

## Picture Pedagogy Online Resources – Lesson Examples

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### Lesson Example 1.1 Introducing Media Literacy

Subject: Media Education

Level: High School

Country: Czech Republic

Teachers in the Czech Republic introduce the nature of mass media to secondary school students through a mixture of lecture and discussion on media topics current at the time. They ask students to consider who communicates what, to whom, through which channel, to what effect, and to what purpose? They are concerned with who owns and produces the media, how the media communicates, how it portrays the world, who the audiences are, and how audiences understand media messages.

The teachers begin by defining their terms, emphasizing that the media encompass many forms of communication that target audiences both broad and niche. The media, they say, are like the air, everywhere, but quality differs, and it is easy to get swamped by it. They ask about how their students use the media, about their everyday consumption, patterns of access, and the function of the media in their lives. Then they ask about whether their students have heard about a latest issue in the media, or if they have heard about it at all. If they have heard, what was their students' source of knowledge and how was it communicated? What is their knowledge about the issue? How is the issue portrayed? Who are the actors? What are their causes of the issue and what might be the consequences? The teachers try to find out to what extent students are familiar with the issue and whether they have, or are even able, to obtain information from different trustworthy sources – both mainstream and alternative – that offer a perspective on the issue wider than that presented in current media.

On one occasion the issue was the refugee crisis in Europe. The teachers discussed the current crisis within a wide historical context and experience with migration. Then the topic was discussed in the context of stereotypes and biases regarding otherness, minorities and faith in society, and whether the media has contributed to forming and proliferating stereotypes about refugees. The teachers then considered the situations in the home countries of the refugees and compared them to the political and social situation in their own country. Finally, students were asked to engage in discussions in an unbiased way as well as informed about other material on the topic that they could follow up in their own time.

On a more general level, the teachers ask students whether they think that the media fulfil their role in their coverage of the particular, current issue under discussion, but also generally. The latter question serves to link to another set of topics: what functions *should* media perform and what functions do they *actually* perform? After some discussion, the students invariably reason that the media have informative, educational, cultural, social, political, and entertainment functions. But what if any of these functions are missing? Is the media sometimes dysfunctional?

As discussion ensues a series of further issues are raised. The media has a tendency to present the news in an entertaining way, and the teachers introduce the term *infotainment*. In particular, the media often present political issues in an entertaining way, known as *politainment*. The media often gives preference to certain topics and so attempts to set the agenda on a topic. The teachers point out that



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agenda setting can derive from of the fact that commercial media are owned by powerful corporations with their own social and economic agendas. In the Czech Republic, the latter even takes the form of politicians owning some of the media, which the teachers refer to as *oligarchisation*.

Sedláček, P. (2016). 'Teaching Media Literacy through Current Media Issues in the Czech Republic', *Megatrends and Media*, 1: 68-78.



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### Lesson Example 1.2 Semiotics in the Classroom

Subject: Art

Level: Kindergarten and Grade 7

Country: United States

Terry was a guest art critic when he visited both grade 7 and a kindergarten class in a Midwestern city United States school. In the grade 7 class, he began by introducing the semiotic distinction between denotation and connotation. 'Denotations', he explained 'are what you literally see in a picture; connotations are what the things and words imply or suggest by what they show and how they show it.'

It was football season at the time and many of students were wearing apparel that referenced the two rivals, local teams. Terry and the students alike were surprised by the variety of denotations on the students' t-shirts including footballs, helmets, and taped hands. The students struggled over Latin phrases that accompanied an old-fashioned oil lamp but had no trouble interpreting the Latin words and the lamp as connoting traditions of academic excellence and seriousness. Connotations were also made of the different typefaces: bold and blocky typefaces were likened to linemen, sleek and fast typefaces to offensive and defensive backs, and old typefaces to academic traditions. By the end of the discussion, Terry and students alike were impressed by the variety of denotations the shirts bore and how many different connotations common items like school logo-shirts carried.

The distinction between denotation and connotation was equally grasped by kindergarten students, although without the actual terms being used. Terry asked the students to sort a variety of cereal boxes he had brought to their classroom into two groups; 'cereal for adults' and 'cereal for children'. Since this was a lesson in interpreting visual culture and not in health, Terry avoided questions regarding nutrition and instead he focused on how pictures persuade. The students enthusiastically sorted the boxes and were readily able to respond to the request to explain their choices. They referenced the imagery on some of boxes as childlike, such as cute bears with honey dippers; cartoon-like tigers; and three little people with cute charming faces that they identified as Snap, Crackle, and Pop. The children also noted the pictures of toys that could be found within the boxes. By contrast, the kindergarteners noted the lack of such pictures on the 'adult cereals'. These featured bowls filled with flakes, fresh fruits, and milk, or dark brown flakes and raisins. Adult cereals also showed coupons to save money, and smiling ladies with slim waists. Asked to explain these differences, the students began to realize that the boxes were intentionally designed to appeal to different groups, including themselves, by how the boxes were designed. This was despite the fact that most of the students were as yet unable to read the words.

Barrett, T. (2003). 'Interpreting Visual Culture,' *Art Education*, 56 (2): 6-12.



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### Lesson Example 1.3 Combining Art and Advertising

Subject: Art  
Level: Grade 6  
Country: Korea

Hyeri was a guest teacher in a grade 6 primary school in Korea when she taught lessons that imploded the categories of fine and popular art by treating examples of each as pictures. Aware that some of her peers questioned the introduction of popular imagery into the art class, she used fine art examples to teach about advertising. She had noticed that many advertisements used imagery drawn from fine arts; for example, LG Electronics, one of the leading companies in Korea, used Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings with a text that read, 'If you use LGs, your life will be full of art.'

Hyeri began by presenting various examples of contemporary advertisements from magazines and newspapers that used fine art images as well as similar examples created by her pre-service elementary teachers. She asked her grade 6 students, 'What is the difference between art works in a museum and the same art images in advertisements? How do written texts make the images look different in these advertisements?'

Hyeri provided art catalogues and magazines, and her students were then allowed to select art images as well as products that they wanted to advertise. Each student was provided with a worksheet to plan his or her advertisement. It asked questions such as, 'What kind of advertisement do you want to create? What messages do you want to deliver? Why do you want to use the art images and texts?'

Many students chose advertisements promoting cosmetics, including make-up and body products, seemingly to mirror, in Hyeri's view, Korean society's focus on an ideal visual appearance. Of art works, these students mostly chose female portraits by Leonardo da Vinci, Ingres, and Renoir. For example, one student used two different portraits by Renoir with the explanatory text, 'Before applying cosmetics ... after applying cosmetics... you can do it.' Some students chose Munch's *Scream* and Picasso *Weeping Woman* to indicate that ugliness required cosmetics to become 'beautiful'.

Other students favored advertising food products such as coffee, bread and yogurts. Their advertisements emphasized freshness and nutrition with the aid of artworks from Van Gogh, Klimt, Rodin, Chagall, Manet, as well as Korean early modernists like Son Dongjin and Jan Doogun.

During the concluding, self-assessment discussion, Hyeri pointed out that the same art picture could be interpreted quite differently with different advertising and text; for example, several students had used Munch's *Scream* to advertise, not only cosmetics but a wig, a brand-new computer, and indigestion tablets.

Ahn, H. (2007). 'When Ad Meets Art: Teaching Visual Culture in Korean Elementary Classrooms', in J. A. Park (ed), *Art Education as Critical Cultural Inquiry*, 234-345, Seoul: Mijinsa.