

MEDIA LITERACY FOR TEENS

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What is Media Literacy?

Youth Learn (2016) defines media literacy as “the ability to interpret and communicate meaning in media”. Young adults interact with media in a variety of forms, however they tend to favor digital media and contemporary technology. Traditional forms of media, such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines, are now accompanied by social media, satirical news stories and targeted advertising (Common Sense Media, n.d.). In order for young adults to be responsible consumers and creators of media, they must have the ability to critically assess, analyze and share credible information both on and offline (Media Smarts, n.d.).



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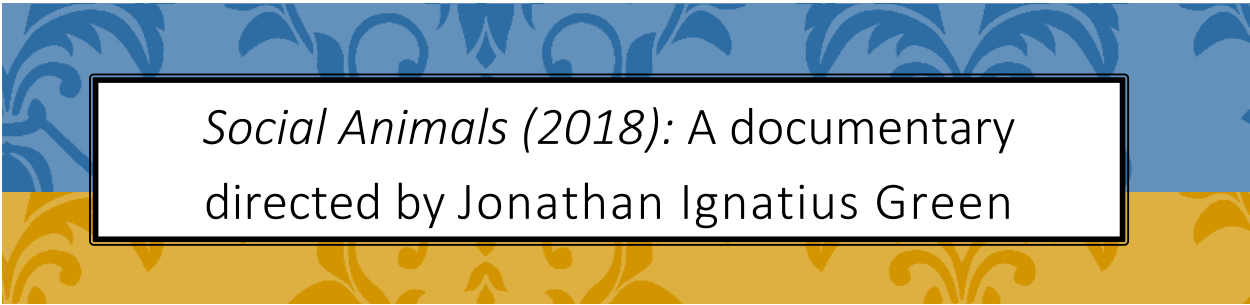
How can librarians help?

Media literacy is a timely and relevant topic, especially for young adults, who must learn how to navigate an increasingly volatile information environment.

Librarians are knowledgeable about information management issues and can utilize library resources and programming services to help teens acquire these skills.

The American Library Association (ALA)

(2018) has demonstrated the value of media literacy programming, through their *Media Literacy @ Your Library* initiative. This project report is a valuable reference to use when planning media literacy activities and programs. However, as the ALA initiative focused on adult media literacy education, you may be looking for activities that better serve the needs and interests of young adult patrons. Some suggestions are provided below. These activities could work as individual events or be combined for a program with multiple sessions.



Social Animals (2018): A documentary
directed by Jonathan Ignatius Green

Description

This documentary follows the experiences of three teens as they document their own lives on the popular photo sharing app Instagram. An aspiring model, with close to 500k followers, demonstrates the increasingly fine line between an individual and their carefully curated online brand. The film also follows the budding career of Humza Deas, a daring New York street photographer, and explores how Instagram can quickly elevate (or hinder) young artists by providing a global platform to share their work. Instagram is not only a tool for artists and influencers. It has become an indispensable platform for typical teens to connect and communicate with each other. The narrative of this documentary is grounded by the cautionary tale of a high school student who experienced significant social trauma, magnified by the unforgiving rules and games of Instagram (Heal, Lipson, Dearmond & Green, 2018).

Target audience

This film explores some mature themes, such as cyberbullying and suicide, that may be triggering for some viewers. The documentary also includes some profanity that is uncensored. Suitable for teens aged 14+.

Scheduling, Staffing & Resources

The film has a run time of 1.5 hours. To make this event an interactive learning experience about digital media, schedule some additional time for attendees to reflect and engage in discussion. The film set up and discussion can be facilitated by one to two library staff members, depending on the size of the group. Visit <https://www.socialanimalsfilm.com/screenings> to download a discussion guide for the film and for more information about booking a screening. Providing snacks and beverages is also recommended to encourage teens to attend, if the library budget can accommodate this.



Media Mash Up Activity: Adapted from Youth Learn (2016)

Description

This activity will allow teens to explore how advertisements can be manipulated to portray a certain message or influence the target audience. The activity will begin with a group discussion about sample ads chosen by the facilitator. The following questions can be used to spark discussion:

- Who is the target audience? How can you tell?
- What advertising techniques are being used?
- What message or messages are being conveyed?
- Are the messages distorted, exaggerated or misrepresented?

Have participants review the spoof advertisements available on the AdBusters website and use these as inspiration to create their own ads, using photo editing software and images they find online. When the activity is finished, participants will present their creations and share their learnings about media representation and advertising.

Target audience

This activity is appropriate for ages 13+. Depending on the demographics of the group, you may want to sort participants by age. For example, two groups for ages 13-15 and 16-18.

Scheduling, staffing and resources

This activity can be facilitated by one to two library staff, depending on the size of the groups. It is recommended that participants are provided two hours to complete this activity. Access to a computer lab or laptop computers is also recommended so participants can access photo editing software. Many programs are freely available online, with PIXLR being a user-friendly option. Library staff should have a good understanding of the software features and be able to assist participants. If technology access is limited, magazines and newspaper clippings can also be used to create the advertisements.



Exploring Bias in the News: Adapted from MediaSmarts (2016)

Description

This activity will provide an opportunity for participants to increase their awareness and understanding of the influence of bias on information shared in news media. Print copies of the article “How to Detect Bias in the News” from MediaSmarts (2016) and review this with participants. This article provides examples of how bias can be expressed through selection and admission, word choice, headlines and other techniques (MediaSmarts, 2016). Sort participants into groups to explore different types of news media, such as newspapers, magazines and online news sources. Have participants focus on diverse stories featuring groups or individuals that may be marginalized by their age, religion, sexuality, culture, race or other factor. Participants will evaluate the articles they find using the MediaSmarts handout and share their findings.

Target Audience

This activity is suitable for ages 13+. Program facilitators should be aware of potentially sensitive news topics and may want to moderate the discussion according to the age and demographics of the group.

Scheduling, Staffing and Resources

It is suggested that participants are provided one hour to complete this activity. Depending on the scope of the program, this activity can be expanded by having participants follow a chosen news source at home, for a one-week period, and report their bias related findings to the group during an additional program session. The program facilitator should ensure that old editions of newspapers and magazines are provided and that participants are also able to access library computers and the internet during the activity.

References

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