Are You Living in a Media Desert?

In many communities, local news from a credible source is no longer available; more than 120 communities have lost their local newspaper since 2008, according to the Media Deserts Project, which calls communities that have no local news coverage “media deserts.”

In this MediaLit Moment, students will have an opportunity to discover their local news sources, and to see whether their community is in a “media desert.” They will then have an opportunity to put their own experience into context by checking out a national map of media deserts at the Media Deserts Project website at http://www.mediadeserts.com.

Have your students examine their local media sources

AHA!: Some communities don’t have access to local news!

Grade Level: 5-8

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

Key Question #4: What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

Core Concept #4: Media messages have imbedded values and points of view.

Activity: Review the map depicted and see where your local community fits. 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:

• Does your community enjoy fresh, local news and information on an ongoing basis?

• What are the local news sources that your family uses? How often are these sources available? Do you read or watch or use this media?

• Have you seen news or information about your friends or relatives in local news? Have you or your family ever been featured in local news? Like sports listings or announcements or for sad events like obituaries? How did you feel about this? Do you think this type of local news is important?

Then, show the map of the Media Deserts. Ask students to point out where their community might fall on the map, and why. What might some differences be for the communities in a Media Desert, or not? Discuss the consequences of being in a Media Desert – or not.

Ask students:

• Does your community have a community media center, or a library that encourages media production by locals? Possibly a Maker Space? Share information on these resources.

Extended Activity: If possible, visit your local community media center, library or Maker Space with students; if possible, arrange for students to do a production activity that has a media
literacy focus.

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.