

5 Questions to Ask About Media

Name _____

Date _____

All media have an author—and an agenda. It's important to know how to analyze and critique any type of media, from social media posts and online articles to books, TV shows, advertisements, works of art, and beyond. Use this sheet to help you think critically about how media are made and consumed.

Directions Answer the questions below to help you analyze and critique *one* example of media.

Info About Your Media Example

Title *No title? Say that, and explain what it is.*

Type of media

Questions to Ask

1. Who created this message?

- a. Was it created by an individual, a group, an organization, or a company?

2. Why was the message made?

- a. Is the message's purpose to inform? To entertain? To persuade? (Or some combination?)
b. Who's the message's intended audience?

3. Who paid (or is paying) for this message?

- a. Money motivates a lot of media—who paid to have this message made?
What else have they paid for? What other agendas might they have?

4. How is the message trying to get your attention?

- a. What techniques are being used to grab people's attention?
What techniques are being used to *keep* people's attention?

5. Who's represented in the message? And who's missing?

- a. Whose points of view and values are represented (or being appealed to)?
- b. Whose points of view and values are missing?

6. [Fill in your own question] *

7. [Fill in your own question] *

* Need some help or inspiration? **Check out this longer list at** <http://bit.ly/2Am8Dvi>
This worksheet is based on the work of the National Association of Media Literacy Education (<https://namle.net/>).

Teacher's Guide **5 Questions to Ask About Media**

The more our students learn to think critically about media, the more it will become second nature for them to ask questions. You can use the tips below to help design and guide a lesson or activity in your classroom using the attached worksheet. Better yet, feel free to adapt this resource to best fit the needs of your classroom! (**Best suited for middle or high school grades.**)

This activity and the questions included are based on work from the National Association of Media Literacy Education's

"**Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Messages.**" <http://bit.ly/2Am8Dvi>

For more information, visit the NAMLE website: <https://namle.net/>.

Example Common Core ELA Standards Addressed

RL.X.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

RI.X.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

W.X.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question.

L.X.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Teaching Tips

Before the activity

- Make sure your students have access to web browsers, as they'll need to do some online research.
- Model how to use the worksheet for your whole class before having students work individually or in small groups. Choose one example of media and walk your class through the worksheet, answering questions together as you go.
- Consider giving students some instruction on how to dig for these kinds of information online (i.e., "scroll to the bottom of a home page and look for the 'About' link").

During the activity

- Whether working individually or in small groups, you can let students choose their own media examples (see the included list), or you can assign them.
- *Before* students start analyzing their media example, give them time to briefly write down some initial impressions about it:
 - What background knowledge do they already have (if any)?
 - What assumptions (if any) do they have about it?
- Offer assistance as needed:
 - Question 3: Help students find information about how media is funded.
 - Question 4: Help students look at aspects of the message like word choice, imagery, connotations, visual design, tone, repetition, and so on, and discuss why they think the message's author made these choices.
 - Question 5: Help students consider factors like race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, geographic location, etc. Have students question whether or not stereotypes are used and how different audiences may perceive them.
 - Questions 6 and 7: Guide students toward creating their own questions. You can also refer them to the NAMLE's "Key Questions..." grid.

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After the activity

- Have students return to their initial impressions of their media examples. Has the activity changed their thinking about this media example? How?
- Ask students to share their findings with partners or in small groups. After that, ask for a few volunteers to share with the whole class and explain their thinking.

Extension

- Empower your students to move beyond merely consuming media. Have them create their own media example. And the next time your students write a paper or create a presentation, video, or other media project, have them reflect on their work with these same questions in mind.

Media Examples for the Activity

Here's a brief and incomplete list of some media examples you and your students can use. Of course, you're welcome to adapt this list or create your own altogether!

- Magazine article or advertisement
- Viral post on Facebook or Twitter (image, story, video, etc.)
- Snapchat story
- Instagram post
- Popular song
- Movie
- TV show
- TV commercial
- Video game
- Mobile app
- YouTube video
- Advertisement preceding an online video
- Billboard advertisement
- Pamphlet or flyer
- Music video
- Pop-up or banner advertisement on a website
- Song
- Blog post
- Podcast
- Email
- Letter
- Historical speech
- Political stump speech
- Online editorial "news" story
- Political campaign advertisement
- Love letter
- Social media post of a viral rumor
- Artwork
- Poem
- Book

More Media Literacy Resources to Explore

- **Common Sense Education — News and Media Literacy Toolkit** <http://bit.ly/2zt1b30>
- **NAMLE — Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Messages** <http://bit.ly/2Am8Dvi>
- **Center for Media Literacy — Media Lit Kit** <http://bit.ly/2iGP0qJ>
- **The Lamp — A Guide to Understanding the News and Making Good Choices** <http://bit.ly/2AkMmOE>
- **Media Spot — Media Literacy Scope and Sequence Template** <http://bit.ly/2hmlfOG>
- **Media Education Lab — What Is Media Literacy?** <http://bit.ly/2zH7n9T>
- **Media Smarts — Media Literacy Fundamentals** <http://bit.ly/2zHFvIX>
- **Project Look Sharp** <https://www.projectlooksharp.org/>
- **The News Literacy Project — The Sift (Weekly Newsletter)** <http://bit.ly/2zoQf8w>