It is one thing to read a listing of dry facts and figures, and it is another to actually see how the data looks in ways that can be illuminating and often surprising. Yet it is still imperative to be confident of the source of the data and the accuracy of the portrayal. The techniques that can be used to illustrate data visually often show a different way of thinking that clearly show how the Text + Context = Message.

In this MediaLit Moment, students have an opportunity to explore the construction of various types of charts, graphs and maps that give them a picture of techniques that can be used to attract attention and go beyond numbers on a page to give new and expanded meanings to the text at hand.

Ask students to evaluate the impact of sample visuals compared to a listing of statistics

AHA!: A picture is worth a thousand words – or numbers.

Grade Level: 5-8

Key Question #1: Who created this message?  
Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?  
Core Concept #3: Other people experience the same media message differently.

Materials: Computer with high-speed internet connection, LCD projector and screen. Various visuals and explanations are available at:  

Activity: Review the charts and maps depicted and decide which you would like to critically
analyze with your class. Before sharing any of these visuals with your students, begin by asking a provocative question or two that will help students think about knowledge that they may already have about the subject, for example:

- Is Africa bigger than the United States, or about the same size?
- What drugs cause the most deaths in the United States? Are they legal drugs?
- Are there more murders in the United States today than there were ten years ago? What makes you think this? Where do you get your information?
- What countries use the metric system? What is the advantage of using the metric system?

After exploring these questions, show the students the pertinent chart or map that you selected. Ask students if they were surprised by any of the information depicted – and if so, how? And why? Reference KQ #3, and CC #3 as students reveal their differing perceptions. Then ask the students to Think-Pair-Share, focus on KQ #1, so that they identify the source of the information. If students have access to iPads or computers, ask them to look up the source of the information and use a checklist to determine whether the organization/website is credible or not. Discuss briefly, asking students for evidence to support their opinion on the credibility of the source and the depiction.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, ©2002-2015.