

ELEMENTARY UNPACKING MEDIA MESSAGES: A CRITICAL THINKING ACTIVITY



Why Thinking Critically about Media Messages Matters: Media messages are everywhere—on TV, online, and in everyday life. Teaching children to think critically about these messages helps them become informed and thoughtful consumers of information.

ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

1

Choose a Piece of Media to View Together:

- Pick a commercial, advertisement, TikTok video, news headline and article, or any other media message.
- If possible, select media that your child is already familiar with or interested in.

2

Watch or View the Media:

- Watch the piece of media together at least once.

3

Discuss Using the Prompting Questions:

- Encourage your child to share their thoughts and observations.

4

Compare Across Media (Optional):

- View multiple media messages and use comparison questions to discuss similarities, differences, and repeated techniques.

5

Reflect Together:

- Ask your child how this activity changed how they think about media.
- Encourage them to come up with their own questions about media they see in the future.

TIPS FOR FAMILIES

- Make it a fun and interactive experience.
- Use open-ended questions and encourage your child to explain their thoughts and reasoning.
- Share your own observations to model critical thinking.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

- Have your child take on the role of the ad creator and come up with their own media message.
- Compare media messages from different sources or time periods to explore changes in techniques or audience targeting.



UNPACKING MEDIA MESSAGES:

Example Discussion Questions

GRADE LEVEL	UNPACKING MEDIA MESSAGES ACTIVITY GOALS	DISCUSSION QUESTION EXAMPLES
PK-1	• Uses evidence like observations and simple interpretations to explain thinking. • Asks clarifying questions.	• What do you see and hear in the media message? • How does it make you feel? Why do you think it makes you feel this way? • What is this commercial trying to tell us about the product? • Who would like this product? Why? • What would you change about this commercial/media message to make it better or more fun? • What questions do you have about this commercial or product?
2-3	• Uses evidence to support their reasoning. • Identifies and analyzes the techniques used to engage the audience. • Begins to evaluate information for accuracy, relevance, and credibility. • Asks relevant and clarifying questions to deepen their understanding.	• Who made this message, and why did they make it? • What are they trying to sell or tell us? • What techniques did they use to make the message interesting or engaging? • Does everything in the media message seem true? Why or why not? • What would you change about this media message? Why? • What questions do you have about this media message?
4-5	• Uses multiple pieces of evidence to support their thinking and proposes revisions based on evidence. • Begins to explain patterns, trends, and cause-effect relationships found through their analysis. • Evaluates information for accuracy, relevance, and credibility. • Asks relevant and critical questions.	• Why do you think this commercial was made, and what does the creator want you to do or think? • What's missing or left out of this message? How might that change what people think? • How might people with different perspectives or experiences react to or interpret this message? Why? • Who benefits from this message, and who might not? • How does one part of the commercial (e.g., music, images, or words) affect the way you feel or think? • If you could change something about this commercial, what would it be and how would it change the messaging?