


# Learning to Critically Read Our World

**Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth,  
and Education Studies Major at Clark University**

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### **Abstract:**

This Praxis Project is a result of my ever growing love for literacy and my belief in the importance of asking questions within our society. For this project, I focused on what questions both second grade students and teachers are asking during their ELA lessons and analyze what this could mean. My analysis focuses on moments where students asked questions, when they did not, and when students did not share at all. I then shift my analysis to focus on common questioning patterns of educators within the classroom. Moreover, my thesis works to understand how Media Literacy can fit into an ELA classroom. With the ideas of Critical Literacy Theory, Questioning Pedagogies, types of oral sharing, and Media Literacy Education in mind, I constructed and implemented a curriculum with the intent to create spaces where learners feel comfortable to share and express any questions that they have about our world. In doing so, I hope that these questions could help students to feel more inclined to challenge the structures of our current society to move towards change in the future. Thus, my project works to understand the role of questioning within the classroom and its power to reshape how we view our world.

## **Acknowledgements:**

### *Contributions and Many Thanks!*

Before getting into my research, I would like to take this time to extend my sincerest thank you's and appreciations to everyone who has supported me throughout this process and made this project possible.

*To Erin:* You have been an incredible site mentor and constant support throughout this entire process and I could not have done most of this without you. Thank you for being flexible with everything we have had to navigate together. Thank you for the early/late meetings. And Thank you for being there for me since the very beginning. Lastly, I want to thank you for welcoming me into your classroom and working with me for the last year. I truly appreciate it.

*To Katie and Adriana:* Thank you for your support through this process and allowing me to observe your lessons. I appreciate the kind words, interest, and support throughout the year.

*To Cara:* Thank you for meeting with me and talking about everything media literacy related. I've loved chatting with you about my project and life. You have been there to help ease my anxieties and work with me when I needed it the most. The support that you have provided me with when creating my curriculum is and will always be so incredibly appreciated.

*To Sarah:* Where do I even begin? This project/process has been a wild ride (that's for sure) and you have been there for me every step of the way. Through the ups and downs, the bumps and turns, and the successes you have always been in my corner no matter what. So, all I can say is thank you thank you thank you. You have been a wonderful advisor and I am grateful to have had you by my side.

*To the entire CYES/Education department:* Whether I was asking for feedback on my curriculum or new resources to read to add to my literature review, I was always met with such a kind response. I am ecstatic to be entering the MAT program with such a kind and supportive network of people by my side.

*And to my cohort:* First may I just say: wow we actually made it! Over the past three semesters, you have all become more than classmates, but I consider all of us friends. Thank you to everyone for being there through the rants, the tears, the confusion, the revisions, the laughs, the lightbulb moments. All of it. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

I could not have done this without all of you.

## Introduction: The Importance of Asking Questions

“Human existence, because it came into being through asking questions, is at the root of change in the world. There is a radical element to existence, which is the radical act of asking questions... At root human existence involves surprise, questioning and risk. And because of all this, it involves actions and change.”

—Paulo Freire

*Learning to Question:  
A Pedagogy of Liberation*

As I sat in the dimly lit classroom, I shuffled my teal, plastic chair closer to the rug so I could hear a student who had just muttered a comment underneath their breath. On this cold, snowy, Monday morning, Erin Tracy’s second grade class was gathered on the rainbow rug for a whole group ELA read-aloud session. Today, Katie McCarthy, an MAT student, was reading a book called, “Listen Buddy” by Helen Lester. This book was presented to the students as a “funny” book that would probably make them laugh, but towards the end of the text, during the climax, I heard a student named Miller mutter, “is this even a funny book?”

This question was jarring at first, since many of the other students in Erin’s class were laughing along. Many seemed to agree that the book was in fact “funny.” However, during this moment, Miller posed a thought that challenged his peer’s interpretation of the text that many others had accepted with ease.

In this moment, Miller’s question was not addressed. This is because he did not raise his hand. In addition, I think this may have also been due to the fact that Ms. McCarthy probably didn’t hear him and was focused on another student talking. To be fair, I could barely hear him and I was the one observing the lesson.

So, as I sat in my slightly too small, plastic seat with half my body falling off the chair, I couldn’t help but wonder: what if?

What if this question was explored? What if he hadn’t shared it aloud? What if others agreed with him? The thoughts swirled around in my mind like hot, alphabet soup. Steaming and streaming with endless possibilities of what this one, seemingly small question could mean.

Without asking this question to himself and to others, Miller may have gone on to buy into the narrative that this book was funny. I would also like to clarify that “funniness” is

completely subjective. What's funny to one person may not be to another and there is no harm if other students found the book to be "funny." However, in this moment, Miller's question acted as a catalyst to not only change his perception of this book, but mine as well.

Moreover, I believe that asking questions is an essential first step to working towards change, whether that change is through our thought process or actions. Thus, I believe that we must create spaces where young learners can reflect on their experiences and ask questions about new information they are taking in within the classroom. Through learning to ask questions about new information, this skill opens young learners to creating different *literacies* or ways of viewing/understanding both themselves and their world.

### **My Project:**

My praxis project is a qualitative, practitioner-inquiry study that has employed ethnographic methods, such as audio-recordings, field notes, and collection of participant artifacts and documents, while excluding any artifacts or spoken words in transcripts of non-consenting students. My data (on assenting students) includes observations (and fieldnotes), audio recordings of English Language Arts classroom activities, and collections of artifacts of student work.

My project aims to theorize and understand what questions second grade students and teachers are asking in response to any media (secondary sources that relay new information such as books, news, tv shows, etc.).

My research took place within a single, established ELA classroom, with Mrs. Tracy whom I have an established working relationship with. As a part of my praxis intervention, I implemented a media literacy curriculum. When I invoke the term "literacy," I will be adopting Vivian Vasquez's definition of literacy from her book, *Negotiating Critical Literacies*. Thus, Vasquez defines literacy as the lens that we use to understand new information (Vasquez, 138).

With all this said, I plan to investigate the following questions:

1. *What questions are second grade children asking within the classroom in response to or during teacher led-whole group ELA lessons?*
  - a. *When students propose questions within the classroom during or in response to whole group teacher-led ELA lessons, what happens before they ask them?*

2. *What questions are second grade teachers asking within the classroom during their whole-group ELA lessons?*
3. *Can a media literacy unit encourage second-grade children to ask more questions within the classroom?*

### **So, Where Did This Project Even Come From? How Did It Even Begin?**

During my freshman year at Clark, I volunteered in a third-grade classroom at Woodland Academy. Throughout the duration of the semester, the teacher I worked with (who I will refer to as Mrs. Smith) consistently asked me to work with a few students who struggled with reading the assignment at hand. During my fourth week of observation, I arrived as the students were about to begin a practice standardized exam. Each student had forty minutes to read a short passage and write a paragraph in response to the prompt given at the top of the page. After ten minutes had passed, Mrs. Smith asked if I could work with one student named Josie who was struggling to read the passage. I sat down and began going through each sentence with her, making sure that she was not just reading the passage but also understanding it as well. However, by the time she had finished the passage and had the chance to write her response, she only had five minutes to write and submit the paper to Mrs. Smith. If this exam was not practice, Josie would have failed because she could not read the exam without assistance. Later, at the end of the day, I was speaking to Josie and listening to her talk about what she likes to do for fun and who she usually spends time with at home. During this conversation I asked Josie if she had time to practice reading at home. She responded by looking down as she described how her mom did not have time to help her because she had to work two jobs to pay for their home.

In this situation, there were many different factors that could have contributed to Josie's difficulty with reading which further caused disadvantages for her within the classroom. On one hand, if we were to cast blame, we could criticize the institutionalized structures that were put in place within the educational system such as standardized testing due to the fact that these exams ultimately cater to wealthier families as they have better access to resources that can help their children succeed. As a result, due to Josie's familial situation, this caused her to not receive the amount of support she required at the time. Although, if we were to examine this scenario through the perspective of problems that occur outside an educational setting versus the inside of the classroom, we could infer that Josie's family is most likely being affected by policies such as

minimum wage which further forces Josie's mom to work two jobs in order to afford a living wage for her family. However, since her mother must work two jobs this then affects Josie because she may not be receiving enough support to reinforce her reading skills beyond the classroom. In addition, there is a possibility that Josie could be undiagnosed with a learning or reading disability or she may require glasses. Consequently, when Josie enters the classroom, she may struggle to learn these skills due to the fact that her class is very large, and her teacher can't spend as much time working with her or she could have fallen behind during an earlier grade and now that the curriculum is more difficult it makes it increasingly challenging to catch up. It is important to note that these are frequent issues that many students struggle with and could have a strong impact on their ability to strengthen their literacy skills.

Moreover, in his piece *Black Bastards and White Millionaires*, Payne writes that, "any theoretical perspective diverts attention from some of the logical possibilities. Every way of seeing is not seeing" (14). So, if we were to look at this scenario from the single perspective of it being Josie's fault or it is the institution's fault, we would be taking away from the nuanced and complex nature of this dilemma. When analyzing Josie's situation, it is important to note that often these issues cannot be individualized due to the fact that they compound on one another, which in turn makes identifying the "sole" reasoning as to why young students struggle nearly impossible.

To move forward I believe that we must accept that there is no "one explanation" for our society's problems but we must work through these issues with a multifaceted, holistic lens to find solutions and move towards action. However, in order to do so we must begin by asking ourselves questions such as "what is going on here?" Or "what are the different factors at play?" While the questions I have posed are only a few examples, they act as a catalyst to further our understanding of the situation and instigate deeper thinking about what exactly is going on. Without asking "why" Josie was experiencing what she was, I may not have been able to identify and understand the different factors that could have contributed to her struggles within the classroom.



### **Questioning (Who I am) and My Epistemological Stance:**

*So, what does my positionality have to do with all of this?*

*Well, to answer that plainly: everything.*

Growing up, I was surrounded by privilege. My town, which is dominated by white, affluent, Jewish families, served as a bubble for the first eighteen years of my life, and throughout those years I was immersed in an atmosphere that I often refer to as “sameness.” When I invoke this term, I use it to describe how so many of the people I knew talked the same, looked the same, acted the same, and identified the same as I did and as a white, Jewish woman growing up in a wealthy neighborhood I held and still do hold and an incredible amount of privilege. When thinking back on my identity, I spent the majority of my adolescence resenting the Jewish culture and values that I had been surrounded with. My mother is Jewish and while my father is as well, he identifies more as an atheist. The “sameness” I experienced within my town extended to religion as well. Most of my peers attended the same Temple as I did and were members of Jewish youth groups my mother always pushed me to join. I couldn’t sit still in services and despised doing anything that involved praying, and often, I was pestered by my family to attend long events I had no interest in going to. Moreover, I had internalized this narrative that there was only “one” way to be Jewish because it always felt as if I was expected by both my parents and my community to fit into their box of what it meant to be a member of the Jewish community.

This box continued to feel smaller and smaller until I was sixteen and had the opportunity to travel to Poland and Israel for a summer with a group of thirty other teenagers my age. We all entered this trip with different understandings of what it meant to be Jewish and while many of us identified similarly to one another, our values and understanding of Judaism each differed. It is important to note that this trip was only made possible due to the class privilege my family holds and marked the first time I had traveled without my parents. Throughout our time abroad, we traveled to a new city every three days, visited as many museums as we could, and explored through trying new foods and chatting with street vendors.

During this time, I had the opportunity to meet a multitude of people who each embraced Judaism in their own way. I remember sitting in an incredibly beige conference room in the basement of our current hostel in Jerusalem. Our tour guide had invited a group speaker to come and instigate a discussion about which part of Judaism we identified with the most. While

seemingly simple, this question took me off guard, and forced me to ask myself what part of my Jewish identity did I value the most? Many of my peers began talking about religion and their belief in God, some mentioned food, and others remained silent like me.

As I sat uncomfortably in my seat, I finally raised my hand and asked, “What about values just in general? Can we talk about that?” From then on, our group got into a lively discussion about what exactly are some Jewish values and if they are values that we identify with ourselves. We talked about core values such as *Chesed* which means to treat others with loving and kindness and *Lo Ta'amod* which means to not stand idly by when we witness injustice. However, we also spoke about a salient concept for many Jews which is to question everything. Judaism is often referred to as a religion of questions as we are taught to always ask. For example, on Passover, a more commonly known holiday where we celebrate the Jews being freed from slavery in Egypt, there is a tradition in the seder where we ask the four questions. Those questions can be seen below in the table along with translations as well:

English	Transliteration	Hebrew
Why is this night different from all the other nights?;	Mah nishtanah, ha-laylah ha-zeh, mi-kol ha-leylot	מה נִשְׁתַּנָּה, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת
That in all other nights we do not dip vegetables even once, on this night, we dip twice?	She-b'khol ha-leylot 'eyn 'anu matbilin 'afilu pa'am 'achat, ha-laylah ha-zeh, shtey p`amim	שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֵין אֲנוּ מְטַבֵּילִין אֶפִּילוּ פַּעַם אַחַת הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה, שְׁתֵּי פְּעָמִים
That on all other nights we eat both <b>chametz</b> and <b>matzah</b> , on this night, we eat only matzah?	She-b'khol ha-leylot 'anu 'okhlin chameytz u-matzah, ha-laylah ha-zeh, kulo matzah	שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֲנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֶמֶץ וּמַצָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה, כָּלוּ מַצָּה
That on all other nights we eat many vegetables, on this night, <b>maror</b> ?	She-b'khol ha-leylot 'anu 'okhlin sh'ar y'rakot, ha-laylah ha-zeh, maror	שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֲנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֵר יְרַקוֹת הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה, מָרֹר
That in all other nights some eat and drink sitting with others reclining, but on this night, we are all reclining?	She-b'khol ha-leylot 'anu 'okhlin ushotin beyn yoshvin u-veyn m'subin, ha-laylah ha-zeh, kulanu m'subin	שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֲנוּ אוֹכְלִין וּשׁוֹתִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבֵין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה, כָּלָנוּ מְסֻבִּין

I've celebrated this holiday every year with my family and while I grew up in a reform community and we technically complete a much-shortened version of the typical seder so we can just skip to the fun part and eat, we always include these questions. It feels fitting to include a vital component of this holiday in my thesis as Passover just recently passed and it coincides with the conclusion of this semester.

With all this said: So, when I raised my hand in that horribly lit conference room, I was in part terrified because for as long as I could remember I was fed this idea that I had to fit into the mold of my community at home. Ironically, I had been taught to ask questions my entire life, just not about my identity or my community, which seems so counterintuitive to me now when I reflect back on my experience, but in this moment I also felt absolutely exhilarated because it was the first time I was far away enough from this space where I had the opportunity to ask the questions that I had been holding in for most of my life.

I then raised my hand again and asked, “*can we still uphold these values and be Jewish without being religious?*” To which her response was a quick, “of course.” In that moment, I realized that Judaism could be whatever I wanted it to be. This experience helped me come to terms with the fact that there’s more than one way to be Jewish and I could uphold Jewish values without subscribing to the single narrative that was pushed onto me by my home environment. Without having a space where I felt comfortable to ask these questions, I may not have realized these things when I did. Unfortunately, I’m unsure as to what would have happened if I said nothing, but what I do know is that I’m grateful for this experience and without asking myself and others those questions that day, I wouldn’t be who I am today.

Moving forward, this one question helped me to reframe how I view myself, our world, and the problems that occur within our society. Prior to this experience I believed that there was only one way of “being,” whether this was shown through religion, gender, ethnicity, etc. However, I have come to understand that there are multiple different realities and multiple truths in our world. Thus, I believe that no two people’s experiences will ever be the same as we all live different lives as different people, and because of this belief, we all have varying interpretations of our experiences. This is why I have chosen to align myself with an interpretivist stance when conducting my research. I believe that it is vital to ensure that the voices of whom I am working with are centered within this work, and through taking this stance I would like to ensure that their individual voices are clearly heard and embraced.

Upon taking an interpretivist stance when conducting my praxis research, it is important that I acknowledge that I am coming from a place of an incredible amount of racial and class privilege. I feel that I began this project as an outsider and still am in many ways as my lived experiences differ greatly from those I am working with within the classroom. Because of the racial and class privilege I hold as a white woman, who grew up in an upper middle-class

household, it will be vital for me to acknowledge and embrace when any implicit biases arise as I must work to unlearn what I have interpreted should be considered the standard for what is considered “engaged” within the classroom.

However, after being in Erin Tracy’s classroom for the entirety of this school year, and working with her for an even longer period than that, I feel that I have become an insider in a lot of ways as well. I have built relationships with almost every student in Erin’s class, and I have a close relationship with both Erin and her MAT student Katie. Because of this when I enter this space, I feel welcomed and comfortable navigating the classroom. The students are often excited to see me, and I am excited to see them. In addition, because I have been volunteering at Woodland Academy for almost four years now, I also feel like an insider within the school itself. Over the years, I have formed connections with other teachers in different grades and subject areas and have worked with other students as well.

Throughout my entire life, I had assumed that there was only one way to be Jewish. However, it wasn’t until I found myself in an environment where I felt that my questions and ideas were welcomed that I was able to better understand my identity as a Jewish woman in society and what that meant to me. Without asking those initial questions I’m not sure who I would be today. Moving forward, I strive to continue questioning. After all, questioning helped make me who I am today.

### **My Conceptual Framework:**

Understanding how this project began and how my positionality has influenced my thinking has been integral to making it come alive. Below, I will explain why this project came to be and the thought process that has guided me through these last three semesters.

So, with that said, before getting into the nitty gritty of my conceptual framework, I’d like to begin by defining some key terms that I will be using. I’ll be bringing up these terms pretty often as my thesis continues, so I think it is important that we’re all on the same page before I begin to explain my thinking.

### **~Glossary/Key Terms~**

- **Media**-any secondary way or source of relaying new information

- **Literacy-** I am using Vivian Vasquez’s definition of literacy from her book, *Negotiating Critical Literacies*. Vasquez defines literacy as the lens that we use to understand new information (Vasquez, 138).
- **Media Literacy:** the way in which we analyze and perceive new information that is conveyed through *media*
- **Critical Literacy Theory:** the way in which we analyze how we’re taking in new information
- **Engagement:** to pay attention to new information we are exposed to and feeling a want to learn more and explore these ideas
- **Reading:** to look at and comprehend the meaning of a written text by mentally interpreting the characters or symbols of which it is composed
- **Sharing:** a way of relaying information, opinions, thoughts, or questions to others
  - **Writing:** to relay information, opinions, thoughts, or questions non-verbally
  - **Oral sharing-**to relay information, opinions, thoughts, or questions verbally

With these definitions in mind, my project aims to understand how second grade students and teachers are navigating new information that they are exposed to during their English Language Arts lessons and how they are interpreting new information.

I would like to begin by doing a small exercise with you (my lovely reader). I want you to please close your eyes for a minute (after you read this next sentence-do not close your eyes just yet). Okay, so now I want you to think about what it means to read. What images do you associate with reading? Are there any words or terms that come to mind? Now, you can close your eyes for approximately thirty seconds. Go on, take a few seconds. What is the first thing that pops into your mind? Once you have an image or an idea in your head, please open your eyes and continue.

So now, if I had to take a guess, I’d say that the image you thought of might be a big book or you could have been thinking about a bunch of books or maybe you even imagined someone sitting at a desk, studying with stacks of novels plastered on their desk. This book could be a textbook, it could be leather bound, it could be blue or red, or you could even be thinking about the large stacks at Barnes and Noble or your local library (I know that’s what I would be thinking about). However, while these are all completely valid examples of things that we read,

for my project, I want to move away from this image and refocus our understanding of reading to involve *different mediums*. In other words, I want us to think about the fact that today we are not just reading books, but we are also exposed to ads, articles, social media posts, etc. that can influence our views. These sources are called *media*, and today we are surrounded by it.

Over the past year, due to covid-19 there has been a large surge of information that is shared digitally. Teachers who were pushed to online school now rely on digital *mediums* to help their students learn, while their students also look to technology to occupy their minds during their free time. As a result, students must sift through more *media* than ever. Thus, I believe it is vital for students to learn how to be *critical* of any new information they are taking in through *media*, which is why I decided to focus on implementing a *media literacy* curriculum as my praxis intervention.

So, as I began to put my project together, I really had to think about what makes us “critical?” Why is it important to be “critical?” What makes us think deeper about new information? What really makes us analyze it? Then it kind of dawned on me: questions.

Now, hear me out. This idea of “questioning” first came up for me as I read Vivian Vasquez’s book, *Negotiating Critical Literacies*, where she explains how she implements *Critical Literacy Theory* into her Kindergarten classroom by exposing her students to a “cycle” or a list of steps she would like each of them to follow when they begin a new topic. This cycle would begin by asking a question, then her students would identify a problem, conduct research on the topic of their choice, take action, and then reflect on their findings. While each step of this cycle is important in its own way, I found myself focused on the first step: asking questions, which is what put this cycle into action. As these thoughts swirled around in my head, I thought back to all the questions I had asked before and how their potential answers ignited my interest to learn more and led me to where I am today.

Looking back at where I started with this project in comparison to where I am now, that is what kept me going. I wanted to learn more. I wanted to find answers to these questions. I wanted to understand this part of our world. In essence, every answer to a question can be seen as a quest to further our knowledge. “After all, the root of the word question is quest” (Mosaic of Thought).

So, now you may be thinking where the hell is she going with all of this question mumbo jumbo, and the thing is that questions play a salient role for young children when strengthening

their reading and writing skills within the classroom. The ability to ask questions while reading a text helps students to form connections and remain engaged in what they are learning. Through igniting a desire for students to learn more, and through equipping them with the tools to set out on their own quests of knowledge, I believe that this could impact their learning in a beneficial way as when students *want* to learn and *choose* to pay attention this further increases the stake and ownership they feel within the classroom.

Through learning to ask questions about *media*, this skill can also open young learners to creating different ways of viewing and understanding both themselves and their world. At its core *media literacy* education is centered around encouraging students to question and analyze the media that they take in and the credibility of these sources. By encouraging students to question and be critical of the *media* they take in, I think that this could help build their *literacies*.

Moreover, through questioning and analyzing new information, I believe that this will help us to create a multifaceted holistic lens when we approach social problems within our society. In doing so, I hope that the ability to be critical of new information will work to equip students with the ability to challenge societal norms. Thus, I believe that we must begin by exposing young children to new and different perspectives. Children have a greater capacity to reimagine and rethink the current societal structures that are still in place because they have not fully internalized these systems. Furthermore, if we equip students with the skillset to comfortably ask questions about the information they are taking in, this theoretically could help them combat the internalization of these structures in the future.

Thus, I believe that this process of asking questions acts as the first step towards invoking change and that it is vital to create an environment for young students where they are encouraged to ask and share questions about the material they are exposed to within the classroom. In doing so, this could help schools work towards fostering their student's curiosity to broaden their initial understanding of the world and instigate greater engagement with the material at hand.

This is why I have decided to focus on the implementation of a *media literacy* curriculum as when we get students to be critical of all different forms of reading material in the classroom, this could help them to become more conscious, knowledgeable and engaged learners moving forward.

### **Ethnographic Context:**

As mentioned previously, my praxis site takes place in a second-grade classroom at Woodland Academy. For some background, I began volunteering at Woodland Academy during the Spring semester of my freshman year. Through the Spring of 2019-Spring 2020, I volunteered in a third-grade classroom as a teacher's aide. During this time, I typically entered the classroom for two hours a week twice a week. Because of this, when I returned to this school, I felt a sense of comfort re-entering the building for my praxis site and working with another Woodland Academy teacher. I already knew where the office was, and the layout of the building. I wasn't shocked by the pale beige tiles, or the inspirational posters hanging up on the previously bare walls.

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic when I began working with my site teacher, Erin Tracy, we worked solely online. During the spring of 2021, Erin and I would meet over zoom once every two weeks, and when I came to observe her ELA classes I would enter her class zoom once a week for an hour and a half. When entering this space, I spent my time listening, learning, and observing the material in which the students are exposed to during their ELA, social emotional learning, and Science/Social Studies lessons. I did not want to intrude and felt very uncomfortable entering this space as I was unsure of what to expect from how different everything was due to the necessary transition to online learning.

I attempted to rotate the times and subjects that I would be present for as I wanted to gain a holistic understanding of how second graders were experiencing their curriculum. Through rotating subjects this also allowed me to gain an understanding of how children are engaging with skills such as reading, writing, vocal sharing in other lessons along with English Language Arts. In addition, because we were completely online it was very difficult to form relationships and help students in the same way that I would in an in person setting.

Since August 2021, I have entered Erin's classroom two to three times a week for two hours at a time. In the fall, I would come in on Mondays and Fridays and observe Erin's ELA lessons while taking notes and audio recordings, and in the spring, on Tuesdays and Thursdays I would do the same.

It is important to note that Woodland Academy has very diverse enrollment of students. Below I will attach a chart that shows Woodland Academy's racial/ethnic diversity of students enrolled during the 2021-2022 school year.



<b>Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2021-22)</b>			
<b>Race</b>	<b>% of School</b>	<b>% of District</b>	<b>% of State</b>
African American	11.3	16.9	9.3
Asian	6.3	6.0	7.2
Hispanic	72.9	44.7	23.1
Native American	0.4	0.2	0.2
White	7.3	27.9	55.7
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.0	0.0	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	1.9	4.3	4.3

Thus, 80% of Erin’s students are ELL learners. Her class is made up of Black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino students from all different backgrounds, and each of her students receive 100% free lunch.

Within the classroom Erin is the head teacher and has an MAT student named Katie McCarthy who works with her every day. In addition, an ELL teacher at Woodland, Ms. Tropeano, comes into the classroom during ELA blocks and occasionally leads a lesson along with a center. On a typical day, I enter the classroom around 8 a.m. (sometimes 8:15 if I overslept).

The students are usually still waking up, but there were some days where I walked in and they were already bouncing off the walls. Despite how quiet the mornings can be, there was always a hum of energy when I entered the room along with some smiles and waves. Once I settle in and place my jacket and bag on the window in the corner, I take a seat next to the students on the rug. Erin’s class begins every day by starting with their morning meeting and then moving into either read aloud or shared reading. Afterwards Erin leads a discussion about the book and why they are reading it for that day. She always explains what her students will be expected to complete when they move into independent work. Moreover, once she has walked students through these steps, she typically transitions the lesson into a section on phonics.

Once students are prepared for the work that is to come, they split off into different centers around the classroom. Typically, Katie, Erin, and Ms. Tropeano are leading three out of four of the centers while I work with students individually or observe a center. The students

usually remain at a center for twenty minutes and transition to another when the timer dings, which has helped me to understand how they navigate this time on their own.

However, due to the pandemic, the state of the classroom has frequently been chaotic. Due to the fact that students were forced to adjust to online learning in their homes, many students learned to rely on their caregiver to regulate their emotions. Now that they are back in the classroom, I believe that the chaos that ensues occurs because many students are still in the process of learning how to self-regulate their emotions.

In the mornings it is relatively quiet. However, there are days where the space feels immersed in chaos. It can be loud, unorganized, and difficult to transition lessons for Erin and Katie. There are students within their class that can be very disruptive. These students, in consequence, end up shifting Erin and Katie's focus off the larger class because there are other issues that they must deal with. As a result, they continuously require extra attention and divert attention away from students who can more consistently regulate themselves.

### **Literature Review:**

When reviewing the literature regarding *literacy*, *critical literacy theory*, and more specifically *media literacy*, I have spent time researching each of these concepts separately as well as together.

In this section, I will frequently refer to many of the terms I defined in my *Conceptual Framework*. So, if at any point during this section you are confused about a definition, please do not hesitate to take a moment to pause and revisit the glossary that I have constructed. Before I begin I will provide those definitions again below to help refresh your memory.

### **~Glossary/Key Terms~**

- **Media**-any secondary way or source of relaying new information
- **Literacy**- I am using Vivian Vasquez's definition of literacy from her book, *Negotiating Critical Literacies*. Vasquez defines literacy as the lens that we use to understand new information (Vasquez, 138).
- **Media Literacy**: the way in which we analyze and perceive new information that is conveyed through *media*

- **Critical Literacy Theory:** the way in which we analyze how we're taking in new information
- **Engagement:** to pay attention to new information we are exposed to and feeling a want to learn more and explore these ideas
- **Reading:** to look at and comprehend the meaning of a written text by mentally interpreting the characters or symbols of which it is composed
- **Sharing:** a way of relaying information, opinions, thoughts, or questions to others
  - **Writing:** to relay information, opinions, thoughts, or questions non-verbally
  - **Oral sharing:** to relay information, opinions, thoughts, or questions verbally

### *Narrowing down "Literacy" and "Critical Literacy Theory:"*

To begin, I would like to discuss the literature regarding *literacy* and *critical literacy theory*. Because my project takes place in an ELA classroom, it was important for me to begin with these terms. Moreover, the act of questioning within the classroom plays a vital role in my project and is in a sense what I would deem the "core" of my research. Thus, in *Mosaic of Thought'*, Keene and Zimmerman note that the root of questioning is "quest," which means that when we ask questions about new information we instigate our own "quest" for new knowledge. Furthermore, questions can instill a desire to learn more about a topic than we had before asking the question. I appreciate Keene and Zimmermans' explanation of what it means to question within the classroom. As they recounted their experiences throughout their piece, they both utilized their experiences to identify the importance of questioning for young learners who are beginning to strengthen their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills.

In connection to Keene and Zimmermans' notion about asking questions, Vivian Vasquez explores this concept in her book, *Negotiating Critical Literacies*. However, Vasquez takes the act of questioning one step further and utilizes a curriculum process to help her students gain new ways of how to view the world. As mentioned previously, Vasquez's purpose of writing *Negotiating Critical Literacies*, was to exemplify to readers how she implemented a curriculum that was rooted in *Critical Literacy Theory* into her Kindergarten classroom through exposing her students to a "cycle" or a list of steps she would like each of them to follow when they begin a new topic. To reiterate, this cycle would begin by asking a question, then her students would

identify a problem, conduct research on the topic of their choice, take action, and then reflect on their findings. While each step of this cycle is important in its own way,

In doing so, Vasquez helps to develop her students' lenses of understanding our world in hopes that this will help them to question how our society functions and their role within these structures. In doing so, Vasquez's goal was to broaden her students' understanding of how our society functions and their role within these structures. Moreover, Vasquez utilizes her curriculum to create spaces where her students feel comfortable to share and foster their questions and utilize these ideas to create a sense of intrinsic motivation that could act as a catalyst for them to think critically about our world. Vasquez's exploration of the first step in this process (asking questions) and curriculum, acted as a major source of inspiration for me when constructing my media literacy curriculum.

### ***When We Ask Questions Aloud We are Sharing with Our Peers:***

Thus, when coming to terms with the literature surrounding *literacy* and *critical literacy theory*, it was important for me to also review the literature regarding what it means to *share*. This is because when students ask questions aloud, they are *sharing* their ideas *orally*. In coming to understand this aspect of the literature, I had to keep this idea of sharing in mind as I conducted my project. I had to come to terms with what it meant to "share" with others because ultimately the way in which we learn how to share our thoughts and ideas play a salient role in shaping the way that we perceive others thoughts and formulate our own personal lenses.

In addition, the way that we learn how to share and communicate with others is ultimately shaped by our cultural background and upbringing. This is a salient concept that both Shirley Heath and Sarah Michaels explore throughout each of their pieces. In Shirley Heath's piece, "What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school," Heath discusses how middle class parents often ask their children "known answer" questions. One example of a "known answer" question is "What sound does a cow make?" While we all know that cows say "moo," these types of questions are very prevalent in the homes of white, middle class and families and ultimately influence childrens' understanding of how they should share and answer these questions with potential answers. However, Heath also found that students who came from predominantly middle class, African-American communities were often asked questions such as

"What's that like?" These questions required kids to make connections, analogies and juxtapose things in their world in order to formulate a response.

In her piece, "Sharing Time," Michaels (1981) makes a similar point when she observes how students are sharing their ideas in a first grade classroom with children. These students all came from different cultural, racial, and SES backgrounds. Moreover, Michaels' piece also explores how students with different upbringings and backgrounds shared their thoughts and ideas differently. For example, she compared how many students who derived from white middle class families entered classrooms with a "topic centered" way of sharing which meant that they were taught how to focus on and discuss one thing whereas students of color from lower class neighborhoods often entered the classroom with a "topic associated" approach to sharing in which they learned to share through sharing linked experiences.

Due to the fact that many educators also derive from white middle class families, they often misinterpret students' points when they share utilizing a topic associated approach. Michaels sentiment about these forms of sharing are important to keep in mind as when we speak with our students or observe students interacting with their peers, they are ultimately *sharing* their ideas *orally*. Moreover, these ideas about what it means to share our questions is important to keep in mind as I have been conducting my project in a classroom where I identify differently than each student in the room. Erin, Katie, Adrianna, and I are all white women who grew up with topic centered approaches to learning. Many of the lessons that are taught and are expected of students to complete are centered around this approach as well. This point of view has been vital to navigating Erin's classroom and the ways in which students are sharing their thoughts as what I perceive ultimately impacts how I viewed them, constructed my curriculum, and interacted with the students daily.

### ***Why Media Literacy?***

Lastly, it is important to discuss the literature surrounding *media literacy*. To reiterate, *media literacy* is the way in which we analyze and perceive new information that is conveyed through *media*. In her piece, "A Review of School-Based Initiatives in Media Literacy Education," Renee Hobbs discusses different teachers' motivations for implementing media literacy curriculum into their classrooms. She writes that:

“When teachers use videos, films, Web sites, popular music, newspapers, and magazines in the K-12 classroom or when they involve students in creating media productions using video cameras or computers, they may aim to motivate students’ interest in the subject, build communication and critical-thinking skills, encourage political activism, or promote personal and social development.” (Hobbs)

Moreover, the implementation of *media literacy* into the classroom has been shown to promote critical thinking skills along with other necessary tools as students are encouraged to analyze new information that they are taking in. When undergoing this work, I found that Hobbs’ work in media literacy connects heavily to Vivian Vasquez’s notion of *critical literacy theory*. This is because both frameworks work to help students become more critical of the information they are taking in through having them analyze different sources. While Vasquez utilized sources such as journals, newspapers, and books, Hobbs’ work expands on these materials to include film, websites, music, newspapers, ads, etc. Hobbs writes that:

“Including a range of diverse narrative and expository texts from the realms of film, television, popular print media, radio, and the Internet helps create authentic learning environments that can connect the classroom to the living room (Foster, 1998; Krueger & Christel, 2001; Teasely & Wilder, 1997). Using critical questions to stimulate students’ active reading response is increasingly a common classroom practice, and this instructional strategy has been extended to include the texts of popular culture, including television, movies, and popular music (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999).” (Hobbs)

In addition, Tracy A. McNelly writes in her piece, “Media literacy instruction in today’s classrooms: A study of teachers’ knowledge, confidence, and integration” that “According to the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE), ‘in its simplest terms, media literacy builds upon the foundation of traditional literacy and offers new forms of reading and writing. Media literacy empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators and active citizens’ (National Association for Media Literacy Education, n.d.).” Both Hobbs and McNelly illustrate through their Media Literacy Education literature that media literacy works to expand the mediums in which students are being critical of new information that they are taking in. While there is a plethora of media literacy research to learn from, the limitation or gap in this collection of literature as there is not much regarding the implementation of these frameworks into elementary classrooms. There are many resources that show educators

creating materials intended for early childhood education, however, there is very little formal research done with grades K-2. I am by no means the first person to implement a media literacy curriculum into a second grade classroom, however, not many people who have implemented Media Literacy Education have conducted research connected to it nor have others focused on the questioning aspect at this grade level in the space of an English Language Arts classroom.

### ***Looking at the Literature as a Whole:***

Ultimately, while these different concepts may seem separate, they all intertwine with one another. *Literacy and Critical Literacy* each work to help us understand how to be critical of new information and create new ways of understanding our world. To gain these new understandings as learners we ask questions about the information that we take in and when we often *share* this information *orally* with our teachers, peers, parents, friends, etc. Thus, this act of *oral sharing* ultimately works to reshape and inform their understanding of their world and what is being asked. Lastly, *media literacy* education takes these concepts and recontextualizes them to include different forms of *media* or mediums that allow us to gain new information. In understanding my research project, it is important that we think of these frameworks as the cogs in a clock. While they may seem separate, each work together to help make us who we are and help us to better understand our world.

### **Methodology:**

My Praxis Project is a qualitative, practitioner-inquiry study that has employed ethnographic methods, such as audio-recordings, field notes, and collection of participant artifacts and documents, while excluding any artifacts or spoken words in transcripts of non-assenting students. My data includes observations (and fieldnotes), audio recordings of English Language Arts classroom activities, and collections of artifacts of student work. I will explain my procedures and reasoning for data collection below:

**Audio Recording:** I recorded a whole-group teacher-led ELA lessons conducted by Erin Tracy. I also audio recorded the media literacy activities that I lead. I only transcribed the recordings of those who consented to my study. I chose to audio record whole group lessons because I felt that

there are a lot of important discussions that are missed or overlooked when completing field notes.

**Observations and Field Notes:** My observations were recorded in the form of field notes and written during and after class. I wrote field notes on study participants to see what questions they asked and whether or not they interacted with their peers and Erin Tracy during the ELA lessons. I also took field notes on study participants who were engaging with the media literacy activities that I implemented. I wrote analytic memos weekly. No observations of non-consenting students were written up. I utilized field notes to take note of body language or parts of students' ELA lesson that may not have been understood over audio recording. Each session, students split off into different centers so I have used my notes to recount what occurs at each center with different groups.

**Collection of Artifacts and Documents:** I scanned participants' work after each activity I conducted. I have utilized this method to visually see how students are applying their knowledge and skills. This method has allowed me to build a greater understanding of where students are at with their skills and how they are interacting with the text.

<i>Data Collection</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Rationale (Before or After Data Collection)</i>	<i>Challenges/Limitations</i>	<i>How did it inform my analysis?</i>
<u>Audio Recording</u>	I will be recording whole-group teacher-led ELA lessons conducted by Mrs. Tracy. I will also audio record	I have chosen to audio record whole group lessons because I feel that there is a lot of important discussion that is missed or looked	This method has posed a challenge as often what is tangibly heard is dependent on where I place the audio recording device for that day and where students decide to sit on the rug for that	This method informed my analysis as it allowed me to hear what students were saying in class and



	<p>the media literacy activities I lead. I will only transcribe the recordings of those who consent to my study.</p>	<p>over when completing field notes.</p>	<p>day.</p>	<p>understand ways in which they were engaging with the material for that day.</p>
<p><u>Observations and Field Notes</u></p>	<p>My observations will be recorded in the form of field notes written during and after class. I will write field notes on study participants to see what questions they ask and whether or not they interact with their peers and Mrs. Tracy during the ELA lesson. I will also be taking field notes on study participants who are engaging</p>	<p>I have utilized field notes to take note of body language or parts of students' ELA lesson that may not be understood over audio recording. Each session, students split off into different centers so I have used my notes to recount what occurs at each center with different groups.</p>	<p>This method has presented as a challenge as it is difficult to document student's word for word comments as well the tone of voice in which they conveyed their thoughts.</p>	<p>This method helped to inform my research as I have been able to recount and capture each part of students' ELA lesson along with their physical reactions and body language as well.</p>

	<p>with the media literacy activities that I will implement. I will write analytic memos weekly. No observations of non-consenting students will be written up.</p>			
<p><u>Collection of Artifacts and Documents</u></p>	<p>I will be scanning participants' work after each activity I conduct. I have utilized this method to visually see how students are applying their knowledge and skills.</p>	<p>This method has allowed me to build a greater understanding of where students are at with their skills and how they are interacting with the text.</p>	<p>The limitations that come with this form of data collection arise when working to understand how students produced what they did. Thus, much of their process towards producing their written work is lost because I am only seeing the product rather than the process.</p>	<p>This method helped to inform my data as it allowed me to see the work students produced as a reaction to the material and prompt that they were exposed to that day.</p>

### **Data Analysis and Findings:**

The data I will be analyzing is primarily made up of field notes, audio recordings, and scanned images of student work. While at my site, I took field notes while observing Erin Tracy's whole group ELA discussions. These lessons were periodically taught by Erin's MAT student, Katie McCarthy, Adriana Troppeano (an ELL teacher at Woodland Academy who we refer to as Ms. T) or Erin herself. These lessons occur Monday through Friday from 8:15-10:00. During Fall 2021, I attended these lessons on Mondays and Fridays from August to December. During Spring 2022, I attended these sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays from January to April.

### **What questions are second grade children asking within the classroom in response to or during teacher led-whole group ELA lessons?**

When I observed ELA lessons, I sat in the plastic, green chair actively listening for any questions that were asked by her students. However, while there were some questions throughout my time listening in, I found that the quantity of questions asked were significantly less than I assumed there would be. In addition, I found that only a few students were asking questions whereas the overall majority were not. Out of seventeen students, it was apparent that Mrs. Tracy's students Ian, Denisa, and Miller consistently shared their thoughts and wonderings about the text. As I noticed these students share during these lessons, it made me wonder *why*? What made them feel inclined to share whereas others may have not? Below I will discuss these wonderings:

#### ***So, what about the students who were sharing and were asking questions?***

*Ian: "What Is He Drawing On?"*

One morning when Mrs. Tracy was reading her students a book called, *The Art Lesson*, by Tomie DePaola, I walked in as the lesson had already begun as I was running a few minutes late and the students were sitting quietly on the rug. *The Art Lesson* is about a boy who loves to draw. The objective of the lesson was for the students to focus on identifying character traits and explain their thought process.

When observing this lesson I noticed that one boy named Ian spoke ten times throughout

the duration of the 20 minute lesson. Out of these ten instances he spoke five times within the first five minutes of the lesson, actively speaking back and forth with Mrs. Tracy.

As I sat and listened, I interpreted Ian’s behavior as engagement. This is because throughout my time in the classroom, Ian would tell me about how he enjoyed drawing and loved art. As a result, I intuitively associated the trait of being “creative” with Ian’s personality. Thus, these associations and assumptions made me wonder if Ian was what I interpreted as “engaged” because he was able to relate to the text. During these five minutes he asked Mrs. Tracy, two out of the three questions in which he asked throughout the entire lesson, both of which happened in the same minute. When looking back I wonder if this was because he was able to resonate with the text for this day.

1.	[00:01:11.20]	Erin Tracy:	They’re creative. How can we tell he’s creative?
2.	[00:01:11.20]	Ian	He’s drawing and stuff?
3.	[00:01:17.14]	Erin Tracy	He’s drawing all of the pictures. Christian?
4.	[00:01:30.27]	Christian	[Unable to make out what he is saying]
5.	[00:01:30.27]	Erin Tracy	*continues to read book*
6.	[00:02:39.21]	Erin Tracy	Yes Ian?
7.	[00:02:39.21]	Ian	What is he drawing on? Why does the chalk look like a bone?

It is important to note that in my field notes, I wrote that Ian was also sitting on the rug right at Mrs. Tracy’s feet. He was the closest student to the book and had a clear view of the

images on the page. Whereas some students who may have opted to sit in the back of the rug, may not have been able to see as clearly as he was. Ian’s body language showed that he was facing forward with his eyes glued to the pages as Erin read. I think that Ian’s position in relation to the physical book or piece of *media* and Mrs. Tracy did play a role in his participation during this lesson as his questions revolved around an image that he could view in the text. In addition, as Erin read, the chalk and chalkboard were never mentioned literally they were only seen through the images of this picture picture book.

*Miller: “Is This Even a Funny Book?”*

To preface: on this day, Ms. McCarthy was reading a book called, “Listen Buddy” by Helen Lester to the students on the rug. Thus, in the beginning of the lesson Ms. McCarthy framed this text as a “funny” book.” Ms. McCarthy’s positioning of this text was heavily influenced by the Fountas and Pinnell lesson guide as one of the discussion questions later on is to ask students “How does knowing that Helen Lester writes funny books help you know that this story probably has humor before you read it.” In doing so she said to her students:

1.	[00:14:05.26]	Katie McCarthy	This week we are going to be reading some really funny stories by an author named Helen Lester and this is the first one that we are going to read today and the thing about Helen Lester’s stories is that they all have animals as the main characters who talk and they do funny things if we have animals that talk and do funny things is this fiction or nonfiction?
2.	[00:14:28.11]	Whole class	(guessing) nonfiction! Fiction!
3.	[00:14:34.25]	Katie McCarthy	So it’s fiction
4.	[00:14:34.25]	Miller	Yes, I know that...

5.	[00:14:39.04]	Katie McCarthy	So, today's story is this book called "Listen Buddy" and Buddy is a funny bunny with big big ears but his ears don't work. He can't hear. He keeps hearing things that don't actually...like his parents and his friends don't actually say so in this book you're going to hear him make a lot of mistakes. Have you ever made a mistake before?
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Ms. McCarthy begins the lesson by asking for students to relate to their own experiences by thinking about whether or not they have ever made a mistake. In doing so, this strategy helps to activate students' prior knowledge and help them to connect to the text at hand. However, by posing this piece of media as something that was supposed to be interpreted as "funny," I wonder if this notion incited an expectation for students to conform and agree with this belief. Moreover, throughout the book Buddy mistakes words that rhyme with one another (ex: squash->wash or bread->bed, etc.) Because of this he has a hard time following directions and when his parents tell him to make a left instead of a right (so he doesn't end up at the scruffy varmints home) he turns right and ends up helping the varmint make soup (which he keeps giving the wrong ingredients for) The varmint is content with his assistance until Buddy puts the soup in the fire instead of on the fire....

Line	Time code	Speaker	Talk
1.	[00:26:41.08]	Katie McCarthy	(continues to read) "The fire went ssssszzzzz and so did the scruffy varmint. I'll teach you, he howled. I will have soup. Bunny rabbit soup and I know just the bunny to use. The bunny rabbit who never listens. YOU. Buddy listened..." What do you think is going to happen now?
2.	[00:26:41.08]	Ian	I think he's...

3.		Katie McCarthy	Oop raise your hand. What's gonna happen next? Can you predict what's going to happen next? XXX?
4.	[00:26:44. 03]	NCS	Um I predict that he's going to use his sharp claws and cut the bunny rabbit
5.	[00:26:49. 14]	Katie McCarthy	Oh, I hope not
6.	[00:26:52. 16]	NCS	I don't know then...
7.	[00:26:52. 16]	Katie McCarthy	But we'll see he seems pretty angry. Denisa, what do you think is going to happen next?
8.	[00:26:56. 00]	Denisa	I think he's gonna get the bunny and his parents and cook them
9.	[00:27:03. 00]	Katie McCarthy	Ooh Elijah?
10.	[00:27:03. 00]	Elijah	I think the bunny will likely run away even faster than the bear but then the bear would just sit there and do nothing
11.	[00:27:13. 27]	Katie McCarthy	Ooh maybe...listen we're almost done Marcos.
12.	[00:27:17. 06]	Miller	Is this even a funny book?
13.	[00:27:20. 17]	Katie McCarthy	Yes

When Miller asked this question, I think he was challenging the notion of what his expected response should be. For some context, Miller is a student who gets in trouble relatively often. He has a difficult time paying attention in class and sometimes needs to be redirected. Because of this, I wonder if Miller was able to resonate with this text and relate to Buddy. In the story, Buddy was a poor listener, but his actions were never mal-intended. Thus, Miller’s question about where this book was actually “funny” really made me think about my own perception of the text. As I thought about Buddy and the events that occurred, it made sense that a child might not laugh at a character who was almost eaten because he misheard a simple direction. In addition, Miller had also been absent from school for an extended period of time, which made me wonder if he was more inclined to challenge Ms. McCarthy’s notion of “funniest” since he hadn’t been in the classroom in a while. This is because when we are not socialized to accept the ideals that others instill on us because it is just what we “should” know, it is much easier to push back against a notion we may not agree with. For example, in her piece “Theory as a Liberatory Practice,” Bell Hooks writes that “Children make the best theorists,” and I believe this rings true. Thus, I believe that children have a greater capacity to reimagine and rethink the current societal structures that are still in place because they have not fully internalized these systems. In this scenario, I wonder if Miller felt capable to challenge the notion of “funniest” because he had not fully internalized the inner workings and structure of the classroom.

Seemingly on the spot, I’m also unsure if Ms. McCarthy knew how to respond to Miller’s question in this moment, as it challenged her own beliefs and how she positioned the story. However, after hearing Ms. McCarthy’s response to his question, Miller goes on to say:

14.	[00:27:20.17]	Miller	It isn’t even funny
15.	[00:27:21.13]	Katie McCarthy	Okay
16.	[00:27:24.23]	Miller	Except for the words that they were just saying



When Miller responds in line 16 with “except for the words they were just saying,” I wonder if he responded this way because he attempted to find a middle ground where he could justify the book being “funny,” while also still maintaining his stance.

Thus, Miller’s seemingly simple question acted as a catalyst to shift my perception of this piece of media and how it was being interpreted by the students. Miller’s question exemplifies how questions have the power to reposition our mindset and shift and expand our perspective.

***So, what about the students who were not asking questions aloud but were sharing?***

While I have witnessed questions being asked during whole-group ELA lessons by students such as Ian and Miller, there are also many students who I noticed did not ask questions, but were actively willing to share their thoughts and ideas with the class during whole-group instruction. Moreover, I found that when students worked to make connections with the text, they often did not pose these thoughts as questions rather as statements.

*Ian: “We have similar kinds of crayons when we got to science”*

For example, during the lesson about “The Art Lesson,” Ian raised his hand again to include a thought about the crayons the boy in the book was using. He said:

[00:05:29.19] Erin: Yes, Ian?

[00:05:29.19] Ian: We have similar kinds of crayons when we go to science.

While this statement is very much not a question, it further shows that students are more willing to share their thoughts about a text, when they are able to form connections and resonate with the new information that they are taking in.

*Denisa: “Mango, Abuela, and Me”*

This sentiment holds true and can be seen through another student named Denisa. On this day, the students were listening to Ms. McCarthy read “Mango, Abuela, and Me” by Meg Medina. The students were sitting on the rug or in a chair next to the rug. The ability to sit in chairs is an option that is provided as long as they follow the agreed upon rules. For example, they cannot sit behind someone, they cannot move the chairs around, and they have three warnings if they do not follow these rules, and then they must sit on the rug.

“Mango, Abuela, and Me” is about a grandmother and a granddaughter who both wanted to communicate with one another, but each had to learn either English or Spanish. Throughout the book the two used different ways to teach each other their language and even used their parrot named Mango to help them understand one another.

Prior to starting the book, Ms. McCarthy asked the students to make predictions and as she read, she periodically stopped every one to two pages to pose a question to the students. During this time, she’d often ask, “What do you think will happen next?” or “What do you think this means?” I noticed there was a lot of eagerness to share ideas this morning which led to a large amount of raised hands.

For example, one student named Denisa appeared to be what I interpreted as “engaged.” I wondered if she was “engaged in the lesson because her behavior indicated a willingness to share her ideas with the class. I noticed that she raised her hand each time Ms. McCarthy asked a question and each time she was given the opportunity to share, she would explain how she was able to connect the text to her own life. While Denisa was not asking questions, these connections indicated to me that she was able to resonate with the text.

After observing past lessons, I noticed that when Denisa was disinterested in the book for that day, she would quickly lose focus and attempt to interrupt the lesson as much as she could. I wonder if these behaviors were intended to entertain herself or identify if others felt the same way. However, when she would disturb lessons, she often made seemingly unrelated comments or giggled after making a random sound.

Looking back, I wonder if these comments that were made by Denisa were shared using a *topic associated* approach. At the moment, as I observed, I assumed that they were unrelated because they were not directly connected to the text. However, now I wonder if this was a strategy for her to gain the attention of the teachers and her classmates so she could share a related thought.

In contrast to my past experiences of observing the lessons in which Denisa was present for, on this day, Denisa sat quietly on a chair next to the rug and rather than blurting out comments or making silly sounds, she raised her hand when expected and was eager to share. This led me to think she was deeply interested in the text and wanted Ms. McCarthy to continue reading.

It is important to note that Denisa speaks Spanish in her home with her family. I think that she may have felt capable of resonating with the text as there was a commonality with the languages being used.

Moreover, similarly to my experience observing lessons in which Ian was seemingly “engaged” Denisa showed a greater willingness to participate in whole-group ELA discussion when she was able to connect to the text for that day.

***So, what about the students who were not asking questions aloud and were not sharing?***

Out of seventeen students I found that there are at least ten students per lesson that I observe that do not raise their hands or share their thoughts with the class. Now, this could possibly mean that they are asking these questions internally, or that these students may be shy, which could be why they are less inclined to share their thoughts with the class. However, because their thoughts are internal, as educators, it is difficult to ensure whether they are engaged with the material beyond students’ body language.

Moreover, due to the fact that I did notice a lack of questions being asked by the majority of Mrs. Tracy’s students, this is part of what inspired me to not just create a *media literacy* curriculum, but implement it as well. I wanted to create spaces within her classroom in which every student would be able to connect to different forms of *media*. In doing so, I utilized materials such as books, movies, popular cartoons, toys, cereal ads, etc. to help students understand that we can learn from the different sources of *media* that we are exposed to. This caused me to think about how I perceive what it means to remain “engaged” in a text and how the role of asking something out loud lends itself to a student’s perception of the material at hand. I think that part of my assumption upon entering this project is that student-asked questions would be loud and apparent, meaning that when they were invested or curious, they would be showing these behaviors physically. In addition, I think that he was more open to sharing his thoughts because of the difference in group dynamics.

As seen through Ian and Denisa’s experiences within Mrs. Tracy’s classroom, many students are more willing to share their ideas and participate when they feel they are able to connect and resonate with the information they are taking in. *Media Literacy Education* centers around using what students already know and are exposed to both within and outside of the classroom to build their knowledge and equip them with tools that can be used throughout

different subjects.

***So, What? Reflecting on What This Data Could Mean:***

During my time in Erin Tracy's classroom, I found that there are students who actively ask questions. There are students who do not ask questions, but they do share their thoughts with the class, and there are students who may not participate in whole-group discussion and presume the role of a listener rather than sharer. As seen through Ian and Denisa's experiences within Mrs. Tracy's classroom, many students are more willing to share their ideas and participate when they feel they are able to connect and resonate with the information they are taking in. *Media Literacy Education* centers around using what students already know and are exposed to both within and outside of the classroom to build their knowledge and equip them with tools that can be used throughout different subjects.

Looking back on this data I think it is important to do what we can to help students to find ways to resonate or form connections with new information that they are expected to take in. This is because when students feel connected to the new information they are taking in, this could help them to feel more inclined to share their thoughts and questions. In addition, I think that it is important to note that many students may be actively thinking about the material at hand internally. However, as seen through Miller's experience when questioning whether the book "Listen Buddy" was "funny," sharing our thoughts and questions with others extends the power to change others' thoughts, ideas, and perceptions of the information they are taking in, which further works to build their *literacies*. Moreover, I believe that finding more ways to help students to resonate with the piece of media at hand can help them to feel inclined and supported to share their thoughts, ideas, and questions with their peers, and in turn, oral sharing has the power to strengthen others' critical thinking skills.

## **What questions are second grade teachers asking within the classroom during their whole-group ELA lessons?**

### ***What is IRE?***

When paying attention to what questions second grade teachers are asking during their whole-group ELA lessons, I noticed that there is a dependence on the Initiate Response Evaluative (IRE) model of questioning within the classroom. IRE is a traditional teacher led question and answer method that is commonly used to ensure that students can recall factual knowledge. It is referred to as IRE because the teacher initiates the conversation with a question, receives a response from a student, and then evaluates whether it is “right.” Once the teacher is satisfied with an acceptable response, they typically move on with the lesson.

I think that Mrs. Tracy along with the other second grade teachers that I have observed utilize this method as it works as a useful tool to help prepare students for their future writing assignments that they must complete during independent work time. Moreover, each ELA lesson that I have observed has an “objective” that coincides with the directions to complete the writing for this day. Today, the objective said, “We will be able to analyze and write details about the ending of a story in order to demonstrate our understanding of the realistic fiction genre.” In conjunction, the prompt that was presented to the students was the question: “is this realistic?”

### ***Scripted Curriculum and Teacher Expectations:***

Moreover, many educators provide these objectives and prompts to prepare their students to complete writing assignments that are expected of them later on and utilize whole-group discussion time to prepare them for these independent tasks. This is because these prompts and objectives coincide with the expectations that are put in place not just by their school administration, but also the state. Elementary teachers are required to adhere to the state standards of what students should understand in a certain time frame. The State standard for this lesson was RL.2.7 (Reading Literature) in which students should “use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.”

It is important to note that Woodland Academy educators are required to adhere to the Fountas and Pinnell curriculum that is pre-written and constructed for them. Thus, Woodland

Academy educators are given curriculum folders that instruct them to ask certain questions and when to ask them.

Because of these requirements put in place by the state, the district, and the school, I think that these factors have played a critical role in many educators’ gravitation towards utilizing the IRE within the classroom.

During this lesson Mrs. Tracy positioned her students to focus on part of the plot which was the ending of the story. The use of IRE as a questioning strategy can be seen when Mrs. Tracy was going over realistic fiction with her students. On this day, they were preparing to read the book “Those Shoes” by Maribeth Boelts, which is about a boy who wants a certain pair of shoes, but his grandma cannot afford to buy him a new pair. He wants the shoes but needs snow boots. In this excerpt she refers back to a book they have already read, “Strega Nona” by Tomie dePaola (with Big Anthony). They begin the conversation by discussing how they can tell if something is real.

I=   R=   E=  

1.	[00:07 :38.14	Erin Tracy	Alright so, today we’re gonna look at the ending of the story and we’re gonna say is the ending real? So, here’s an example: Streganona. At the end of Streganona, Streganona fixes the magic pasta pot and then big Anthony has to eat all of the pasta that the pot made is that real?
2.	[00:07 :38.14	Rose	No!
3.	[00:07 :40.18	Erin Tracy	Could that be real?
4.	[00:07 :40.18	Denisa	No

5.	[00:07 :40.18	Erin Tracy	Why?
6.	[00:07 :44.03	Denisa	Because he's too fat
7.	[00:07 :46.02	Erin Tracy	Okay, he couldn't possibly eat all of that pasta his stomach would explode. Why else couldn't that be real?

Thus, in this excerpt, in line 1, we see Mrs. Tracy pose the question of whether or not the events that happened in “Streganona” could be considered “real.” She asks her students, “Anthony has to eat all of the pasta that the pot made, is that real?” In doing so, this question serves as the initiator for her students to respond to. This is because there is only one intended answer to this question in which the correct answer is “no, it is not real.” When both Denisa and Rose respond with “no,” Mrs. Tracy moves onto her next question which is “why?” This indicates that she is satisfied with their response. Once she asks this question, she fields responses from some other students until she moves on with the lesson. This next excerpt is a continuation of the previous piece in which they say:

I= [green box] R= [yellow box] E= [red box]

8.	[00:07 :40.18	Erin Tracy	Why?
9.	[00:07 :44.03	Denisa	Because he's too fat
10.	[00:07 :46.02	Erin Tracy	Okay, he couldn't possibly eat all of that pasta his stomach would explode why else couldn't that be real?
11.	[00:07 :54.09	Ian	I think he might throw up

12.	[00:07 :49.28	Erin Tracy	He might throw up, why else couldn't that be real?
13.	[00:08 :01.17	Christia n	Because he wouldn't actually eat a pot of pasta
14.	[00:08 :09.13	Erin Tracy	Okay Ian?
15.	[00:08 :09.13	Ian	If he doesn't like pasta why would he eat it?
16.	[00:08 :12.22	Erin Tracy	Okay, think about the pasta pot. What's special about the pasta pot? How do you know that couldn't be real?
17.	[00:08 :25.18	Erin Tracy	Do we have magic pasta pots?
18.	[00:08 :25.18	Whole class	Nooo!!!!
19.	[00:08 :27.13	Erin Tracy	No. So we know that that couldn't be real. It's not like real life there's no magic pasta pots somebody can't make an entire town full of pasta it doesn't work that way

In this portion of the excerpt, we see Mrs. Tracy shift her initial question based on the students' responses. She begins by simply asking “why” and later extends the question in line 10 to include “why couldn't that be real.” In this instance, Mrs. Tracy is affirming the answer to her first question which is that the magic pot is “not” real. However, here we also see in line 19 that she is seeking out a specific answer in which magic pasta pots do not exist in real life.

Although, after hearing this exchange, it made me wonder if this questioning strategy would be more effective when conducting a lesson with a non-fiction text. One demonstration of this strategy utilized to help solidify facts from a non-fiction text can be seen through an exchange that I transcribed from a day in which the students were learning about the types of



birds and their beaks. On this day, Ms. T was leading the lesson and conducting the read-aloud. She was reading a book called, “The Perfect Beak” by Robin Page, while the students sat on the rug. Every one to two pages, Ms. T would stop reading and ask the students a question about the page they just read to see if they could recall the information they had just taken in.

I= [green box] R= [yellow box] E= [red box]

1.	[00:08:51.25]	Ms. T:	Spoon bill. A spoon bill lives in fresh water marsh-marshes her beak is what? how do describe a spoon bill? XXX?
2.	[00:09:07.04]	Non-Consenting Student:	XXX [provides another descriptor]
3.	[00:09:07.04]	Ms. T:	it’s like a spoon so what shape is it? Errrrrr- round! Round like a spoon it’s perfect for scooping up shrimp from the muddy water. A spoonbill beak is like a very big spoon Ian?
4.	[00:09:25.09]	Ian	It’s like a execrator it’s like it moves like parts
5.	[00:09:39.08]	Ms. T:	yeah.
6.	[00:09:39.08]	Non-Consenting Student:	XXX [provides another descriptor]
7.	[00:09:43.05]	Ms. T:	[flips the page] A sap sucker. A sap sucker lives in the woods his beak is what how do we describe a sap sucker’s beak XXX?

Through this example, we can see how Ms. T utilizes the IRE questioning strategy to help students form connections from the text and recall the facts they recently learned. In this excerpt, it is apparent that she is still following a more traditional question and answer pattern in which she initiates a question in line 1, listens to NCS and Ian's responses, and evaluates them. In doing so, once she is satisfied with their responses, she moves onto her next question in line 7 regarding a sap suckers beak.

Moreover, I think that the IRE can be useful in the classroom; however, it depends on the nature of the text. I think that when using the IRE to recall facts and make connections about non-fiction texts it actually serves as a really useful tool. However, when attempting to strengthen critical thinking skills, I wonder if this is where this strategy falls short. While I believe there are benefits to the IRE, I think that if we would like to help students develop their critical thinking skills, this strategy could hinder them in a way as it implies that there is a "correct answer" whereas often when we asked ourselves "big picture" questions there is no "one" answer for many of the systems that exist in our world. Thus, I believe that there is a time and a place for the IRE questioning strategy in the classroom, but when overused it could inhibit students' desire to think critically about our world.

### ***Bread-Crumb Epistemology:***

Another method of teacher-questioning that I have noticed frequently used within the classroom is what I will refer to as "Bread-Crumb Epistemology," which means to "[lay] down a trail of verbal clues during conversations so a learner would have few alternatives but to provide a statement that would suffice for knowing about a phenomenon" (Windschitl, 2019, p. 8).

One illustration of the invocation of this strategy can be seen on a day in which the students were watching a video read-aloud of the book "Big Anthony" by Tomie dePaola. When I walked into the classroom this morning, the book was projected onto the whiteboard, while a soothing woman's voice read-aloud. Every few minutes Mrs. Tracy would pause the video to ask her students a question about the text. I noticed this "bread-crumbling" strategy used when Mrs. Tracy paused the video to ask her students about what we call someone who "doesn't pay attention. The objective for the ELA lesson this morning was for students to "be able to identify how a character's thoughts and actions can show what kind of person they are in order to demonstrate understanding of character traits." In conjunction with this objective the students were also given a

writing prompt that they would be expected to complete later on which said, “What are 2 character traits that you would use to describe Big Anthony? Use examples from the book to tell why you chose those traits.” The objective and prompt worked to help set up the discussion for what aspects of the story students should be focused on as they listen to the video. In doing so, both objective and the prompt work to prepare and guide students with their thinking as they take in new information.

Thus, when discussing the different character traits that Big Anthony may have, Mrs. Tracy pauses the text to discuss some potential words we could use to describe Big Anthony after he makes a few mistakes when attempting to follow directions. These mistakes are portrayed to listeners as Big Anthony not paying attention, which leads Mrs. Tracy to ask the class the following question.

1.	[00:02:06.01]	Erin Tracy	Okay. What do we call somebody who doesn't pay attention? NCS?
2.	[00:02:15.04]	NCS	XXX
3.	[00:02:15.28]	Erin Tracy	Not listening, but usually when you're not paying attention you're dis...
4.	[00:02:12.22]	Whole class:	[mumbles of different answers]
5.	[00:02:21.07]	Erin Tracy	Distracted
6.	[00:02:24.28]	NCS	[repeats what Erin says to themselves]
7.	[00:02:26.15]	Erin Tracy	So would you say he's distracted?
8.	[00:02:28.13]	Whole class	Yeah

In this excerpt, we see that Mrs. Tracy proposed her initial question in line 1. However, in line 3 we see her evaluate a student's response, and while they answer her question, she moves onto providing verbal cues for the word “distracted” because she wants her students to associate

not listening or paying attention with being distracted. Moreover, in line she says, “you’re dis...” which provides a halfway point for the students to provide the answer. I wonder if this strategy was used as a timing strategy because when looking at how long this conversation lasted. It was relatively quick in which Mrs. Tracy posed the question, provided the clues for her students and then gave them the answer all within thirty seconds. If we look at the time frame from lines 3 to 5, she only provided her students about five seconds of thinking time to produce the answer that she was looking for. When looking back on this moment, I wonder if Mrs. Tracy used this strategy as a way to help prepare her students for their independent work time. This is because when they completed a practice writing assignment later on Mrs. Tracy used the word “distracted” as one of the describing words to show what the students could say about Big Anthony.

Another example of this teacher-questioning strategy can be seen later on, when Mrs. Tracy tries to help her students think of another word they could use to describe Big Anthony. This question is prompted by a part in the text where Big Anthony was asked to leave a gate open on a farm where he was helping and instead left all the gates open, which caused the animals to escape.

1.	[00:06:30.17]	Erin Tracy	What can we say if you’re not being careful. This is a word you guys talked about when you were playing charades with Ms. T the other day if you’re not careful then you’re care...
2.	[00:06:42.07]	Denisa	less!
3.	[00:06:42.07]	Erin Tracy	Careless good. Do you think it was careless that he left the gate open?
4.	[00:06:47.20]	Whole Class	Yes
5.	[00:06:49.11]	Erin Tracy	And what happened when he was being careless? Elijah?

6.	[00:06:52.25]	Elijah	All the animals ran away
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In line 1 Mrs. Tracy, follows a similar question asking structure as she did previously when providing verbal cues for “distracted.” Here we see that she would like to hear the students respond with the word “careless.” This is apparent as in line 1, she invokes students’ prior knowledge about a previous activity and then moves on to say “if you’re not careful then you’re care...” In doing so, Denisa completes the verbal cue with the back half of the term in line 2 when she says “less!” In doing so, Mrs. Tracy confirms that this was the term she was hoping to hear when she affirms Denisa’s answer in line 3 where she says “careless, good.”

I wonder if this instance of bread-crumbing was also utilized to help prepare students for their writing assignment later on. This is because after the video finished, the students were expected to complete a graphic organizer prior to their writing. They completed this task during their whole-group discussion

The image below was taken from Mrs. Tracy’s slideshow for this day. Mrs. Tracy typed the class constructed answers onto the slide and then displayed them on the board. The graphic was created as a device to support students in the writing they were expected to complete.

On this slide we see that the words “careless” and “distracted” are both used as examples.


ELA 8:20-10:00

Objective: We will be able to identify how a character’s thoughts and actions can show what kind of person they are in order to demonstrate understanding of character traits.

**Character Trait:** Careless

How do you know?

He didn’t close the gate and let all the sheep



Big Anthony

**Character Trait:** Messy

How do you know?

He crashed into the cake and knocked it over

**Character Trait:** Lazy

How do you know?

When he was supposed to take care of the lunches he fell asleep instead

**Character Trait:** distracted

How do you know?

He was supposed to be drinking but looked at the bird and it spilled everywhere

Below, I will also provide an example of students' writing assignment, that was completed as a whole-class in which Mrs. Tracy's students could use it as a reference when they completed their own writing work independently.

Topic Sentence → Have you ever read Big Anthony, His Story?

TTQA → Two character traits that I would use to describe Anthony are

lazy and messy .

Examples → I infer he is lazy because He fell asleep when he was supposed to take care of the lunches.

Examples → Maybe he is messy because He crashed into the cake and knocked it on the ground.

Closing Sentence → Now you know all about Big Anthony, His Story.

### ***So, What? What Could This Data Mean?***

When thinking about my time spent in the classroom observing teacher questions, I've come to see that the methods of invoking IRE and "Bread-Crumbing" can serve as a useful tool when working with non-fiction texts. Moreover, I think that these teacher question-oriented strategies work to help students to recall facts and understand the guidelines of what work they are expected to complete within the lesson. However, when viewing these methods from a stance of working to strengthen critical thinking skills, I think there is a lot of room for variation in instruction. This is due to the fact that IRE and "Bread Crumbing" mainly center around guiding or ensuring that students can recall the "correct" answers to complete an assignment whereas critical thinking skills require students to think beyond the assignment at hand and connect back to their own lives.

However, in saying all of this I would like to acknowledge that this is a widely used phenomenon and strategy as many teachers are required by their administration and the state to ensure that students can produce a product to demonstrate what they have learned. As mentioned previously, each teacher at Woodland Academy receives a curriculum folder that instructs them

to ask certain questions before, during, and after the lesson at hand. As a result, the ELA lessons that are conducted are very scripted. When speaking to Erin Tracy about the invocation and implications of the use of Fountas and Pinnell curriculum she said, “The use of a scripted curriculum such as F&P Balanced Literacy, provides teachers with read aloud lessons and lines of questioning that guide students toward particular concepts when reading a text. Personally, I feel that this takes away from students' ability to think critically, question the content of the text, and draw their own conclusions.” Thus, Erin Tracy exemplifies how many teachers may not agree with the practices of this pre-chosen curriculum but must find ways to adhere to it and utilize methods to prepare their students to complete the task at hand despite their own personal beliefs.

Moreover, I think that by having students answer questions with a limited scope of what is considered “right” or “correct” is not necessarily a harmful practice that could impact their ability to question. Rather these practices have the potential to limit space and time that could be offered to students to allow them to explore their own questions. In addition, students are required to complete a writing assignment that then gets out into their writer's notebook. This notebook is utilized as a formative assessment to also ensure that students are capable of completing work for the Massachusetts standard that is expected of them. Moving forward, I think that the implication of these strategies will continue to be that these tools may be useful for inciting a product, but ultimately work to stifle student questions. When comparing teacher questions versus student questions, I have noticed that in each lesson that I have observed there are at least thirty teacher-asked questions (this includes each time they repeat a question) in contrast to ten student-asked questions. Furthermore, I think that depending on what the focus of the lesson is on for ELA, I think there could be more balance in the method of questioning that teachers invoke within the classroom.

## **Can a media literacy unit encourage second-grade children to ask more questions within the classroom?**

### ***So, How Does All of This Connect to My Curriculum?***

The curriculum that I have created combines expectations for both technology and ELA Massachusetts standards. The intent of this curriculum was to help create more questioning spaces within the classroom, where the questioning roles were flipped. I wanted to build lessons that could help students to feel empowered as questioners. Moreover, this curriculum is adaptable for the use of different mediums, when providing examples for students. In Mrs. Tracy's class, I used images from movies, cartoons, recently read books, and cereal boxes to invoke students' prior knowledge and personal contexts. In doing so, I wanted to help students to feel connected to the materials they were thinking about, which in turn could help increase their engagement.

When creating this curriculum, I took a co-constructive approach meaning that we would construct our media literacy knowledge together. Each activity, after the first day, was implemented in the form of small group instruction, which means that these lessons were conducted three times with different groups of students. Thus, in creating and implementing this curriculum, I thought about these actions as "pushing the door open." What I mean by this is that, learning to be critical and analyzing the purpose of media in our world takes time. These actions are dependent on a collection of critical thinking skills that require practice and consistency. By introducing the concept of "media" and what it means to be critical of it. I hope that my intervention has served as a means to "open the door" to this form of thought that students may or may not have been aware of previously. In doing so, the curriculum that I have constructed is by no means an "end," but it is only the beginning.



**A Look at Curriculum:**  
*My Media Literacy Unit:*

**Lesson 1: What is “Media?” Where do we see it in our lives and in our classroom?**  
**(Approximately 20 minutes)**

M.A. Standard:

-K-2.CAS.c.1: Identify and describe how people (e.g., students, parents) use many types of technologies in their daily work and personal lives.

Media: a source or something that gives/tells/shows us new information and is in between two people having a conversation

Objective: Students will create a definition for “media” and will be able to identify where they have seen media in the classroom and their personal lives. (For this activity we will primarily focus on the media they are exposed to within class while also touching upon what media they may be exposed to at home)

Students will know: what media is and how to define it

Students will understand: media is a part of our lives and we interact with it both in and outside of the classroom.

Materials:

- Big bag
- Books
- Chromebook
- Images of websites
  - Youtube
  - Go noodle
- Images of TVshows/Movies
  - Spongebob
  - Encanto
- Images of ads
  - Cereal ads
  - Toys
  - Pop its

Instructions:

1. Begin by showing students examples of media without explicitly asking them what media is (pull materials out of bag and hang pictures up on the board)
2. Ask students to compare and contrast what is similar and different about these things
  - a. Turn and Talk
    - i. (Ex: Talk about your favorite tv show or movie)
3. Can have Erin write a list on a slide on the board
  - a. Make a running list
4. Pull out “buzz” words to create a compiled class definition that could be revisited/hung on the wall
  - a. Write this definition on anchor chart with examples we discussed
5. THEN introduce them to the term: media (write at the top)
6. Discuss
  - a. Have you seen these items before? Where?
  - b. Are there things that you’ve seen at home?
7. Conclusion
  - a. Reiterate that we have learned what Media is (reread definition)
  - b. All sorts of different kinds of media can be found both in and out of our classroom

**Lesson 2: What is this piece of media trying to do? Part 1:**

M.A. Standards:

Technology:

-K-2.CAS.c.2 Recognize when the purpose of content is to provide information or to influence you to act.

ELA:

-2.RI.2.6: Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe.

Objective: Students will think about the purpose of a piece of media and identify if it is intended to persuade, entertain, or inform us?

Students will know: how to identify if a piece of media is meant to persuade, entertain, or inform us

Students will understand: different kinds of media have different purposes

Materials:

- Printed ads-laminated
- Non-Fiction book
- Images- TV and Movies

Instructions:

1. Full group discussion or small group
  - a. Recap Media definition
  - b. Re-Introduce the PIE acronym-connect to past ELA lessons
  - c. Show three different pieces of media
    - i. Ad-Persuade
    - ii. Non-fiction book-Inform
    - iii. Movie/TV Show-Entertain
  - d. Focus will be on **Persuade**
2. Ads and Commercials are meant to try and persuade us to think a certain way\*\*
3. Whole group:
  - a. Pull up commercials-play one for them and then discuss
  - b. LINK: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1Fx2d4V188>
    - i. What questions does this bring up for you?
  - c. Now I have a couple questions for y'all:
    - i. How do you think this ad is meant to persuade us?
    - ii. What do you think it's trying to make us think?
      1. Is it trying to get us to do something?
4. Small Group Modality: Center (Approximately 15 minutes)
  - a. Give each student a toy or image of one and have them pair up with a partner if it is a larger group
    - i. Have them discuss the toy/image and fill in the sentence frames provided
      1. Discuss what each group thought of and wrote on their paper
        - a. Do not have to write but can if they would like to
  - b. Scaffold sentence frames (write on board)
    - i. I think that this ad is saying that \_\_\_\_\_ are \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. This is because \_\_\_\_\_

### **Lesson 3: What is this piece of media trying to do? Part 2:**

M.A. Standards:

Technology:

-K-2: 2.4-Identify the purpose of a media message (to inform, persuade, or entertain)

ELA:

-2.RI.2.6: Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe.

Objective: Students will analyze media that is meant to **persuade** us.

Students will know: Media can persuade us to think differently than we did before seeing it

Students will understand: Media can influence us to think in a different way

Materials:

- Laminated ads
- Expo markers

Instructions:

1. Recap day before
  - a. Show same ads again
  - b. Persuade
2. Activity: Media Web (~10 min)
  - a. **Option 1:** Whole group-Leave ads projected on the board and have students come up and circle things that stick out to them
  - b. **Option 2:** Pairs-Break up students into pairs of two and give them an expo marker and a laminated piece of paper with an ad
3. Discussion: Keep scaffolded sentence frames on the board
  - a. I think that this ad is saying that \_\_\_\_\_are\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. This is because\_\_\_\_\_

**Lesson 4: Cereal Boxes (Who is this made for) Part 1**

M.A. Standards:

Technology:

-K-2: 2.4-Identify the purpose of a media message (to inform, persuade, or entertain).

ELA:

-2.RI.2.7 Explain how specific images (e.g., a diagram showing how a machine works) contribute to and clarify a text.

Objective: Students will identify who they think certain cereals were made for what parts of the image made them think that way

Students will know: Ad makers use different methods to persuade their viewers to buy their item

Students will understand: Media is made with an audience in mind

Materials:

- Cereal boxes or images of different cereals
  - ex. captain crunch, froot loops, special k, etc.
- Paper/pen

Instructions: \*\*\*can be adapted to small group instruction through same method as day before

1. Start by recapping previous day
2. Pull out some cereal boxes and ask students if they've ever seen them before?
  - a. What are their favorite cereals?
  - b. Do they eat cereal?
3. Then open the space for questions
  - a. Ask them to come up with a question or two that they have about the cereal boxes
4. Discuss-let them lead (talk about their questions)
  - a. or they can write one on a post it
5. IF they are not asking questions-pose some yourself
  - a. What do you think the makers purpose was when they designed the boxes
  - b. Why do you think they look this way
  - c. Who do you think these were made for/intended for?
    - i. Kids or adults?
    - ii. boys or girls?
6. Activity: Explain that each student is going to receive an empty cereal box
  - a. They're job is to write-using their typical structure to write about who they think their cereal box was made for
    - i. Give two reasons or two examples for they think the way they do

## **Lesson 5: \*Make your own\* Cereal Box (Who is this made for? Part 2)**

M.A. Standards:

Technology:

-K-2: 2.4-Identify the purpose of a media message (to inform, persuade, or entertain).

ELA:

-2.W.2.8 Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

Objective: Students will become the “makers” and make their own cereal box

Students will know: Ad makers use different methods to persuade their viewers to buy their item

Students will understand: Media is made with an audience in mind

Materials:

- Cardboard/Paper
- Markers/Crayons

Instructions:

1. Students are each given a piece of cardboard or a piece of paper
2. They will make their own cereal box and then present it to the group
3. Guidelines/Rules:
  - a. They must start by asking questions about what they want their cereal box to be
    - i. Should write down at least one on a post it on the page
4. Students will have time to color/draw
5. Afterwards, they will present/share with the group
  - a. Can hang them on the wall or put them in their readers notebook

Sentence starters:

**Part 1:** "I think that \_\_\_\_\_ will like my cereal box

**Part 2:** "I think this because \_\_\_\_\_ "

**Word bank 1:** "kids, adults, teenagers, babies"

**Word bank 2:** "it is colorful" or "it has a famous soccer player on it"

**Conclusion:**

1. Whole Group Instruction:
  - a. Recap each day’s lesson
    - i. Media
    - ii. PIE

- iii. Persuasion
  - iv. Audience
  - v. Creation
2. Ask questions
- a. What is media?
    - i. Who can give me an example
  - b. What are some different things that media tries to do?
    - i. PIE
  - c. Why do you think it's important to be aware that media can try to persuade us?
    - i. Because it can influence us to think or act in a way that we not have before
  - d. Are different pieces of media ever made for a specific audience? Or specific people in mind?
    - i. Why so?
  - e. How did it feel to make your cereal boxes (a piece of media on your own)?
    - i. Who did you make your cereal box for?
3. End with asking if anyone has any lingering questions for me

### **Reflections on Implementing My Media Literacy Curriculum**

#### **Lesson 1:**

Walking into lesson 1, I was incredibly nervous. I was not sure how the lesson would go as I had never been in charge of teaching a whole group lesson on my own before, let alone a unit. However, I found that this lesson went incredibly well. I created slides that were projected onto a whiteboard, so the students can see the ideas proposed by their classmates. This allowed me to ensure that I was not turning my back to them and that I could be present. I will attach the images and materials that I showed them in Appendix A. This activity excited the group because it gave them a chance to think about things they already have been exposed to. There were many connections made to websites where we watch videos and movies, and past experiences viewing these forms of media. When it came time to build a definition for “media,” after comparing and contrasting the students were able to easily understand what media was. A few clarifying points I made were the idea that “Media” is not a conversation as it is something that acts as an in between or source that allows us to learn new information. This was an important distinction to make as many students were beginning to get confused. Moreover, I considered this lesson a success as students left the room with a definition of media and thinking about where they see it in their lives and in their classroom.

**Lesson 2:**

Upon reflecting on lesson 2, I think that it went okay. I was working in centers, so it was a bit difficult to keep track of the time. This lesson (as designed) is a bit more hectic to manage because you have to set/reset materials three times. However, I think that students walked away from this lesson with the understanding that media can persuade us because it wants us to do something. For example, when we looked at different ads and toys students made a note in their sentence frames how the packaging was made with the intent of wanting us to buy it. We continuously referenced the pie chart where we talked about how an author's purpose and a media's purpose are essentially the same thing. With this lesson, similarly to the day before, students were really excited about being able to discuss items that they see in their day to day and pieces of media that they enjoy. However, one note I will make about this lesson is to be mindful of time and also prepare students before you bring out different items. This is because many of the students (understandably so) wanted to play with the toys or open them and I had to take a moment to explain how if they want to see them during the rest of the week then they have to treat the items with respect. Overall, this lesson went well, but I would keep in mind that it may be a bit more chaotic to maintain.

**Lesson 3:**

Lesson 3 did not go according to plan. On this day, the students were very jittery and it was noticeable that they did not want to sit still. This morning had already posed a difficult start as there have been different groups of teachers in the room over the last couple of days. Because of this, I think the students felt that their routine was disrupted. In addition, I do not think that the modality for this center worked with the structure of this lesson. Yes, while my media web activity was intended for small group instruction, I think that this activity requires much more preparation and materials than I anticipated. Walking into this lesson, I only had two ads (I was assuming my groups would be smaller) and very large groups for all three centers. For the first group I worked with, I split the students into two "teams." However, I did not establish enough guidelines for team behavior before splitting the students up. In addition, I also spent too long recapping what we did the day before so by the time we got to the activity, the students were very jittery. In addition, the center on the rug was incredibly disruptive and noisy, it was difficult to keep the students focused as they were watching and listening to the other group get yelled at



on the rug. Because of this it was really difficult to keep them on task and ensure that they were focusing on the purpose of the lesson. Moreover, for the next two groups I decided to have them work in one group and rotate the materials in a circle, giving each student a chance to speak. This worked a bit better than the “teams” but ultimately still posed some problems. Students were bored having to wait their turn and listening to their peers. Furthermore, in the future, if I were to revise this lesson and try to implement it again, I would have the students start in a whole group modality and introduce the lesson in which we are continuing what we did the day before. However, I would include a think-aloud and more explicit instructions prior to splitting the group up. Then, when students move to their individual center instead of teaching the entire lesson, they would each get an ad and an expo marker to themselves and understand what to do. I think that this lesson can be a great tool, but will require more preparation, materials, and a combination of modalities.

#### **Lesson 4:**

Lesson 4 actually went really well. Using cereal boxes as a reference point for the students to work with acted as a great tool to invoke their prior knowledge and personal lives. Moreover, I adapted this activity after yesterday in which I brought in enough materials for every kid to have their own sheet and also did a think aloud with them before they were assigned individual work. Some groups worked better than others and were more engaged. However, many of the responses were really interesting. For this lesson, I invited students to ask their peers questions about the cereal box we were working on together and then had their peers answer with their ideas. This method helped to co-construct their knowledge of what it means for ads to persuade us and even though yesterday did not go as planned, students were able to recall and demonstrate that they had taken away the main objectives of the lesson. Moreover, this lesson was a great way to get students to ask questions, show that their questions were valued, and for teachers to ask their own questions to the students, while providing an opportunity for the students to produce their own work (see Appendix A for images from this activity).

## **Lesson 5:**

This last lesson went really well and was a great way to end the week! By flipping the roles and having the students act as the media “makers” this allowed them to synthesize the information that they had taken in throughout the week and explore their creativity. In doing so, the students were really excited about being able to show their creativity and express their thoughts and ideas. They worked to think about who they were making their cereal for and why, which helped them frame the different purposes of media and what it tries to do. As a result, this lesson was a simple, fun way to bring the entire week to a close and have the students demonstrate what they have learned. I include images of their finished work in Appendix A. Blank copies of the materials I created and used can be located in Appendix B.

### **Reflections on My Curriculum as a Whole:**

#### ***Creating Questioning Spaces and Valuing Student Questions: A Reflection on Student Questions***

When looking back on my unit as a whole, I noticed that students were in fact asking more questions during this one week period of implementation. After I completed my last lesson, I wondered if this may have been because I actively opened the space for students to share their questions during each lesson. Moreover, at the beginning of each lesson, I began our discussion by asking students what they wondered about (in regard to the media or materials I had prepared for that day). Through invoking this practice and openly welcoming student questions, I think that this worked as a successful strategy to help construct a questioning space and flip the questioning roles during my lessons.

However, while I did notice an increase in questions, there were not as many questions as I had anticipated. I wondered if this is because I had spent so long constructing this curriculum that my own hopes and assumptions skewed my view on how these lessons would realistically translate into the classroom, especially after noticing that students were not asking or sharing many questions during their whole-group ELA lessons. Moreover, many of the questions I mentally took note of were in regard to students wishing to affirm a “right” or “correct” answer after completing the activity for that day. Many of the questions I received were from students asking if the result they produced was “good enough.” This was especially apparent in lessons 2 and 3 as we discussed the target audience for a piece of media. I think these questions were

brought to my attention for two reasons. The first is because the act of completing an assignment to produce an intended result is a practice that is familiar to students. Many students have been socialized to this classroom structure due to the ways in which the institution is constructed to ensure that students are “learning.” In saying all of this, I think that this act of socialization is heavily a product of educators being required to follow a scripted curriculum. Moreover, I think the other reason why students may have wanted to affirm a correct answer was due to a lack of confidence in sharing their questions or ideas. In these instances, I think that both the concept of media literacy and the notion of exploring their own questions were new. These are practices that are not typical for the classroom and many students may not have experienced prior to these lessons. When implementing my unit, I felt that there was a hum of excitement when I asked students to share their ideas with their peers. It was empowering to see the students that I worked with find joy in asking new things about our world and interrogating these ideas through media.

### ***Reframing Questioning Strategies: A Reflection on Teacher Questions***

In contrast, when reflecting on my own experiences as I taught this curriculum. One thing I noticed as I taught was that I found myself utilizing the IRE and Bread Crumb questioning patterns that I spoke about previously. When looking back on these experiences, I wondered if this was because these strategies were familiar to me. Many of my own teachers have used the IRE and Bread Crumbing as learning tools within the classroom and I unknowingly mimicked what I’ve seen other teachers do before when put into a teaching position for the first time. I would like to note that this curriculum was my first time teaching (ever) within the classroom, especially with a curriculum that I had constructed. I was incredibly nervous and actively put myself in a vulnerable position each day that I stepped into the classroom and in front of Erin’s students. In doing so, when I got nervous or felt unsure of myself as I taught, I leaned into what I knew. As previously stated, I think that the IRE and Bread Crumbing can serve as useful tools within the classroom, but the effectiveness of these strategies is dependent on the subject at hand.

As I taught, I did in fact notice how I was phrasing the concepts. I had to stop, take a breath, and reframe how I wanted students to receive what I was asking them. When doing this, I had to actively interrupt this pattern and reframe how I continued. In doing so, I had to ask myself the question which was, “what do I want to achieve with this question” and “what do I want students to get out of this lesson?” In asking myself these questions, I was able to reframe

how I presented my lessons to the students. In doing so, I wondered if I positioned myself in a way that showed I wanted to know what they were thinking and wondering about.

### **Conclusion:**

#### ***Stepping Away With My Own Questions:***

Because at its core this project is about asking questions, it feels fitting that I would step away from this journey with a few questions of my own. The first question that I am left with has to do with the impact of time. I wonder how the impact of my curriculum implementation would have differed if it took place over the course of a month or even a year rather than one week. This question is one that will stick with me because I think when working to develop students' critical thinking skills, these tools require consistent time and practice to strengthen them. However, I hope that the lessons that I did have time to implement served as a step towards helping students to continue strengthening their ability to think critically about the information that they are exposed to within our world. Moreover, the other question I will step away from this project with is how my use of questioning strategies could have differed as I taught and if this would have made an impact on my lessons. This is a question that I will continue to explore as it is hard to know for sure what this would have looked like. However, I think that if I stepped into teaching this curriculum with a bit more experience and confidence there is a chance the strategies that I implemented could have looked different.

#### ***Moving Forward...***

When thinking about the implications that this research work could have on practitioners, future readers, and myself, I think that one thing we can all take away from this work is that questions are a powerful tool within the classroom, whether they are invoked through students or teachers. With all this said: This journey has been incredibly special. I have come to love the kids that I have worked with and I am incredibly grateful and appreciative towards everyone who supported me and cheered me on along the way.

As I implemented my curriculum, the act of opening questioning spaces to welcome student ideas contributed to why there was an increase in questions asked. I hope that I was able to open more questioning spaces for students.


A main takeaway from these lessons and my experiences with working with Media Literacy Education is that Media Literacy should be a consistent practice. At its core MLE is about helping students strengthen their critical thinking skills through analyzing different forms of media. However, the ability to think critically is a skill that takes time and continuous practice to learn and develop. In understanding these salient concepts, I hope that my media literacy curriculum serves as a *step* towards creating more critical viewers of information as when we analyze the new information that we take in through various sources, and in doing so, we are learning to be critical of our world. I hope that you (my lovely reader) will not walk away from my work with an end or a cookie cutter idea of how things “should” be because there is no “one” way for how our world should be or why it is the way that it is, but instead, I hope that you walk away with an understanding of what it means to ask questions and share them with our peers. When we teach youth to be critical of new information whether that’s through media literacy or some other method, we are instigating a start rather than end. After all, asking the question is only the beginning, finding its answer is the fun part.

Appendix A:

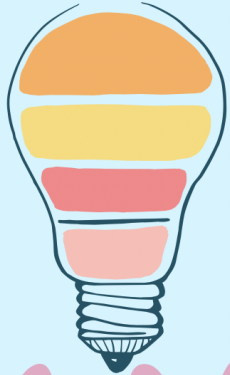
Images from Lesson 1:

**Writing 10:00-10:35**

**Objective:** Students will create a definition for the different items they observe and will be able to identify where they have seen items that are similar or different in the classroom and their personal lives. (For this activity we will primarily focus on what they are exposed to within class while also touching upon what they may be exposed to at home)



Ms. Turetsky  
Teaching  
(Day 1 of 5)



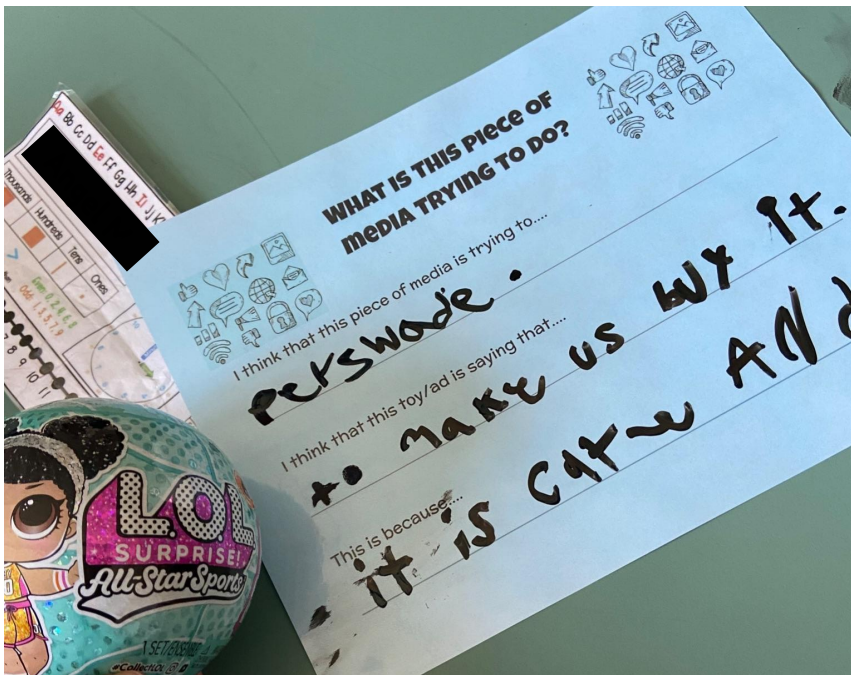
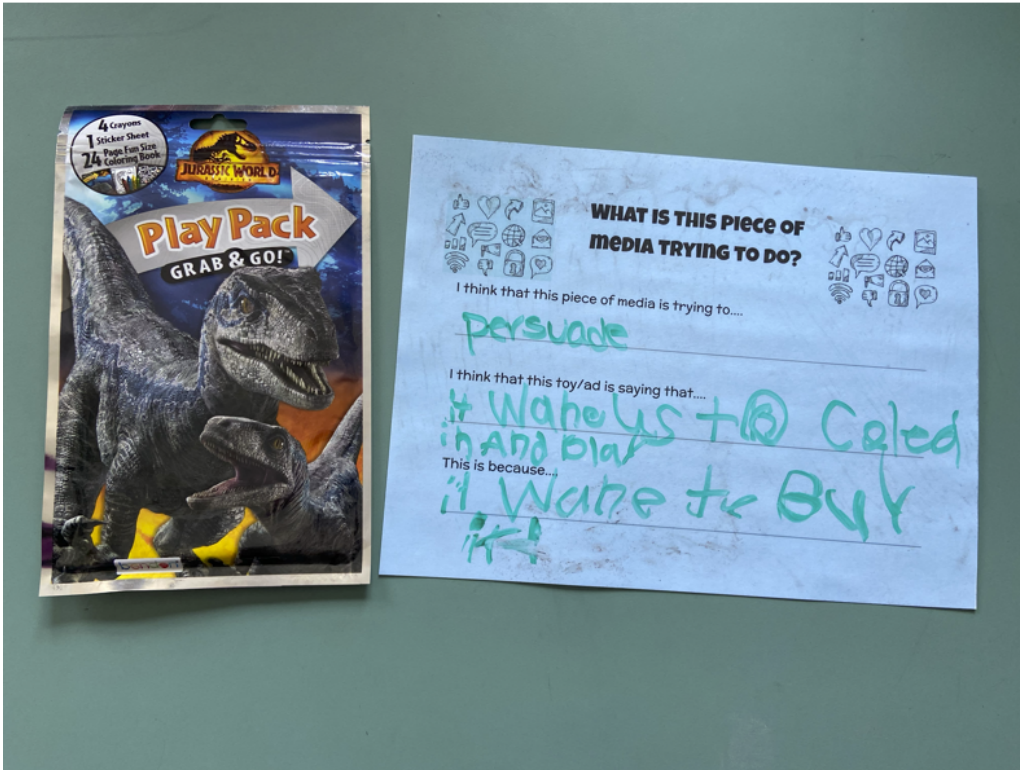
**HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT'S IN MY TEACHER BAG?**

**WHAT IS SIMILAR ABOUT THESE ITEMS AND WHAT IS DIFFERENT?**

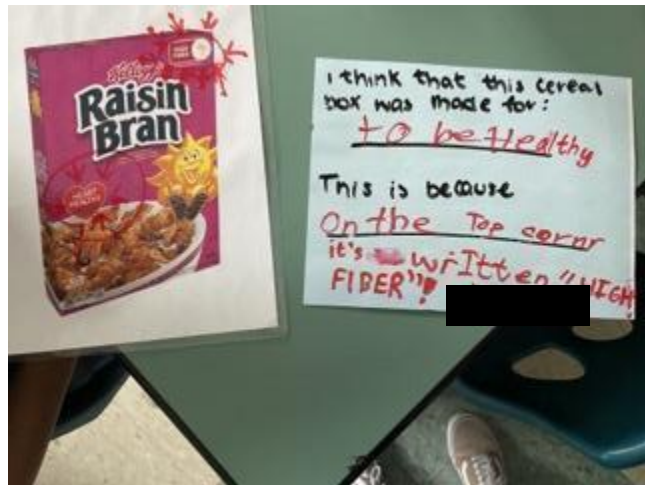
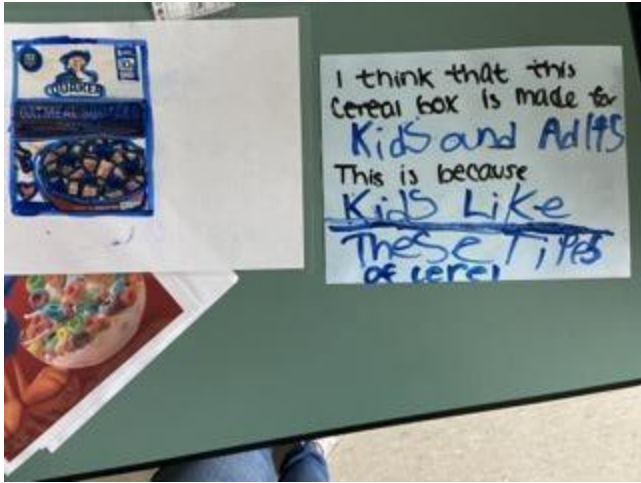
**MEDIA**

These items are similar because...	These items are different because...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There are a lot of cartoon or fictional people</li><li>• We can watch all of these videos</li><li>• Movies and ads</li><li>• Encanto, Turning Red, and spongebob are all on Disney plus (a website that shows us many different movies and tv shows)</li><li>• They are very colorful and have some of the same colors</li><li>• The packets are both toys but they have different packaging</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They have different characters and they can do different things</li><li>• We can watch these videos on different websites</li><li>• The packs are different because the superheroes have powers and only some of the princesses do</li><li>• They are showing us different things in different videos</li><li>• The covers of the books are telling us something different about each book</li></ul>

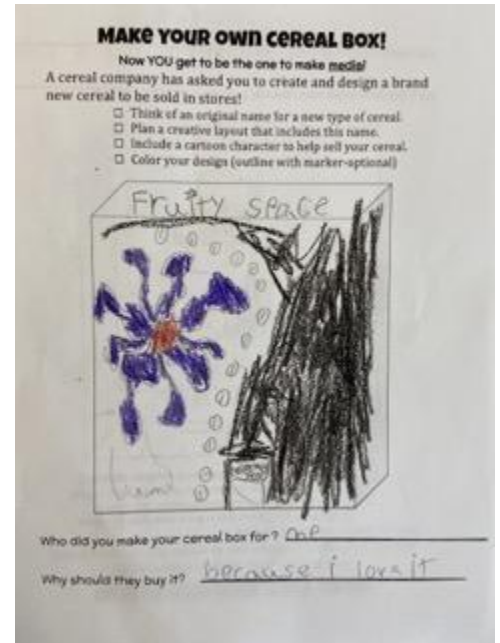
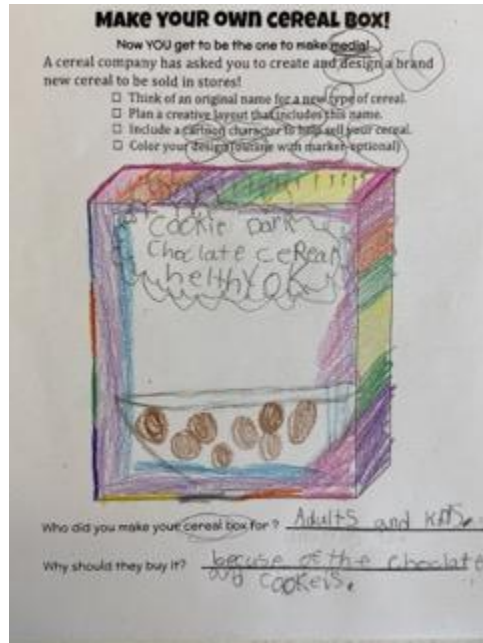
Images from Lesson 2:



Images from Lesson 4:



Images from Lesson 5:





**Appendix B:**

*Copies of my materials*



**WHAT IS THIS PIECE OF  
MEDIA TRYING TO DO?**



I think that this piece of media is trying to....

---

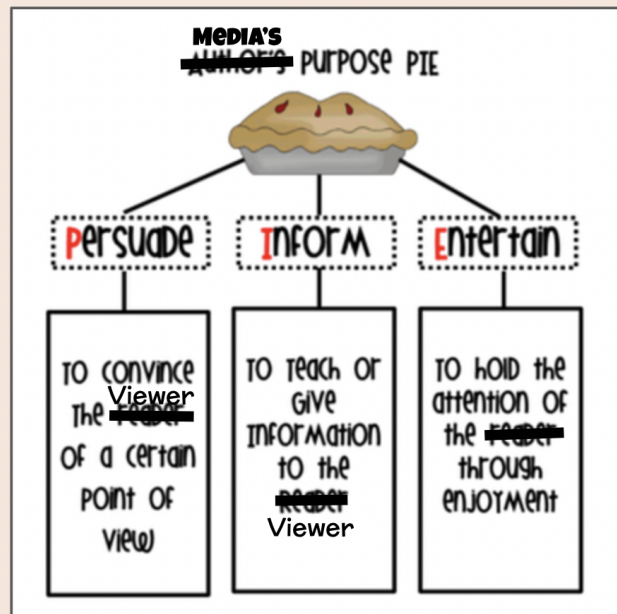
I think that this toy/ad is saying that....

---

This is because....

---

# SO, WHAT IS THIS PIECE OF MEDIA TRYING TO DO?



# OUR FOCUS FOR THIS WEEK IS PERSUADE!

Do you think ads/toys/media try to persuade us?

How so?

What does it mean to persuade someone?

Have you ever seen an ad or a toy that made you think differently after seeing it?



## ACTIVITY:

### Instructions:

- You and a partner are going to receive a different piece of media
- Your job is to talk to your partner about how you think this piece of media is trying to persuade/entertain/inform us
- What do you think this piece of media is trying to tell us and why?

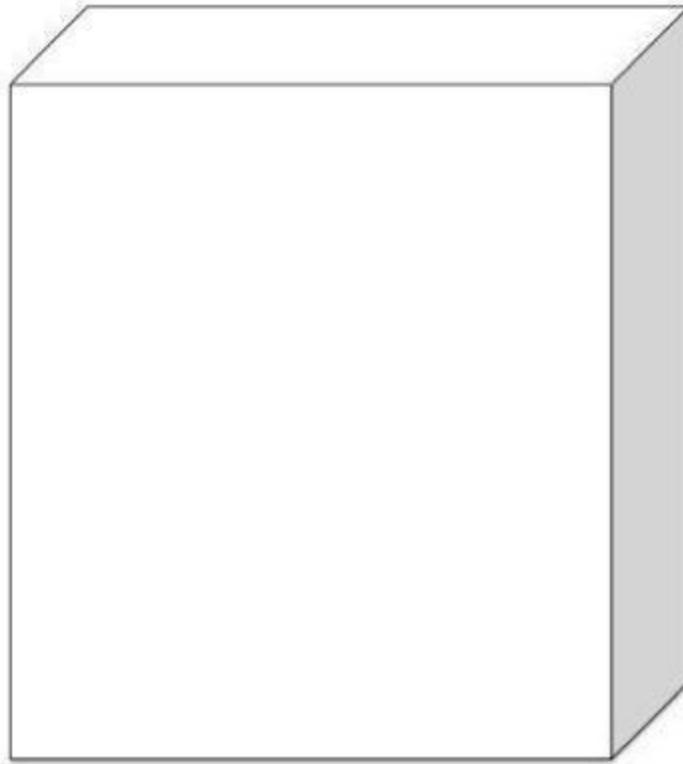


## **MAKE YOUR OWN CEREAL BOX!**

Now YOU get to be the one to make media!

A cereal company has asked you to create and design a brand new cereal to be sold in stores!

- Think of an original name for a new type of cereal.
- Plan a creative layout that includes this name.
- Include a cartoon character to help sell your cereal.
- Color your design (outline with marker-optional)



Who did you make your cereal box for? \_\_\_\_\_

Why should they buy it? \_\_\_\_\_

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