

**MEDIA EDUCATION
FOUNDATION
STUDY GUIDE**

Remote Control

Children, Media Consumption & the Changing American Family

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CONTENTS

Note to Educators	3
Program Overview	3
Pre-viewing Questions for Discussion & Writing	4
Key Points	4
The Big Picture	4
American Idle	4
National Past Time	5
Turning Back the Clock	5
Taking Back the Remote	5
Post-viewing Questions for Discussion & Writing	6
Assignments	7

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

This study guide is designed to help you and your students engage and manage the information presented in this video. 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, discussion 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 encourage students to reflect critically on the video during class discussions, and serve to guide their written reactions 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).

Assignments 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 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.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The average American child spends over 40 hours per week consuming media, the equivalent of a full-time job. This means that by the time children born today turn 30, they will have spent an entire decade of their lives in front of some type of screen. *Remote Control*, based on the findings of the Kaiser Family Foundation's landmark study *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8 to 18-year-olds*, examines the implications of this unprecedented level of exposure. Putting a human face on the report's statistical findings, filmmaker Bob McKinnon explores the media habits of two families, supplementing their powerful personal insights with testimony from media experts, educators, and policymakers. *Remote Control* breaks down the central role media play in our lives, revealing far-reaching effects that we are only beginning to understand.

PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. What types of media do you consume? How much time per day do you think you spend consuming media? Do you ever consume more than one medium at the same time?
2. When you were growing up, what types of media did you consume? How much time per day do you think you spent consuming media? Did you ever consume more than one medium at the same time?
3. Do you think kids are spending more time consuming media today than when you were growing up?

KEY POINTS

The Big Picture

- On March 9, 2005, the Kaiser Family Foundation, a non-partisan health research organization, released the findings of their yearlong study of children's media habits. The study found that the average American child:
 - Spends over 40 hours a week with media
 - Sits in front of a screen for over four-and-a-half hours a day
 - Has a television set in their bedroom
 - Eats the majority of their meals in front of a screen
 - Has no rules regarding their media consumption
- Most people are concerned with the content of what kids watch – things like whether programs contain too much violence, sex, or advertising – but are typically less concerned with how much media kids actually consume.
- Overexposure to media and its messages is a public health concern.

American Idle

- According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, a typical child's home contains three television sets, three compact disc players, three VCRs or DVD players, two video game systems, and a home computer.
- 60% of American families watch television while eating dinner.
- 72% of parents wish their children played outside more.
- Increasingly, kids seem to prefer playing video games to playing actual sports.
- According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control:
 - There is a direct correlation between hours spent watching television and childhood obesity.
 - Over 80% of nine-year-olds play organized sports. By the time they turn 13, only 20% do.
- According to the National Institute of Health, over six million children are medicated for Attention Deficit Disorders – an increase of 600% since 1981.

National Past Time

- One of the main problems with television and other electronic media is that they steal time away from other activities.
- Children have a mental remote controller in their heads, and if their attention isn't captured in the first five seconds, they change the channel.
- According to *Education Week Magazine*, the top two words that children use to describe school are "boring" and "tired."
- According to the U.S. Department of Education, watching over 10 hours of television per week has a negative impact on academic achievement.

Turning Back the Clock

- Time spent by children on free unstructured play has declined by 25% between 1981 and 1997.
- 64% of parents wish their children spent less time watching television and playing video games.
- One hour each day of quality conversation between parents and children improves academic performance.
- Kids are losing the ability to entertain themselves without the use of electronic media.

Taking Back the Remote

- According to the U.S. Center for Media Literacy, fewer than 5% of U.S. schools teach media education.
- Corporations and artists should provide media that's positive for children, and parents need to understand what their children are exposed to so they know how to take corrective action.
- The Kaiser Family Foundation's study of children's media habits also found that:
 - Kids who live in houses where the television is not left on most of the time spend an average of an hour less each day watching television.
 - Kids who don't have a television in their bedroom spend almost an hour-and-a-half less each day watching television.
 - Kids with television rules that are usually enforced spend an average of about 40 minutes less each day watching television than kids who don't have television rules.
- When American children born today turn 30 years old, they will have spent almost 10 years of their lives in front of a screen.

POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. What is your initial, overall reaction to the Kaiser Family Foundation’s study of children’s media habits? What are your own thoughts about living in a media culture? Do you agree with the report that overexposure to media is a public health concern? Why or why not?
2. What electronic media devices do you own? How many do you have total?
3. When you were growing up, did your family watch television while eating dinner? How about now? Do you watch television while eating dinner? Why is the relatively new phenomenon of people watching TV while eating significant, according to the report?
4. Do you play video games? If you do, what kind of video games do you play and why? What do you get from video games? Do you ever think they might be cutting into time you could be spending doing other things? If you don’t play, why not? And how aware are you of the game play of others?
5. How about television and other electronic media? Do you feel they can steal time away from other activities? Beyond time issues, do you see any other problems that can result from too much media consumption? Explain.
6. Have you ever played organized sports? How about other recreational activities? Do you ever feel there’s a correlation between the amounts of physical activity you engage in and the amount of media you consume?
7. What are your thoughts on Attention Deficit Disorders – on what causes them, and why they seem to be on the rise? Do you think media habits play a role in ADD? Do you believe medication is the best way to treat the symptoms of ADD? Why or why not?
8. Do you think your own media consumption negatively impacts your academic achievement? Especially how much you read? Why or why not? Be as specific as possible as you explain yourself here.
9. Why do you think child health experts see such a value in free unstructured play? What’s meant by “free” and “unstructured” in this context, anyway? What are some examples of this kind of play? And how do you think this differs from play tied to digital screens? Should children be encouraged to play with electronic media devices? Should they be encouraged to act out what they learn from the media? Why or why not?
10. Do you think schools should include media education classes? Why or why not? What would a good media education class teach kids, in your view?
11. Do corporations have a responsibility to society? Should corporate media companies be required by the government to provide media that is suitable for children? Or should making a profit be their sole objective? Why or why not?
12. If you were a parent, would you regulate the use of television in your home? Why or why not? If so, how would you do it? What about other media forms? Would this be easier said than done, or do you think you could come up with a way that would work? Explain.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Over the course of one week, keep a media journal in which you record your observations about all the media you consume. After a brief synopsis of each media example, describe the messages, values, and attitudes you think it communicates. Also, keep track of the amount of time you spend consuming media. How does your average rate of media consumption compare to the Kaiser Family Foundation's report on children's media habits?
2. Write a position paper defending the Kaiser Family Foundation's central conclusion that overexposure to media is a public health concern. Be sure to cite the video, the report itself, and any other sources you use, but be sure also to put your main ideas in your own words. Here is a copy of the Kaiser Family Foundation's 2005 report, an executive summary, and the 2010 report update:
http://mefwordpress.s3.amazonaws.com/GenerationM_Study.zip.
3. Devise your own media education curriculum. But first, write a paragraph clearly and concisely summarizing what the overall goal of your media education class will be. Then make a list of the kinds of activities and assignments and readings that you think would be most effective in achieving this goal. Once you have this framework in place, write up a curriculum: Develop an actual lesson plan, including discussion questions, writing assignments, and group activities. Be sure to find media examples to use along with your curriculum. A teacher should be able to take your curriculum in hand, make sense of how to use it simply by reading it, and teach a really good class with it.
4. Choose a piece of media that you have a strong *negative* opinion about, and write a letter to the company who produced it. Be sure to include the messages that the piece of media is sending to its viewers and the possible consequences of these messages in society. For instructions on how to write a letter of this type, visit <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=119>.
5. Choose a piece of media that you have a strong *positive* opinion about, and write a letter to the company who produced it. Be sure to include the messages that the piece of media is sending to its viewers and the possible consequences of these messages in society.