



# MEDIA LITERACY

MAKING THE CONNECTION

## TEACHING CHILDREN TO WATCH CAREFULLY, THINK CRITICALLY AND NAVIGATE SAFELY

It is becoming increasingly apparent that being 'media literate' is much more than just understanding and learning about television. Amidst today's rapidly changing technology, media literacy incorporates all that is read, heard, seen and computed. One must know how to interpret messages in any medium – radio, television, printed word, computers, even art forms.

TV&ME, although centered in the messages that television sends to viewers, recognizes and appreciates the involvement of other media in children's lives. It is important to acknowledge and apply the same principles of media literacy to computers, for example, as to television.

With this fact in mind, the following pages contain information on children's television and Internet use, as well as tips and tools for making their time with the media as productive, meaningful and educational as possible. We hope you find it useful.

### WHAT IS MEDIA LITERACY?

Media literacy is having an informed and critical understanding of the nature, the technique and the impact of the mass media, as well as the ability to produce media products.

# The Eight Principles of Media Literacy

Following are the eight principles of media literacy as defined by the Canadian Association of Media Education Organizations (CAMEO).

## 1. All Media Products are Constructions

Although media products often appear to be seamless extensions of reality, they are, in fact, carefully crafted constructions, the results of countless decisions, conscious and unconscious. Meaning and impact are created through selection, context and juxtaposition, as well as shape, colour, light, and composition.

## 2. The Media Construct Reality

Everyone has a reality construct—a sense of what the world is and how it works. The media must, like humans, shape raw sensory data into a coherent representation of reality.

## 3. Audiences Negotiate Meaning

What a reader makes of a “text” depends on the reader’s past experience, skill in reading, and current state of mind.

## 4. The Commercial Implications

All media products have commercial implications which shape both their content and their form.

## 5. Ideology and Values

All media products contain, usually implicitly, value messages and assumed “truths” about the nature of the world and its inhabitants.

## 6. Social and Political Implications

The media have the potential to affect social and political behaviour in a variety of ways.

## 7. The Relationship of Form and Content

Different media “codify” reality in different ways: the medium shapes the message.

## 8. Media Aesthetics

The media have aesthetic dimensions: greater understanding can lead to greater appreciation.

**Remember:** *all media are constructed, even live events and news!*

## Did You Know...?

- Early viewing habits last a lifetime.
  - Television images remain imprinted in the unconscious mind forever.
  - Infants only see fragments of light and sound.
  - Toddlers become “full-fledged” viewers.
  - Preschoolers crave action and surprise.
  - Elementary students develop the cognitive ability to follow plot.
  - By age 8, children can identify with a character and may believe TV is “real”.
  - Adolescents:
    - become capable of high levels of abstract reasoning,
    - become more independent viewers and watch less TV with their families.
  - Television is the third most time consuming activity in a child’s day.
  - Children:
    - watch an average of 15+ hours of television per week,
    - will view 150 000 commercials by the time they reach 18.
  - Internet usage among 9-14 year olds with access to the Internet continues to rise. In 1999, youth (9-14) spent an average of 2.4 hours a week. In 2000, they spent an average of 3.8 hours a week. This represents a substantial year-over-year increase of 58%.
  - 59% of 9-14 year olds say that they do nothing else while they’re online, the other 41% multi-task – talk on the phone, listen to music, eat, watch TV – while working at their computer.
  - Of the two-thirds (66%) of kids, aged 6-8 that have computers at home, more than half of these kids have Internet access as well.
  - 6-8 year olds are online for one hour or less each week.
- \* *Television statistics taken from Canadian Heritage: Television Violence – A Review of the effects on children of different ages*  
Wendy L. Josephson, Ph.D
- \* *Internet Statistics taken from the 2000 YTV Kid and Tween Report*

# How Children Spend Their Time, 1981 and 1997\*

(Measured on a weekly basis, in hours and minutes)

1981		1997	
Activity (ranked)	Weekly Time Use (In Hours and Minutes)	Activity (ranked)	Weekly Time Use (In Hours and Minutes)
1. School	21:22	1. School	29:22
2. Playing	15:54	2. <b>TV Viewing</b>	<b>13:09</b>
3. <b>TV Viewing</b>	<b>15:12</b>	3. Playing	12:58
4. Eating	9:08	4. Eating	8:18
5. Household Work	2:27	5. Household Work	5:39
6. Sports	2:20	6. Sports	5:17
7. Studying	1:25	7. Studying	2:07
8. Reading	:57	8. Reading	1:16

\*Children ages 3 - 11; selected activities.

*Taken from: Sandra L. Hofferth, "Healthy Environments, Healthy Children: Children in Families" (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1997 Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Child Development Supplement, 1998).*

# Why Teach Media Literacy?

- Media is an everyday part of children's lives.
- It is a vehicle for cultural expression.
- It is highly motivating.
- It is a natural curriculum integrator.
- It is mandated curriculum.
- It enhances the classroom experience.
- It is a powerful teaching tool.

## Next Steps

As educators, we need to:

- become familiar with current media resources;
- utilize effective media literacy strategies in the classroom;
- model and promote “responsible viewing” habits;
- encourage young students to understand and interpret media messages.

### IT IS IMPORTANT TO TEACH CHILDREN TO:

watch carefully,  
think critically, and  
navigate safely.

# 10 TIPS FOR TEACHERS

1. When viewing television, design your lessons to include the following **TV&ME** lesson plan format:
  - a) **Previewing activity:** This activates the learning process and helps students to connect the learning to their own life experiences.
  - b) **Focus for Viewing:** Always have a purpose or reason for watching. Even a one-minute segment needs to be directed to specific learning opportunities.
  - c) **Viewing the video, program or segment:** Once the Focus for Viewing has been clearly established, engage the children in active viewing.
  - d) **Postviewing Activity:** Discuss the Focus for Viewing and then offer several activities which can connect the viewing experience to learning opportunities across the curriculum.
  - e) **Closure:** At the end of each media based lesson, review the purpose of the lesson, and allow the students time to reflect on the learning experiences.
2. **Play it Again, Sam!** Replay the segment several times, asking the children to focus on different learning opportunities.
3. **Many Messages.** Think of a video as a 'library of information'. Preview the entire production and select several 2-3 minute segments which address specific learning outcomes. Show just the segments using the media based lesson plan above.
4. **Lights please!** View the screen with the lights on. Most people experience the media in lighted rooms. This also allows the students to review the Focus for Viewing and take notes if required.
5. **Sound off!** Try turning the sound off and ask the students to interpret the message through non verbal cues alone.
6. **Cover Up.** Cover the picture. Ask the children to listen to the sounds. Have them interpret the message from this viewpoint.
7. **Pause For a Purpose.** Use the pause function on your VCR. Ask the students to predict what might happen next; look at the particular non-verbal message; select a relevant discussion point.

8. **Tear It Apart.** Using the techniques provided in this document, ask the children to 'deconstruct' their viewing sessions. Provide them with the tools to understand what they are watching and what goes on behind the scenes to produce the selection.
9. **What Else is New?** Provide opportunities for the students to apply their knowledge about media literacy to venues other than television. Consider deconstructing print materials, radio, computer and video games.
10. **I can do that.** Provide opportunities for the students to produce their own media. Use this guide to help them become producers, editors, light and sound technicians, costume designers and reviewers.

# 10 TIPS TO HELP YOUR STUDENTS UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY'RE WATCHING ON TV

- 1. Listen up.**  
Try to focus on what the television message is saying. If the picture was not there, would you still get the same message?
- 2. Picture perfect.**  
Turn off the sound and just watch the picture portion of the program or commercial. What is the message? Is it as clear as it would be with sound?
- 3. Guess who?**  
Can you guess who the program or commercial is aimed at? What are the clues to help you make this choice? Why do you think the producers selected this particular target group?
- 4. Music, please.**  
How has the music influenced the message of the program or commercial? How might different music or sound effects alter the message?
- 5. Talk about it.**  
Make an effort to watch programs with others. Discuss your thoughts, feelings and what you have learned from the experience. Why do you think different people interpret the same message in different ways?
- 6. Speak up.**  
If you are confused, upset or excited about something you see on television, consider contacting the local broadcaster to express your comments.
- 7. Keep an open mind.**  
You can expose yourself to many points of view. Gather lots of information and then make up your own mind.
- 8. Lead the way.**  
Identify programs which represent the values you believe in. Encourage your friends and brothers and sisters to watch more of these kinds of programs. What are your reasons for your choices?
- 9. Be in control.**  
Know what the buttons on your remote control do. Experiment with all the functions. Why do you think all these buttons are there?
- 10. Fact vs. fiction.**  
Always remember that everything you see on television is constructed or “made up” by many people who work behind the cameras. What is real on TV and what is not?

# INTERNET SAFETY TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

The following tips have been designed to help you and your students make the most out of your time on the Internet. You will also learn valuable information from children themselves, as they learn how to navigate safely and productively. Feel free to post these tips as reminders for you and your students as you explore the wonderful world of the Internet. Happy surfing!

## **Join the team!**

If your students are using the computer and other media, become familiar with the technology yourself.

## **All eyes on the computer**

Situate the computer in a place in your classroom where it is easy to see what's on the screen. Walk by frequently as your students are surfing and stop to ask them questions about the site.

## **Be aware.**

Log on to the recommended websites on the next page and learn about Internet safety, effective ways to search for information and how to protect your students from predators.

## **Speak up!**

Have an active discussion with your students about the rules for computer use. Design them together, write them up and post them by the computer.

## **Enrich the learning environment.**

Encourage your students to use the Internet as one source of information. Provide additional resources, such as encyclopedias, journals, television documentaries and library books. Encourage them to use all these sources to verify their information before accepting it as 'true'.

## **Interactive Mode**

Be aware that the Internet has a unique 'window of interactivity' that is unlike most other mediums. Encourage your students to ask questions about what they are reading. Have them think about who they are responding to, the reason they have been approached and what the outcomes of this correspondence might be.

## **Be an advocate.**

The computer in your classroom contains a wealth of information and a wide range of entertaining, enlightening activities for you and your students. Be advocates for safe rules. Speak up about issues related to illegal and offensive content.

LOG ON AND LEARN!

# SITES FOR TEACHERS

As Educators, you may wish to look at the following sites, which can help you become familiar with safe practices while you use the Internet. Read the information and incorporate the suggestions into your computer work with your students.

- For a clearinghouse of information related to media awareness, safe sites for children, tracking mechanisms and protecting your children on line, consult the Media Awareness Network website at: [\*\*www.media-awareness.ca\*\*](http://www.media-awareness.ca)
- Check out the Media Awareness 'Knowing the Issues' website at: [\*\*www.webawareness.org\*\*](http://www.webawareness.org)
- View a study about 'Canada's Children in a Wired World' at [\*\*www.connect.gc.ca/cyberwise\*\*](http://www.connect.gc.ca/cyberwise)
- To access 'Missing', a computer game, video and guide to teach children how to surf safely, log on to: [\*\*www.livewwwires.com\*\*](http://www.livewwwires.com)
- The Canadian Association of Internet Providers has an interesting website which provides information about hate propaganda, consumer issues and the use of the internet to lure children. Check it out at: [\*\*www.caip.ca\*\*](http://www.caip.ca)
- In addition, the following websites may help educators guide and coach their students to safe, responsible use of the Internet.
  - Internet Safety for Parents: [\*\*http://www.ualberta.ca/~dlauman/EDES501\*\*](http://www.ualberta.ca/~dlauman/EDES501)
  - Surf Monkey – Parent Resource: [\*\*http://parents.surfmonkey.com\*\*](http://parents.surfmonkey.com)
  - Protecting Children in Cyberspace: [\*\*http://www.childpsych.com\*\*](http://www.childpsych.com)
  - National Parent Information Network: [\*\*http://npin.org\*\*](http://npin.org)
  - Online-safe Resources for Home & School: [\*\*http://www.netfamilynews.org/resourcesotherlanguages.html\*\*](http://www.netfamilynews.org/resourcesotherlanguages.html)
  - Internet Safety: [\*\*http://www.worldkids.net/school/safety/internet/welcome.html\*\*](http://www.worldkids.net/school/safety/internet/welcome.html)
  - Have a Safe Trip! A Parent's Guide to Safety on the Internet [\*\*http://www.cla.ca/resources/safetrip.html\*\*](http://www.cla.ca/resources/safetrip.html)

# TIPS FOR YOUR STUDENTS WHEN USING THE INTERNET

Consider the following tips to make your students' experience as safe and enriching as possible! Feel free to post them somewhere in your classroom for students to use.

## Use Common Sense

Above all, ask yourself the question, 'Is this a safe thing for me to be doing?' You have a wonderful inner 'alarm system' that can act as a warning for you. Listen to it!

## 'No Name' Me

This is your opportunity to pretend to have some exciting, way out identity! Always use a pretend name when entering a chat room. Be sure to pick one that doesn't reveal your true identity!

## No Thanks

Avoid opening attachments or e-mail or files from people you don't know. You never know what they might have in mind, so stick with communicating with your friends!

## Ask Someone!

If you are confused about a message you receive, or if you are feeling uncomfortable about some communication, ask someone you trust about it. They may be able to help you to make safe, informed choices.

## Check It Out!

Before responding to any company or business on the internet, check to see if it has 'family friendly' services such as 'Kid Zone' or a 'Child Friendly' search engine. For this information, go to [www.connect.gc.ca/cyberwise](http://www.connect.gc.ca/cyberwise).

## Use Your 'Information Filter'

Remember that all media is constructed, or put together for a purpose, and directed at a particular target audience. This applies to the Internet as well. Use your information filter to accept information as interesting, but not necessarily reliable. Check several sources and compare information.

## Balance Your Time

Make an effort to share your leisure time between 'passive and active mode'. After surfing the Internet, watching TV or reading a book, spend equal time playing outside, getting some exercise or sharing a laugh with a friend.

# SAFE AND INFORMATIVE SITES FOR KIDS!

The following are a few of the recommended sites for kids who want to get the most out of safe, responsible Internet use.

- To learn more about Concerned Children's Advertisers and TV&ME, log on to: [www.cca-kids.ca](http://www.cca-kids.ca).
- To access information on media awareness, 'cyber smarts', rules for safe passage, and a whole bunch of other neat stuff for kids, log on to the Media Awareness Network website at: [www.media-awareness.ca](http://www.media-awareness.ca).
- Check out this great website on internet safety issues, produced by the Internet Service Providers at: [www.connect.gc.ca/cyberwise](http://www.connect.gc.ca/cyberwise).
- The Canadian Association of Internet Providers cares about you. Check out their suggestions for healthy surfing at: [www.caip.ca/issueset.htm](http://www.caip.ca/issueset.htm).
- Here are some more cool sites to help you to be a safe, smart surfer!
  - Ask Professor Pixel: <http://www.ou.edu/oupd/kidsafe/inet.htm>.
  - Kid Safety on the Internet: <http://www.ou.edu/oupd/kidsafe/start.htm>.
  - Kids, Surfing Safety and Other Considerations: <http://www.larrysworld.com/articles/kidsurf.htm>.
  - Safe Kids.com: <http://www.safekids.com/>.
  - Web Wise Kids: <http://www.webwisekids.com/>.
- For safe and fun sites that will help you to learn information, have fun and practice responsible surfing up to age 12, check out: Berit's Best Sites For Children at: <http://www.beritsbest.com>.
- Ask a Canadian expert how to create a web page for your school, or how to design an online game. Check it out at: [www.schoolnet.ca/netdays/](http://www.schoolnet.ca/netdays/).
- From the creators of YTV, Yabber.net enables kids like you (8-14) to meet online and interact with each other in a variety of ways, using chat rooms, message boards, member paging, diaries and polls – all in a safe, parent-involved environment. Visit [www.yabber.net](http://www.yabber.net).