

## Surveying Our Media

By Steve Schullo

The mass media are so prevalent in our society today that we often take them for granted and ignore their pervasiveness and influence. Television, radio, the Internet, newspapers, and books are some of the tools of mass communication that surround our students with a repetition of lessons that are seldom analyzed critically. A great beginning for teaching media literacy is building awareness of the prevalence of media in our lives. Through this activity, students integrate math and science skills by creating surveys to assess the amount of media around them. They take this information and deepen their understanding by analyzing the data they collect in graphs and generate deeper and more critical questions for further research.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to...

1. list multiple forms of media.
2. create surveys to assess their media environment.
3. generate graphic representations of raw data.
4. analyze the results of their investigation.
5. understand that all media messages are constructed (ML Core Concept #1).

**Materials/Preparation:**

1. Overhead projector or whiteboard.
2. Paper and pencils/pens.

**Teaching Strategies:**

- I. Whole class introductory discussion about *communication*
  - Generate a list with students of different ways we communicate.
  - Introduce basic vocabulary:
    - a) a *medium* is a tool of communication and in the plural they are called *media*.
    - b) *mass media* refers to tools of communication that carry messages to many people.
  - Play a game identifying which media they listed on their chart of communication are mass media and which are not. Add to the list as students generate more ideas.
  - Ask students to list all the different types of mass media they can think of.
  - Discuss the role of mass media in their lives by asking:
    - ? Which types of mass media are most prevalent in your life?
    - ? What are some advantages and limitations of mass media?
  - Explain that when their grandparents were growing up much of the mass media they have today did not exist. Propose an investigation of how much and what types of mass media are in their homes.

## II. Investigating amount of mass media in the home

- Begin with a brief discussion of the role of social scientists and how they get information from observations and questionnaires.
- As a whole class, design a survey that lists the main types of mass communication that they might find in their homes. Leave spaces next to each item for students to check off how many of each medium they can find.
- Before beginning the investigation have students make hypothesis about what they think they will find.
- Send a copy of the survey home with each student to record for homework.
- The following day, create a large class graph to collect the data that the students generated from their home media surveys.
- Have students work in teams to tally their group's data and then transfer their results on to the class graph.
- Once everyone's data has been recorded on the class graph, discuss the results and question what can be implied from the results. Also compare the results to the student's hypotheses.

## III. Investigating favorite television programs

- Explain to the class that they will now create a second survey to find out what people do with one type of mass media, the television. This time their survey will require they question their family members about their favorite TV programs.
- Have students write down their hypothesis about what they predict they will discover.
- Send home the survey for homework and make sure there is room for the students to write the name of the favorite TV program and the person's relation to them, i.e. mother, father, brother, sister, aunt, grandmother, etc.
- The next day, have students work in teams to collect and tally the data. Each team could be responsible for one group of informants. For example, one group could collect all the data about favorite TV programs of mothers, while another group could collect information about favorite TV program of brothers, etc.
- This information could be transferred to large class graphs to analyze. Have students discuss the patterns they notice and the questions that arise.
  - ? What are the favorite programs of men and women? Boys and girls? Does gender seem to influence choices of programs?
  - ? Are the favorite programs of parents different from the favorite programs of kids? How does age affect which programs people prefer?
  - ? What patterns do you see repeated?
  - ? How does this information compare to your hypothesis?

? What questions does this information leave unanswered? How can you find answers to the new questions this data has produced?

- Students could write about the information they interpret from the graph and list the new questions that they are unable to answer.
- This research can continue along the lines of student interest to try to solve some of their questions with more surveys.

## **California State Standards**

### Language Arts

#### *Reading Comprehension*

2.1 Understand how text features (e.g., format, graphics, sequence, diagrams, illustrations, charts, maps) make information accessible and usable.

#### *Writing*

1.7 Use various reference materials (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, card catalog, encyclopedia, online information) as an aid to writing.

#### *Listening and Speaking Strategies*

1.8 Clarify and enhance oral presentations through the use of appropriate props (e.g., objects, pictures, charts).

#### *Analysis and Evaluation of Oral and Media Communications*

1.10 Compare ideas and points of view expressed in broadcast and print media.

### Math

#### *Statistics, Data Analysis, and Probability*

1.3 Summarize and display the results of probability experiments in a clear and organized way (e.g., use a bar graph or a line plot).

### Science

#### *Investigation and Experimentation*

5. Scientific progress is made by asking meaningful questions and conducting careful investigations. As a basis for understanding this concept and addressing the content in the other three strands, students should develop their own questions and perform investigations. Students will:
- a. Repeat observations to improve accuracy and know that the results of similar scientific investigations seldom turn out exactly the same because of differences in the things being investigated, methods being used, or uncertainty in the observation.
  - b. Differentiate evidence from opinion and know that scientists do not rely on claims or conclusions unless they are backed by observations that can be confirmed.
  - c. Use numerical data in describing and comparing objects, events, and measurements.
  - d. Predict the outcome of a simple investigation and compare the result with the prediction.
  - e. Collect data in an investigation and analyze those data to develop a logical conclusion.