



Body Language

by Sue Lockwood Summers

Prom time is a prime time to discuss body-image issues.

Students—as well as adults—are influenced by images in the media. From movie posters to music videos, billboards to banner ads, we are tempted to measure ourselves against the styles, shapes, and symbols we see.

Prom season—when how you look and what you wear take on special importance—is the perfect time to discuss body image, expand individuality, and increase critical thinking. The following activities are meant to be collaborative lessons for media specialists and teachers.

Upper elementary to middle school

- Have students bring in fashion catalogs during a two-week period. Assign small groups to look through the catalogs and list all the types of people who are featured. Next, have the groups visit the local mall or the school cafeteria and list all the types of people they see. Compare and contrast the lists. Draw conclusions.
- Have each student bring in a magazine. Discuss the images on the covers and how technology might have been used to enhance the images. Discuss the impact of magazine covers.
- Discuss dieting and how it affects adults, teens, and children. Talk about various types of diets. Have small groups of students list reasons why diets are so prevalent in today's culture. Compare lists and discuss reasons.
- Have students watch a TV program devoted to news about celebrities. Ask: "Why do you think news stories about the bodies of celebrities are so fascinating?"

High school

- Invite a fashion model to talk to students about the modeling industry. In advance, have students prepare questions for the model on lifestyle, health, image, attitudes, and stereotypes.
- Discuss the capabilities of image-enhancing software, such as Adobe Photoshop and the auto-slim feature on some new digital cameras. If available, have students use these to reconstruct an image downloaded from the Internet. Talk about the recent controversy over publicity photos of news anchor Katie Couric released by CBS News that made her appear more slender. Ask: "How can image manipulation influence the public?"
- Have students conduct research on eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Discuss how media images might contribute to these disorders.
- Body images in media messages impact the lives of young men as well as young women. Discuss the implications of this cultural phenomenon on teenage boys.
- Have students work in small groups to produce skits that share positive messages about healthy body image. Videotape the skits and air them on the school TV news broadcast. ❖

RESOURCES

Body Image

www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/ca6277819.html

Get Them Thinking! Use Media Literacy to Prepare Students for State Assessments

Sue Lockwood Summers (Linworth Publishing, 2004)

YouthLearn: Learning: Activities and Projects

www.youthlearn.org/learning/activities/multimedia/medialit.asp

CONTENT STANDARDS (www.mcrel.org)

Language Arts: Viewing

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Level III, Grades 6–8: 4. Understands the use of stereotypes and biases in visual media (e.g., distorted representations of society; imagery and stereotyping in advertising; elements of stereotypes such as physical characteristics, manner of speech, beliefs and attitudes).

Level IV, Grades 9–12: 8. Understands effects of style and language choice in visual media (e.g., use of long-shots to signify both real and metaphoric isolation; rapid editing in a television commercial; juxtaposition of text and color in a billboard; words in headlines intended to attract attention).

Language Arts: Listening and Speaking

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Level II, Grades 3–5: 13. Listens to and understands persuasive messages (e.g., television commercials, commands and requests, pressure from peers).

Language Arts: Media

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

Level III, Grades 6–8: 6. Understands the ways in which image-makers carefully construct meaning (e.g., idea and word choice by authors, images created by photographers, television programs created by groups of people, photos or cutlines chosen in newspapers).

Sue Lockwood Summers is director of Media Alert! (www.mediaalert.org) and author of three books that demonstrate effective media-literacy teaching strategies.



Cable Programs and Websites

Healthy Bodies:

You Are What You Eat

www.cnn.com/specials/2006/healthy.bodies

Nick News with Linda

Ellerbee: Look Before You Eat, NICK, May 2, 6am ET/PT

Nick News with Linda

Ellerbee: The Fight to Be Fit, NICK, May 9, 6am ET/PT,

www.nick.com/turbonick/index.jhtml?extvideoid=26050

What's Wrong with This Picture?

www.the-n.com/checkit/article.php?ipv_sectionID=42&ipv_articleID=182