

Teaching Note
Do You Know How Your Kids are Watching?
 Some suggestions for teachers and parents about active television viewing and development of critical participation and appreciation.
 Jack Livesley

Many teachers tell me they are often asked by parents for advice about home television viewing. The following suggested four-week outline might serve as a basis for teaching units and provide some guidelines for family viewing.

Week One

Keep a simple log. Record the number of hours each member of the family views and the kinds of programs watched.

- Dramas
- Situation Comedies
- Documentaries
- Newscasts
- Sports Events
- Movies
- Specials — education, etc.

Discuss, as a family or class, the kinds of programs watched. Perhaps one person might log the hours and have each person in the group report to him or her their viewing times. Another could keep track of the types of shows. All the family or class should participate and get used to discussing TV habits, likes and dislikes.

Week Two

On the weekend or early in the week, decide, as a group, on one mid-week program that most of the people enjoy and plan to watch it together. Situation comedies or dramas might be the best choice here. Each member, or student, will have a simple assignment. Younger people (below ages seven or eight) might just tell some of the story after the show. Others should pick out one character and discuss him or her along the following guidelines:

Tell why you chose the character (more than one member might choose the same character, but strive for variety)

Is the character believable? Do you know anyone remotely like this person? Is this person a "type," a certain nationality or stereotype?

If you invited this character to your home, what would you serve for dinner?

Make up a little story using this character, a story that did not happen in any of the

episodes you've seen, but could happen.

Name another actor or actress who might play the part. Name a friend or acquaintance of yours who might suit the role.

Naturally, you may not have time or inclination to try all of the above. They are suggestions. You may have others. You might want to make them into games of guessing character, stories, actors, and situations.

The whole point is that you will start participating in your TV viewing and doing something with what you see.

Week Three

Let's talk about commercials. Why do we have them? Are there some programs — or networks — that don't have them? Why?

Everyone should choose a commercial he or she likes, and one they can't stand. Discuss the reasons for likes or dislikes with each other.

Discuss the types of products that are advertised, or endorsed, on the programs you like. (What do we mean by an endorsement?) Why are these products advertised at these hours on these programs?

Choose a character or person who appears in the commercial and ask yourself the same questions as you did about the characters you chose in week two. Are they real people? Believable? Would you want to get to know them, or have them over for dinner?

Take a good hard critical look at a commercial that you see over and over and play some games with it to find out more about the elements of a commercial. Listen to the sounds and/or the music. Turn the sound off on your TV set and just watch the picture. What's the effect? Have someone cover the screen and just listen. Many commercials are made so they can be used on both radio and TV. Discover which ones they are.

Again, you may have other ideas. The important thing is to keep discussing and participating as a family, class or group.

Week Four

Let's go back to characters again. Pick a situation comedy, or drama, that has been

running for several years. Discuss with each other what changes have occurred. Are any of the characters different kinds of people now from what they were in the early years of the show? (Any of *Barney Miller's* group? *M.A.S.H.*? e.g., "Hotlips" Hoolihan has certainly changed over the years.) What characters have left the show and been replaced? How and why were the replacements chosen?

You might examine the "family" shows. (*The Waltons*, *Happy Days*, *The Jeffersons*, etc.) Discuss the family behaviour and such things as relationships of parents to children. What are the problems of growing up in these families. Are they the same problems we have?

How do persons under 10 years of age in your family think of policemen? Look at a crime show together, and discuss the prob-

lems and how they are solved. Do you know any policemen in real life? What do they think of police shows?

This approach could lead to the whole study of violence, problem solving and role stereotyping on TV. Sometimes it helps to see that the roles are played by actors who have played other parts. (e.g. *Quincy's* Jack Klugman was Oscar in *The Odd Couple*. Your family can find and discuss other examples.)

Perhaps, if your family has had any recent experience with doctors or hospitals, you might like to discuss medical shows (*House Calls*, *Trapper John*, *Marcus Welby*, etc.). Again, the whole point is examination of stories, situations, characters, and perhaps most of all relationships, to help us examine our own relationships in family.

Parents and students who become more

interested in critical viewing could go on and do some more examination of effects of sound, music, dialogue, sets and scenery, etc., in programs and commercials.

Examine newscasts and documentaries. What arguments are put forth? What are the counter arguments? Perhaps you could prepare a short documentary or biography (even with pictures) on your family or its members or your friends.

What can we learn about language from viewing television? Make up a game about listing the kinds of words that are used over and over again in commercials, for example, new, bigger, better, savings, now, relief, compare, and so on and on.

When it comes to critical evaluation of TV, your local librarian will be able to help you find books and reference materials. TVOntario can provide assistance too.

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Guy Leger, Secretary-Treasurer of AMTEC, will supervise the membership records for AMTEC beginning January 1, 1982. Any changes to addresses or renewal information should be sent directly to Mr. Leger.

Gord Jarrell, Coordinator of Learning Materials for the Scarborough Board of Education in Ontario, will initiate a new program when he begins a membership recruitment drive. Mr. Jarrell will personally approach people and agencies in the Toronto area about joining AMTEC.

For further information about the recruitment program, contact:

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For membership changes, contact:
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