will find creative projects. Even if you don't think you're very creative, these activities are an important part of the course. You will not be marked down for "bad" artwork or poetry. Working creatively with the material lets you express yourself while at the same time demonstrating your awareness of significant elements of media literacy and how they are interrelated.

Each lesson begins with a short introduction that gives you necessary background information on the topic. You are encouraged to read the entire lesson—the introduction and all the assignments—before you begin work. This gives you a sense of what you will be accomplishing and helps you organize your time more effectively.

In each lesson, you will find sections to guide your studies and enhance your understanding of the material:

An **Assignment Checklist** is included at the beginning of each lesson so you can see at a glance what is required, and check off assignments as you complete each one. Assignments are fully explained in the lesson.

**Lesson Objectives** outline the main goals of the lesson and give you an idea of what to expect.

## Introduction

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The **appendix** contains important material that you will be expected to read and incorporate into your work throughout the year.

## Introduction

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**Viewing** and **Reading** sections list the films you will watch and outline your reading assignments. These films and readings will inform your written work.

**Writing Assignments** are designed to help you solidify key concepts and knowledge. They often encourage you to think deeper about the material, and make important connections by applying your knowledge and your reasoning skills. Responses may vary from short answers to full length essays and reports. In the appendix of this coursebook, you will find writing instruction regarding the different types of assignments you will find in this course.

**Activities** provide a wide range of hands-on ways to explore the topics you are studying. Each lesson includes instructions for one or more activities.

**Think About It** includes questions for you to ponder and discuss with your parents and friends. By discussing issues, expressing your opinion, and listening to the opinions of others, you will come to a clearer and more in-depth understanding of the topics in each lesson.

Information for **Enrolled Students** is found at the end of most lessons. This section provides reminders and information for students who are enrolled in Oak Meadow School and submitting work to their Oak Meadow teacher.

The **appendix** contains important material that you will be expected to read and incorporate into your work throughout the year.

The **appendix** contains important material that you will be expected to read and incorporate into your work throughout the year. Take some time to familiarize yourself with the information in the appendix. You will find Oak Meadow’s academic expectations, original work guidelines, information about how to avoid accidental plagiarism, and details on citing sources and images. You will also find writing instruction to which you will be directed throughout the course.

It is assumed that you will be working with an adult who assesses and supports your learning whether you are enrolled in Oak Meadow or are using this course independently. This teacher—who may be a parent, tutor, or Oak Meadow teacher—is the one to whom you should turn if you have questions about your assignments or how to get the most out of this course.

## Online resources

This course uses technology and the vast resources found online.

**Internet access is required for this course.**

Throughout this course, you will view an extensive array of award-winning films from the Media Education Foundation (MEF).

Whether you are enrolled in Oak Meadow School or using this course independently without enrollment, the Oak Meadow office will provide a private access link to MEF. By clicking on the link and entering your email address, you can request a password that will give you access to the list of films specifically chosen for this course. Students who are enrolled in Oak Meadow School and using an OM email address will be sent a password immediately; for all others, the password will be sent after a brief verification process.

You'll have plenty of opportunities to do online research, and you are encouraged to find videos, images, and articles about any of the topics you find interesting. The best way to learn is to follow your interests in any given subject. Of course, you'll also find valuable resources in print at your local library. Several assignments focus on magazines and the library is an excellent place to view a wide variety of publications.

## Academic expectations for enrolled students

- If you are enrolled in Oak Meadow School, you'll find a reminder at the end of every other lesson that instructs you to submit your work to your Oak Meadow teacher. Continue working on your next lesson while you are waiting for your teacher to send lesson comments. At the end of the course you will receive a final evaluation and grade, which will be recorded on your Oak Meadow School transcript.
- Please follow the assignments in order and, whenever possible, place your responses to the assignments in the Google Drive course doc provided by your teacher. Your teacher will give you feedback on your work in this shared Google doc, so the more work that can be put there, the better. Activities and projects that are completed by hand can often be photographed or scanned and linked to your course doc (detailed instructions on how to do

## Introduction

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## Introduction

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this are provided in the appendix). This is the preferred method since all your work stays in one place, as do your teacher's comments.

- If you prefer to submit your work through the postal mail, see your Oak Meadow Student Handbook for information. Whenever you find mention of the Google course doc in your lessons, you can disregard these instructions and submit the work in your preferred manner. If you have questions on how to work around any Google-related instructions, ask your teacher.
- You are expected to meet your work with integrity and engagement. Your work should be original and give an authentic sense of your thoughts and opinions, rather than what you think the teacher reviewing your work wants to hear. When you use other sources, you are required to cite them accurately. Plagiarism, whether accidental or intentional, is a serious matter.
- The appendix of this coursebook includes complete details on Oak Meadow's academic expectations and original work guidelines. It is your responsibility to make sure you understand these academic expectations and abide by them.
- Please remember to stay in touch with your Oak Meadow teacher and share your comments, ideas, questions, and challenges. Your teacher is eager to help you.

Media literacy is a vital skill for today's global citizens. We wish you a challenging and insightful experience in this course!

# Lesson



# Making Sense of Mass Media

## Learning Objectives

- Become familiar with the scope and technology of media
- Explore how mass media affects family life
- Gain a better understanding of the self through media use analysis

Media messages are all designed to communicate something to someone: information, opinions, propaganda, misinformation, advertisements, facts, promotional material, stories, and more are fall under the umbrella of media communication. Mass media is concerned with relaying messages to a large number of people.

The word *media* can refer to the **structure** or form the message takes: print (books, online articles, billboards), audio (radio, music, broadcast commentators at a sports game), or visual (video, film, art). The word *media* can also refer to the **technology** used to deliver the message: publishing (newspapers, magazine, books), digital sound recording (CDs, mp3s, audio books), video recording (television, commercials, music videos), or Internet (blogs, websites, search engines). Or the word *media* can refer to the **content** of any other these forms or technologies. *Media* is a fluid word and a fluid concept.

The study of the media in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is marked by change. The media-saturated world you live in is dramatically different

*Media* is the plural of *medium*, and while the word *media* is often used in the singular form (referring to media as a single entity), in this course you'll often see it used in the plural form, such as "Media teach us a great deal about our social world." Think of it as meaning "media outlets" or "media sources" and that will help the plural form make sense.

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Fill out the Media Literacy Pre-Course Survey.
- Read pages 2–9 and 15–21 of *Media/Society*.
- View *Remote Control: Children, Media Consumption and the Changing American Family* (Media Education Foundation, 2007).
- Use media to illustrate the concept of media.
- Give an opinion on the quantity vs. quality of media.
- Write about yourself in a one-page free write.
- Activity A: Media-Free Zone
- Activity B: Counting on Media

Lesson 1

(continued)

from the mediated world of your parents and is a foreign language compared to the media world of your grandparents. Yet, despite the quantity and quality of change, for the most part, we continue to do the same thing with our media that past generations did: We are audiences, absorbing the messages of the media.

The 20th century marked a monumental shift in quantity and quality of media, bolstered by an immense growth in technology. Within a relatively short period of time, media began entering our homes, workplaces and public spaces in unprecedented quantities. Traditionally, families, schools, businesses, and religious organizations helped define who we were as individuals and members of society. Suddenly, the media became important—and highly influential—socializing agents as well.

The media are so familiar to us and so intimately a part of our daily lives that they can go almost unnoticed. We take them for granted as always available, always there. But noticed or not, media messages are still bombarding us for most of our waking hours. What is their immediate and cumulative effect on us as individuals and as a culture? How much of what we think and do has been influence by media?

One of the goals in this course is to recognize how regularly we take the media for granted, and to closely examine why that is and the effect this automatic acceptance of media has on our lives. Have you ever stopped to think about how your media experience has been carefully constructed by someone else? What might be the goals and motivations of those who are behind your media experience?

**STOP HERE**  
**and Take the Media Literacy Pre-Course Survey**

Before you read any further, complete the Media Literacy Pre-Course Survey. You'll find it in the back of this coursebook. You can write directly in the book, or copy the survey and fill it out. You'll need to refer to your survey at the end of the course, so if you make a copy to fill out, make sure to keep track of it.

Use this space to jot down notes, questions, or ideas.





Times Square in New York City is a media assault on the senses: print ads, video, music, news, and more.

## Written Assignments

1. Throughout the course, you will be using media to define media literacy concepts. For this assignment, you will find a real life example that illustrates the concept of *media*. The example can be a photograph or drawing, an advertisement, a graphic image, etc. or you can write a description. Make sure the example clearly shows the meaning of the word. Be creative! Feel free to combine media in your example. Cite all your sources (refer to the appendix of this coursebook for the correct format for citations based on the form of media).

### Make the Connection

Watch the following video clip to get a quick overview of media.

“A Brief History of Media—Dan Gillmor” (YouTube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWOBRKx38fo>

2. Do you think it is important to monitor the quantity of time spent with the media or quality of the content watched? Is either quantity or quality of concern to you? Why or why not? Explain your answer and give specific examples to support your ideas.
3. Write about yourself in a one-page free write. A free write is a writing technique where you write down anything that comes to mind, without worrying about grammar, complete sentences, or anything else. (For more information on how to do a free write, see “Prewriting Techniques” in the appendix of this coursebook.) Don’t try to edit or analyze what you are writing, just write for at



Lesson 1

(continued)

**Activity B: Counting on Media**

For 24 hours, document **all** media you are exposed to, both through choice and by happenstance. As with the previous assignments, there is no judgment. Just document your exposure as objectively as possible. What was source of the media exposure? What was the content? How much of your attention did it require? How much time did you spend on each media exposure? How much energy? You may find it easiest to create a simple chart to record this data. Afterwards, write a brief summary of your exposure and your thoughts about the experiment. Were there any surprises?

**FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS**

You are encouraged to submit your work digitally using the Google Drive course doc provided by your teacher. You can begin using your Google course doc right away, putting each assignment under the lesson 1 heading. Work can be typed directly into the course doc or typed in another application and copied into the course doc. Make sure to number each assignment carefully.

If you are submitting work through the mail, use 8 ½” x 11” paper, and print only on one side. Please format your typed documents with a standard font (such as Times New Roman), and use a font size, paragraph spacing, and margin setting that will make it easy for your teacher to read your work and provide comments. If you handwrite your work, please do so legibly, using only one side of the paper. Neatness counts! Make sure that your work is well organized and easy to read. Smudges, tears, and wrinkles detract from the legibility of your handwritten work, and do not make a very good impression.

You will submit this work to your teacher along with lesson 2 (at the end of the next lesson). Feel free to contact your teacher at any time with questions about this or any other assignment.

## Lesson



# Meta Media: Media's Mirror

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## Learning Objectives

- Analyze how one medium addresses the content and meaning of another
- Collect and analyze anecdotal data on meta media
- Explore the self and relationship with the media

Much media content spends time, energy, and attention referring to, dissecting, and critiquing other media. Meta blogs—blogs devoted to compiling the best articles and posts from other website and blogs—are very popular and often turn up in Internet searches. Magazines like *People* often focus on television or film, while others, like *The New Yorker*, often critique media. In the 1984 film *Splash*, Madison learns English by watching a television in the electronics department of a New York City department store. In the 1994–2004 television series *Friends*, the friends watch as Joey plays a doctor on a television soap opera. In the 1976 film *Network*, television news anchor Howard Beale has a breakdown live on the air, which ironically increases the ratings of his failing network. The 2006–2013 television program *30 Rock* is about a live television show. All these examples show how the media represents itself and comments on other media. How do we learn about the media? What sense can we make of one medium through the lens and language of another? In what ways do we learn about who we are (and who we want to be) through the media?

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read pages 33–43 in *Media/Society*.
- Provide an example of meta media.
- Keep track of instances of one media referencing another.
- Activity A: Media production “Self map”

Lesson 2  
(continued)



# Assignments

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Use this space to jot down notes, questions, or ideas.

## Reading

Read pages 33–43 in *Media/Society*, beginning with “Changing Patterns of Ownership” through the first half of page 43. Look carefully at the data tables to get a strong sense of conglomerate ownership of the media.

## Written Assignments

1. Find a real life media example of *meta media*. The example can be a blog or video link, photo, advertisement, television show, film, etc. or you can write a description. Make sure the example clearly shows the meaning of the word. Be creative, and feel free to combine media in your example. Cite all your sources (refer to the appendix for details about proper citation).
2. As you spend time with media this week, make note of any time one medium references another. For example, do TV characters comment on what is in the news? Do newspaper articles make reference to what is reported on TV news, film, or Internet? How many times does an ad or a name-brand product show up in a film? How many times do you see a blog refer to something that appeared in a film, YouTube video, television show, or another blog? Keep a notebook with you throughout the day and jot down all instances that come to your attention. At the end of the week, review your notes and see if you notice a pattern. Does one medium promote or blame another medium? Do certain types of media seem to “get along”? Write a brief summary of your findings, citing specific examples from your data.

## Activities

Complete the following activity.

### Activity A: Media Production of a “Self Map”

Gather images, mementos, and/or messages that reflect your sense of self, and then gather images, mementos, and/or

