

## Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Media Literacy

This week’s lesson covers the media and media literacy, beginning with a discussion of the importance of *background knowledge* when analyzing, discussing or debating an issue. Simply put, without a strong foundation of facts about a topic under consideration, no amount of logic or rhetorical skill can make up for not knowing what you’re talking (and thinking) about.

Since many important topics (including many issues raised during an election) are complex and/or global in nature, chances are a bulk of our background knowledge will come to us via media sources such as newspapers and magazine, radio, television and the Internet. But how can we know whether or not this information is accurate, relevant or unbiased?

Before thinking about individual news sources, it is important to understand how the fundamental components of media (such as words and images) delivered via any news source interact with our senses (particularly sight and hearing) to provide the factual/logical and emotional information we use to make decisions and understand the world.

As we look at specific news sources (like a major newspaper or cable news program), the field of Media Literacy offers ways to analyze these news “products” to determine accuracy and potential bias. And any discussion of the news media must take into account the most important trend impacting both producers and consumers of media: the “democratization” and transformation of media brought on by the Internet.

### ***Terminology***

Important vocabulary terms used in this lesson include:

- Media
- Media Literacy
- Background Knowledge
- Internet news sources (including web sites, blogs and social networks)
- The Link Economy

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## ***Goals***

The goal of this lesson is to give students an understanding of:

- The importance of background knowledge needed to understanding an issue or argument
- The traditional role media has played in delivering background knowledge on important issues
- The role of the senses in processing information delivered via news sources such as newspapers, radio, television and the Internet
- How pictures (either still images and video) can deliver facts or create emotional impact, which can potentially create conflict between words spoken or read and visual imagery that are part of a news story
- How to evaluate different types of news sources for accuracy and bias
- The changes taking place in media due to the Internet communications revolution

## ***Primary Resources***

The following resources are available at the [www.criticalvoter.com](http://www.criticalvoter.com) web site to support this lesson:

- **Critical Voter Podcast 007 – Media Literacy:** A 30 minute audio lesson covering the media and media literacy
- **Quiz** – A short quiz designed to determine if someone has listened to and understood the podcast.
- **Blog Entries** – The Critical Voter blog contains multiple blog entries dealing with the issues covered in the podcast (look for entries the week of September 16, 2012 or use the categories menu to look for stories in the category of Media Literacy).

## ***Additional Resources***

Links to lists of rhetorical devices can be found on the [Critical Voter Resources page](#).

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### *Suggested Activities*

Activity	Notes on this activity
<p>Have students listen to the podcast and answer the quiz questions to ensure they have listened and understood the concepts covered in the lesson.</p>	<p>The podcast can be played in class or assigned as homework.</p> <p>The quiz is made up of four questions which were designed to be easily answerable by anyone who has listened to the podcast lesson in its entirety.</p>
<p>Ask students to create a list of 2-3 experiences they associate with each of their five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch), then ask them to associate each of those experiences with either logos (logic and reasoning), pathos (emotion) or ethos (connection).</p>	<p>This exercise can be done individually, in small groups or as a class and can consist of filling out a three column table with the senses listed in the first column, experiences in the second and whether those experiences are logos-, pathos- or ethos-based in the third.</p> <p>The idea behind this assignment is to demonstrate that sight and hearing, in contrast to the other three, are the two senses most associated with reasoning.</p>
<p>Look at the photos or other illustrations in a daily newspaper or news magazine and determine whether they provide information about a story associated with the image or perform some other function (such as setting a mood or other non-logos-based activity).</p>	<p>In instances where images are not associated with the pure delivery of information, have students discuss what they think the goal of the image is and how accurately it reflects the written words in the story accompanying the image.</p>
<p>Follow a news story as it unfolds over the course of a week on multiple news sources (the daily newspaper, daily radio and TV coverage, a weekly news magazine, and multiple Internet sites).</p> <p>Review and discuss how each news source has been releasing new information about the story in terms of speed, accuracy, and sensationalism.</p>	<p>Compare news headlines from different media sources regarding the same fact or facts pertaining to the unfolding story. Discuss how some headlines use techniques such as provocative or sensational language in order to draw you further into the story (in order to get you to click on a link in an online news source, for example).</p> <p>Review the different approaches to the news story in the context of what type of “product” each news source represents.</p>