Chapter 12
Core Concept #2
All Media Construct Reality

Life as a Sitcom or Not!
Grades 4–12

Objective: To filter media reality by drawing the distinctions between real life and real media; to use media as an occasion to look inside oneself instead of just outside to the screen. (For younger children, I recommend using a cartoon and, of course, keeping the discussion simple.)

Again, we apply the four stages of the Empowerment Spiral to this exercise by making your students *aware* of the differences between what they see on TV and how they live.

1. Assign a television program—sitcom, cartoon, reality show—and ask students to be aware of the details of the story: characters, plot, friends, parents, material belongings, problems, solutions, emotions, and relationships.

2. Ask students to *analyze* their reaction to the program: How does the plot make them feel about their life? Would they trade their "real" life for the TV lives of sitcom families? Is what they see on TV too unreal to make a connection with their own lives? Ask students to *reflect* on their own life. Do they compare their reality to the constructed reality of media? What works in their life? What is missing? What can they live without? What do they need to be happy? Even in the fiction of the program, is there some underlying truth that relates to their life?

3. Next, *reflect* on who constructed the reality of this program. Was it a director, producer, or a writer? What is their perspective? What do you think is their intended message? What other media have they created?

This exercise itself is an *action* that allows students to articulate how they filter media and integrate subtle media messages into the fabric of their lives—for better or worse.

Shorter Version: Select a television program for the students to watch. Ask them to notice the details of the story: characters, plot, friends, parents, material belongings, problems, solutions, emotions, and relationships. How do their stories match up to the stories of the characters in the program? Do they compare their reality to the constructed reality of media? What is real?

Internet Fast
Grade Level: Anyone who uses the Internet

Objective: To give students "time out" from the digital world so that they can "tune in" to the symbolic world of their own incredible, curious souls!

1. Propose a question that would normally be answered in a fact-finding essay. For example: What was Jesus' mission? What is the Trinity? Why is Mary called the Mother of God?

2. Instead of pointing and clicking their way to the answer on the Internet, have students probe the question through a personal reflection in their journals. This is not about resourcing other people's documented religious experiences or facts; it is sourcing their curiosity and connection to the spiritual realm. Encourage students to respond from images and stories that have shaped their religious imagination.

3. Read the responses aloud and discuss where the stories and images came from. Also, what did it feel like not to have a quick and easy access to the "answers."

Be Still and Know
Grades K–12

Objective: To change the energy of the traditional classroom where right answers rule the day to the energy of spiritual intuition where wisdom offers quiet counsel.

Instead of buying into the self-serving hype of the technology age that information is power, be countercultural and cultivate the power of prayer and meditation. Introduce *meditative* journaling as a way to develop contemplation. Begin with a journaling exercise at the beginning of class that invites students to simply check in on how they are feeling. I recommend that students begin the journaling meditation with the words: "Today I feel _____." Then, fill in the blank and write whatever comes to mind. Start the process by allocating just a few minutes of reflection time for the journaling and then gradually increase the meditation time to longer and more frequent periods of journaling. You can also expand the focus of the journaling to include contemplation on a prayer, a video, a lesson theme, a bible story, and so on. (Younger students, who cannot read, can journal with images. In fact, you might want to offer students of any grade level the option to use images instead of words.)

Jesus Goes to the Movies:
A Reflection on *The Truman Show*
Grades 9–12

Objective: To discover the continuing story of Jesus the Christ in contemporary media by identifying the parallels between the story of Truman and the life of Jesus.

Every Hollywood producer's dream is to create the greatest story ever told. No small wonder, then, that the story of Jesus the Christ keeps cropping up year after year in movies about healing and redemption. In many cases, the movies tell contemporary stories of Jesus through Christ figures who embody some significant characteristic of Jesus or his mission. Is Truman of *The Truman Show* a Christ figure? Have your students find the parallels between the story of Truman and the life of Jesus. You may also expand this exercise to other movies about Christ figures—both men and women.

Modern Day Parables on the Internet
Catechists

Here comes YouTube! It has to happen sooner or later. First, you took a peek at YouTube in Part One. Now, it's time to bring YouTube into the classroom.

Jesus grabbed the soapbox and bullhorn of his day when he brought his message to wherever the people were. That's exactly where YouTube goes today—and so must you. Like the parables, some of the videos, indeed, have the power to make you see life very differently. And, yes, there are some videos on YouTube that are absolutely not suitable for children or teens—that is what happens with a populist medium, which has something for everyone. Remember, you are the teacher, the filter, and the one in control. You get to make the decisions about what is shown to the class.

Getting Started:

1. Don't go alone. Begin by asking family, friends, and colleagues if they can suggest some good YouTube sites. Then grab a comfortable seat, bring along some popcorn, feast your senses with some great stuff—upbeat music, awesome images, poignant messages—and get hooked! You will be genuinely touched by the depth and creativity of so many of the producers—many of them teenagers or young adults. YouTube will give you hope! For starters, try "Christian the Lion" at the following link at: **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btuxO-C2IzE**

2. To save your favorite YouTube sites, use the "bookmark" tab on your computer. (Or better yet, go to: **http://www.delicious.com** and create a folder of favorite websites that you can access from any computer.) Now you can plug the videos into your curriculum as you wish.

3. Check out this engaging take on the parable of the Good Samaritan:
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68OAEMSaSe4

This is actually a very good exercise in how tradition and innovation collaborate to create something provocative.

Next Step: Student Project

Speaking of parables, turn the YouTube surfing and selection over to your students. You define the search.

1. *Assignment:* Do the parables still challenge us to look at the tough questions of living righteously? Have your students come up with some YouTube selections that exemplify the lessons of the parables. (You can also use the Beatitudes because they are so countercultural. The meek inheriting the earth? Poor in spirit? A great way to cast doubt upon the norms and needs of today's "gotta have it right now to be the best" mentality.)

2. *Conclusion—Presentation and Discussion:* You can format this part of the activity however you want, but it is imperative to provide a time and place for the students to present their selections. Your task is to keep the discussion on point in terms of prompting the students to probe the challenges of the parable message. Of course, never lose an opportunity to reinforce how the Gospel is alive and well in the media of the twenty-first century.

Note: I recommend having all students sign a preliminary agreement on what is appropriate for the classroom prior to showing a YouTube site. If the video is not in line, it is not on screen.