



## Lesson 18.16 “Media Literacy: Messaging All Around Us”

### Unit 18: Civics and Government Today

#### Lesson Objectives

- Students will recognize the impact media has on their everyday life and experience
- Students will distinguish between professional and nonprofessional media sources
- Students will use a common experience of selecting a breakfast cereal to consider how decisions they make are triggered by both internal and external sources

#### Lesson Competencies

1. I can recognize how media communicate values, information, and ideology. (Moose SS)
- I can analyze primary and secondary sources and draw appropriate conclusions. (Moose SS)
- I can analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation. (ELA 8)

#### Essential Questions

How has New Hampshire been shaped by many voices?  
How have New Hampshire’s people shaped its government?

#### Focus Questions

How do people act as good citizens in a democracy?  
What are the people's rights and responsibilities?

#### Estimated Time

One 45-minute class session

#### Materials & Equipment

[Unit 18 "Learn It!," "Media Literacy," pages 1-5](#)  
Photos of cereal boxes for projection  
Class set of “Cereal Boxes Send a Message!”



## Educator Introduction & Rationale

Media literacy is an essential skill for students. Although elementary/middle school students may not be interacting with media without adult involvement, skills for media literacy must begin to build a strong foundation. Media literacy is the ability to evaluate information from outside sources, usually news media, but also including social media, nonprofessional media, and advertisements. Even as young people, students are exposed every day to media's messages and tactics; tools to process these messages are vital.

To act as a good citizen in a democracy, people need to be well-informed not only on political issues and general news, but also on how to evaluate rumors and trends in their communities. The ability to discern what is true and what is a good resource for information creates informed voters and citizens who can ground their communities in sensible knowledge. Being media literate is a hard, complicated skill that even adults should continue to practice as they consume ever-evolving media. Recognizing that media is all around us every day is a crucial skill for learning to wade through all the external influences citizens confront every day.

Media literacy is more than becoming an informed voter through digesting news and information responsibly. It also involves other qualities that define civic virtue that all good citizens should practice. These include respecting the viewpoints and opinions of others, obeying laws, and encouraging participation in the community. Media literacy encourages these qualities, which help people practice good judgment in making compromises and building consensus. Democracy requires responsible participation in the community, and media literacy is a core skill for that participation.

This is the fifth lesson for middle school students in Unit 18: Civics and Government Today. In this lesson, students are challenged to consider what factors they consider when making decisions and where these influences come from. An activation about a recent decision students made pushes them to consider the internal and external factors that influenced them and the origins of these factors. An analysis of photographs of cereal boxes helps students consider what messages companies and manufacturers are presenting to consumers when they market products on grocery store shelves. The extension activity similarly demonstrates to students that everyone interprets events, even when they observe the same event at the same time. Please note, lesson vocabulary and definitions are at the end of the document. You may wish to preview these with your students. Please adapt all the material in this lesson, as necessary, to meet the needs of the students in your classroom.

## Before the Learning Activity

### Student reading and comprehension questions

**How media literacy part of our democracy?** Students can read [Unit 18 "Learn It!," "Media Literacy," pages 1-5](#), or review the information as a class.

After review, students should be able to answer:

1. What are examples of literacy? (newspapers, TV news, social media, online advertisement, etc.)
2. What are the differences between professional and nonprofessional journalism?

## Learning Activity

### Activation

**How have you been influenced?** Ask students what decisions they have had to make over the last 24-hours. This could be as small as what to have for lunch, how they wanted to spend their allowance, what to do on their day off, or even which brand of snack to ask for at the grocery store. Either individually or as a group, ask them to reflect:

1. How much thought did you put into this decision? Was it something you weighed for a long time or a decision you made quickly?
2. What factors influenced the choice? Prior experience? Something they've seen, read, or watched?
3. Were these factors internal or external? If they were external, where did they come from?

The point of this discussion should be for students to understand that even if they don't realize it, they are being influenced by external factors every day. For example, going to the grocery store may not seem as "media" the same way TV commercials are, but the packaging, placement, and names are all forms of media meant to influence their choices and decisions.

### Direct Instruction

**Where do we encounter media?** Discuss with students that:

- We interact with media every day – most Americans, even kids, spend 6-10 hours per day on media
- Professional and nonprofessional journalists are held to different standards. The public needs to make themselves aware of the source of any media they consume and believe to be fact
- Media literacy means being able to recognize and evaluate the messages you are receiving and finding good information to help you act responsibly
- Media is present in every aspect of our life – from what we watch, what we choose to buy, and what we choose to think



**Guided Practice**    **Which cereal is best?** To demonstrate that media is influencing decisions we make every day, students will be asked to compare the messaging communicated by different common cereal box brands.

Distribute "Cereal Boxes Send a Message!" and project the cereal box pictures. Give students a few minutes to fill out the worksheet with their answers and then review as a class. Note that students may have different answers from each other because they may interpret the messaging differently from their classmates.

Discuss how the cereal boxes are intended to convince shoppers of a particular message and convince them that their cereal is the best for the consumer. They use images, colors, and prior experiences of consumers to send a particular message about their product.

**Extension**            **Do you see what I see?** Conduct an experiment in your classroom to see how the same group of people can remember an event very differently from each other.

Show students a short video they would not be familiar with – if it is a silent film or in a language foreign to the students, that will work best.

Tell students they should watch the video carefully, no talking, no writing, just careful watching.

When the clip is over, set a timer for two minutes and prompt students to write down everything they remember. Compare results as a class and consider if everyone remembered the video exactly the same way.

Ask students what this proves about "eyewitness accounts" in the media – does someone know exactly what happened just because they were there?

## Supporting Materials

### Other Resources

The activities for this lesson were adapted from various sources, including:

- SPLC Learning for Justice:  
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/digital-literacy>
- Center for Media Literacy: PDF can be found on the “Moose on the Loose” website  
<https://moose.nhhistory.org/Moose/media/Default/Documents%20and%20PDFs/Unit-18-docs/U18-Five-Key-Questions-CML.pdf>
- Media Smarts: <https://mediasmarts.ca/>
- News Literacy Project, “How to speak up without starting a shutdown”:  
<https://moose.nhhistory.org/Moose/media/Default/Documents%20and%20PDFs/Unit-18-docs/U18-How-to-speak-up-without-starting-a-showdown.pdf>
- 5 Questions to Ask about Media, Common Sense Media:  
<https://moose.nhhistory.org/Moose/media/Default/Documents%20and%20PDFs/Unit-18-docs/U18-5-questions-to-ask-about-media.pdf>

# Standards

## New Hampshire Social Studies Frameworks:

- ✓ Civics and Governments: Rights and Responsibilities (SS:CV:8:4.1)

## NCSS Themes:

- ✓ Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity
- ✓ Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- ✓ Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

## C3 Frameworks:

- ✓ Civic and Political Institutions (D2.Civ.2.6-8)
- ✓ Historical Sources and Evidence (D2.His.13.6-8)

## Common Core ELA:

- ✓ Key Ideas and Details (RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2)
- ✓ Integration of Knowledge (RH.6-8.8)
- ✓ Production and Distribution of Writing (WHST.6-8.4)

## Lesson Vocabulary

<b>check</b>	(verb) In government, when one part of the government legally stops another part from taking its desired actions
<b>communities</b>	(noun) Groups of people living together or having something particular in common
<b>journalism</b>	(noun) The profession of investigating and reporting the news
<b>literacy</b>	(noun) The ability to read and write
<b>media</b>	(noun) A system to communicate with a large number of people, such as television, radio, or newspapers; for example, the news media communicates about events
<b>media literate</b>	(noun) The ability to identify different means of communication, to recognize and to evaluate the messages in the information, and to create your own communication