

Chapter 11

Core Concept #1

The Audience Negotiates Meaning

Who Do They Think We Are?

Grades 1–12

Objective: To make students aware of target marketing as a technique to shape consumer values and behavior in order to sell products.

This is an easily adaptable exercise for all ages that challenges your students to watch television commercials through the lens of a critic, not with the wallet of a consumer.

1. Prior to class, record a random series of television commercials from a variety of programs. (As always, make sure that both the commercials and the sponsored programs are suitable for your student age group).
2. Explain target advertising. Ask students to give you some examples.
3. Start the DVD. As you show each commercial, ask students to:
 - a. Identify the advertiser's intended target audience: Is it men, women, children, teens, or general audience?
 - b. Describe the specific characteristics of the intended audience: gender, race, ethnicity, age, income, and so on.
 - c. Has the advertiser made any assumptions about the lifestyle and values of the intended audience? Do those assumptions reflect the students' experience of themselves and the people portrayed in the commercials? Do the students feel stereotyped and manipulated? If so, does this change how they will respond to advertising in the future?

Attraction or Distraction *Grades K–12*

Objective: To help students become aware of the rightful place of stimulation and contemplation in their lives.

Like most adults, kids today are stressed out with overcrowded schedules. We live in a fast-paced culture of constant information flow and electronic stimulation. This is not just a time awareness exercise; it is also a lesson in priorities. It can be simplified for younger students.

1. Have students make a list of all the things that they do in a typical day.
2. In their journals, have the students convert that list into a chart with the activities running along the side of the page and columns with the following headings:
 - Time (How much time do they spend on each activity?);
 - Feeling (How does each activity make them feel?);
 - More Time (Which activity do they wish they had more time for?); and
 - Less Time (Which activity do they need less time for?).
3. Analysis and Discussion: How did this exercise make the students feel? Is there enough time in their day? Do they use their time well? Is there a balance of prayer, work, and play? Are they too busy? Do they spend a part of their day in silence or being still? What are their priorities? What is missing from their day? What would an ideal day look like? Did they learn anything new about themselves?
4. Conclude the exercise with a meditation or quiet journaling.

Audience Feedback *Grades 6–12*

Objective: To let your students (your audience) teach you about how best to engage them.

1. Divide the class into six groups.
2. Assign the following media formats to each group: TV programs, commercials, movies, Internet sites, blogs, and podcasts.
3. Have students bring in examples of how their assigned media catches and sustains their attention. How do they identify and connect with the particular media both in terms of form and content?
4. Have the students prepare a lesson plan using their assigned media.

Question Collage *Grades 4–12*

Objective: To awaken your students to their life questions by working with images. This can be an individual or group activity.

What is a life question? (Give examples: Who am I? What is my purpose? Why do people suffer?)

1. Ask students to write down some of their own life questions in their journals. (You can also post this as a blog assignment). Students should then select *one question* that they consider to be most important.
2. Have students look through magazines for images that symbolize their question and then create a collage with those images. On the other side of the collage, students should write down their question. They can also do this exercise online by using their own digital pictures and creating a photo collage. Try the following websites to create a free thirty-second montage with music:

<http://www.photomix.com>

<http://photobucket.com>

<http://animoto.com>

<http://www.esrapbooking.com>

3. Reflection: Students move into small groups and share their collages. Have other students in the group guess each other's questions based on the images. Groups then report back to the class on the experience.

Surfing outside the Box *Grades 6–12*

Objective: To work with students as they explore the diversity of the web of life on the Web. This is a good opportunity to facilitate supervised and directed use of the computer in the classroom.

In groups, have students put together a presentation of digital resources—websites, YouTube videos, blogs—that reflect a world outside of their own experience. You can tie this into a lesson on social justice issues (hunger, homelessness, poverty, immigration). If you have access to computers, have the students explore the suggested resources and sites during class. Caution: Make sure you investigate the contents of selected media prior to student presentations.

Switching Roles

Grades 4–12

Objective: To provide an experience of collaborative teaching and learning that simultaneously allows the teacher to become an active participant in the students' culture.

Students take over the classroom! Have your students—perhaps in a group—prepare a lesson on some form of media technology, and then teach it to the teacher. This is an excellent opportunity for the teacher to learn how to blog or set up a Facebook page. This exercise is best done with computer access.

Media Open Space

Grades 3–12

Objective: To begin a conversation with one another across the cultural chasm without shouting across the digital divide.

Connect with your students' digital world the old-fashioned way: Talk about it! Declare “open space” in the classroom and begin a conversation about their favorite websites, video games, music videos, and social networks (e.g., Facebook). Find out how they communicate and connect with one another. Talk about the pros and cons of long-distance friendships and relationships begun and nurtured mostly on the Internet and cell phone. Are there differences in how teacher and student perceive these relationships? What values inherent in first-century Gospel are present in twenty-first-century culture?

Questioning Media

Grades 4–12

Objective: To encourage students to experience media as thought-provoking and reflective—not just entertaining and passive.

1. Create three columns on the board.
2. Ask students to name their favorite movie. Write answers in column #1 (e.g., *Finding Nemo*).
3. Next to each movie, ask students to think of how that movie taught them a *lesson* about life or about faith. Write answers in column #2 (e.g., Fourth Commandment: Honor Your Parents).

4. Ask students to think of the lesson as an answer to a question about something in their life. Write answers in column #3 (e.g., Why do children want to be independent? Why is it important to listen to your parents? Why are parents so protective?).
5. Challenge students to think of other movies that made them question their life or faith.

The Power of Images *Grades 1–12*

Objective: To make students conscious of how images communicate and how each of us can have a different perspective of the same image. This is a good tie-in to discussions about the unconscious but often damaging influence of violent and sexually inappropriate images in media.

This is a basic awareness activity on how images communicate. Let's start with some positive imagery. I suggest using religious images because they are fundamentally emotional and can evoke a range of responses based on the varied experiences of the viewers.

1. Select an image that is familiar to your students: Moses on Mt. Sinai; the Annunciation; Jesus walking on water.
2. Ask each student to describe in their notebook:
 - a. How the picture makes them feel; and
 - b. What the picture says to them and about them.
3. Ask for some volunteer answers. Refer to some of the points in the section, "It's All in the Delivery" (see pages 81–82 in *Catechesis in a Multimedia World*) that address the difference between print and image.
4. Discuss how media carry powerful messages and how often we are unaware of the effect of these images. Have students give some examples of images that have made them fearful, confused, hopeful, happy, insecure, and so on.

What's It All About? *Grades 6–12*

Objective: This activity is for the catechists. Do you know how your students understand or even value "meaning"?

This activity can follow "The Power of Images" exercise or it can stand alone. The bottom line is to get your students to articulate if and how they find meaning in the

media. First, you have to find out if “meaning” is of value to them. How do they define meaning and where do they find meaning in their lives, in their faith, in their media? Ask for examples. Plan a presentation day, so your students can bring in symbols, music, clips from movies, and artwork that express how they experience meaning.

Facebook Gets a Facelift

Note: In order to prepare for the following exercise, it is important that you create your own Facebook page. If you have not done so already, go to: <http://www.facebook.com> and follow the directions to set up your profile page.

At the outset of the activity, clearly state what you consider to be inappropriate content on any of these Facebook pages as well as the consequences for any infraction of your guidelines.

In the Chapter 7 suggested activity “Made in the Image of God,” you were encouraged to create your own Facebook page. Are you ready to bring Facebook into the classroom? This activity might feel a little intimidating if not risky considering the possibilities for inappropriate use. However, that is exactly why you need to normalize Facebook by making it part of mainstream learning where you can guide and filter the experience. It is actually far riskier to leave your students alone in the unsupervised territory of social networking.

Of course, Facebook has everything to do with revelation. The purpose of creating a Facebook profile is to reveal yourself so that others will connect with you. Isn’t that exactly what happens in the Divine-human relationship? God is revealed through Jesus Christ so that we can connect with God in a deeper and more meaningful way. Do we really reveal our true selves on Facebook so that we can connect with one another on a deeper level, or is Facebook just a vehicle to present a facade that draws “friends” to us in quantity but not in quality of relationship?

Here are two ways to use Facebook as a tool for genuine self-revelation and revelation:

1. Create a Facebook page for God, Jesus, Mary, or one of the saints.
2. What if you really saw yourself as being made in the image of God? What would your Facebook page look like? Have students create an alternative Facebook page that presents them as images of God.