



Lesson Plan

Comparing Real Families to TV Families

Overview

In this lesson, students learn how the media construct reality by studying the families portrayed on television, and comparing them to the real-life families they know: their own, and those of their peers. The lesson begins with a survey of student's favourite TV shows about families, and what they enjoy most about them. In groups, students select a family-based television show to monitor and report on. As each group reports, students will discuss whether or not the program accurately represents real families and family relationships.

Level: Grades 2-5

About the Author

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Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- recognize that the media construct reality
- understand that the representations made by the media are not always accurate
- enjoy investigating family shows on TV

The Lesson

Explain to your class that in the next week they are going to be looking at TV families. Ask them to think about the television programs that they enjoy watching. Distribute the *My TV Survey* and let students answer the questions. Discuss their answers or tally the results as a class over the next week.

Preparation and Materials

- Distribute *Letter to Parents*
- Photocopy handouts of *My TV Survey* and *My TV Family Log*
- Create a list of television shows about families. Include times, days and the channels on which they appear. The list might include programs like: *Malcolm in the Middle*, *Full House*, *The Simpsons*, *Rug Rats*, *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Hey Arnold*, *Home Improvement*, *The Cosby Show*.

Preparation for Group Activity

Divide students into groups and let each group decide which television show they would like to watch. Distribute *My TV Family Log*, get students to fill in the name of their assigned program, and discuss the elements they will be looking for as they fill out the rest at home with their parents.

Activity – approximately one week later

Once group members have gathered their information individually, they should create a group report on their program, which they will present to the class. (When describing the individual TV family members, students might like to present them "in character.") When each group has finished presenting, the class will discuss the following questions.

- Do you know anyone who is like a character from this TV family?
- What do you think of the kids in this TV family? Are they like you, or different from you? What do you like about these kids? What don't you like about them?
- What are the relationships like between the members of this TV family? Does everyone get along? Are they always arguing, or putting each other down, or do they support one another?
- Is this how real families act?
- How are problems resolved in your TV family?
- Do you think that the actors who play the roles of the members of this family act this way in real life?
- Does this family live like your family does? (i.e. their house, their neighborhood, their clothes?)
- Do the members of this TV family participate in activities that your family participates in? What are the differences?
- Who is missing in this TV family?
For those of you who watched this show, how do you feel when you watch it? Does it make you happy? Relaxed? Upset? Angry? Amused?
- How would we rate this TV family? (Have class vote and record the results on the blackboard under categories like **Real** or **Not Real**)

Once the groups have presented and the class has voted, ask the following questions:

- Is it okay to have TV shows about families that are not very realistic? Think back to your feelings when you were watching some of these shows. What are some good things about looking at these TV families, especially those whose members don't act like real people? (They are funny to watch, you can escape from your own world.)
- Why might it be a problem for some kids to watch these shows? (They may think that this is how other families behave, it might make them feel that something is missing or wrong in their own families.)

Tell students to think about their own families and the activities that they enjoy. Write "We Are Real" on the blackboard and tell the class that you would like them to draw, create a collage, or paint a picture of themselves and their families doing an activity that they enjoy.

Write "We Are Real" on the blackboard and tell the class that you would like them to draw, create a collage, or paint a picture of themselves and their families doing an activity that they enjoy doing together. (Alternately, you could ask students to bring in photographs of themselves and their families and create a larger collage on a classroom bulletin board.)

Evaluation

- Group presentations and log
- Pictures

Student Handout #1

Letter to Parents/Guardians

Name: _____

Dear Parents or Guardians,

As part of our unit on *Families In The Media*, we will be encouraging children to become more aware of the depiction of families in the television programs that they watch. Often children receive distorted images of the structures and behaviors of families from television that greatly affect their perceptions of how real families work. Throughout this unit, we will be comparing our families to the families that we see in our favorite shows and we will be measuring the gaps that exist between fantasy and reality.

In the next week, your child will be bringing home *My TV Family Log* to complete. Please sit with your child to watch the assigned program and help your child to answer the questions in the log. Your child needs this information to develop a group presentation and to participate in class discussion, so try to record as much detail as possible in the responses.

Thank you for your help. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Student Handout # 2

My TV Survey

Name: _____

1. What is your favourite TV show about families? Why?

2. If you could be like one of the members of this TV family, who would it be?

3. Why would you like to be like this person? Is it because of their looks? Personality? The way people treat them? The things they can do?

My TV Family Log

Name: _____

Family TV Show:

1. Describe the members of your TV family. Include their names, their position in the family, a description of what they look like and how they act.

Name of Character	Position	Description	How They Act

2. Who is your favorite character? Why?

3. Who is your least favorite character? Why?

4. Where does your TV family live? Are they rich or poor? What is their house or apartment like?

5. What happens in the show?