Rosemary Smith, Managing Director of the Getting Better Foundation in Livingston, Montana, was asked to serve as a guest teacher for the Sleeping Giant Middle School’s “Cougar Friday” in Livingston. Rosemary and her teaching partner, Kelly Miller, decided to create a “MediaLit Moment” by conducting a scavenger hunt, to combine some physical and mental exercise. Here is an overview of their classroom experience:

AHA! I can ask pertinent questions of ANY media that I come across.

Key Question # 1 Who created this message?

Key Word: Authorship/Construction

Core Concept # 1 All media messages are constructed.

ACTIVITY:

Rosemary and Kelly collected newspapers and magazines leading up to Cougar Friday, and librarians and teachers provided outdated publications to spread out on the gymnasium floor. Students got to pick 1 publication to sort through at the start (for “payment” of 10 pushups, they could exchange or buy a 2nd or 3rd journal for different ad inventory).

Kelly and Rosemary chose 12 different advertisers’ goals to headline on 12 poster-boards they hung throughout the gym and bleachers. Students sorted through their magazine for ads that target each headline with the goal of pasting at least one ad under each headline in a 20-30
minute timeframe. Healthy nutritional snacks were distributed as rewards for 1st, 2nd and 3rd finishers. Then, everyone “hiked” to each poster-board together, asking leading questions to apply the 5 Core Concepts and 5 Key Questions:

1. **Who created this message?**

Students were taught to look all around the advertisement to determine if the ad was sponsored by a major company or local organization... sometimes the answer wasn’t evident and the students had to research further.

2. **What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?**

   1. Fashion models – used to tell people that if they used those products, they’d look like and be popular like the models. Students were further asked “What if you do or don’t use this product?”
   2. Celebrities – ditto above.
   3. Bright, colorful pictures of fast cars or fancy trucks were used to sell them or insurance for them. Advertising created the sense that a corporation cares about the safety of drivers or insureds more than others (interesting to note: there were 10 ads posted under this headline – reflecting 10 different insurance companies – all implying they care more about their insureds than the next).
   4. Rugged bows, ATVs, hunting equipment and “macho” camouflage attire were used to equate masculinity with hunting, camping and outdoor activities.

3. **How might different people understand this message differently from me?**

   1. Race – students discussed how people of different races or ethnic backgrounds might interpret the ads differently.
   2. Gender – This was a big topic of discussion for the group. They talked about how cosmetic companies target girls much more than boys, even with new mainstream gender-neutrality messaging. The kids thought girls are more susceptible to advertising than boys.
   3. Age – students thought younger people are more susceptible to ads than older people. They discussed studies reflecting 55+ year olds being more apt to disseminate “fake news” and social media posts. The kids were delighted to talk about their parents and grandparents “always being on their smart devices”.

4. **What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?**

   1. Money (and buying this product) makes people happier – all ads positioned smiling, happy people – even ones for arthritis or health insurance. Kids were quick to get the message that people on medicine might not be feeling well or are grumpy.
   2. If you work hard, you might be able to afford the lifestyle portrayed in ad.
   3. Omitted –
- People taking this product might not be feeling well.
- This product might lead to other issues or health ailments.
- Some people might not be able to afford to take this medicine or buy this product.

5. Why is this message being sent?

1. Initially, the students thought some of these ads were created to help them look or dress beautifully or cook nutritious foods. Then, began to uncover the fact that the ads were still trying to manipulate them to buy THAT advertised product (over other products on the market, or to create a need in their minds that may or may not have existed prior).
2. Kids were then able to discern that all ads are created to sell/profit from getting them to do something. It’s up to each of us to decide whether we actually need, or want to buy something.

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