

Children's TV: Watching Kids Watch TV

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Unit Length: Just over 2 weeks (11 50-min. class periods)

Audience: 9th – 12th Grade English or Media Studies Course

Introduction

This unit could be used for a 9th – 12th Grade English or Media Studies Course at virtually any high school or junior high. I believe that the activities and topics would be extremely engaging to either advance-placement students or those students in comprehensive courses. The unit is also relevant for any set of demographics or location (rural, urban, suburban) in U.S. school districts since virtually all students watched some type of children's television at some point in their lives (e.g., cartoons, educational TV, etc.) The unit would take approximately two weeks wherein class periods are 50 minutes in length. Unit Objectives

Life Goals: Students will develop critical skills to analyze their past television viewing as young children. In turn, they will possess the skills to make informed decisions about television viewing for their own future children or the children for whom they are caring. **Writing Goals:** Students will develop analytical writing skills and note-taking skills. **Literacy Goals:** Students will gain literacy on Internet resources. They will gain access to knowledge about film/TV editing techniques. **Communication Goals:** Students will be able to present their findings orally or through a project presentation board.

Alignment with Standards

I believe this project aligns with many of the state standards currently in place, but because I do not know when I will be able to use this unit, I do not know if it will align with new standards in the future. Therefore, I have chosen not to consider standard alignment until that time. The project considers many different modes of learning, multiple intelligences, a healthy balance of student-centered and teacher-centered activities, and student choice. Thus, as far as educational theory is concerned (and hopefully the state will take this theory into regard as much as possible for the new standards), I believe the unit is extremely well aligned.

Rationale

People watch TV. Our television-watching habits should not go unexamined, especially those of children. High school students are very capable of making informed, critical decisions about their media consumption. Students need to look at how their lives are influenced by TV and how their younger brother's, sister's, cousin's, etc. lives are influenced by the "boob tube." Students will also find this project highly engaging. They enjoy watching and discussing TV. They feel it is relevant to their lives. They have prior knowledge they can use to take in knowledge from this unit.

On a side note, I think this unit could be extended or have an additional unit afterwards that considers children watching adult television. This would be a great comparison to have back to back! So, this unit would be great to have a segue into other units on TV studies.

Detailed Description of Activities

Day 1

As students file into the class and I take roll, I will be playing the song, “Money For Nothing,” by Dire Straits at a sound level the whole class can hear. The classic line: “You play the guitar on the MTV. That ain’t workin’ that’s the way you do it. Money for nothin’ and chicks for free...I want my MTV” might ring a bell for some students. Music is a welcome break in the day of most students and also sets a tone for the class period. As I mentioned in my previous unit plans, music can be a great way to have people enter a space and prepare themselves mentally to do whatever it is they will be doing in that space.

Activity 1: If TVs Watched Us

Objectives/Purpose: This activity will have students looking at television in a whole new light, through the eye of photographer Shawn Michienzi. The purpose of them looking at the online photography gallery is for them to consider the question, “what has television come to mean to our culture?”

Materials needed:

- Space available in the school’s computer lab, at least 1 computer/2 students (should be signed up for in advance)
- Guided worksheet for analysis (worksheet entitled “INTERNET GALLERY: If TVs Watched Us.” Please e-mail me for a Word document of this worksheet.)

Students can work alone or in pairs, but they must fill out the worksheet on their own. They will be reminded of the rules of school computer use and expected media center behavior before we go to the computer lab. They should bring their belongings with them to the computer lab as they will leave from there when the bell rings. Students will spend the remainder of the hour in the media center, completing their worksheets to be handed in by the end of the hour.

Day 2

Discussion: 10 min. “If TVs Watched Us”

Using answers that students gave in their worksheets, “INTERNET GALLERY: If TVs Watched Us,” from the previous class period, I will lead a brief class discussion on the meaning of television in our culture. Questions to be discussed:

- What does television mean to our culture?
- Why do we watch TV?
- How did TV become so popular? Is it more or less popular than other media sources: radio, film, Internet, newspapers?
- Is the way young children are influenced by TV different from the way teenagers or adults are influenced by TV? How?

Background: 40 min. Television/Film Techniques

Students will receive a booklet on television techniques. This information can be found, copied, and made into a class document at no charge. Information is available online at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/gramtv.html>. I will lecture on the key techniques such as shots, camera and lens movement, music, editing, etc. using examples from popular television series such as *ER*, *The Parkers*, *Friends*, *Boston Public*, etc.

Objectives/Purpose: This activity will highlight how certain editing, lighting, sound techniques in TV play off of the viewer's emotions. Having students analyze these techniques will be useful comparison tool for looking at the specifics of children's television.

Day 3

Activity 2: 50 min. "In the Beginning" Collages

Objectives: To have students look retrospectively at their own first experiences watching television.

Materials needed:

- Poster board
- Glue
- Colored markers or pencils
- Many black & white printed images from children's television shows on PBS (Sesame Street, Mr. Rogers, etc.) and cartoons or other educational programs for children

(NOTE: You can get these images by doing a www.google.com image search. Be sure that the programs you get images from are relevant to your students' age group, i.e., at least 10 years from the current period—about the time they were between 4-7 years old. Also, if you have any immigrant students, perhaps you can include TV images from their homeland or provide them with an alternative assignment or have them work with a native partner.)

Ask students to take a trip down nostalgia road. Students will create a collage, including at least 5 images and discussion on the poster board of how each of those images answer the following questions:

- What/who is this image? What television program is it from?
- What do you remember about this character/these characters?
- Did you learn anything from this character when you were younger? What?
- Do any of the characters have anything in common? (Draw arrows to indicate these connections.)

Students can arrange their collage however they like: chronologically by how old they were when they watched certain programs, in order of preference, in order of educational value, etc.

Day 4

Reflection (5 min.)

We will spend a few minutes looking at each other's collages from the previous class period. While students tour the room, they will take notes on the following questions in their notebooks:

- How is your collage different from others? In what ways?
- How is your collage the same? In what ways?
- Do you think different people in the class had different ways of experiencing TV as children? How?

Activity 3: History of Children's Radio and Television

Objectives/Purpose: Students will work in pairs to collect information about the history behind children's broadcasting. You can assign students to a specific program or have them find it on their own. Below are step-by-step directions for students.

1) Research the history of children's television at a couple of the following Web sites:

- <http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blchildrenstelevision.htm>
- http://www.cbc.ca/kids/general/time/history_radio_tv/default.html
- <http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/2002/may/kidstv/>
- http://www.pbs.org/kids/text_only/did_you_know/back_timeline.html
- <http://www.toonarifc.com/links.html>

2) When did children's TV programming begin? What was it like in the early days? Write down three facts about this history.

3) Select one program in particular that you and your partner are interested in. Answer the following questions about that program in paragraph or outline format:

- When did the program begin and end (if it has ended yet)?
- What age, race, economic class of children did/does the program target? If you cannot find this information directly, can you determine the target from the content of the program?
- When was/is the program broadcast (time of day, week, etc.)?
- What genre (variety, type) of children's show does the program fall under (animation, education, adventure)?

4) If at all possible between one of the two people in your group, record an example of your selected television program on TV tonight and bring it to class tomorrow on a VHS tape (check listings in your TV guide. NOTE: those with cable will have an easier time at this.) Check with the teacher, as she may be able to provide you with a clip she herself has taped.

Day 5

Analysis: 20 min.

Get into pairs from the previous class and using the film/TV techniques booklet, analyze the techniques used in a 5-min. clip of your program. Be prepared to talk to the class about how these techniques are designed to make audiences respond to the program emotionally. Also, be prepared to discuss your findings from the Web search done yesterday.

Presentations: 30 min. History of Children's Television

Students will present their findings with the class about a specific children's show. Continue presentations into Day 6 if necessary.

Day 6

Introduction to Media Ethnography Project: (15-20 min.) I will give a handout explaining what the final product of the unit will comprise. I will go through the assignment step by step with the students, answering any questions they may have. The handout will include the following points:

- Think of a young child or group of children (ages 3-10) you can observe watching a children's television show. Examples: younger siblings, cousins, neighbors, nieces, nephews, babysitting charges, etc. You should be able to observe this child or group children at least three times watching the same program over the next week.
- During each observation, record the program on a VHS tape for later use in your presentation if you are able.
- During each observation, take notes on the following: - atmosphere: where, when, other setting factors - physical and emotional reactions of the child/children and in what part of the program those reactions took place - conversations about the program with you or others in the room - differences to reactions to commercial breaks versus the program itself
- Write a short essay (350-500 words) explaining how the children's television show in your observations is defined in the genre of "children's television." -OR- Create a graphic organizer (Venn diagram, clustering, etc.) that explains how the children's television show in your observations is defined in the genre of "children's television."
- Create and administer a TV consumption survey to a parent or guardian of the child/children you are observing about the child's/children's TV-watching habits. -OR- Interview (and produce a transcript) a parent or guardian of the child/children you are observing about the child's/children's TV-watching habits. (Students should know from previous lesson plans or units how to perform interviews, know the difference between open & closed questions, and understand transcripts in order to complete this assignment.)

- Write a conclusions paper about your findings from the observation (350-500 words). -OR- Graph your findings in a chart of some sort.
- Present your findings orally for 10-15 minutes. -OR- Create and display a presentation board on your findings.

Practice Observation: 30-35 min. Students will work in pairs, observing and taking notes on each other watching 10-minute clips of a popular television. The teacher will guide this activity by pausing the program and making examples of students.

Days 7-10

Students will have access to the media center, computers, and art/presentation supplies in order to work on their projects. They will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss new observations in each class period. The teacher may want to space other activities in days in between so that this work does not fall over three consecutive class periods, thus giving more time to students for homework on the project. Day 11: Presentation Fair Students will present their findings at the fair either through an oral presentation or on a presentation board that the class can view.

Assessment

Assessment for Observation Notes (10% of final project grade):

This is complete work only. That is, students will receive a grade based on the fact that they have completed all three observations and taken relevant notes.

Assessment for Essay/Graphic Organizer (20% of final project grade):

Both the essay and graphic organizers should be clearly organized and free of spelling, mechanical, and grammar errors.

Assessment for Survey/Interview Transcripts (20% of final project grade):

This is complete work only. That is, students will receive a grade based on the fact that they have completed the assignment and adopted the information into their final presentations.

Assessment for Oral Presentation/Presentation Board (50% of final project grade):

Oral presentations will be graded on clarity, poise and ease of hearing the student's voice, organization of information, and inclusion of visual aides.

Presentation boards will be graded on inclusion of visual aides, aesthetic appeal, and organization of information. Presentation boards should be free of spelling, mechanical, and grammar errors.