

MEDIA LITERACY IN *THE WORLD TODAY*

CURBSIDE ACTIVITY (20 MIN)



This activity can be utilized in partnership with the **Bloomberg's *The World Today*** exhibit.

Facilitator Preparation

In an ever-changing digital world, our screens have become windows—offering opportunities for self-expression and learning, while also exposing users to content designed to provoke strong emotions, drive engagement, and sometimes deepen social divisions or misconceptions of the world around us. According to the Global Digital Report, individuals ages 16–24, the group most actively shaping their identities and moral perspectives, spend an average of 3.5 hours per day on social media.

Research from the National Library of Medicine indicates that increased digital media consumption can negatively impact emotional well-being—particularly in adolescents and young adults. Among young people in particular, high exposure has been linked to anxiety, depression, and measurable stress responses. Psychologist Steven Stosny refers to this as “headline anxiety” and At this critical stage of development, it is essential to build foundations for emotional resilience and digital well-being. These practices support healthier engagement with online spaces and empower young people to help shape digital environments that promote inclusivity, reduce sensationalized language, and support positive identity formation.

The Media Literacy in The World Today Curbside Activity, developed in partnership with Bloomberg's The World Today exhibit, is designed to build resilience in today's digital landscape. By examining positive news headlines and analyzing the language used in digital media, learners critically explore how media tactics shape emotions and influence worldviews. Stosny encourages individuals to slow reactive thinking by handwriting



distressing headlines and identifying the specific elements that trigger worry or fear. By rewriting headlines, students are asked to thoughtfully engage with the message of the headline and are given time to identify media tactics while practicing reframing. Writing by hand slows immediate reactions and creates space for more intentional reflection, as the act of longhand writing activates areas of the brain that support deeper processing of overwhelming emotions. This process helps restore a sense of agency, equipping learners to engage thoughtfully with digital content rather than feeling overwhelmed or powerless.

Materials Needed

Pens/pencils

Paper

Access to *The World Today* exhibit or current news headlines

Key Terms

Headline anxiety

Media Literacy

Algorithm

Echo Chamber

Essential Questions

1. What strategies do media outlets use to shape audience emotions, perceptions, and worldviews?
2. Why is it important to think critically about the media we consume?
3. How can we recognize and critically analyze these techniques in the digital content we consume?
4. What are strategies we can practice to build emotional resilience while navigating challenging or negative digital media?

Enduring Understandings

- News and media outlets often use intentional tactics that amplifies negative emotions and shape how audiences perceive the world.
- These tactics are designed to drive repeat engagement, often creating echo chambers that intensify negative emotional and physical responses.
- Tangible coping mechanisms that slow down emotional processes can be utilized to affirm a sense of hope, agency, and resilience in digital spaces.

Learning Outcomes

In alignment with C3 Social Studies Standards and The California SEL Standards, learners will:

- Identify and analyze the impact that sustained exposure to negative or sensationalized media can have on learners' mental, emotional, and physical well-being.
- Critically analyze language and media strategies to promote healthier online spaces and regulate emotional responses.

Suggested Opening Discussion Prompts (3 min)

- What is media, and how does it function as a vehicle for information, ideas, and influence?
- **Media:** Channels and platforms used to create and share information, including print news, social media, television, and written publications.
- What type of media do you most often interact with online?
- In what ways does the media you consume online affect your mood, stress levels, or overall well-being?
- How does the world you see online compare to the world you experience in your everyday life?

Suggested Transition Dialogue

“Digital spaces can connect us, inform us, and offer spaces for self-expression. At the same time, the media we consume is often designed to shape how we think and respond to the world around us. Language, tone, images, and music all influence how we interpret the media we view online and can impact our mental health—especially when content feels overwhelming or anxiety-inducing. Today, we will explore the strategies news outlets and social media platforms use to influence how we think and feel.”

Introduction to Tactics (5 min)

Facilitation Note: Not all online media experiences are negative. It is important to emphasize that healthy, inclusive digital spaces do exist, and that we share a collective responsibility to foster, protect, and contribute to those positive environments.

Digital Media Tactics

Facilitation Note: Below are common rhetorical and linguistic tactics frequently encountered in media.

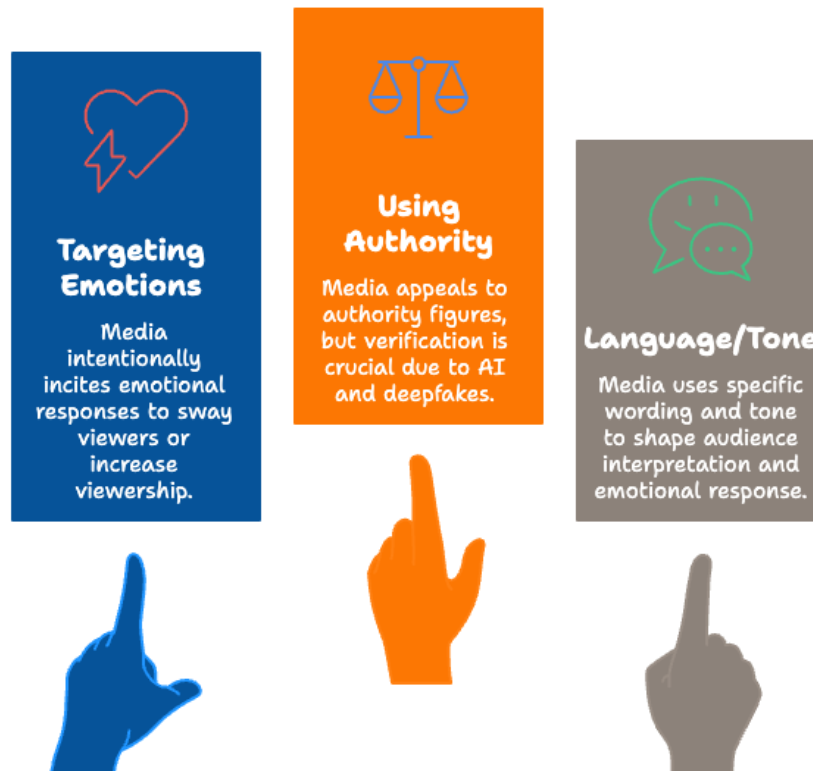
- Introduce these strategies before inviting learners to analyze their selected headlines.
- Strive to balance inquiry with direct instruction: as you explore each tactic, encourage learners to share examples they have encountered and reflect on how those experiences shaped their emotions in the moment.

Facilitation Note:

Utilize the handout provided to support learners in processing and responding to common tactics encountered across digital media platforms. Encourage learners to reflect on the following prompts:

- Where do you most commonly encounter tactics such as **targeting emotions**, **using authority**, or manipulating **language and tone** in digital spaces?

Which rhetorical tactic is being used in the media?



Suggested Differentiated Prompts for Middle School Learners

1. If you don't regularly watch or read the news, where do you usually get your information?
2. What examples of emotional persuasion have you seen on TV, social media, or online?
3. How does the way someone speaks, or the tone they use, affect how you react to or understand a message? Can you give an example?
4. What types of news or information would you like to see more of? Why? Share at least two examples.
5. This framing keeps the conversation accessible while building foundational media literacy skills.

Activity (10 min)

Students will be asked to pick one headline that stands out to them. This can be modified as a paired or group activity.

Step 1: Headline Analysis

- Learners will select one news headline that stands out to them and write it down.
- After reviewing the media tactics discussed in the workshop, students will:
 - Write the full headline and engage in close reading.
- **Facilitation Note:** Close reading protocol for students of diverse needs:
 - Read the text first to figure out what the text says (main idea/details)
 - Read it again to focus on how the text says it (focus on author's point of view and text structure) this is where they can underline the words and phrases that feel sensational or emotional
 - Read again to determine the meaning of the text.
 - Underline words or phrases that feel sensational or designed to spark an emotional reaction.
- Invite them to pair-share using the following suggested prompts:
 - Why did you choose this headline?
 - Why do you think these particular words or phrases were used?
 - How does this headline demonstrate the media tactics we discussed?
 - What reaction do you think the writer intends to evoke?
 - How might a headline like this shape the way you view or interact with the world around you?

Step 2: Headline Re-Write

- Learners will revisit the headline they selected and rewrite the headline they analyzed—choosing to make the language more neutral by intentionally applying their knowledge of the media tactics discussed.
- Invite learners to pair share with a partner using the following suggested discussion prompts:
 - What approach did you take when rewriting the headline, and why?
 - Which words did you choose to change, and why?
 - What specific words were used to incite emotional responses?
 - What emotions do you think the original wording was intended to evoke, and how did removing and rewriting the headline shift or reshape that response?

Step 3: Whole Group Share Out

- After investigating these headlines, students will be given an opportunity to share their findings with the group.

Wrap Up (5min)

Remind participants that many media tactics are designed to capture attention and keep us engaged. This activity created space to pause, reflect, and respond thoughtfully rather than react. Regulating our engagement with constant news exposure is an ongoing, mindful practice. Digital spaces are not inherently harmful—they are shaped by the people who participate in them. Each of us has the power to help cultivate online environments that are inclusive and promote positivity, hope, and wellbeing.

Suggested Closing Prompt

- What additional strategies can we use to promote wellness and foster healthy, inclusive online spaces?

Additional Suggestions for Media Self-Care

- **Limit screen time:** Turn off nonessential notifications and set boundaries around when and how long you engage.
- **Reclaim your algorithm:** Be intentional about who you follow. Unfollow, unsubscribe, and curate a feed that reflects your values.
- **Create healthy online spaces:** Share hopeful content, fact-check information, and foster supportive digital communities.
- **Remember perspective:** Frequent negative headlines do not always reflect the full realities of the world around us.
- **Prioritize rest:** Avoid late-night scrolling and protect your sleep.
- **Lean on community:** If you feel overwhelmed, reach out to a trusted friend, family member, or community member. You are not alone.
- **Pause and reflect:** Ask yourself, what am I looking for right now? What do I hope to gain from continuing to scroll?