



Illinois Media Literacy Coalition

# THE **WHAT** AND **WHY** OF MEDIA LITERACY

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## DEAR ILLINOIS EDUCATORS,

We've been offered a great opportunity to lead the country in practicing media literacy in our high schools. On July 16th 2021, Governor Pritzker enacted Public Act 102-0055 mandating every high school to teach a unit of media literacy. The following document offers a framework for adapting media literacy into high school classrooms.

In this brief guide, you will find the definition of media literacy, the rationale to teach it and guiding principles on how to implement it into your existing curriculum.



# MEDIA LITERACY DEFINITION:

Expanding a 21st Century Literacy



*"Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and communicate using a variety of objective forms, including, but not limited to, print, visual, audio, interactive, and digital texts."*

*Illinois Public Act 102-0055*

By expanding the traditional literacy skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, media literacy offers 21st century skills for inquiry and critical thinking to better navigate our current information landscape. Media literacy is a collection of both knowledge about media, and skills informed by that knowledge.

Both consumers and creators of media benefit from these knowledge and skills. We emphasize media literacy as a COLLECTION of skills that are acquired over time that build upon one another. Media literacy therefore is meant to be an ONGOING practice that its learners should exercise in a variety of ways.

## Enacting Media Literacy: Who has the control?

Media literacy is a method that brings freedom to the consumer/user to choose what media to use, how and when to use it, and how to address its impact. Much of the media we consume is filtered and shaped by algorithms and other technologies, which in turn, have the ability to influence our attitudes and behaviors. Because of this, knowing how to discern the intent and purpose of media messages has become a more important practice. Media literacy can bring its learner a greater sense of control over how media messages impact both themselves and those around them by answering the questions: who has control over the message, its use and its impact as part of our media environment?



# WHY TEACH MEDIA LITERACY?

Engaging in media literacy has four main benefits:

*Freedom*

01

It affords its learners the **freedom** to choose media messages by applying an informed inquiry built on facts and reason.

*Wellbeing*

03

It promotes digital **wellbeing** by developing media habits that support individual needs and builds agency for engaging with media technologies.

*Civics*

02

It creates **socially responsible citizens** by identifying impacts of the media environment on society & individuals.

*Self-Efficacy*

04

It builds skills for college & career readiness through demonstrating **adaptive skills** for future jobs and self development.



# MEDIA LITERACY FRAMEWORK

Introducing 4 Central Pillars of Media Literacy



We present the following four concepts as a framework towards understanding the foundations of media literacy. This is not a curriculum, but instead a set of key, overarching concepts for media literacy learning and practices in classrooms. When building curricula and choosing resources, these overarching concepts will ensure fidelity with the goals of media literacy education and the aims of the Illinois Public Act 102-0055.

*Manufactured reality*

## CONCEPT 1

All media messages are constructed toward a specific purpose. They do not simply mirror reality, but instead represent it through a series of purposeful choices made by their creators and consumers.

Humans are unique in our ability to communicate with one another using language in order to convey messages for different purposes. We use media channels to broadcast those messages to larger audiences and a wide variety of people. To make messages meaningful, their creators and consumers construct them into narratives with characters, actions, events, and ideas that represent their individual perspectives. In constructing these narratives, we make purpose-driven choices as to which elements to highlight, and which to discard.



For example, if we are telling a story about our employment history to a prospective employer, we may emphasize our achievements more than our failures in order to convey how competent we were in our previous jobs to make the prospect believe that we are the strongest candidate.

When we take a selfie with others to post on social media, we may smile and frame that picture in a way that emphasizes how much fun we are having at that moment. In both of these cases, we identify a particular purpose and use narrative (be it verbal or an image) tools to create a message that works toward communicating that purpose.

*The medium is the message*

## CONCEPT 2

The choice of medium in which a message is created and distributed impact how that message is interpreted.

We consume and create media in many different forms (audio, text, video are a few) and formats (book, song, movie, mural, poster, etc...). Each of those forms have their advantages, and limitations in regards to how the message is conveyed and received. In other words, the affordances and constraints determine how to create the message and how to interpret it and so the choice of the medium influences how the message is received.

Consider a news story about a building fire in a neighborhood. The form by which that news story is put together may affect how it is received by the audience. Video of the fire may be more impactful than only a written description. However, it may be less precise in conveying the effects of the fire over a large area, if we only see video of one part of that fire. Video may emphasize the danger and fear caused by the fire, but may not touch on the ongoing hardship the fire will cause to residents. This example highlights the ways that the meaning of media messages can change because of the form that it is transmitted in.



*Media Influence*

## CONCEPT 3

Media are powerful communication tools that people use to influence actions, attitudes, beliefs and values. In this way, media connect sender and receiver through messages.

We are all influenced in some way by the messages that people relay through media, both in ways that are obvious and subtle. Although the amount of influence that media may have on us is open to debate, we are constantly exposed to different attempts to persuade by media creators. Consider the amount of political and consumer advertising that is run online and through other broadcast channels. If it didn't work, we wouldn't see it so often.



A classic example of this comes from advertising. While stopping at your local coffee shop for a cup, you see a sign at the register promoting a sale on its pastries. You see it, and choose to buy one. If you were to analyze that sign, it didn't tell you to "buy a pastry" but instead "hey, pastries are on sale this week". That "nudge" was persuasive enough to get you to purchase it. While it is true that media influence can also be used to undermine your sense of choice (in cases where media engenders fear and anger), it doesn't ALWAYS do so, and can be used for other purposes.

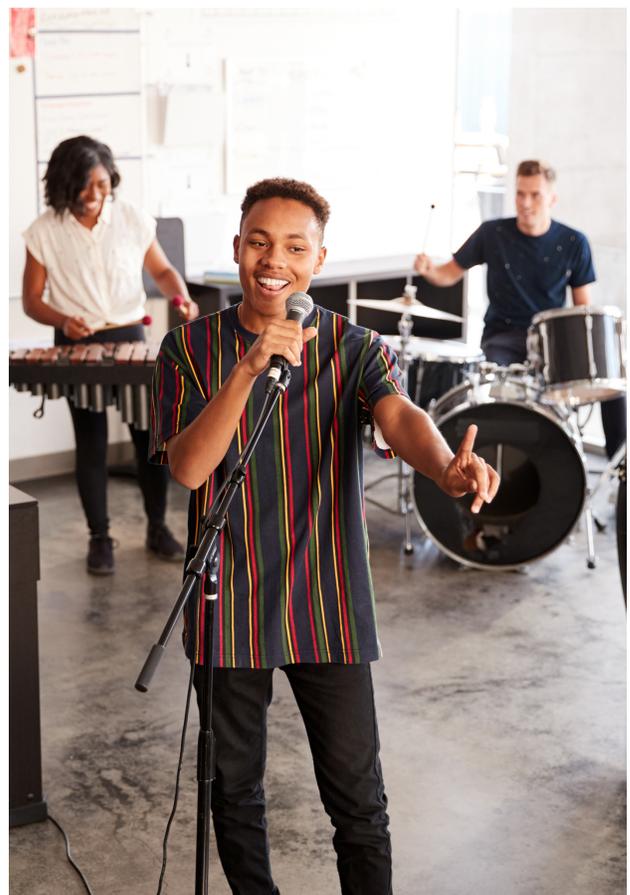
*Empowerment*

## CONCEPT 4

Analyzing media messages, evaluating their impact, and reflecting on our media use provide us greater control over its use that fosters a greater sense of wellbeing, agency, and self-efficacy.

Overall, the goal of media literacy is to develop a sense of wellbeing and agency with media through greater inquiry and reflection of both consuming and creating media. While consuming media, a person with greater knowledge of media literacy can engage in a practice of asking questions of media messages including “who created the message?”, and “why was it created?” as part of their regular practices. When that same person engages in media creation (including sharing content on social media platforms), the user engages with these same questions in order to consider the intended purpose and impact of the media message being shared. The more these practices are used, the more automatic they become. As a result, the person can feel more in control and build a greater self-efficacy.

For instance, when watching a video from an influencer on Tik-Tok that features information on healthy eating, a person with greater media literacy skill considers the impact of this information before incorporating it into their existing understandings of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle, by comparing it with other sources of information, whose purpose is to inform, and not just to entertain. Before sharing this information with others, they also consider the impact of sharing information from a non-expert source publicly before doing so.



# NEXT STEPS

Continuing to Develop and Build on this Framework



Our goal with this framework is to provide a springboard for dialogue among educators, scholars, practitioners and others interested in shaping and improving media literacy education in Illinois and beyond. We welcome feedback, thoughts, and ideas on how for use this framework to inform your use of media literacy in schools through joining us as part of the Illinois Media Literacy Coalition.

Find out more and sign up on our website at [ILMLC.org](http://ILMLC.org).

## CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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