

Media Literacy and Democratic Citizenship

The founders of the United States articulated the need for a literate citizenship as core to the development of a deep and enduring democracy. We live in an age when the most influential messages about pressing social issues and events are delivered through mass media such as television, magazines and the Internet. It is essential to the success of our democracy that young people consciously and consistently analyze and evaluate media messages. They need to be taught to seek out current, accurate, and credible sources of information. They need to understand the influence of media messages on their understanding of the world. And they need training in identifying and using various techniques for communicating messages in different media forms. Without these critical skills we risk losing the diversity and freedom of thought that underpins a culture of true democracy.

Collective Reading of Media Messages

These materials are based on the classroom practice of collective reading in which the teacher leads the class through the critical decoding of media messages while teaching and reinforcing core knowledge. This constructivist approach encourages the development of moral reasoning as students clarify their own interpretations, listen to the analysis of their peers, and discuss ethical issues. Decoding of the posters in this kit will help train students to distinguish fact from opinion, analyze point of view and identify bias, interpret historical documents, and use evidence to back up a thesis. The classroom reading process is particularly effective in involving students who rarely share their opinions about print-based material, including students with reading disabilities, visual learners, and students for whom English is a second language. The teacher should consider calling on students or going around the room to ensure participation by all students in the collective reading process.

Reading Bias

This kit trains students to recognize and analyze the biases of the Soviet government as presented in posters and how government views changed over time. A major theme of *Soviet History through Posters*, and all Project Look Sharp kits, is the recognition that all media messages come from a particular point of view and have a bias that reflects the intent and perspective of the producer and sponsor. The teacher should encourage students to ask critical questions about any media messages encountered inside or outside the classroom using the *Key Questions* and *Principles of Media Literacy* found at www.projectlooksharp.org.

Bias in this Kit and in the Classroom

This kit, like all media, also has a point of view, a bias. As teachers use the materials they may identify opinionated language, selective facts, missing information, and many other subjective decisions that went into constructing this view of history. Teachers and students should be asking critical questions about the editorial choices that went into constructing these lessons. When using these materials teachers will make their own decisions about what to include and edit, what questions to use and what issues to avoid. All of these decisions, both by the creators and users of the kit, will influence the view of history that students receive. Teachers should encourage students to thoughtfully analyze and discuss the images, the stories, the perspectives, and the biases celebrated and criticized within our own classrooms. Those skills and practices are core to an educated democratic citizenry.

Fair Use of Media Documents

The classroom critique of political and cultural documents such as posters is essential to the development of core literacy skills in our media-saturated democracy. To enable educators to fulfill our core civic mission, Project Look Sharp has created media literacy integration kits using a variety of different media documents for critical analysis in the classroom. The documents in this kit are presented for the purpose of critical analysis and criticism and are to be used solely in an educational setting.