



Bulletin

Parents Learning About Children's Education

The Massachusetts Statewide Parent Information & Resource Center (PIRC)

Available online in English, Spanish, and Portuguese at www.pplace.org



Let's begin by taking a look at what media literacy is and why it is so important.

From T.V. to T-shirts, from billboards to cereal boxes, from computer games to the Internet, children are bombarded by media messages every day. "Media" means a form of mass communication. It includes printed material such as newspapers, magazines, and comic books. And it includes messages we can see and hear on T.V., computers, video games, radio, and at the movies. These messages are around us all the time and they are readily accessible by everyone, with or without a parent's O.K.

Literacy, the ability to read and understand the written word, is very important to a child's education at any age. Media literacy is just as important. "Media literacy," in its simplest terms is being able to see, read, or hear any media message and understand how to make sense of it.

Knowing how to "read" (or decode) media messages begins with the understanding that all media messages are made *by* someone *for* a specific purpose. To make sense of media messages, children need to learn how to take them apart and to

As part of Parents' PLACE's collaboration with local community organizations, we have joined with WGBH Boston, a major public broadcasting producer, to bring you this special issue of the Bulletin on media literacy. WGBH views the media as playing an important role in helping to prepare children for success in school and has a special interest in media literacy.

see what is really going on.

In learning to read, children learn that words in a story convey certain feelings and beliefs. In learning to read media messages, they must learn the meaning of images and sounds. They need to know that just because something is printed or said does not make it true. Learning to understand why and how messages are created in T.V. commercials and magazine ads, for example, is part of becoming a good critical thinker.

Parents can do a lot to teach their children what they as parents believe is best. When children are alone in their interactions with media, they draw on these lessons to create meaning for themselves. This issue of the *Bulletin* explains media literacy and gives practical suggestions for ways parents can help their children develop skills they can use every day to become good critical thinkers.

We hope you enjoy the article provided by WGBH and find all the information in this *Bulletin* useful in starting to talk with your children about media literacy. Have fun!

*Jessica Krywosa, Parents PLACE
Media Coordinator*

Media Literacy Begins at Home: Tips for Parents

by WGBH Educational Outreach


WGBH, your local public television station, aims to help families prepare children for success in school. One way we do this is through our educational programs. WGBH believes that media can play a positive role in the lives of children when used wisely. To use the media wisely and to really benefit from T.V. and other media, we need to know about the impact that media has on our lives. *We need to become media literate!*

So, What is Media Literacy?

Literacy means being able to read, write, and understand the written word. Media literacy is the ability to read, analyze, evaluate, and produce messages in a variety of other forms, such as television, radio, and computers, as well as in print.

We all know that reading and writing will always be VERY important. Today we live in a world where people get most of their information in ways that combine text with pictures and sound. Today, being able to read and write is no longer enough to make a person literate.

continues on page 2

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Media Literacy Begins

at Home, continued from page 1

Tips for Families

Dr. Faith Rogow, Founding President of the Alliance for a Media Literate America, offers these tips to help families become more media savvy:

Know Your Values

Make a list of the values you most want to pass along to your children. Use that list to judge the media your child sees. Put a star next to every program or game that reflects your values. Cross out every value that does not agree with yours. If lots of your values are crossed out, you may want to make some new choices.

Remember that media are powerful teachers. When the messages in your child's media choices contradict your values, your job as a parent becomes more difficult (and being a parent is hard enough!)

Look at the Balance

Look at how your child uses media. Plan "screen time" to fit into a balanced routine of many different activities. Screen time means the time spent in front of the T.V., computer, or video games. A balance of activities might include:

- chances to make noise *and* quiet time;
- chances to have conversations *and* to express themselves in other ways, like drawing or dancing;
- chances to move all their muscles, in both big ways (like running) *and* small ways (like putting together a puzzle);
- time to play alone *and* with others, time to imagine; and
- chances to explore the world around them.

Observe Behavior and Mood

By watching children's behavior after screen time, you can tell a lot about how they are affected by what

they've seen. If, after viewing or playing a computer game, your child is aggressive, cranky, scared, or sad, you may want to consider making different media choices.

The Message is in the Images

Images are more powerful than words, especially for young children who are just learning to speak and understand language. So, to see what your child might be most likely to remember, try watching media or playing video games with the sound off.



Talk, Talk, Talk

It's never too early to get kids into the habit of talking about media. Ask your children questions about what they see or hear in advertisements, on T.V. shows, or on a Web site. Encourage them to ask questions, too. You will not only help your child become media literate, but will also support their critical thinking skills!

Making the Most of Media

Media works best when it extends learning and natural play. Try some of these media literacy activities to



help children get the most of their screen time:

With Younger Kids

After the T.V. is turned off, your kids can put on their own show. A simple prop, like a paper towel tube, can be a microphone. An empty box can become a T.V. set. There's no right or wrong way to make your own T.V. show. The important thing is to have fun together.

With Older Kids

Have your child create his or her own commercial. Find an ordinary item to advertise (a belt, sunglasses, etc.). Have children think of words to go along with an existing tune, or come up with their own jingle. Tape the ads and then replay them for children to hear. Discuss how their ads are similar to or different from ads that they have seen or heard.

("Tips for Families" were adapted with permission from "Choosing & Using Media with Young Children," 2001, by Dr. Faith Rogow, Insighters Educational Consulting.)



WGBH Boston is the source of some of public television's best-known children programs, including *Zoom*, *Arthur*, *Between the Lions*, *Postcards from Buster* and *Peep and the Big Wide World*.

WGBH provides a wide array of on-air, online, and print resources to help parents prepare children for success in school. For more information, you can visit them online at www.wgbh.org, or write to: WGBH Educational Outreach, 125 Western Ave., Boston, MA 02134.

The Basics

Monitoring T.V. viewing and video game playing

If you think about it, although school is very important, it does not really take up very much of a child's time. Clearly, the hours and days that a child is *not* in school are important for learning, too. One thing that you can do to help your child to make the most of that time is to monitor T.V. viewing and video game playing.

American children on average spend far more time watching T.V. or playing video games than they do completing homework or other school-related activities. Here are some suggestions for helping your child to use T.V. and video games wisely:

- Limit the time that you let your child watch T.V. Too much television cuts into important activities in a child's life, such as reading, playing with friends and talking with family members.
- Model good T.V. viewing habits. Remember that children often imitate their parents' behavior. Children who live in homes in which parents and other family members watch a lot of T.V. are likely to spend their time in the same way. Children who live in homes in which parents and other family members have "quiet" time away from the T.V. when they read (either alone to each other), talk to each other, play games or engage in other activities tend to do the same.

- Watch T.V. with your child when you can. Talk with him about what you see. Answer his questions. Try to point out the things in T.V. programs that are like your child's everyday life.
- When you can't watch T.V. with your child, spot check to see what she's watching. Ask questions after the program ends. See what excites her and what troubles her. Find out what she has learned and remembered.
- Go to the library and find books that explore the themes of the T.V. shows that your child watches.
- Limit the amount of time your child spends playing video games. As with T.V. programs, be aware of the games he likes to play and discuss his choices with him.

T.V. Time Activity

Good T.V. programs can spark children's curiosity and open up new worlds to them.

For children ages 9 to 11

Watching television can be educational for your child or just something that she does to fill the time.

What You Need

T.V. set, World map, Reference books (or online Web news, biography and geography sites)



What to Do

- Place a world map next to the T.V. set. Arrange to watch T.V. news programs with your child.
- After the program have your child use the map to find world news spots.
- Have your child use reference books such as encyclopedias or appropriate online Web sites to find out more information about a story, a country or a person in the news.

Excerpted from "Helping Your Child Succeed in School," U.S. Department of Education, 2002. The entire booklet is available free by calling ED Pubs at 1-877-433-7827 or 1-800-437-0833 (for TDD or TTY). It can be ordered online at: www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html, or downloaded at: www.nochildleftbehind.gov. It is also available in alternate formats, such as Braille, large print, audiotape or computer diskette by calling 1-202-260-9895 or 1-202-205-8113. The entire booklet is in the public domain and may be reproduced freely for educational purposes.



Ready To Learn.

Kids! Check out even more media literacy activities at "Arthur's Guide to Media Literacy" and "Don't Buy It!" at pbskids.org/go.

Parents! Make the most of time together. Visit PBSparents.org for thousands of activities tied to your child's favorite PBS KIDS programs. Get expert advice from leaders in child development on many topics. The Web site is also available in Spanish.

Teachers! PBS Teacher Source can help you connect with each and every one of your children, regardless of their abilities. At PBS.org/teachersource you'll find free educational resources tied to PBS programs. Resources are matched to state and national standards, and can be searched by subject, grade level, or keyword.

Getting Familiar with the Standards

“Learning standards” are what students should know and be able to do as a result of their education. Separate learning standards are set for each core subject area and for grade levels from pre-k through 12th grade. In Massachusetts, these learning standards are known as “Curriculum Frameworks.” Schools use these standards as the “framework” for what they teach each year. Then, the statewide tests known as MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) test how well students have learned these standards.

Recently, many states—including Massachusetts—have added media learning standards to the core subject area of English language arts. The media standards set the expectations for what students should learn and be able to do to understand and use media effectively in the world today.

In Massachusetts, the **English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum Framework** has four Strands, all having to do with communication. The four strands are **Language, Reading and Literature, Composition, and Media**. At the most basic

level, all of these strands have to do with communication.

The **Media Strand** has two general standards: 1) Analysis of Media and 2) Media Production. Both media standards are designed to help students develop media literacy as well as thinking and language skills.

The first Media standard, Analysis of Media, states what students should be able to understand about different media formats and how they are used in everyday life. The second Media strand, Media Production, sets the expectations for what students should be able to do in order to create and use different types of media. For example, students should be able to use a computer to create a presentation or be able to design a web site.

Here is an example of a specific standard under **Analysis of Media** for 3rd or 4th graders:

Standard 26.2: Compare stories in print with their filmed adaptations, describing the similarities and differences in the portrayal of characters, plot, and settings.


The ELA Curriculum Framework gives an example of how a student might have this learning experience. It suggests that students could compare the way the author describes Stuart Little in the book to how Stuart Little appears in the movie.

Parents could guide this kind of discussion at home. They could ask their children questions like “what was the same” and “what was different” about the way the book describes Stuart compared to how the film describes him. Parents could also ask their children to talk about the way images in the movie tell us about Stuart.

Students have the chance to learn and practice their media literacy skills in other subject areas both inside and outside of school. In fact, media literacy can play an important part in every course, just as books do.

The Curriculum Frameworks for the various core subject areas are a good place to learn more about what students are learning. **The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks** for the core subjects can be viewed online at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html. If you would like copies of the Frameworks or parts of them, please contact Parents’ PLACE.

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Quick Fact!
 Children spend almost 4x more time with “screened media” than they spend reading books, newspapers or magazines.
(Source: Annenberg 2000 Study)

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