

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION



Challenging media

STUDY GUIDE

MEDIA LITERACY IN A TIME OF WAR

WRITTEN & EDITED BY JO ANN STEVELOS, NOAH FOWLER AND TODD NELSON

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO HUDSON MOHAWK INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER

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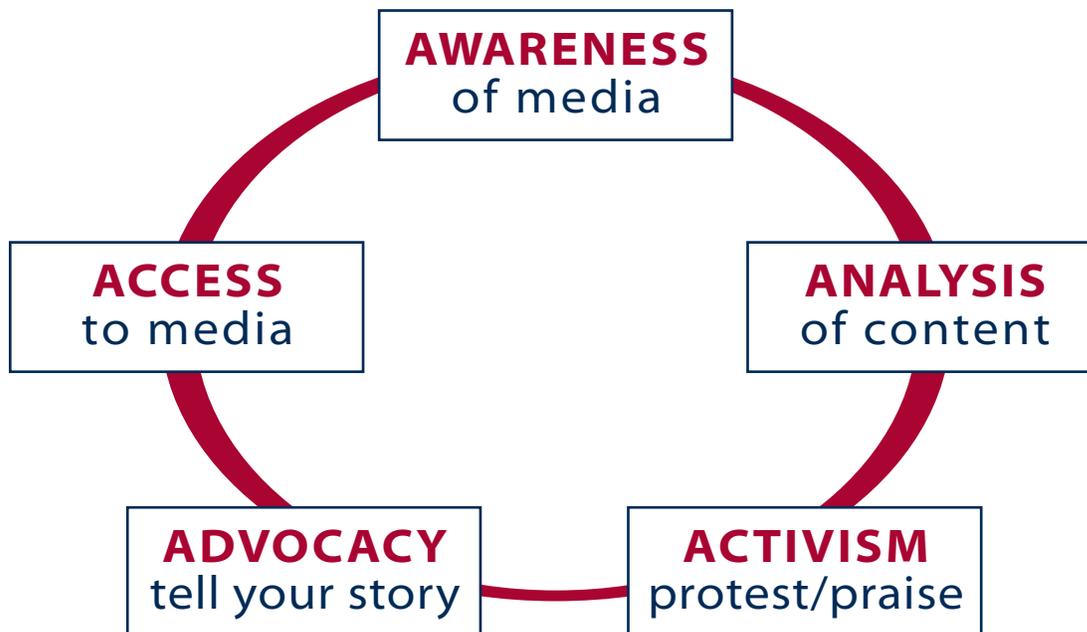
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USING THIS VIDEO IN THE CLASSROOM

- » View the video prior to showing it to your students.
- » Review the study guide and choose which exercises you will use with your students.
- » Use the previewing activities to help your students prepare for the ideas presented by the video.
- » Encourage *active listening*. Because the content of this video is likely to elicit emotional responses from the students, it is important that the students engage with each other in ways that ensure everybody has the opportunity both to speak and to be listened to. It is advised that you set guidelines or norms to ways to “actively listen” in advance of classroom discussions. Check out MEF’s handout, *Techniques for Active Listening*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdf/ActiveListening.pdf>)
- » Have the students keep a journal. It will be an effective place for them to explore their own attitudes and opinions and to record their observations about the media.
- » Review and discuss the handout *How to be a Critical Media Viewer*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdf/CriticalViewing.pdf>)
- » Incorporate activism and advocacy into your media literacy study. They are an important part of empowering students.

THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT¹



THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT EXPLAINED

AWARENESS

Students learn about the pervasiveness of the media in their lives.

ANALYSIS

Students discuss the forms and contents of the media's various messages as well as the intent of most media to persuade an audience.

ACTIVISM

Students develop their own opinions about the negative and positive effects of the media and decide to do something about it – this can be in the form of praise for healthy media, protest of unhealthy media, or development of campaigns to educate others with regard to the media, to change media messages, etc.

ADVOCACY

Students learn how to work with media and use their own media to develop and publicize messages that are healthy, constructive, and all too often ignored by our society.

ACCESS

Students gain access to the media – radio, newspaper, internet, television, etc. – to spread their own message. This in turn leads to further awareness of the media and how it works, which leads to a deeper analysis and so forth.

1. Diagram and explanation adopted from E.D.A.P.'s GO GIRLS! Curriculum, (c) 1999 (<http://www.edap.org/gogirls.html>)

NOTE TO TEACHERS

This study guide is designed to help you engage and manage the information presented in this video with your students. Given that it can be difficult to teach visual content – and difficult for students to recall detailed information from videos after viewing them – the intention here is to give you a tool to help your students slow down and deepen their thinking about the specific issues this video addresses. With this in mind, we’ve structured the guide so that you have the option of focusing in depth on one section of the video at a time. We’ve also set it up to help you stay close to the video’s main line of argument as it unfolds. The structure of the guide therefore mirrors the structure of the video, moving through each of the video’s sections with a series of key summary points, questions, and assignments specific to that section.

Key Points provide a concise and comprehensive summary of each section of the video. They are designed to make it easier for you and your students to recall the details of the video during class discussions, and as a reference point for students as they work on assignments.

Questions for Discussion & Writing provide a series of questions designed to help you review and clarify material for your students; to encourage students to reflect critically on this material during class discussions; and to prompt and guide their written reactions to the video before and after these discussions. These questions can therefore be used in different ways: as guideposts for class discussion, as a framework for smaller group discussion and presentations, or as self-standing, in-class writing assignments (*i.e. as prompts for “free-writing” or in-class reaction papers in which students are asked to write spontaneously and informally while the video is fresh in their mind*).

Exercises for each section encourage students to engage the video in more depth – by conducting research, working on individual and group projects, putting together presentations, and composing formal essays. These assignments are designed, at base, to challenge students to show command of the material presented in the video, to think critically and independently about this material from a number of different perspectives, and to develop and defend their own point of view on the issues at stake.

OVERVIEW

INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN A TIME OF WAR

Amy Goodman's film lecture presents disturbing observations that describe how the U.S. media have abandoned their important function in our democracy in a time of war. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Noam Chomsky observes:

"In order for democracy to be 'democratic' the media has to fulfill two functions: One, the media must report the news fairly, completely, and without bias. And two, the media must function as a watchdog for the public against abuses of power."

As Goodman reminds us throughout the film, the media, especially corporate-owned media, have failed to provide accurate, unbiased information to citizens about the actions and policies of the current administration's U.S.-led war on Iraq. Goodman untangles the role of the media in reporting complex wartime events and provides a context in which to think about their role when she asks, "If this were State media how would it be any different?" Goodman advocates for independent media as a corrective to the "corporate lens" of mainstream media and a vital means of preserving the important democratic tradition of debate and dissent in times of war.

THE VIDEO WAR GAMES / GENERAL NEWS

KEY POINTS

- » The militarization of the media coverage of the U.S.-led war on Iraq has compromised the democratic function of journalism.
- » Media organizations are among the most powerful institutions on earth. Both corporate-owned media and independent media are used to shape public opinion and foreign policy.
- » U.S. corporate-owned media produce news for U.S. consumption that is different from news produced for international consumption.
- » During wartime, citizens depend on journalists to provide accurate, unbiased information, to seek out and provide diverse opinions on important issues, and to monitor and report on the actions of those in power.
- » It is important to ask questions about the images of war we don't see, and about who selects the images of war we do see.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. What reasons does Goodman provide for the differences in *CNN* domestic news versus *CNN* international news broadcasts?
2. Who is selecting the images that we see in the media? If the statement that "Ownership determines content" is true, how will it affect the images of war that we see in corporate-owned media? How do these images shape public opinion? What role do independent media have in providing images of war?
3. What is *CNN*'s Aaron Brown's opinion on the role of the media and the images they select during wartime? How does this differ from Amy Goodman's opinion?
4. What connection does Goodman make between the exposure of Iraq's torture chambers and the discussion in corporate-owned media of torture as an acceptable practice in the U.S.?

EXERCISES

1. George Orwell's novel *1984* describes a world in constant warfare in which three superpowers periodically shift allegiances to sustain their economies and retain control. One of the superpowers invents "Newspeak," a language that uses oversimplification, misrepresentation, and euphemism to conceal true motives and actions.

What military terms and references have the media adopted to describe wartime events? Would you consider them a form of "Newspeak"? Review several corporate owned publications such as *Time Magazine*, *The New York Post*, and *U.S.A. Today* to analyze how often those terms appear in articles reporting on the U.S. led war in Iraq. Describe how this has influenced your perception of the war.

2. Since the 9/11 terror attacks, the Bush administration has benefited from an unprecedented level of cooperation from the media. Close ties between the political and business worlds have translated into media coverage and editorial practices that aim to please the government and/or its allies in the business community. Furthermore, the current administration has been criticized for using public fear and uncertainty to pressure corporate-owned media to avoid critical reporting about its policies and actions. In response, some mainstream, corporate media outlets have begun to criticize the administration's manipulation of information to serve its own agenda.

Research whether or not there is evidence that corporate-owned media have turned a critical eye on themselves and begun to evaluate their traditional role of providing the public with an unbiased flow of information.

THE VIDEO WAR GAMES / GENERAL NEWS

More specifically, use both corporate-owned and independent newspapers to analyze coverage of the current administration's reason for going to war. Then discuss the media's subsequent criticism of those reasons.

3. Watch a corporate-owned network news broadcast – *NBC*, *CNN*, or *ABC* – for two weeks. Document five examples of the foreign policy issues reported. What images were used to support the story? Who were the sponsors of the particular news hour you were watching? What did you learn about the policy? How many points of view were presented in the stories? Which points of view, or voices, were not reported? Did you agree or disagree with the report?

UNHEARD VOICES / CASUALTIES OF WAR, ETC.

KEY POINTS

- » A FAIR study documents that less than 1% of war coverage among the four major networks was devoted to antiwar voices. Check out www.fair.org.
- » The overwhelming majority of people who die in war are ordinary citizens and their deaths go largely unreported in U.S. media.
- » Mainstream, corporate-owned news coverage of the U.S.-led war in Iraq is provided both by reporters embedded in the military and by military officials who are embedded in the networks.
- » International journalists have been far more critical of corporate owned media coverage than U.S. journalists.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. If independent journalist May Ying Welsh did not follow injured Iraqi civilians to the hospital do you think we would have learned about their stories?
2. Is it ever appropriate to show graphic images of war casualties? If so, when? If not, why not?
3. By what means have corporate-owned media and the U.S. military silenced reports of wartime events? Is there an instance in your local community in which you have experienced or witnessed the silencing of voices?
4. How has the peace movement been portrayed in mainstream media? What, if any, kinds of bias do you feel the corporate owned media have towards the peace movement? Why might this be? Can you make a direct connection between corporate news sponsors and how their products are used in the world?
5. Journalists have often experienced life or death situations during wartime. How is this even more true for independent journalists not embedded in the U.S. military?

EXERCISES

1. Write a response to one of the key questions Amy Goodman asks in the film: "If this were State media, how would it be any different?" Be sure to define what you think is meant by "State" media, and how it is similar and different from the system we have today in the U.S.
2. Identify the unheard voices in your community, create a profile of one person and tell their story. Go to www.indymedia.org and find out whether there is an independent media center in your community. Research how you would publish your story on the independent news website or in an independent newspaper.
3. KPFA (94.1 FM Berkeley) was the first listener-sponsored community radio station in the United States. KPFA was founded by Lou Hill and a small group of WWII conscientious objectors. Hill believed that the increasing militarization of life at the end of WWII impeded the free flow of news and information. Because FM radio was essentially non-existent in 1949, Hill distributed free radios to listeners and asked them to support independent news. For many people this was a new concept; they could not understand why they should pay for something they could get for free. The KPFA staff were diligent in their efforts to educate listeners and develop the concept of a public-owned radio station.

Do one of the following:

- a. Research the history of the relationship between the military and media in times of war. Read a biography about Lou Hill and the origin of KPFA. What kind of coverage did KPFA and other independent media provide during wartime? What do you think Lou Hill would say about the news coverage of the U.S.-led war on Iraq?

UNHEARD VOICES / CASUALTIES OF WAR, ETC.

b. Choose three major military actions and compare and contrast the relationship between the military and the media. How was the news reported? How did reporters get their information? Where does the U.S. led war on Iraq fit into the history of media coverage during wartime?

DISSENT & DEMOCRACY

KEY POINTS

- » Independent media actively resist censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech by providing a forum for dissent and debate.
- » A large number of artist venues and radio stations are owned by major media corporations that sometimes pressure performers not to engage in political speech.
- » One of the roles of journalists in a democratic society is to tell the stories of the voiceless until they can tell their own stories.
- » In a democratic society, dissent should be commonplace – not silenced.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. America has a history of dissent and debate as well as unity and cooperation. The film shows images of the suffragettes, the civil rights movement, and the February 15, 2003 antiwar protest. How are these struggles connected historically to the struggle for democracy, especially in times of war?
2. The film opens with *Public Enemy's* song *Don't Believe the Hype* and ends with *Polarity 1's News Goo*. What are these songs about and how do they relate to the film?
3. What is the function of independent media in times of war?
4. Why is dissent considered a democratic ideal? Why is dissent healthy?
5. What happens in a society when dissent is not commonplace?
6. What is the role of independent media in a democracy?

EXERCISES

1. Goodman closes her lecture with the observation that “we are tired of seeing our friends and neighbors through a corporate lens.” How, specifically, do you feel the “corporate lens” shapes how we see ourselves and how others see U.S.? What is the role of independent media in shifting this perspective? How has dissent been framed through the corporate lens? What examples can you see in independent media to refocus this mainstream lens and open healthy and diverse discourse?

2. Describe how independent media have functioned in the U.S.-led war on Iraq. Have independent media outlets fulfilled their two traditional functions, as described by Noam Chomsky:

“One, the media must report the news fairly, completely, and without bias. And two, the media must function as a watchdog for the public against abuses of power.”

Have these alternative media sources given citizens the opportunity to inform themselves? Have they given people the opportunity to actively inquire and ask questions about the substance and direction of foreign and domestic policies in times of war?

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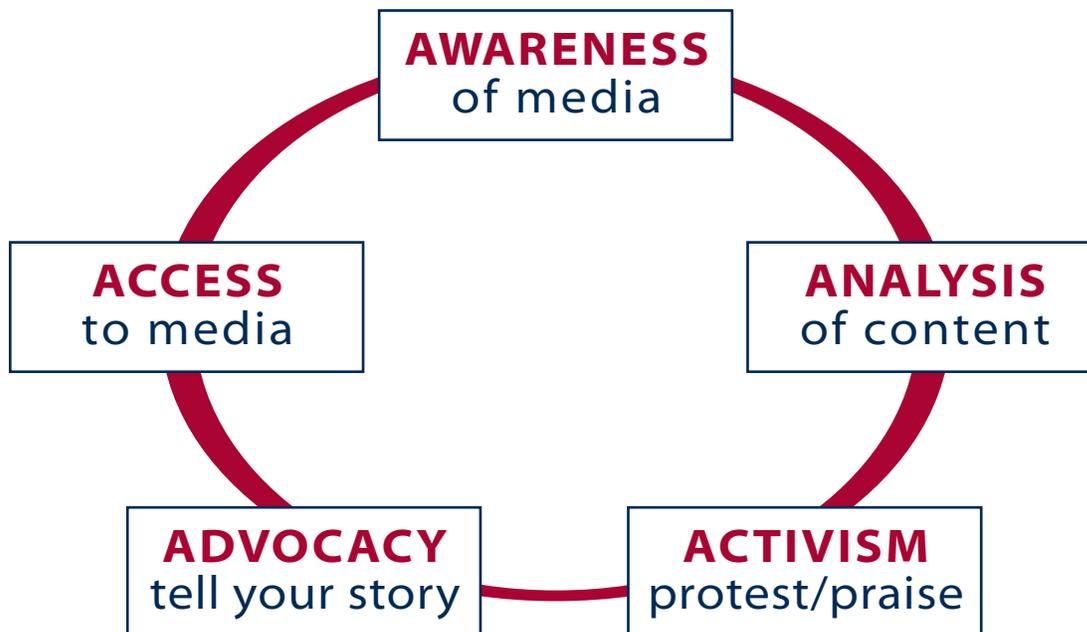
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THE VIDEO WAR GAMES / GENERAL NEWS

KEY POINTS

- » The militarization of the media coverage of the U.S.-led war on Iraq has compromised the democratic function of journalism.
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- » During wartime, citizens depend on journalists to provide accurate, unbiased information, to seek out and provide diverse opinions on important issues, and to monitor and report on the actions of those in power.
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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

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EXERCISES

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2. Since the 9/11 terror attacks, the Bush administration has benefited from an unprecedented level of cooperation from the media. Close ties between the political and business worlds have translated into media coverage and editorial practices that aim to please the government and/or its allies in the business community. Furthermore, the current administration has been criticized for using public fear and uncertainty to pressure corporate-owned media to avoid critical reporting about its policies and actions. In response, some mainstream, corporate media outlets have begun to criticize the administration's manipulation of information to serve its own agenda.

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UNHEARD VOICES / CASUALTIES OF WAR, ETC.

KEY POINTS

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EXERCISES

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UNHEARD VOICES / CASUALTIES OF WAR, ETC.

b. Choose three major military actions and compare and contrast the relationship between the military and the media. How was the news reported? How did reporters get their information? Where does the U.S. led war on Iraq fit into the history of media coverage during wartime?

DISSENT & DEMOCRACY

KEY POINTS

- » Independent media actively resist censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech by providing a forum for dissent and debate.
- » A large number of artist venues and radio stations are owned by major media corporations that sometimes pressure performers not to engage in political speech.
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- » In a democratic society, dissent should be commonplace – not silenced.

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