



Get Them Thinking!

Use Media Literacy to Prepare Students for State Assessments

Sue Lockwood Summers

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DEDICATION

This book is lovingly dedicated to Bob - my husband, partner, editor, mentor, coach, support system, encourager, and best friend!

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Summers, Sue Lockwood.

Get them thinking! : use media literacy to prepare students for state assessments / Sue Lockwood Summers.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 1-58683-172-0 (pbk.)

1. Audio-visual education. 2. Media literacy. 3. Critical thinking—Study and teaching. 4. Educational tests and measurements—United States. I. Title.

LB1043.S89 2005

371.33'5—dc22

2004012670

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Published by Linworth Publishing, Inc.

480 East Wilson Bridge Road, Suite L

Worthington, Ohio 43085

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ISBN: 1-58683-172-0

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago I was a teacher and a single mother. For professional as well as personal reasons I became interested in learning about the effects of the mass media on children. At that time there was a great deal of research and professional writing about television and its effects on children. I decided to pursue a Master's degree in this area, but discovered that the media courses were basically "how-to" classes, such as how to create slide-tape presentations, how to use a darkroom to develop film, and how to write computer programs. Even after I received a Master's degree in Media, I continued to learn all I could on the subject of the mass media's ability to shape and influence the lives of children and teenagers.

I had the privilege of meeting an intriguing and wonderful man who taught graduate classes. He convinced me that I should take the information I had learned and offer a course for teachers. He turned out to be a very influential man in my life (he is now my husband) and he helped me design and develop a graduate course entitled "The Effects of Mass Media on Children." I taught this class for the University of Northern Colorado. After a few years, I realized that the course centered on the issues and problems, but did not offer helpful and hopeful solutions for teachers and parents.

In 1991 I stumbled upon the term "media literacy" and quickly discovered that it referred to critical thinking about the messages of the media. I took a professional sabbatical from my media specialist position and attended seminars and meetings, including a conference in Canada on the topic of media literacy. Much to my surprise there were hundreds of people in attendance from all over the world; they were from Scotland, England, New Zealand, Australia, France, and numerous other countries. There were relatively few people from the United States. I attended workshops and keynote presentations and connected with people in the United States group. The conference was life-changing.

By the time I returned to Colorado I was convinced that media literacy was the solution to many problems that had been attributed to the mass media. The United States is the foremost producer of media in the world, but at that time only a handful of teachers in the United States were infusing media literacy techniques into their teaching.

I created another graduate class with the assistance of my husband and began offering the course, "Media Literacy: How to Teach Students to Be Critical Thinkers About the Mass Media." Since then I have presented media literacy strategies at parent-teacher nights, teacher in-services, and educational conferences. I authored *MEDIA ALERT! 200 Activities to Create Media-Savvy Kids* (MEDIA ALERT! 2000) and co-authored *Changing the World through Media Education* (Fulcrum Publishing, 1998).

At the 2002 conference of the Colorado Educational Media Association, one of many conferences that has allowed me to share my passion for media literacy, I described my strategies for using media literacy to prepare students for state assessments. Donna Miller, editor for Linworth Publishing, was in the audience and asked me to write a book on this topic for media specialists and teachers.

The impact of state assessments on teachers and their daily curriculum choices has been phenomenal, and the ramifications of these standardized tests seem endless. One significant result is the limit placed upon “extra” curriculum units because they are not specifically detailed on the tests.

As a library media specialist in an elementary school for more than 20 years, I have seen teachers bring their own styles and interests to their classroom settings. Some might be fond of drama and allow the students to create and act out skits. Others have a passion for science and their classrooms are filled with realia from nature. Still others are travelers and encourage students to “visit” foreign places throughout the school year.

However, as accountability has tightened for teachers, administrators, and school boards regarding students’ test scores, those teacher-developed extras have vanished and the rigors of the “3 Rs” have once again assumed a position of dominance.

For thirteen years I have been an advocate of media literacy—the application of critical thinking to the messages of the mass media. During that time teachers and students have shown a genuine interest in learning about the creation, development, distribution, and impact of media messages on individuals and on society. Media literacy stimulates us to be better consumers and better citizens. We could not have a democracy without the media because most of what we know about government and society comes from information delivered via the mass media. On the other hand, it is imperative that the media know that the consumers of their messages demand truth and responsible reporting.

In years of teaching graduate courses in media literacy and speaking at educational conferences, I have never met anyone who does not believe that critical thinking is an essential part of what students need to learn. However, media literacy does not appear as a specific section on most state assessments, so teachers have had to let the subject matter slide or wait to teach it after the tests are over.

In reality, media literacy is part of the tests, as all state assessments do in fact measure the critical thinking of students. Media literacy teaches students about the culture’s messages in order for them to become wiser and more savvy about the world around them. What could be more crucial than authentic critical thinking?

During the years I have taught lessons that integrate concepts of media literacy into existing courses for students of all ages, I’ve observed that:

- students are highly motivated to learn about the media,
- teachers readily accept this approach as a necessary ingredient of a complete education, and
- communities that are properly introduced to this topic realize that the schools are broadening the education of their students.

After these experiences, in which media literacy training enabled students to perform better as test-takers and as citizens, I wrote this book. In schools across the nation it is essential to merge into extant curricula opportunities for students to practice critical thinking to prepare for state assessments and for life.

Three things make this book unique and worthy of the readers' time.

- Collaboration is highlighted. Media specialists can cooperate with content specialists and will find curriculum tie-ins for the activities in this book, despite the vast amount of curriculum content classroom teachers at all levels are required to cover every day.
- Integration is the key. No media specialist or teacher has extra time in the teaching day for additional subjects, so media literacy must be merged into the existing school day.
- Lessons in this book are authentic, meaningful, and interesting. Students enjoy analysis, investigation, and creation of media messages and will look forward to media literacy lessons.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the topic of media literacy for media specialists and teachers. For some, media literacy is a new subject area, while others may be familiar with it but have decided it was not feasible within existing time constraints. State assessments are currently a major issue in education across the nation and will be with us for the long term, but we must teach students what they need to know, not merely how to pass tests. Integration of media literacy into existing curriculum is proposed throughout this book as a cure for the state assessment blues.

In each of the next five chapters one aspect of the media process is discussed. Lessons for students in elementary school, middle school, and high school are offered. Each lesson has a curriculum tie-in and consists of authentic media-related activities for the students. The topics in this book are related to state assessment content focusing on the teaching of proficiencies students will need to succeed. A quick look at the Table of Contents shows the skills that regularly appear on state assessments, such as summarize, predict, sequence, determine point of view, target audience, format, writing styles, use appropriate word choice, analyze poetry, draw conclusions, and interpret statistics.

Chapters 1 through 8 contain helpful, ready-to-use reproducibles that supply a structure for gathering information and writing responses. In

addition, a number of transparency masters are included. There is a glossary of terms and definitions. The Appendix lists articles, books, Web sites, videos, and other resources to extend learning beyond the specific lessons described in this book.

For the activities in this book, media specialists and teachers can determine the specific media to be utilized and the amount of time to allocate for each lesson. Specified media and instructions for activities are merely suggestions, as educators regularly modify lessons to fit the needs of their students.

Go ahead and highlight text, write notes in the margins, add ideas for the next time the lesson is taught and personalize these lesson plans. This is a book to be used, not just read and stored on a shelf.

Teachers, media specialists, and students will never read, hear, or view the media the same way again after involvement with the activities in this book. They will become actively engaged in the process of analysis and want to discuss their impressions with others. Their eyes and ears will become more aware of the media's messages and their excitement about the culture will be infectious. Students will benefit from this dynamic approach, and school administrators may wonder why the test scores are better than ever before.

As teachers and media specialists integrate study about the current culture into daily lessons, media literacy will no longer be considered a new or superfluous subject, but the most effective way to teach critical thinking.



CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW

State assessment tests are inevitable in schools across the United States. Standardized assessments have been adopted as a form of accountability to measure the degree of learning that is taking place in our nation's schools. The accountability is justified because the nation's citizens who indirectly pay for the education system require it. State standards have been set in place, and they direct the development of the school curricula, which are, by definition, dynamic. Curricula must be modified periodically to keep up with contemporary ideas and strategies.

In addition to their function of measuring student learning, state assessments have also been used to gauge levels of teaching in the schools and, consequently, the performance of each school. This additional application of state assessment tests has introduced underlying questions of validity because the tests have been developed to measure achievement of students and their results are commonly used to rate effectiveness of teachers.

It is general knowledge within the education community that state assessment scores do not necessarily reflect the high level of teaching and the dedication of educators in most schools. Teachers are often frustrated with their students' test scores, knowing that

assessment topics have been adequately covered prior to the tests. It is apparent that low test scores do not necessarily correlate with the educators' level of expertise in their fields. One ramification of state assessments is that teachers refocus on teaching specific skills and knowledge. They continue to attend workshops, graduate classes, and conferences to learn better methods of teaching reading, writing, mathematics, and other subjects. Instruction does not seem to be at fault.

If there is an appropriate and well-planned curriculum and educators are hard at work preparing and sharing lessons on specific test topics, why do state assessments not mirror this excellence? It appears that students do not individually digest and transfer all that is taught to them during the school year. How can test scores better reflect the overall quality of teaching that occurs in classrooms during the school year?

The concern of teachers and media specialists is not what to teach. There is actually more curriculum to cover than time allows. The solution, therefore, must be to make changes in teaching strategies. It is essential that educators take a different approach. To continue to teach in a manner that does not effectively impact student performance on state assessments perpetuates the status quo. A different, more successful approach to teaching requires consideration of critical thinking and media literacy.

Critical Thinking

One constant on all state assessments is critical thinking. Educators must integrate critical thinking into all curricula to generate a lasting impact, rather than merely focusing on facts and skills within the subject matter. Teachers who recognize the goal of teaching thinking rather than just imparting knowledge help students make connections beyond the content of the coursework. However, due to pressure to complete the curriculum content within the confines of the schedule, attention is usually focused on the school curriculum.

For instance, as teachers create lesson plans about various writing styles, they usually draw on samples from library books or texts that are available within the school. They might have students use critical thinking lessons, such as "compare and contrast the two writing styles in these two essays." This activity will develop critical thinking. However, this lesson overlooks the opportunity to extend the learning to writing styles that are available outside of the school and part of the daily lives of students. A surefire way for critical thinking training to permeate all lessons is through the use of media literacy strategies.

Media Literacy?

Media literacy refers to the skills and knowledge needed to question, analyze, interpret, and evaluate media messages. It is the application of critical thinking to the messages of mass media that saturate our culture. A simple definition, created by the Alliance for a Media Literate America, states:

Media literacy empowers people to be both critical thinkers and creative producers of an increasingly wide range of messages using image, language, and sound. It is the skillful application of literacy skills to media and technology messages. As communication technologies transform society, they impact our understanding of ourselves, our communities, and our diverse cultures, making media literacy an essential life skill for the 21st century (www.amlainfo.org/medialit/index.php).

- Four steps to media literacy are awareness, analysis, reflection, and action.
- **Awareness** The first step to becoming media literate is an increased awareness of the messages of the media. An example of a lesson to accomplish this step is for students to list as many types of print and electronic media as they can. The outcome of the lesson is that students take notice of the communication methods that are being utilized in the culture around them.



What Is Media Literacy? A Broader Definition

“Within North America, media literacy is seen to consist of a series of communication competencies, including the ability to ACCESS, ANALYZE, EVALUATE and COMMUNICATE information in a variety of forms including both print and non-print messages. Interdisciplinary by nature, media literacy represents a necessary, inevitable, and realistic response to the complex, ever-changing electronic environment and communication cornucopia that surrounds us.

To become a successful student, responsible citizen, productive worker, or competent and conscientious consumer, an individual needs to develop expertise with the increasingly sophisticated information and entertainment media that address us on a multi-sensory level, affecting the way we think, feel and behave.

Today’s information and entertainment technologies communicate to us through a powerful combination of words, images and sounds. As such we need to develop a wider set of literacy skills helping us to both comprehend the messages we receive, and to effectively utilize these tools to design and distribute our own messages. Being literate in a media age requires critical thinking skills, which empower us as we make decisions, whether in the classroom, the living room, the workplace, the boardroom or the voting booth.

Finally, while media literacy does raise critical questions about the impact of media and technology, it is not an anti-media movement. Rather, it represents a coalition of concerned individuals and organizations, including educators, faith-based groups, health care-providers, and citizen and consumer groups, who seek a more enlightened way of understanding our media environment.”

Used with permission from the Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA), <www.amlainfo.org/medialit.html>

Figure 1.1: What is Media Literacy?

- **Analysis** This step involves “deconstruction” or the investigation of all parts of a message, such as the text, image, background, and props. At this level students should recognize that media messages did not just happen but that each was carefully designed.
- **Reflection** At this point the viewer, listener, or reader identifies the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs within the message and compares them to his own ideas. A suggestion for a lesson at this level is to assign students to visit a Web site and reflect on ideas that are presented.
- **Action** This final step focuses on what will be done with the message. Perhaps the message causes anger and instigates a letter-writing campaign. Perhaps it is a reminder of the speed limit and causes the driver to slow down. An activity that gets to this level involves students’ completing the first three levels and then taking action, such as writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper about a topic that has captured their interest.

It is important to note that media literate citizens must reach all four levels, but students may not attain all levels at each grade level. Educators must consider



National and State Standards

The driving force behind all curriculum development and test preparation is a set of content standards written by and for each state. Following is a list of Web sites to use in locating sets of national standards and compilations of state standards. Readers should also check specific state and school district standards.

State-by-State Media Literacy Standards (within content standards)

<www.med.sc.edu:1081/statelit.htm>

McREL National Standards and Benchmarks Compendium

<www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

McREL National Media Standards

<<http://198.17.205.11/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=7&StandardID=10>>

Colorado Information Literacy Standards

<www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/slinfolitindex.htm>

AASL Information Literacy Standards

<www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/AASL/Professional_Tools10/Information_Power/Information_Literacy_Standards_for_Student_Learning.htm>

National Standards for History

<www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards>

National Standards for Civics and Government

<www.civiced.org/stds.html>

National Science Standards

<www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/nses/html>

Standards for the English/Language Arts

<www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

<www.ncss.org/standards/toc.html>

Math National Standards

<<http://standards.nctm.org/document/index.htm>>

National Geography Standards

<www.nationalgeographic.com/resources/ngo/education/standardslist.html>

National Educational Technology Standards

<<http://cnets.iste.org/students>>

National Standards for Music Education

<www.menc.org/publication/books/standards.htm>

National Standards for Arts Education

<<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standardss.cfm>>

Physical Education Standards

<www.mcrel.org/compendium/Standard.asp?SubjectID=18>

the four steps and have students reach the levels that are appropriate in each lesson.

Media literacy can be found in the state standards of almost all states, although the term “media literacy” might not actually be used. For example, the Colorado Content Standards for Reading and Writing include:

Standard 2: Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Standard 4: Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

Standard 5: Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, references, and technological sources.

The state’s content standards acknowledge the wide range of skills that must be mastered in the education process. In addition, Information Literacy Standards state that the student who can access, evaluate, and use information critically and creatively and contributes in a positive and ethical way is information literate.

What About That Test?

When teachers and media specialists extend learning beyond the classroom and initiate opportunities for students to think critically about the media messages that fill today’s culture, students are motivated to retain the skills and knowledge in a new and personal way. The transfer of learned skills to new situations is thus

improved. Each test presents unique and never-before-seen problems and writing samples in which students must use their prior learning to comprehend, decipher, and apply their knowledge and skills. For example, students may have read many stories during the school year and followed their teachers' instructions to determine the authors' purposes for the writings. When a new piece of writing is offered on the test, teachers assume previous experiences will enable students to remember and then transfer the skills from the prior lessons. However, the content and format of the test item might be radically different from the stories that students have experienced. This assessment is truly a test of the students' broader critical thinking skills, rather than a specific skill to determine an author's purpose.

Educators who teach critical thinking rather than a series of individual skills will enable students to handle any test item. Critical thinking is often seen as obtuse and unwieldy for teaching in a classroom. However, by using media literacy strategies, critical thinking activities that are focused on media messages, teachers connect with their students' lives in a meaningful way and teach critical thinking concepts that will stay with students.

The goal of media literacy is not to create cynics. There exists a continuum of thinkers, with sponges on one end and cynics on the other.

Continuum of Thinking

Sponges ————— **Healthy Skeptics** ————— **Cynics**

Sponges absorb everything they see, hear, or read and assume all of it is true. Cynics dismiss everything they see, hear, or read and assume all of it is incorrect or biased information. The media literate citizen must be a healthy skeptic with skills to judge the reliability of sources of information, to verify the validity of facts, and finally to reflect on the meaning and impact on one's personal life. However, these skills are not innate; they must be learned and practiced.

Figure 1.3, on page 6, is the *GrassRoots Taxonomy of Thinking Skills* (adapted in Canada from Bloom's Taxonomy) gives a visual breakdown of levels, verbs that best reflect thinking at each level, and examples of each. The *GrassRoots Taxonomy of Thinking Skills* can be a valuable aid when media specialists and teachers create lessons.

Critical thinking skills in this book are generic to all state assessments. Many critical thinking skills can be taught or reinforced by applying them to messages of the mass media.

Integration and Collaboration

The keys to successful media literacy lessons are integration and collaboration. No teacher has time to teach extra subjects. Therefore, media literacy cannot be handled as a separate subject.

The integration of media literacy education into existing curriculum areas encourages students to look at the world around them in new ways, perhaps for the first time, while they study the curriculum content. The teacher or media specialist

Figure 1.3: GrassRoots Taxonomy of Thinking Skills

GrassRoots Taxonomy of Thinking Skills

(adapted from Bloom's Taxonomy of Thinking Skills)

Category	Knowledge Information Gathering	Comprehension Confirming	Application Making Use of Knowledge	Analysis (Higher Order) Taking Apart	Synthesis (Higher Order) Putting Together	Evaluation (Higher Order) Judging the Outcome
Description The skills demonstrated at this level are those of:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation and recall of information; • knowledge of dates, events, places; • knowledge of major ideas; • mastery of subject matter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding information; • grasping meaning; • translating knowledge into new context; • interpreting facts, comparing, contrasting; • ordering, grouping, inferring causes; • predicting consequences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using information; • using methods, concepts, theories in new situations; • solving problems using required skills or knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeing patterns; • organization of parts; • recognition of hidden meanings; • identification of components. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using old ideas to create new ones; • generalizing from given facts; • relating knowledge from several areas; • predicting, drawing conclusions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comparing and discriminating between ideas; • assessing value of theories, presentations; • making choices based on reasoned argument; • verifying value of evidence; • recognizing subjectivity.
What the Student Does	Student recalls or recognizes information, ideas, and principles in the approximate form in which they were learned.	Student translates, comprehends, or interprets information based on prior learning.	Student selects, transfers, and uses data and principles to complete a problem or task.	Student distinguishes, classifies, and relates the assumptions, hypotheses, evidence, or structure of a statement or question.	Student originates, integrates, and combines ideas into a product, plan, or proposal that is new to him or her.	Student appraises, assesses, or critiques on a basis of specific standards and criteria.
Sample Trigger Words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define • list • label • name • identify • repeat • who • what • when • where • tell • describe • collect • examine • tabulate • quote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • predict • associate • estimate • differentiate • summarize • describe • interpret • discuss • extend • compare • contrast • distinguish • explain • paraphrase • illustrate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apply • demonstrate • complete • illustrate • show • examine • modify • relate • change • classify • experiment • discover • use • compute • solve • construct • calculate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • separate • order • explain • connect • divide • compare • select • explain • infer • arrange • classify • analyze • categorize • compare • contrast • separate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • combine • integrate • rearrange • substitute • plan • create • design • invent • what if? • prepare • generalize • compose • modify • hypothesize • develop • formulate • rewrite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decide • grade • test • measure • recommend • judge • explain • compare • summarize • assess • critique • justify • discriminate • support • convince • conclude • select • rank • predict • argue
Sample Task(s)	Name the food groups and at least two items of food in each group. Make an acrostic poem about healthy food.	Write a simple menu for breakfast, lunch or dinner using the food guide chart.	What would you ask shoppers in a supermarket if you were doing a survey of what food they eat? (10 questions)	Prepare a report about what the people in this class eat for breakfast.	Create a song and dance to sell bananas.	Make a booklet about 10 important eating habits that would be suitable for the whole school to follow in order to eat correctly.

Used with permission, The GrassRoots Program, Canada's SchoolNet. part of the Canadian Ministry of Industry (Industry Canada) <www.schoolnet.ca/grassroots/e/project.centre/shared/taxonomy.asp>

needs to present the subject matter that is to be taught in an innovative way.

Collaboration between the media specialist and the classroom teacher or specialist teacher can reap huge rewards. The library is not an entity unto itself but is a service center catering to the needs of the entire school. Students often do not see connections between what is learned in the library media center, what is learned in the classroom, and what is necessary for success in the “real world.” Effective collaboration can result in significantly more realistic and exciting lessons for students. Information skills taught in the library and applied to the subject being studied in the classroom work best when the teacher and media specialist have planned the lessons together and perhaps even taught them together. Each of these specialists brings experience and knowledge to the team. Media literacy can become part of each lesson plan to ensure that lessons are authentic and that they focus on real-life examples. This innovational technique, the integration of media literacy strategies, motivates students to see the “bigger picture” without resulting in a curriculum that is overloaded with additional instructional units.

This book is filled with lessons that can be used in the collaboration process. Consider specialist teachers as well as the classroom teachers. Perhaps there is a gifted-and-talented class or a special-education class, where the teachers rarely work directly with the media specialist. Perhaps there has been ongoing collaboration between the classroom teachers and the media specialist, but the art, music, and physical education teachers have never felt the need to work together. The concepts of media literacy might initiate new and compelling reasons for collaboration.

An excellent way to collaborate and to bring the world into the classroom is the use of classroom sets of newspapers. The format and content of this medium can provide dynamic topics for study. News articles, advertising, and opinion pieces offer valid writing styles to analyze.



Figure 1.4: Newspapers in Education

Newspapers in Education

Many local and regional newspaper organizations now have “Newspapers in Education” departments. One function of the department is to participate in the educational process by offering multiple copies of newspapers delivered to the school and bundled for classroom use. The papers are offered at reduced rates and in some instances, as a result of local sponsorships, are free to teachers.

The use of classroom sets of newspapers offers numerous advantages to K-12 teachers and media specialists and is beneficial to almost every curriculum area. Teacher guides are related to individual subjects and current news sections or topics. Some offer teacher guides with strategies to help students prepare for state assessments.

Teachers and media specialists have found newspapers invaluable in teaching about current events, photojournalism, “hard” news, “soft” news, advertising, layout, bylines, editorials, reviews, headlines, comic strips, inserts, coupons, travel, history, sports, the stock market, geography, math, language arts, English, drama, writing styles, and many more subjects. Contact a local or regional newspaper to learn about the guides and services available to teachers.



Cable in the Classroom

Cable in the Classroom is the cable industry's nonprofit education foundation. Its purpose is to connect educators with programming and resources that have been designed and distributed via cable channels with students in mind. Check out the Web site at <ciconline.org> for a dynamic source of information about learning resources, advances in teaching and learning, and demonstrations of the educational power of broadband technology. *Access Learning* (formerly known as *Cable in the Classroom Magazine*) is provided to schools by local cable companies throughout the nation. The magazine lists curriculum-related programming in subject areas and offers a monthly overview called "Taping Highlights." In addition, the magazine has timely articles, "Content Connections," "Web Spotlights," "Teacher Tips," and other sections which are helpful for media specialists, teachers, and administrators. It also offers contact information for education-friendly cable networks. Below is a list of network Web sites to enable educators to learn more about teachers' guides and curricula that are available, most of which are free.

Web sites for popular cable network resources include:

A&E Network	<www.aetv.com/class>
Biography Channel	<www.aetv.com/class>
BRAVO	<www.bravotv.com/>
Cable News Network (CNN)	<www.cnnstudentnews.com>
Discovery Channel	<http://discoveryschool.com>
The History Channel	<www.historychannel.com/classroom>
Home & Garden Television	<www.HGTV.com>
Nickelodeon Channel	<www.teachers.nick.com>
WAM!	<www.wamtv.com>

Many teachers and media specialists are leery of introducing television programming into their school days, believing that students see far too much television outside of school. In reality, television networks offer many instructional and educational programs that enhance learning by bringing school subjects to life. Most educators are familiar with the benefits of public broadcasting programs, and cable provides opportunities to collaborate with classroom teachers.

Five Essential Questions

This book is unique in that it applies the focus of critical thinking to five essential media literacy questions. Each of the five questions is the focus of a chapter in this book, and each chapter includes grade-appropriate lessons for students in elementary, middle, and high school. The questions cause students to investigate the content and format of media messages, the role of mass media in our culture, and the impact of those messages on themselves and on society. This process breaks the topic of media literacy into manageable questions that can be asked about all media messages. These questions supply the outline for learning activities in this book.

Five essential questions that supply the framework for this book are:

Who created the message? (Chapter 2)

The focus is on the author or creator of the message; the purpose the creator had in mind; the point of view, and perhaps bias, in the message; the author's intended audience for the message; and the format the author selected.

What is the message? (Chapter 3)

At this point, analysis (deconstruction) of the message begins. Through close examination the reader, listener, or viewer concentrates on the parts that make up the whole. Thinking skills include investigation of writing style, word choice, and image; determination of whether the message is fact or opinion, fiction or nonfiction; the ability to summarize content and put it in sequence; and the recognition of statistics and how they can influence us.

How was the message delivered? (Chapter 4)

The focus of activities and discussion is on context and visual clues, genre, how messages capture the attention of the audience, and poetry as a style of communication.

What is the impact of the message on me? (Chapter 5)

This chapter concentrates on reflection, where the focus is on personal reactions and responses. Skills to be developed here are essential in activities such as judging the reliability of the message and recognizing personal responsibilities.

What is the impact of the message on society? (Chapter 6)

The last question in this series is concerned with the ability to draw conclusions, make inferences, predict, and judge the worth of a message. These are higher-level thinking skills that enable students to look beyond their own lives and critique the media's roles in society. Each student continues to further develop an individual "hierarchy of believability."

Chapter 7 provides instruction and learning activities to help students move to the next step, the creation of original media messages. At this point students have covered the five essential questions and completed the four steps of media literacy. Now the fun begins! Students work at a higher level of Bloom's Taxonomy of Thinking because they are functioning at the synthesis level. They get excited as they realize it is time to create, design, develop, compose, invent, or rewrite, and let their creative juices fly.

In **Chapter 8** support is offered to expand the integration of media literacy into all curricula at every level. Additional activities are supplied to help media specialists and teachers work together to merge media literacy into the daily lives of students. As media literacy becomes an integral part of all subject areas, students will become critical thinkers and better citizens.

There is a **Glossary** of terms, some of which may be new to readers. The **Appendix** is an assortment of resources that includes media literacy organizations, lesson plans, books, Web sites, and videotapes.

Media Literacy and Student Learning

Numerous studies have attempted to assess the impact of media literacy training on students. One recent study, “Measuring the acquisition of media literacy skills,” in the July/August/September 2003 edition of *Reading Research Quarterly*, was developed by Renee Hobbs and Richard Frost. Hobbs, one of the founders of the media literacy movement in the United States, currently teaches at Temple University in Pennsylvania.

This research examined one central question: How does media literacy instruction, integrated within a yearlong course in high school English language arts, affect the development of students’ message comprehension, writing, and critical thinking skills? ...

This study measured students’ comprehension and message-analysis skills in response to three nonfiction message formats: reading a print news-magazine article, listening to a U.S. National Public Radio (NPR) audio news commentary, and viewing a television news segment targeted at teenagers. Comprehension skills were measured after exposure to each message through a paper-and-pencil response to open-ended questions. Writing skills were measured by coding a sample of open-ended response text for word count, holistic writing quality, and the number of spelling and usage errors. Analysis skills were measured after exposure to each message with use of paper-and-pencil measures with open-ended and checklist items to determine students’ ability to identify purpose, target audience, construction techniques, values and point of view, omitted information, and comparison-contrast...

This research shows that media literacy instruction embedded in a secondary-level English language arts course can be effective in meeting traditional academic goals...

This study shows how specific textual-analysis skills can be acquired through classroom activities that incorporate a variety of types of popular media.

The study acknowledged a definite improvement in learning as compared to the control group.

How to Start

To change the school design or the approach that teachers use in school cannot be accomplished by one person. It is necessary to start the discussion about media literacy and see who is ready to get involved. Then a study group can be formed. The process should grow and generate the interest of other educators. Individual media specialists, curriculum planners, and teachers can begin media literacy strategies in their media centers and classrooms with support from the administration. However, impacting the entire school or district will require time and resources and should be considered at least a two-year process.

Perhaps as the students discuss, investigate, examine, and judge media messages during their learning activities, the media specialists, teachers, and support staff will also be challenged to question, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the

media messages that fill our culture. Not only will the students welcome the new approach that focuses on the world around them, but also many of the conversations in the hallways, on buses, in homes, and in the community will be critiques of the mass media.

State assessment scores should slowly improve without major changes in funding, class size, or radical shifts in programs. Media literacy is that powerful.

Getting the School Administration Involved

Gaining the school administration's support is the first step in the process of integrating media literacy into the school's curriculum. Before media literacy is merged into the daily lives of students, it is important for those people who will be directly involved to have conversations with the principal, assistant principal, and perhaps the area superintendent, depending on the size of the school district. During the discussions it will be wise to share copies of the state-by-state media literacy grid, found at <www.med.sc.edu:1081/statelit.htm>. The grid details how media literacy language is merged into each state's content standards in areas such as language arts, social studies, and technology.

It is important to be prepared to present and explain information about media literacy, including what it is, how it will benefit students, and, most important, how this approach is likely to enhance scores on state assessments. It may be prudent to bring samples of media literacy lesson plans and resources to meetings with the administration. Chapter 8 discusses more thoroughly the concerns about paring back school activities in order to improve student performance on tests. It would be advisable to absorb that material before the meeting in order to better field concerns about whether media literacy is extraneous to the curriculum.

Gaining the cooperation and support of the administration should be seen as a process, not a stand-alone effort. Since the focus is to modify all curricula at all grade levels, it is important that sufficient background information be made available. Locate articles about media literacy in education journals and share copies with administrators prior to the first meeting. Use the resources found in the Appendix to locate media literacy articles. The more the teachers and media specialists have done their homework regarding the benefits of media literacy, the more likely media literacy will be embraced as a positive innovation.

Once the administration is "on board," offer in-service training to teachers to whet their appetites about media literacy, share easy-to-use lesson plans such as those found in this book, and generate discussions about the mass media, not as a threat to existing curriculum, but as an approach that bridges the gap between school and the rest of the culture and improves state assessment results.

Getting the Community Involved

In addition to the school administration, the community of parents also needs to be introduced to this approach. Students should not suddenly be studying television commercials or magazine covers without their parents being involved in the media literacy process and the reasons for the change in the curriculum. Until the term "media literacy" becomes a household term, it will need some explanation.

A presentation to the school board to offset concerns might be a fruitful first step. Then the parent-teacher organization at the school might arrange for a Media

Literacy Night for parents and family members. On page 13, the Reproducible 1.1, “Parent Letter” offers a sample letter that, with local modification, can be sent to families before the Media Literacy Night to generate interest. Transparency 1.1 “How Is Media Literacy Related to State Assessments?” also found in this chapter on page 14, offers topics for discussion with teachers, school board, parents, and other interested community members. It is not necessary to cover all media literacy activities that are to be incorporated. It is important that parents have an introduction to the topic and an opportunity to participate in sample media literacy activities and discuss prospective benefits from the new approach.

(School Letterhead)

(Date)

Dear Parents,

In an age when the mass media have become part of all of our lives, it is essential that the study of mass media messages be part of your student's education. As a means of preparing students for state assessments and successful lives, we have decided to integrate media literacy into the curriculum at our school.

Media literacy is the application of critical thinking to the messages of the mass media. The skills and knowledge in this field of study prepare students to question, analyze, interpret, and evaluate the messages they see, hear, and read. The critical thinking that will be part of learning in all subject areas will help students become discerning and competent citizens. Media literacy may be a new term, but critical thinking has always been part of education.

We invite you to be part of the education process. We are scheduling a MEDIA LITERACY NIGHT to be held at the school on (date)_____. (time) _____. Please plan to attend and learn more about this motivating approach to learning.

We look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Sincerely,

Consider these critical thinking skills that are included on state assessments and are also inherent in evaluating media messages:

- **Discriminate Between Fact and Opinion**
- **Determine Point of View**
- **Recognize the Author's Purpose**
- **Classify as Fiction or Nonfiction**
- **Summarize**
- **Identify Genre**
- **Recognize the Writing Style**
- **Interpret**
- **Compare and Contrast**
- **Judge the Reliability**
- **Analyze**
- **Develop Organizational Skills**
- **Improve Vocabulary**
- **Predict What Happens Next**
- **Determine Relevance**
- **Sequence**
- **Draw Conclusions**