Learning Pathway: Critical Media Literacy

The Critical Media Literacy Learning Pathway features background on "What is Media Literacy?" and key concepts of critical media literacy as well as learning activities throughout the Building Democracy for All eBook that promote media literacy learning for students.

Media Literacy Connections by eBook Topics

Topic 1: The Philosophical Foundations of the United States Political System

- [Standard 1: Media Literacy Connections: Democracy in Social Media Policies and Community Standards](#)
- [Standard 2: Media Literacy Connections: The Internet as a Public Utility](#)
- [Standard 3: Media Literacy Connections: 21st Century Women STEM Innovators](#)
- [Standard 4: Media Literacy Connections: Media Coverage of Kings, Queens, and Royal Families](#)
- [Standard 5: Media Literacy Connections: Representations of Native Americans in Film, Local History Publications and School Mascots](#)

Topic 2: The Development of the United States Government

- [Standard 1: Media Literacy Connections: Declarations of Independence on Social Media](#)
- [Standard 2: Media Literacy Connections: Media Marketing and Government Regulating of Self-Driving Cars and Electric Vehicles](#)
- [Standard 3: Media Literacy Connections: Representations of and Racism Toward Black Americans in the Media](#)
- [Standard 4: Media Literacy Connections: Political Debates Through Songs from Hamilton: An American Musical](#)
- [Standard 5: Media Literacy Connections: The Bill of Rights on Twitter](#)

Topic 3: Institutions of United States Government

- [Standard 1: Media Literacy Connections: Hollywood Movies About the Branches of Government](#)
- [Standard 2: Media Literacy Connections: Writing an Impeachment Press Release](#)
- [Standard 3: Media Literacy Connections: Members of Congress' Use of Social Media](#)
- [Standard 4: Media Literacy Connections: Political Impacts of Public Opinion Polls](#)
- [Standard 5: Media Literacy Connections: Website Design for New Political Parties](#)

Topic 4: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens

- [Standard 1: Media Literacy Connections: Immigration in the News](#)
- [Standard 2: Media Literacy Connections: Portrayals of Immigrants in Television and Film](#)
- [Standard 3.1: Media Literacy Connections: COVID-19 Information Evaluation](#)
- [Standard 3.2: Media Literacy Connections: Women Political Leaders in the Media](#)
- [Standard 4: Media Literacy Connections: Online Messaging by Special Interest Groups](#)
- [Standard 5: Media Literacy Connections: Digital Games for Civic Engagement](#)
- [Standard 6.1: Media Literacy Connections: Social Media and Elections](#)
- [Standard 6.2: Media Literacy Connections: Media Spin in the Coverage of Political Debates](#)
- [Standard 7: Media Literacy Connections: Celebrities' Influence on Politics](#)
- [Standard 8: Media Literacy Connections: Political Activism through Social Media](#)
- [Standard 9.1: Media Literacy Connections: Media Recruitment of Public Sector Workers](#)
- [Standard 9.2: Media Literacy Connections: Images of Teachers and Teaching](#)
- [Standard 9.3: Media Literacy Connections: For Whom Is and Could Your School Be Named](#)
- [Standard 10: Media Literacy Connections: Representing Trans Identities](#)
- [Standard 11: Media Literacy Connections: Media Framing of the Events of January 6, 2021](#)
- [Standard 12: Media Literacy Connections: Music as Protest Art](#)
- [Standard 13: Media Literacy Connections: PACs, SuperPACs and Unions in the Media](#)

Topic 5: The Constitution, Amendments, and Supreme Court Decisions

- [Standard 2.1: Media Literacy Connections: Prohibition in the Media](#)
- [Standard 2.2: Media Literacy Connections: The Equal Rights Amendment on Twitter and other Social Media](#)
- [Standard 3.1: Media Literacy Connections: Civil War News Stories and Recruitment Advertisements](#)
- [Standard 3.2: Media Literacy Connections: Representations of Gender and Race on Currency](#)
- [Standard 4: Media Literacy Connections: The Equality Act on Twitter](#)
- [Standard 5: Media Literacy Connections: Reading Supreme Court Dissents Aloud](#)
- [Standard 6: Media Literacy Connections: Television Cameras in Courtrooms](#)

Topic 6: The Structure of Massachusetts State and Local Government

- [Standard 1: Media Literacy Connections: Native American Mascots and Logos](#)
- [Standard 2: Media Literacy Connections: A Constitution for the Internet](#)
- [Standard 3: Media Literacy Connections: Military Recruitment and the Media](#)
- [Standard 4: Media Literacy Connections: Your Privacy on Social Media](#)
- [Standard 5: Media Literacy Connections: Pandemic Policy Information in the Media](#)
- [Standard 6: Media Literacy Connections: Gendered Language in Media Coverage of Women in Politics](#)
- [Standard 7.1: Media Literacy Connections: Trusted Messengers, the Media and the Pandemic](#)
- [Standard 7.2: Media Literacy Connections: Environmental Campaigns Using Social Media](#)
- [Standard 8: Media Literacy Connections: Online Campaigning for Political Office](#)
- [Standard 9: Media Literacy Connections: Advertising the Lottery Online and in Print](#)
- [Standard 10.1: Media Literacy Connections: Local Governments, Social Media and Digital Democracy](#)
- [Standard 10.2: Media Literacy Connections: Protecting The Commons](#)

Topic 7: Freedom of the Press and News/Media Literacy

- [Standard 1: Media Literacy Connections: Press Freedom in the United States and the World](#)
- [Standard 2.1: Media Literacy Connections: Objectivity and the News from All Sides](#)
- [Standard 2.2: Media Literacy Connections: Investigative Journalism and Social Change](#)
- [Standard 3.1: Media Literacy Connections: News Photographs and Newspaper Design](#)
- [Standard 3.2: Media Literacy Connections: How Reporters Report Events](#)
- [Standard 4.1: Media Literacy Connections: Recommendation Algorithms on Social Media Platforms](#)
- [Standard 4.2: Media Literacy Connections: Fake News Investigation and Evaluation](#)
- [Standard 5: Media Literacy Connections: Critical Visual Analysis of Online and Print Media](#)
- [Standard 6: Media Literacy Connections: Memes and TikToks as Political Cartoons](#)
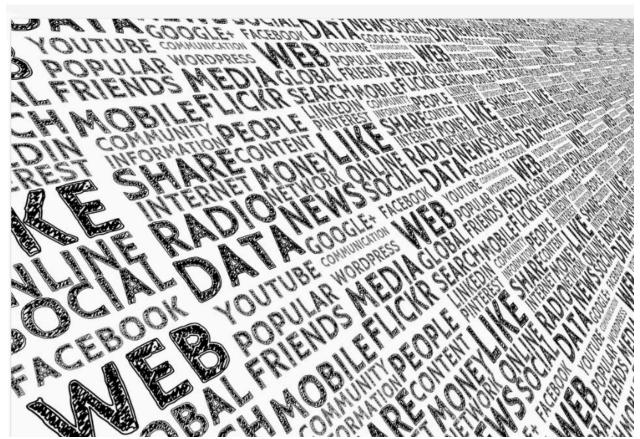
What is media literacy?

'**Media literacy**' is defined in a variety of ways. Most commonly it is used as an 'umbrella term' that encompasses analysis of mass-media and pop-culture, digital or technology analysis, and civic engagement and social justice action.

Sometimes the terms 'media literacy' and 'media education' are used interchangeably. Leading global scholar in children's media cultures [David Buckingham](#) sees them as two separate actions, related to each other. He defines:

Media literacy is "the knowledge, skills and competencies that are required in order to use and interpret media" (2003, p.36).

Media education as "the process of teaching and learning about the media" and media literacy as "the outcome – the knowledge and skills learners acquire" (2003, p.4).

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Interpretation, or evaluation, is a key component of any media literacy work. [Sonia Livingstone](), of the London School of Economics, notes that "Evaluation crucial to literacy: imagine the world wide web user who cannot distinguish dated, biased, or exploitative sources, unable to select intelligently when overwhelmed by an abundance of information and services" ([2004, p. 5]()). In media literacy work, interpretation or evaluation is the process by which students and teachers dig through their already-existing knowledge in order to share information with each other and build new knowledge.

In the United States, media literacy is defined as "hands-on and experiential, democratic (the teacher is researcher and facilitator) and process-driven. Stressing as it does critical thinking, it is inquiry-based. Touching as it does on the welter of issues and experiences of daily life, it is interdisciplinary and cross-curricular" (Aufderheide, 1993, p. 2). The student of media literacy learns how to access, analyze, and produce a variety of media texts (Aufderheide, 1993).

Some scholars add the qualifier 'critical' to their use of media literacy. *Critical* **media literacy** encourages analysis of dominant ideology and interrogation of the means of production; it is rooted in social justice (Kellner & Share, 2007) and explores the "behind the scenes" of ownership, production, and distribution. Critical media literacy is an inquiry into power, especially the power of the media industries and how they determine the stories and messages to which we are audience.

> ## There are (at least!) three ways to apply the term 'critical'
>
> **Critical analysis:** Approach a text from a distance and eliminate emotional response, while exploring *why* there is an emotional response. Critical analysis is a clinical approach (asking questions). As part of the interpretation/evaluation process, it involves self-reflection: What do I know/believe and how do I know it/why do I believe it?
>
> **Media literacy is critical:** Six corporations control 90% of all mainstream media in America ([Lutz, 2012](#); Phillips, 2018). Eight-to-eighteen-year-olds fill 10hr, 45min worth of media use into 7hr, 38min time frame (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010). 95% of US teenagers self-report smartphone ownership/access (Anderson & Jiang 2018). Based on quantity of time alone, young people deserve to have formal study of the media in order to better understand that which they are spending so much time.
>
> **Critical media literacy:** Engages in process of continuous critical inquiry, diving deeply into questions of ownership, production, and distribution: What is known about the text? How is this known? What is the context for understanding the text?

Sometimes in media literacy work, the ***question* is more important than the *answer*.** The question is an invitation for students and teachers to work together, to share knowledge, and to build collaboration. Because so much of media analysis is about interpretation, there may not be one absolute answer. In many of the lessons, you will see discussion questions posed without corresponding answers or information; please use this as an opportunity to generate shared knowledge with students and, if further questions arise, to check for additional resources.

Concepts of Media Literacy

In 2003, and updated in 2007, David Buckingham codified the concepts of media literacy. The concepts are flexible and can be adapted to multiple media. The following are the basic outlines of each concept:

Production: Media texts are consciously manufactured. Addressing production asks questions about how the media are constructed and for what purpose. It is important to explore the 'invisible' commercialization of digital media and global role of advertising, promotion, and sponsorship.

Language: Visual and spoken languages communicate meaning; familiar codes and conventions make meaning clear. Digital literacy looks at digital rhetoric, especially website design and links.

Representation: Events are made into stories which invite audiences to see the world in one way and not in others. This concept explores authority, reliability, and bias; looks at whose stories are told and whose are ignored.

Audience: Who is engaging with what texts and how are people targeted? This concept looks at how users access sites, how they are guided through sites, and the role of users' data gathering (2003, pp.53-67; 2007, pp.155-156).

[Apply the Concepts/Engaging Media Literacy: News and Information Evaluation](#)

References

- Anderson, M. and Jiang, J. (May 31, 2018). Teens, social media and technology 2018. Pew Research Center. Avail: pewinternet.org.
- Aufderheide, P (1993). *Media literacy: A report of the national leadership conference on media literacy*. Queenstown, MD: The Aspen Institute.
- Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture.* London: Polity Press.
- Kaiser Family Foundation (January 20, 2010). Daily media use among children and teens up dramatically from five years ago. Avail: kff.org.
- Kellner, D. and Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education. In Macedo, D. and Steinberg, S. (Eds.), *Media literacy: A reader*, pp.3-23. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Phillips, P. (2018). *Giants: The global power elite.* New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.

Additional Resources

Popular press coverage on social media & fighting fake news:

- [Fighting Fake News](#)
- [Teaching kids news literacy could be a matter of life and death](#)
- [How Does "Fake" News Become News?](#)
- [Facebook 'danger to public health' warns report](#)
- [Critical Media Project](#)

Scholarly works that introduce and apply media literacy:

- Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. London, England: Polity Press.
- Buckingham, D. (2007). *Beyond technology: Children's learning in the age of digital culture.* London, England: Polity Press.
- Buckingham, D. (2019). *The media education manifesto*. London, England: Polity Press.

Scholarly work with news analysis component:

- Higdon, N. (2020). *The anatomy of fake news: A critical news literacy education*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Young adult work on how to make sense of fake news:

- Otis, C.L. (2020). *True or false: A C.I.A. analyst's guide to spotting fake news*. New York, NY: Feiwel and Friends.

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