

LESSON H-UIV-L3

Challenges in Enhancing Media Literacy Regarding Global Terrorism

Unit IV: 9/11: A Case Study in Contemporary Terrorism

Grade Levels: 9–12

Time: 240 minutes (3–4 block schedule 80-minute periods or 5–6 standard instructional 40-minute periods)



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Objectives

- Identify and practice selected skills necessary for the critical analysis and evaluation of mass media content related to global terrorism.
- Apply core concepts (media literacy, terrorism) to case studies on terrorism and related topics (wars in the Middle East) to deepen understanding of the complexities of local, national, and international decision-making related to global terrorism.
- Analyze the impact of media content on public responses to terrorism and how mass media corporate and public entities (broadcast, cable, and satellite television; internet sources; cell phone and other portable electronic device providers) influence patterns of decision-making by governments and others related to global terrorist activity.

Key Terms

- media literacy
- terrorism

Lesson Materials

- National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Position Statement on Media Literacy (found at <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/medialiteracy1>) (Note to Teacher: This is primarily a teacher resource, but parts can be used by students as well.)
- Images of War section of Frank Baker’s web site (found at http://www.frankwbaker.com/images_of_war.htm)
- War Reporting section of Frank Baker’s web site (found at http://www.frankwbaker.com/war_reporting.htm)
- Links to mass media content on the Iraq war from the Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting web site (found at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=13>). Enter the search term “Iraq” to view coverage of stories related to Iraq.
- Questions for media analysis from A Media Education Approach to Teaching/Talking About The War by Chris Worsnop (found at http://www.frankwbaker.com/war_reporting.htm)
- *Terrorism: A Very Short Introduction* by Charles Townshend (Oxford University Press, 2002)
- projector for displaying documents (optional)

Lesson Plan

Note to Teacher: Students will practice the following skills (based on the NCSS Position Statement on Media Literacy):

1. Accessing messages (media content)
2. Analyzing the content of messages
3. Creating media content (messages)
4. Distributing media content (messages)
5. Interpersonal skills of collaboration and networking

Day #1

- Invite the students to offer their own definitions of the phrase “media literacy.” Have them brainstorm what they consider to be characteristics of a “media literate individual” (keep in mind that brainstorming does not involve judgments of contributions, just a listing of them). After the brainstorming has occurred, set up small groups of 4–5 students so they can develop a definition using the list of characteristics prepared by the class. Each group should have these roles: moderator, recorder, summarizer, and one or two researchers (students can use computers to access additional content for the task if needed).
- Once each group has developed a definition, the summarizer in the group should read it to the class. As each group’s definition is read aloud, students should note areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Then ask the students to examine their definitions in light of the definition prepared by the NCSS and identify how they compare. It is important at this point to encourage students to explore what skills a person would need to become “media literate,” along with the types of messages and communication devices a person should use and understand to meet the definitions being utilized.
- Have the class develop an agreement or consensus on one or more acceptable definitions of “media literacy,” judged against the criteria of clarity, comprehensiveness, and applicability to multiple situations and contexts, and then move on to the next step in the lesson.
- With a definition or definitions now solidified, ask this essential question: “What challenges does the public face in using media content to understand global terrorism?”
- Ask the students to list subsidiary questions that come to mind when they are prompted by this essential question. Similar to the opening brainstorming activity, do not judge or comment on the questions posed by the class, but simply list them. If students need time to list the questions, give them 3–5 minutes and insist that students actually state questions, not just words, phrases, or declarative sentences.
- Have a recorder collect all the questions posed by the class, and then assign a volunteer to cluster them within categories that appear to have common content or ideas. (This may be done as a homework assignment if time is short.) When the clustered list is complete, you can move forward with the lesson.
- Assign the homework for the next day. Ask students to identify relevant sources of information they would use to investigate the competing perspectives on the Iraq War, which will be used as a case study for examining the role of the media (and as a prelude for the culminating assessment of student understanding for this lesson). Ask students to identify four print resources, four broadcast sources, and four electronic sources (not broadcast). At least two of the sources in each category must be from outside of the U.S., and of those two, at least one must be from the Middle East.

- Prepare the clustered list to show to the class on an overhead display, or prepare the document in Word and have it photocopied for the class.

Day #2

- Have students post their list of sources (either on a bulletin board, or electronically on a class website, Wikispaces, or discussion board) from their homework. Guide the full class to spend 15 minutes reviewing the findings. Once the full class “walk-around” or website/Wikispaces review has occurred, have the students categorize the resources into one of the three classifications (print, broadcast, electronic) and into subgroups by areas of origin (North America, Europe, Middle East, etc.). In the case of businesses, students may want to create subgroups that reflect other characteristics (i. e., multinational corporations), and in the case of websites, other subgroups may be needed (non-governmental organizations, individuals, and so forth).
- If the students have not found sufficiently broad resources in their homework assignment, utilize the links from the Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) web site to complement their findings.
- Return to the essential question and the subsidiary questions raised by the students on Day #1. Ask students these two questions:

- If you were to prepare a recommendation for people who had never heard of the Iraq War about what sources they should consult in order to get a comprehensive and balanced perspective on the conflict, what would you say?
- What criteria would you employ to make thoughtful judgments about the sources you are recommending?

Facilitate the discussion by asking students to examine the clustered list of subsidiary questions and to identify key questions that might contribute to answering these two inquiries. The goal of the discussion is to have students generate a set of criteria and possible resources that would inform this member of the public about the Iraq War so that person could reach a thoughtful, independent decision about it.

- As you facilitate the discussion, keep these ideas in mind, which are extracted from Chris Worsnop’s suggested approach to media education about war. Introduce these ideas if the students’ questions and comments do not bring them forward.
 - Audience—Who is asking, and on whose behalf?
 - Audience/ideology/values/politics—Whose content is included, and whose is excluded?
 - Versions of reality—How reliable and fair are the presentations of media content?
 - Audience positioning/politics—How does the content make us feel, and is this part of our criteria?
 - Commercial interests/ownership—Is the question of audience share, ratings and profits being raised?
 - Values/ideology—Are we asking if our personal assumptions about the war are being reinforced, or are we open to alternative perspectives?
 - Audience/response/form and content/aesthetics—What is the style of presentation in the media content?
 - Diversity—How does the content relate to groups defined by race/ethnicity, gender, class, religious faith, nationality, sexual orientation, and others?
 - What other questions should we be asking?
 - How would we know what a “good” answer might look like?
- Once the discussion has reached a point where students have generated a relatively common set of criteria, as well as a set of resources that reflect a range of perspectives and viewpoints, then provide the

homework assignment:

- Ask students to answer this question by consulting at least six sources (including two from each category, one from North America or Europe, and one from the Middle East): “What has been the impact of the Iraq War on daily life in Iraq since 2003?” Ask students to identify a balanced set of sources that would fairly present an answer to the question to an uninformed individual.
- Students should identify the sources and compose a list in preparation for the final day of the lesson (Day #3). (Note to Teacher: The list of links on the FAIR website on the Iraq war is a good starting point for students in need of support.)

Day #3

- Have the students return to their groups from Day #1 and share their findings from the Day #2 homework assignment. Since most of the content will be available via the Internet, or in some cases in video format (possibly on YouTube or in video archives of broadcasters or non-governmental organizations), it is important to provide sufficient time for each small group member to learn from his or her peers by reviewing the content of the recommended sources. Each student should receive the media analysis form (see the end of this lesson) and use it to critique the recommended resources. Be sure that students review at least one resource from each of the three categories and that all sources in the group are examined by at least one group member using the form.
- Once the media analysis forms are completed, ask the final question for the lesson: “Based on your review of the sources in your group, what qualities did the best resources have that made them ideal for our uninformed citizen?” Provide 10–15 minutes for each small group to discuss and justify their list of qualities, and then have each group report their findings to the class. Facilitate discussion of the responses, and have one student record the results for future reference.
- Return to the essential question: “What challenges does the public face in using media content to understand global terrorism?” Then assign this culminating assessment of student performance: “Based upon our activity using the Iraq War, prepare a two-page set of guidelines for how to better understand global terrorism through the media. Your final document should be in Word, and be double-spaced with one-inch margins all around. Review the list of subsidiary questions the class posed about our essential question and make sure you have addressed most, if not all of them. Also, keep in mind the content of the discussions in small groups as well as the final listing of qualities which the class developed for making good choices about media content for the Iraq War.”

Evidence of Understanding

Have each student complete the two-page guidelines document reflecting the work of the three-day lesson, and adhering to the criteria of clarity, cogency, and comprehensiveness. As needed, refer to the Workshop questions and other resources listed on Frank Baker’s web site or links noted on the NCSS Position Statement on Media Literacy to inform final evaluations of student work.

Taking Action and Giving Service

- Have the students prepare their guidelines lists and a cover letter, and send their recommended guidelines to media outlets, elected officials, other faculty, and non-governmental organizations, as well as media analysis experts and groups to inform them about their work and invite critiques to assist them in further investigation of the topic.
- Have the students create a podcast or brief video that presents the guidelines with relevant audio and/or video content that illustrates the proposed guidelines.

Student Assignment: Challenges in Enhancing Media Literacy Regarding Global Terrorism

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Name _____ Date _____

Period/Class _____

Media Analysis Form

Directions: Using the checklist provided below, assess the quality of the resource being examined in light of the question being posed.

Question for Investigation:

Rating/Explanation (4=excellent to 1=very poor)

Criteria	Rating	Explanation
Impartiality of presentation	_____	_____
Creator is clearly recognizable or identifiable	_____	_____
Topic of the content is clear	_____	_____
Intended audience is clear	_____	_____
Images/audio/text can be understood by a non-expert	_____	_____
Narration is impartial and lacks bias	_____	_____
Presentation is given sufficient time to deliver a clear, thorough message	_____	_____
Presentation avoids editorializing about the topic from a single perspective	_____	_____

Other (elaborate):
