



**MEDIA  
AWARENESS  
NETWORK**

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**Level:** Grades 5-8

**Length:** 1+ hour

**About the Author**

This lesson was created by the National Institute on Media and the Family

**Lesson Plan**

**A Day in the Life**

**Overview**

This lesson examines how technology and media have changed over the past fifty years, and how this has influenced everyday life. In small groups, students will read a pair of case studies that review a day in the life of two high school students, one living in 1949 and the other in 1999. In each case study, students will look at the role played by the media in the lives of the individual. After discussing the case studies, students are asked to predict what the role of media might be fifty years from now.

**Materials**

- *A Day in the Life - A Case Study* (one per student)
- *Retrieval Chart* (one per group of three to five students)

**Background**

In the "School Success in the Media Age" audio tapes, Dr. David Walsh describes media's impact on the developing brains of children and identifies the seven building blocks for school success. Due to technological advances, the prevalence and forms of media have changed drastically over the past 50 years. For example, 50 years ago very few households had televisions; today 99 percent of homes have a television, with an average of 2.4 televisions per household. More than half of America's children have televisions in their bedrooms. In "School Success," Dr. Walsh explores the impact of these changes on our children and our society.

**Procedure**

1. Divide the class into groups of three to five students. Explain that they will be reading two case studies that review a day in the life of two high school students, one living in 1949 and one living in 1999. Explain that they attend the same high school in the same community.
2. Distribute the *A Day in the Life - A Case Study* handout to the students and ask them to read it.
3. Define "media" for the group. Media is something that someone creates to carry a message from one person or group to another. This message can take many forms.
4. Brainstorm a list of forms of media. The list may include, but is not limited to:

television  
radio  
movies  
magazines  
videos  
CD-ROMs  
video games  
computer games  
telephone  
Internet  
billboards  
signs  
posters  
mail  
flyers

record players  
e-mail  
voice mail  
pagers  
cell phones  
cassette tapes  
graffiti  
stickers (on fruits and vegetables)  
catalogs  
clothing (with logos, picture, and slogans)  
books  
newspapers  
comic books  
VCRs  
packaging  
answering machines

5. Distribute a [Retrieval Chart](#) to each student group. Instruct the students to use the retrieval chart to systematically gather information from the case studies.
6. Discuss the following:
  - What changes took place in family lifestyles during the 50 year time period of the two case studies?
  - Are these changes perceived as positive or negative?
  - Which of these changes are related to changes in technology or media and how?
  - In what ways were the behavior and attitudes of the two students different?
  - Similar?
  - In the students' opinion, how accurate of a picture do these stories present?
  - Do they apply to people in all areas of the country in these two time periods?
  - Do they apply to people in all areas of the world during these two time periods?
7. Give each group 10 minutes to write about what they think a day in the life of a high school student in the year 2049 would be like.
8. Have each group share their scenarios with the class.

### **Extension Activity**

1. To verify the accuracy of the case studies, have students design an interview tool with a specific list of questions relating to technology, media, and lifestyle.
2. Have students use the list of questions to interview community residents who were in high school in 1949 and local businesspeople who have been in operation since 1949 or before.
3. Ask students to present their findings to the class.

## Student Handout #1

### **A Day in the Life - A Case Study**

**1949**

Jimmy was awakened by his mother calling up the stairs, "Jimmy, you're going to be late!" He looked at the small alarm clock and saw that the hands had stopped moving at 2:36. He must have forgotten to wind it again. He jumped out of bed and stumbled to the bathroom. Fortunately, he'd showered just two days ago so he could get by without one today. He splashed his face with cold water, brushed his teeth, and slicked back his hair with Bril cream. Then he returned to his bedroom to get dressed in cotton pants, a cotton button-down shirt, and a sweater vest. He hadn't polished his shoes for a few days and they needed it, but they'd just have to wait; he didn't have time this morning.

He headed to the kitchen, where his dad was sitting at the table reading the local newspaper while his mom scrambled eggs. His dad pointed out a small article in the society section about the birthday party they'd had last week for Jimmy's little sister Betty. The paper had included every little detail, from the pink dress his sister wore, to the marble cake they ate, to the Pin-the-Tail-on-the-Donkey game they played. Usually Jimmy liked to read the parts of the paper his father had finished during breakfast, especially the comic strip Dick Tracy, but he didn't have time to linger today. He bolted his down his scrambled eggs, toast, and fresh-squeezed orange juice, grabbed his stack of books, and ran out the door. He strapped his books to the back of his bike and hopped on for the six block ride to school. He liked to ride by the vacant lot and read all of the billboards that were there. Every once in awhile, there was a new one or they'd change one of the old ones. Jimmy liked reading billboards - they made the monthly, one-hour drive to the City to visit his grandparents more interesting. His favorite were the Burma Shave billboards. Next time they went to his grandparents, he was going to take his buddy Ricky. Ricky's grandparents lived nearby and Ricky had never been to the City before.

School that day went quickly, though Jimmy had a hard time keeping his mind on the lectures and his lessons. He was thinking about his date that night with Patty. They were going to see the movie "On the Town," starring Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly, with a group of friends. They'd all been waiting eagerly for that movie to come to town. The "down side" was that Jimmy would have to miss his favorite radio show, "The Shadow," which was only on Friday nights.

After school, Jimmy went straight home. His mother had some chores for him to do before he went out with Patty. She wanted him to straighten-up his room and "do something with all that trash!" Jimmy's mother did not understand that his collection of "Captain Midnight" and "Superman" comic books were not trash, even if it was spread out all over his room! As he straightened up his room, Jimmy wished his family had more money so he could have his own radio in his room. He really liked to listen to popular singers like Hank Williams, but his parents wanted to listen to big bands and they usually got their way.

Soon his mom called him down for dinner. He wanted to get a burger, fries, and milkshake before the movie, but his mother insisted that he eat a nutritious home-cooked meal. She had made meat loaf and mashed potatoes with gravy.

During dinner the family talked about their day and their weekend plans. Jimmy's mother shared a telegram she'd received that day from her sister; she'd given birth to her fifth child - a baby boy she named John. She also reminded his dad that she would be mailing in an order from the Sear's catalog on Monday so if he wanted anything that he couldn't buy here in town, he had to let her know.

As Jimmy left for his date, his mother was popping popcorn on the stove and his father and little sister were settling down in front of the radio. This time Jimmy walked; he was hoping to hold Patty's hand and that's hard to do on a bike. At Patty's house, Jimmy went in long enough to be polite and to promise to have Patty home by her 11 p.m. curfew.

The movie theater was only a few blocks from Patty's house, so they arrived with plenty of time before the movie. Jimmy stood in line with his guy friends to buy tickets, while the girls read the posters about up-coming movies. Before the movie started, they watched a fifteen-minute newsreel from the government. Russia had exploded an atomic bomb only a few months ago and the entire news reel was about Russia and communism. It was kind of "heavy stuff" for a date, but they had to sit through it to get to the movie.

The movie was good - Frank and Gene sure could sing and dance! After the movie they went to the local hang-out to listen to records on the juke box. A lot of people were dancing but Jimmy and Patty shared a soda and watched. At 10:45 they left so Patty would be home before her curfew. Jimmy continued home and as he got ready for bed, he wondered what people used to do before movies were invented. Life must have been boring!

### **1999**

Zach was gently awakened by the music on his AM-FM clock radio. After five minutes of music from his favorite radio station, the alarm buzzed. Even though he was awake, he hit the snooze button so he could lay there for another few minutes. He liked to ease into the day and always set his alarm for fifteen minutes before he had to get up so he could hit snooze a few times. He could hear his sister singing in the shower - she'd gotten a shower radio for her birthday - and her singing was clashing with his music, so he plugged his headphones into his radio and used them to block her out.

Eventually Zach turned off the clock radio and got up. Fortunately, they had three bathrooms in the house so he didn't have to wait for his sister to stop primping before he could shower. Zach had showering down to a science and now that they'd developed a shampoo/conditioner in one, he'd shaved a few more minutes off his shower time.

After his shower, Zach returned to his room and put on a CD. Zach was a big music fan and liked to set the mood with different music. He used the money from his part-time job at the bagel shop to buy CDs, so he had a lot to choose from - over 300! He chose something mellow for this morning to calm his nerves. He had to present a social studies project he'd been working on for several weeks today at school. Zach had decided to do a multimedia presentation and would be using Power Point on the computer as well as a VCR and monitor. Zach wanted to get to school early to make sure all the technology was working properly. Technology was great as long as it worked, but could be a real pain when it didn't!

Zach automatically reached for his favorite T-shirt - it had a cool saying on it and was a popular brand name - but then he thought he'd better wear something a little nicer for his presentation. His social studies teacher was from the "old school" and thought personal appearance was important. Zach chose a plain long-sleeved rugby shirt instead.

After he got dressed, Zach went downstairs and into the kitchen. His mom was already gone - she went to work early so she could be home by the time his little sister got home from school. Plus, she worked in the heart of the city and she had to commute 45 minutes each way. By going in early and leaving early, she missed the worst of the rush hour traffic.

Zach's little sister was sitting at the table watching the little color TV they kept on the kitchen counter. She loved cartoons and watched them every day before school. She had a TV in her bedroom too, but for some reason she preferred to watch the one in the kitchen or the living room.

Zach grabbed a pre-packaged breakfast bar and went to tell his dad he was leaving. His dad was on his laptop, checking his stock prices on the Internet. His parents had only discovered the Internet a year ago, but now they were on it so much they'd had another phone line installed. They used it to trade stocks, reserve airline tickets, buy birthday presents, and send e-mail. Zach used the Internet too, but mostly for research for school projects. He used to play a lot of computer games on it, but he'd gotten so busy this year with school, his job, and sports, he didn't have much time. His Nintendo hardly got used anymore.

As Zach drove himself to school, he thought how great it was to have a car. It was old and kind of rusty, but it got him where he needed to go. He thought back to last year, before he'd saved up enough money to buy this car, when he'd had to ride the bus. It was embarrassing for a junior in high school to ride the bus with all the freshmen and sophomores! He'd dealt with the humiliation by slumping down in his bus seat and listening to his portable CD player. Music always made him feel better. Now, as he drove, Zach switched from radio station to radio station, looking for a song he liked. This car was so old it didn't even have a tape player! His mom's car had a 10-CD changer in the trunk and six regular speakers, plus two bass speakers, but she didn't let him drive it to school.

When he got to the school, he found a parking spot right away - one of the perks of coming to school early. He also didn't have to wait in line to get through the metal detector. The rest of the day went well, too. His presentation went off without a hitch, except that one of the kid's pagers went off in the middle of it. The school had a new policy not allowing pagers on school grounds, so the kid was sent to the principal's office. After he was done with his presentation, the rest of the day flew by. Most of his teachers were into interactive materials, which made the time pass faster, though it was still pretty boring.

After school, Zach and some friends went to the mall to play video games and "hang out." The mall had a place that had virtual reality machines, which were really cool, but they were expensive so they didn't use them often. Zach called his mother on her cell phone to ask her to tape a television program for him. He wouldn't be home to watch it tonight, and he forgot to set the timer this morning. Then he called to check his voice mail messages. When his friends got hungry, they went to the food court so they could each get their favorite kind of food. Zach's soda cup had a coupon for half-priced tickets to a movie at the mall theater, so he pulled off the coupon and kept it in case they decided to go to a movie later. This theater had ten different movies to choose from and if they couldn't find anything else they liked here, there were four other theaters nearby. Several of his friends had big color televisions and VCRs in their bedrooms, so they could always rent a movie and just hang out. After discussing it, they decided to see the latest high-action movie - lots of noise and things blowing up.

After the movie, which was good but nothing spectacular (they all start to look alike after awhile) Zach headed home. When he walked in, his parents were watching a video of an old movie called "On the Town." They asked Zach to sit and watch it with them, so he did. But it was so boring - lots of singing and dancing and very little action. As Zach got ready for bed, he thought about how glad he was he didn't live in the days when movies were as boring as "On the Town!"

**This handout was created as part of the Lesson "A Day in the Life" by the National Institute on Media and the Family, a US-based, non-profit organization that provides resources on the influence of electronic media on early childhood education, child development, academic performance, culture and violence. (Reprinted with permission.) © 2000 National Institute on Media and the Family**

Student Handout # 2

## **A Day in the Life - Retrieval Chart**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

List and Compare the following:

1. **Media Related Activities from 1949**

2. **Media Related Activities from 1999**

3. **Main Differences (Media Related and Other) Between 1949 and 1999**