

Pop Culture: What is Beautiful?

Title: Now *That's* Beautiful!

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Suggested Grade Level(s): 7-9, 10-12

Suggested Length of Class Time: One class (60 minutes)

Subject Areas: Media Literacy, English Language Arts, Social Studies

Rationale:

Popular Culture and the messages it communicates have always been a powerful shaping force in our society. It is critical that students learn to deconstruct and become critical observers of these messages because of the prevalence of the Internet, digital cable and satellite television, and advertising on every imaginable public space.

In this lesson, students are encouraged to consider our notion of beauty and to what degree that notion is taught to us by the media/popular culture. How much influence, for example, do films, magazines, television programs, and commercials have on the ways in which we believe we should strive to look, dress, and accessorize? What is “cultural capital” and does one who meets the current standards of beauty have more of it? What price will people pay for beauty? How dependent is “beauty” on youth?

Logistics:

Classroom setup

- individual and small group work in classroom - a standard classroom will easily accommodate the needs of this lesson

Materials

- Magazine articles about beauty – any fashion/glamour magazine is full of them
- Newspaper – search the recent daily newspapers or go on line and search for recent articles about beauty
- Student journals (or loose leaf if students are not already writing in journals)

Suggested resources/images

– Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty has made some fantastic 1 minute films that are on-line at the following url:

<http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/dsef07/t5.aspx?id=7373>

Onslaught and Evolution are particularly good resources for encouraging discussion on the issue of the artificiality of commercial beauty.

- The Media Awareness Network is an excellent resource with literally hundreds of resources and ideas for instruction and discussion of this topic. Its website address is www.media-awareness.ca

Suggested Outcomes:

English Language Arts 7-9 and 10-12:

- Students will be expected to speak and listen to explore, extend, clarify, and reflect on their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences.
- Students will be expected to communicate information and ideas effectively and clearly, and to respond personally and critically.
- Students will be expected to select, read, and view with understanding a range of literature, information, media, and visual texts.

Social Studies Grade 9

Theme Two - Culture:

- The student will be expected to demonstrate an understanding of the local and global factors that have shaped the culture of Atlantic Canada

Theme Five – Interdependence:

- The student will be expected to explore his/her concept of world view that explain the factors that influence and are influenced by it

Introduction:

Before beginning the instructional activities, it would be useful to engage the students in an informal discussion about what they already know about the messages in the media relating to beauty. What do they think the messages of today are? Where are these messages most prevalent - magazines, MuchMusic, movies? Who is the main target audience for these messages? Are girls more targeted than boys? Older women more than older men? How has the notion of what is beautiful changed over the years? Do any of the students know what was considered beautiful in the 1950s, 1800s, ancient Greece, etc.?

Suggestions for Teaching and Learning:

Step 1

- Invite students to peruse some newspaper and magazine articles and ads. Encourage them to write down any comments about any interesting facts they learn, or whether they see anything they would like to buy, etc.
- Encourage them to note down anything they notice about how these articles/ads are telling them what to believe. Invite students to share their findings.
- Watch the Dove films, “Onslaught” and “Evolution” if the internet and LCD player are available.

Step 2

- Go over the general “rules” and “roles” of a literacy circle:
 - o **Artful artist** uses some form of artwork to represent a significant scene or idea from the reading.
 - o **Literary luminary** points out interesting or important passages within the reading.
 - o **Discussion director** writes questions that will lead to discussion by the group.

- **Capable connector** finds connections between the reading material and something outside the text, such as a personal experience, a topic studied in another class, or a different work of literature.
- **Word wizard** discusses words in the text that are unusual, interesting, or difficult to understand.
- Students may now break into groups of 5, with each student taking a role in their literacy circle. Then give each group a different newspaper or magazine article/ad to read. Ideally each member of the group will receive his/her own copy.
- Once they have finished reading the text, the students may begin to fulfill their job – write down some questions, illustrate an image, mark quotes, summarize, highlight words in their journals or on loose leaf.
- Once everyone in the group is ready, they may then discuss the article and answer the questions, consider the highlighted words, etc. and determine what the article is telling the reader about beauty.

Step 3

- When all the groups have completed their circle work, invite them to report back to the rest of the class on their findings in their article/ad.

Extension of ideas:

- Extend this lesson by introducing the concept of “agenda” into the students’ thinking. They have just begun to consider *who* is telling them what to think, now encourage them to consider *why* these messages are being sent. The source of information has an agenda and it is important to learn how to interpret what this agenda might be. One possible activity is to have students to give you the “facts” of a recent celebrity news story that they have heard about. Divide the board into 3 sections. In the first, write all their facts on the board, then ask them for their sources. Write any and all sources in the second panel on the board. Then ask the students to explain how they know that they can believe the story. These reasons will be written in the third panel on the board. Then lead the students in a discussion about how we can decide what is the truth in the story. Chances are that the students will realize that only one or two facts are true, and the rest is rumor and conjecture.

Suggestions for Assessment:

- Students may hand in their journals/loose leaf, with article attached for assessment.
- Groups may make a small poster of words and images that examine/question/critique the message they got from their text.
- Students may make a more formal presentation of their findings from their article by giving a 5 minute presentation at the front of the class, rather than the informal discussion suggested above.