

Selling Reality: An Analysis of Prime Time Reality Programming

English, Grade 11, College Preparation, ENG3C

Overview

Students examine many facets of prime time television programming, focusing on reality programming: the kinds of storylines that are seen, the overall messages and values being conveyed, and the audiences being targeted. They conduct a detailed analysis of advertising during prime time reality programming, including costs, product placement, and value to the advertiser/sponsor. Based on their analysis of this advertising, students examine the ethics and effectiveness of the advertising strategies in reaching the target audience.

Connections to Financial Literacy

Students examine the difference between real needs and artificially constructed desires as presented in reality television programming and ways in which audiences are targeted by reality programming and advertising. They consider the implications of consumer and advertising messages promoted in “reality” programming and the ethical implications of product placement in reality television programming.

Connections to Curriculum

Students critically analyse television advertising. The content focus is on the strand *Media Studies* particularly explaining how media texts prompt different responses and the forms, conventions, and techniques that are used to create meaning.

The curriculum expectations addressed in each lesson are identified within the lesson plan. The curriculum expectations, including examples and other supporting information, can be accessed through a hyperlink within the lesson.

Considerations for Planning

These lessons may take several periods to complete.

Viewing of the reality program can be completed for homework, or could take place in class, using an episode available online or on DVD.

Teachers need to be aware that for some students, their television viewing may be restricted. Some students may also have restrictions around watching reality TV programs.

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Ads During Prime Time Lesson 1

Students conduct a survey of prime time television programming, highlighting the various kinds of television programs that have come to dominate the major television networks during “prime time.” In particular, students examine reality programming: the kinds of storylines that are seen, the overall messages and values being conveyed, and the audiences being targeted.

Connections to Financial Literacy

Students examine the difference between real needs and artificially constructed desires as presented in reality television programming and ways in which audiences are targeted by reality programming and advertising.

Curriculum Expectations

[Click here](#) to access expectations in full, with examples.

Media Studies

1. Understanding Media Texts: demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts

- 1.1** explain how media texts, including increasingly complex texts, are created to suit particular purposes and audiences
- 1.4** explain why some media texts might prompt different responses from different audiences

2. Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques: identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning

- 2.2** identify conventions and/or techniques used in a variety of media forms and explain how they convey meaning and influence their audience

Learning Goals

Students will:

- analyse reality television programs as constructions
- identify the techniques—both symbolic and technical—that are part of reality television programs
- identify the advertising strategies used, and analyse the consumer messages and values conveyed through reality television

Sample Success Criterion

I can describe how the sequence of images and scenes created an impact on the meaning of the story.

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Ads During Prime Time Lesson 1		
Considerations for Planning		
<p>Readiness</p> <p>Students should have an understanding of the key concepts for media literacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All media are constructions • The media contain ideological and value messages • The media have social and political implications • Various audiences interpret and respond to media messages differently • The media have financial interests • Each medium has its own language, style, techniques, codes, conventions, and aesthetics • Form and content are closely related in the media • The media have commercial implications (www.aml.ca). <p>Students should have understanding of basic advertising strategies – specifically the use of claims and emotional appeals</p>	<p>Terminology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime time television • Target audience • Reality television 	<p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12, Subject-Specific Examples – Media, Grades 7-10, 2005 for sample templates • Handout: Deconstructing a Reality Program <p>Advertising resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.aml.ca • www.media-awareness.ca

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Ads During Prime Time Lesson 1	
Minds On	Connections
<p>Whole Group → Setting a Context through Brainstorming</p> <p>Lead a brainstorming session where students generate a list of popular prime time television programs, aired between 7 pm and 11 pm.</p> <p>Based on this list, students discuss what is meant by the term “prime time” on television.</p> <p>Guide the discussion with questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of shows do we often see during prime time? • Who is most likely to be watching shows during this time period? • What is meant by the term “reality” television? Is the term “reality” misleading? Why or why not? <p>Review the meaning of the following key concepts in media literacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the media construct reality - each medium has its own language, style, techniques, codes, conventions and aesthetics. <p>Relate these two concepts to the discussion of reality programming.</p> <p>Pose the following scenario:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagine that a video camera is placed in one corner of the classroom to record our lessons for one school day. If we were to show the tape to parents, would this accurately depict what really happens in class? • What does this tell us about “reality” programming? <p>In making their response, students consider the roles that camera placement, shot composition, and editing play in constructing reality television.</p>	<p>A or L Assess students’ knowledge of prime time and reality television, through their ability to cite examples, and explain the meaning of the terms.</p>

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Ads During Prime Time Lesson 1	
Consolidation	Connections
<p>Whole Group → Sharing and Summarizing</p> <p>Students share their analysis with the class.</p> <p>Lead a discussion that summarizes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the main characteristics of reality television programming with a focus on the ways in which “reality” television programs are examples of media constructions • the kinds of advertising messages and strategies that have been identified as being part of the programs (e.g., commercials for products or services, or sponsorship of a program) <p>Record the discussion points in a class chart.</p>	<p>AOL Assess students’ understanding, using co-constructed success criteria and the results of their analysis of the reality program.</p>

HANDOUT

Deconstructing a Reality Program

In your group, select a reality program from the posted list.

Use the following guidelines to deconstruct the program considering the following: text, audience, and production.

Decide how you will present your information. You can write a report, make an oral presentation, create a slide presentation or video, or use another format of your choosing.

Text

Describe what typically happens in each episode, and who is involved in the story.

- Are the characters realistic? Why or why not? Why do you think they were chosen or “cast” in this program?
- What are the storylines about? Where do they take place?
- Are there “heroes” and “villains”?
- Do the storylines include plot development, with rising action, conflict, climax, and resolution?
- What are the messages and values conveyed through the storyline?
- What effects do interview segments have on the meaning of the show? (if included)

Audience

- Who is the target audience for this program? How can you tell (Consider the program itself, and the context in which it appears—that is, its televised time slot.)?
- What commercials are aired during the program?
- Why might advertisers want their commercials aired during this time?
- Does the show have corporate sponsors? If so, how do you know who they are?
- Why would a company want to sponsor this show?
- In what ways are the sponsor and its products visible during the program?

Production

Describe the ways in which the show is produced (Consider the use of various production techniques and elements such as camera shots and angles, editing, music, voice-overs, etc.)

Explain the effects of these various production elements:

- Are certain production techniques used at certain key moments during the program, e.g., the use of music to create an emotional impact during a particular scene?
- How is editing used in the show? Is it used to construct scenes of conflict, romance or suspense?
- Describe the use of voice-overs. How do they help to construct reality during particular scenes?

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Advertising Costs Lesson 2

Students conduct a detailed analysis of advertising during prime time reality programming. They track the advertisers who have bought commercial time during a program; determine the cost of placing a 30-second commercial during the show; and examine the ways in which product placement (as a form of advertising) is woven into the narrative of the storyline, the use of stock characters, setting, and plot devices. Based on their analysis of this advertising, students examine the ethics and effectiveness of the advertising strategies in reaching the target audience.

Connections to Financial Literacy

Students consider the implications of consumer and advertising messages promoted in “reality” programming and the ethical implications of product placement in reality television programming.

Curriculum Expectations

[Click here](#) to access expectations in full, with examples.

Media Studies

1. Understanding Media Texts: demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts

- 1.1 explain how media texts, including increasingly complex texts, are created to suit particular purposes and audiences
- 1.4 explain why some media texts might prompt different responses from different audiences

2. Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques: identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning

- 2.2 identify conventions and/or techniques used in a variety of media forms and explain how they convey meaning and influence their audience

Learning Goals

Students will:

- identify the advertising strategies used, and analyse the consumer messages and values conveyed through reality television
- identify the techniques—both symbolic and technical—that are part of reality television advertising

Sample Success Criterion

I can define, provide examples, and assess the impact of various strategies on the target audience for a reality television episode, e.g., product placements, program-themed commercials, product occurrences, prizes and giveaways.

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Advertising Costs Lesson 2		
Considerations for Planning		
<p>Readiness</p> <p>Students should have an understanding of the key concepts for media literacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All media are constructions • The media contain ideological and value messages • The media have social and political implications • Various audiences interpret and respond to media messages differently • The media have financial interests • Each medium has its own language, style, techniques, codes, conventions, and aesthetics • Form and content are closely related in the media • The media have commercial implications (www.aml.ca). <p>Students should have understanding of basic advertising strategies – specifically the use of claims and emotional appeals</p>	<p>Terminology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product placement • Product occurrences 	<p>Materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12, Subject-Specific Examples – Media, Grades 7-10, 2005 for sample templates: • Handout: Advertising in Reality Programs <p>Advertising resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.aml.ca • www.media-awareness.ca • http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/media_entertainment/niensens-tops-of-2011-advertising/ • www.adage.com • http://www.frankwbaker.com/prime_time_programs_30_sec_ad_costs.htm

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Advertising Costs Lesson 2	
Minds On	Connections
<p>Whole Group → Discussing Advertising on Reality Programs</p> <p>After a brief review of what students have learned about reality programming, lead a discussion that focuses on advertising in reality television. Emphasize that television networks make their income from the money advertisers pay to place their commercials in particular “time slots” during television programs.</p> <p>As a class, research the cost of a 30-second commercial aired during prime time reality programs. Consult websites such as http://www.frankwbaker.com/prime_time_programs_30_sec_ad_costs.htm for this information.</p> <p>Guide students’ critical thinking by posing the question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the cost of buying 30 seconds of airtime for a commercial tell you about the importance of advertising strategies? 	<p>A^{or}L During a review of advertising strategies that are part of prime-time programming, assess students’ knowledge and awareness of current advertising trends and terminology as it relates to advertising on television.</p>
Action!	Connections
<p>Pairs → Focusing on Advertising in Reality Programs</p> <p>Work with students to co-construct a list of success criteria for a critical analysis of a television program.</p> <p>With a partner, students continue their analysis of a reality television program with a focus on advertising. As part of their analysis, students respond to a series of questions. See Handout: Advertising in Reality Programs.</p> <p>Whole Class → Sharing Findings about Advertising in Reality Programs</p> <p>Pairs post their responses to the questions.</p> <p>In a Gallery Walk, students note similarities in the findings and add any comments or opinions they have on sticky notes.</p>	<p>A^{or}L Provide verbal and written feedback regarding students’ analysis of advertising and their initial insights as to the messages being conveyed as well as the target audience. Use the co-constructed success criteria to give this feedback.</p>

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Advertising Costs Lesson 2	
Consolidation	Connections
<p>Whole Class/Individual → Expressing Opinions</p> <p>Use a values line strategy to discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How would you react to the following comments about reality programming and the messages and values conveyed through the shows? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Most reality programs today are about the exploitation of people’s difficulties and struggles, or their hopes and dreams, in exchange for ratings and profits.”</i> <i>“Reality television is altruistic and provides an essential service—to help those in need—and that’s why they are popular.”</i> Where do you stand on the issues being raised? <p>Lead a discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where did you see example of “exploitation” and/or “essential service”? How effective is reality television as a vehicle for the companies representing the products? Do you think product placement during reality programming is more effective than product placement during sitcoms or dramas? Why or why not? What advice would you give to viewers about advertising during reality television? What should they know or be aware of? <p>Following the discussion, students write a journal entry in response to the question: What recommendations would you make (to television viewers and to reality television producers regarding advertising practices of reality television programs)?</p> <p>Pairs/Small Groups → Storyboarding an Episode for a Reality Program</p> <p>Students develop an outline for an episode of a reality program of their choice. They make a list of potential product placements that could occur during this episode, considering the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the target audience? What companies do you think would be interested in your episode? Explain the reasons for your choices. Who is cast in the show? How can you create an emotional connection between the actors and the product? Between the viewer and the product? 	<p>Note: A Values Line allows students flexibility in showing where they stand on an issue; they choose one of two choices or position themselves between those two extremes.</p> <p>Tip See Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12, Subject-Specific Examples – Media, Grades 7-10, 2005, p. 17 for a storyboard template that could be used as part of the outline.</p> <p>A⁴⁵L Assess students’ understanding of the financial benefits for the advertiser, as well as the impact of the advertising strategies on audiences, using co-constructed success criteria and their presentation of their findings.</p>

HANDOUT

Advertising in Reality Programs

With your partner, select a reality program to examine its advertising strategies.

Advertising and Reality Programs

What commercials are broadcast during the reality program you selected?

- Why do you think advertisers decided to place their commercials during this program? What factors would they take into consideration, (e.g., target audience)?
- What are the commercials selling?
- What techniques are being used to appeal to the target audience?

Program-themed Commercials

Many television critics have observed that program-themed commercials are becoming increasingly popular during reality programming.

- Do the commercials aired during your program reflect or connect to the program theme? If so, in what ways?
- What effect might these commercials have on viewers' response to advertising during television programs?

Product Placement

Product placement is another strategy advertisers use to sell their product. Product placement occurs when advertisers pay money to have their product included as part of a program, (e.g., presence of a logo, or company colours, something used or worn by one of the characters, or a product or message that appears in the background).

- Are there examples of product placements in your reality program?
- Why do you think those products have been included?
- What is the connection between the program and the products placed there?
- Do you think this is an effective advertising strategy? Explain.
- Are the products shown within the program given more legitimacy than those shown in commercials? Why or why not?

Prizes and Giveaways

Many programs offer giveaways or prizes to contestants, participants, or the audience.

- Does this occur during your program? Explain.
- How do people react to these giveaways? Why do you think they react this way?
- What message does this give the audience about the product or service being given away and about the show that provides them?

Role of the Product

Many products in reality television are almost like characters, in that they have a particular "role." These roles include something that can help people, a prize or an event, or a symbol for something else, (e.g., a symbol of a certain personal quality or value such as community support)?

- What kind of role is given to the product in the show?
- What emotional connection is the audience encouraged to make as a result?
- How are these connections created?

Curriculum Expectations

Financial Literacy in Grade 11 English

English, Grade 11, College Preparation, ENG3C

Ads During Prime Time Lesson 1	
Media Studies	
Overall Expectations	Specific Expectations
<p>1. Understanding Media Texts: demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts</p>	<p>Purpose and Audience</p> <p>1.1 explain how media texts, including increasingly complex texts, are created to suit particular purposes and audiences (<i>e.g., reality television shows use ordinary people from different walks of life to appeal to different demographic groups; an infomercial uses techniques associated with public service announcements to persuade people to buy a product “for their own good”</i>)</p> <p>Teacher prompt: “Why do advertisements feature endorsements from ‘professionals’ and testimonials from ‘satisfied customers?’”</p> <p>Audience Responses</p> <p>1.4 explain why the same media text might prompt different responses from different audiences (<i>e.g., explain why a public service announcement about gambling addiction might prompt different reactions from consumers and people in the casino business; explain why some audiences might respond positively and others negatively to celebrity endorsements of social justice causes</i>¹)</p> <p>Teacher prompts: “Why might male and female players respond differently to gender stereotypes in video games?” “Why might an unflattering newspaper photograph of a politician prompt different responses among different groups?”</p>
<p>2. Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques: identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning</p>	<p>Conventions and Techniques</p> <p>2.2 identify conventions and/or techniques used in a variety of media forms and explain how they convey meaning and influence their audience (<i>e.g., TV sitcoms use the simulated audience response of a laugh-track to influence viewers to share the “audience’s” amusement</i>)</p> <p>Teacher prompt: “What elements in the opening of a TV sitcom are designed to ‘hook’ viewers and encourage them to stay tuned?”</p>

¹TL Media 7-10 “Examining Multiple Perspectives of an Advertisement” 22

Curriculum Expectations

Financial Literacy in Grade 11 English

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Advertising Costs Lesson 2	
Media Studies	
Overall Expectations	Specific Expectations
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