**IB Language and Literature Year 1**

**West Sound Academy**

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4 Big Ideas of Media Study and Analysis

***1. Messages are constructed.*** The construction process is invisible to the readers of newspapers or the viewers of television. Awareness of the choices involved in the making of media messages sensitizes readers and viewers to the subtle shaping forces at work— in the choice of photo or cutline in a newspaper, in the images, pacing and editing of a TV news program. Noticing the construction of a message helps one become a more critical, questioning reader and viewer— but this kind of noticing doesn't come naturally to the process of reading or watching TV. It is a learned behavior.

***2. Messages are representations of the world.*** The reason why media messages are so powerful is that viewers and readers depend on them for their understanding of the culture. One reason why children are thought to be more vulnerable to media influences is because they have less direct real-world experience to compare with the representations provided by television and mass media. Are police officers really like the guys on "Cops?" Are high school students really as cool as the ones on "Gossip Girl?" Is our community really as dangerous and violent as it appears from reading the newspaper's Metro section? Understanding how media messages shape our visions of the world and our sense of ourselves is a central concept in media literacy.

***3. Messages have economic and political purposes and contexts.*** Understanding that mass media industries sell audiences to advertisers is a powerful new concept to many American adults, who are barely aware of how a newspaper can be delivered to the doorstep for 35 cents a day or how television can enter the home a no cost. Teaching this concept to young people, of course, can be sticky, for how you teach about it depends on your ideological perspective on advertising, market economics, the industrial revolution and late-20th century capitalism. Individuals employed by giant media companies might not feel comfortable with the idea of high school teachers and students analyzing their ownership patterns and acquisitions, looking critically at their annual reports and reading their trade magazines. However, any meaningful critical discourse about media messages must include a careful and systematic examination of the economic and political contexts in which films, TV shows, newspapers and news programs are produced.

***4. Individuals create meaning in media messages through interpretation.*** While a family may occasionally sit down to watch a TV program together, the meanings they make of the program will differ. Based on contemporary scholarship in literature and the humanities which examines the intersection between the reader and the text as the source of meaning, this perspective focuses on recognizing and critically analyzing the pleasures and satisfactions that readers and viewers get from the experience of media consumption. For example, in one English class, a 10th grade student submitted an essay on "The World Wrestling Federation" analyzing the powerful symbols of good and evil embedded in the setting, costume and music of the program, interpreting the typical impotence of the referee as a defense of vigilante justice, and describing his own comfort in knowing the good guy will always win. After reading this young viewer's thoughtful, creative work, who can say that WWF is trash television? While not being completely relativistic, media literacy advocates often refuse to line up with those individuals who have a more traditional perspective on children's TV, those who are very comfortable intoning the merits of PBS and the evils of popular, mass audience fare, championing the "good" shows and decrying the "bad" shows. It may not be so important what you watch, media literacy advocates say, but how you watch it.

**Discussion Questions for Big Ideas in Media:**

**Messages are constructed:**

1. What forces are at work in the making of media messages?
2. Why doesn’t viewing media critically come naturally to us?

**Messages are representations of the world:**

1. Can you think of any existing cultural or social stereotypes that were likely generated from the media?
2. Do you believe that we depend on the media to understand our culture? Why or why not?

**Messages have economic and political purposes and contexts:**

1. Why would some people feel uncomfortable with critical media analysis?
2. Could media exist without political/economic implications? Why or why not?

**Individuals create meaning in media messages through interpretation:**

1. The passage argues that media literacy advocates aren’t completely relativistic. Do you agree?
2. How can we practice responsible media consumption as viewers?