In the 1930’s, Franklin Roosevelt used the new medium of radio in an attempt to win voter support for his New Deal policies. And seventy years later, Barack Obama is using a variety of web tools to attract support for his policies. On the Whitehouse.gov website, you’ll find transcripts of press briefings, blogs, and photos, all of which can be exported to a variety of social media applications. The site also includes videos of our President at various town halls and events, and frequent video addresses in which Obama makes his case directly to voters. The material on this site is selected by someone in the White House and is posted to create a positive image of our country’s leadership. More and more, politicians are understanding how the use of media can positively impact public image and help gain support among voters. Take a look at this image of President Obama at the recent Summit of the Americas:


The social environment conveyed in this photo is casual, yet Obama is clearly a leader who has ideas to discuss with the Congressional delegation in the photo. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will take a stand on issues they care about, and also learn how to create an image of themselves as leaders taking action on those issues.

Have your students create a “photo opportunity” at school which projects an image of leadership

AHA!: A picture showing me “in action” can inspire other people to support my cause!

Key Question #5 for Producers: Have I communicated my purpose effectively?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Grade Level: 8+
Materials: any camera, whether personal, disposable, or digital

Ask your students to think about an issue they feel deserves attention. It could be the school’s lunch policy or the need for a gymnasium or theater program. Or students could identify an individual or group whom they believe deserve praise for their contributions to the campus community.

Next, ask your students to think of a photo opportunity for themselves which could also help draw popular support for the issue or person they’ve chosen. They could be presenting an award. They could be having a serious discussion with the principal. They could be “caught” in an act of service. You may wish to use photos from Whitehouse.gov to discuss the kinds of scenarios which are typically used to project images of leadership.

Students should also produce some writing for this activity which helps to establish the purpose of the photo-op. At a minimum, students should write a caption which helps to frame the importance of the scene which has been captured in the photograph. With more time allotted to this activity, students could write a blog, a position statement, or a plea for support.

If at all possible, give your students the opportunity to use the photo as a presentation tool as they discuss their issue before the class. Doing so should help ensure that students choose an issue which is of genuine concern to them.

The way in which photo opportunities are created and displayed depends on your students’ technical sophistication, the sophistication of the equipment you have available, and the imagination of you and your students.

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, © 2002-2008, Center for Media Literacy, http://www.medialit.com