

No Place for Hate[®] Activity Library

Telling Your Story: Analyzing the Media We Consume

Lesson Plan and Overview

Media shapes how young people understand themselves and the world around them, yet not everyone sees their identity reflected accurately, or at all, in the TV shows, movies and other media they consume every day. Representation is not just about visibility: it influences self-esteem, shapes perceptions of who belongs and who matters, and can either challenge or reinforce harmful stereotypes about race, ethnicity and other aspects of identity. The goal of this lesson is to build media literacy skills that help students recognize bias and nuance in the content they encounter daily. Ultimately, giving students the language and tools to evaluate representation empowers them to become more thoughtful media consumers and advocates for inclusive storytelling, a skill that extends well beyond the classroom into how they engage with a media landscape that profoundly influences attitudes toward difference.

Grade Level **Grades 6-12**

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Explore the extent to which the TV shows and movies they watch portray a diversity of characters.
- Consider and reflect on the importance of representation and visibility in movies and TV shows.

Materials Needed

- Video: PBS NewsHour [“Why On-Screen Representation Matters.”](#)
- Handout: Analyzing the Media We Consume

Words You Might Use

Diversity: Different or varied. The population of the United States is made up of people belonging to diverse groups characterized by culture, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.

Represent: To stand for a group that shares similar identity characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

Stereotype: An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences.

Core Activity

- Begin by showing a graphic like this one from Common Sense Media's [Inclusion Imperative](#) report to students:

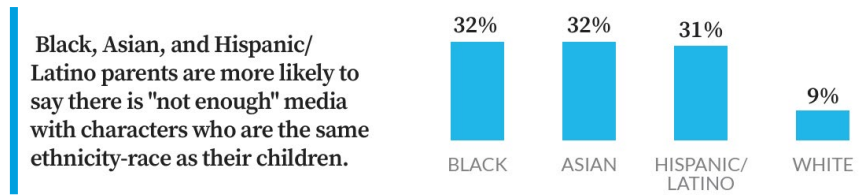


Image Credit: Common Sense Media

- Ask students:
 - Why do you think people notice if a TV show or movie or book features characters who are the same ethnicity-race as them?
 - Why do you think it's important to see different types of people represented in the media we consume?
 - Why is it meaningful to see yourself represented in media like TV shows or books or movies?
- Before moving into other parts of the lesson, ensure that students are entering the conversation from a place of shared language by introducing terms that will come up in the conversation like diversity, representation and stereotype. Ensure there are no misunderstandings or clarifying questions before moving into the rest of the lesson.
- Then, ask students:
 - What are some things you think about when choosing a new TV show or movie to binge?
 - Do you consider the diversity or representation of the cast? Do you consider the topics or themes the TV show or movie addresses?
- Transition by explaining that in many cases, we respond when we are able to see nuanced and accurate depictions of ourselves in the TV shows, movies, and social media content that we consume. Let's hear some young people describe how they feel about this.
- Show the video from PBS NewsHour "[Why On-Screen Representation Matters.](#)"
- After watching the video, engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What did you hear the students share about why representation matters to them?

- Based on the video, why do you think it's important that young people see accurate and nuanced portrayal of their identities in media?
 - Where is there room for improvement with representation in the media?
 - Can you think of any examples of TV shows or movies that really get representation right? Are there any that really get representation wrong?
 - What identity or traits would you love to see included in future TV shows or movies?
- Transition by explaining to students that they are going to take some time to reflect on and analyze a TV show or movie of their choosing. (Consider sharing a rating suggestion when selecting their TV shows or movies to ensure conversations remain school appropriate.)
 - Start by giving students 1 minute to think of a TV show or movie that they have strong (positive or negative) feelings about.
 - Then, distribute the [worksheet](#) to students, reading through the questions as a class to ensure students understand the task.
 - Give students approximately 10 minutes to evaluate their chosen TV show or movie on their own.
 - After students have completed their individual analysis, break them into small groups to allow them to share their key takeaways (aim to give each student 1 minute to speak in each group).
 - If time allows or class size is smaller, consider doing this with the whole class.
 - Close with discussion:
 - What did you notice doing your individual analysis?
 - What did you notice hearing about your classmates' analyses?
 - Were there any TV shows or movies that did really well in your analysis or really poorly? Why do you think that is?
 - What is the impact of seeing diversity? What is the impact of not seeing diversity?
 - What did you learn by doing this?
 - What more would you like to know?

Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further

Note: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.

- After students have completed the core activity above, break students into small groups. Remind students of the TV shows or movies that they analyzed earlier in the lesson. Ask them to do a little research based on those shows/movies—what production companies or television networks have the opportunity to do better with diverse programming? Have students write letters or emails (that do not need to be sent) in which they ask and encourage the production of more diverse and representative programming. Remind students to make the letter as personal as they feel comfortable.
- Now that students have completed the core activity, as a class, select one of the movies or TV shows that did poorly in the analysis activity. Use YouTube, a streaming platform or memory to choose a scene that lacks diverse representation. (For example, the [introduction of Long Duk Dong](#) in *Sixteen Candles*). Return students to their small groups and direct them to rewrite the scene to include more inclusive casting, storylines or perspectives.
- After students have engaged in the core activity, invite an appropriate local filmmaker, journalist, content creator or media professional from a diverse background (who has spoken about their identity) to speak (in person or virtually) about their experiences navigating representation in their field. Before the speaker arrives, ask each class to create interview questions for them. (If an asynchronous option is needed, consider showing clips like Entertainment Weekly's [Anderson Cooper, Neil Patrick Harris & More on Representation and Role Models](#) or [Viola Davis' 2015 Emmys Acceptance Speech](#).)

Home Connection

Share ADL's Table Talk [Everyday Bias](#) with families.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

Students will engage in reflection and discussion about representation and the importance of diversity in movies and television shows. This will contribute to a school and classroom environment where discussing representation and the importance of diversity are encouraged.

ANALYZING THE MEDIA WE CONSUME

- 1.** What is the TV show or movie you and your group will be focusing on?
- 2.** Briefly summarize the TV show or movie.
- 3.** Why did you select this TV show or movie? What do you enjoy about it?
- 4.** Main Characters: Let's explore 4 main or secondary characters, and consider their identity characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability/disability, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.
 - a.** From Stranger Things: Lucas Sinclair—African American, male, straight, pre-teen/teen, upper-middle class.
 - b.** _____
 - c.** _____
 - d.** _____
 - e.** _____
- 5.** Reflecting on all of the TV shows or movies you brainstormed for this activity, how diverse is your list of shows or movies? Why do you think that is?
- 6.** Does the TV show or movie address identity or diversity? Why do you think that is? Do any stereotypes come up in the TV show or movie OR are stereotypes addressed? How so?
- 7.** Is there anything else you find to be interesting or noteworthy related to diversity and your chosen TV show or movie?