As the authors make clear in *Seeing Through Maps* (see review in Maps Newsletter, Oct. 2009), people who read maps are audiences, and maps usually have something to “say” to their readers. For example, a tourist map that shows the locations of downtown businesses says “Shop downtown!” But how often do people get to read a map that says something they want to hear about themselves or their community? In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to create a map that expresses their feelings about the community in which they live, as well as their thoughts about the things in their community that they might like to see change.

**Have your students create a “current use” map of their community**

**AHA!:** In this map, I’m not just telling people where places are, I’m also telling them about my community!

**Key Question #4 for Producers:** Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?

**Core Concept #4:** Media have embedded values and points of view

**Grade:** 4+

**Materials:** colored markers (we suggest red and blue), and a base map to distribute to students. The choice of area for the base map depends on your location and the demographics of your student population. If your school is in a rural location, you may need a map which focuses on a county-wide area. If your school is located in an urban area, then your map should focus on one or more neighborhoods. If your students commute from long distances, you may want to make the school the focal point of your map.

Because the map that your students make will include the public places they go on a daily basis, you should use a base map which gives students a frame of reference by indicating the
location of public places and municipal services such as hospitals, fire stations, libraries, schools, etc. Students will be making sentence-length notes on these maps, so a map which only includes arterial streets may be the best for this activity. Your local planning agency will probably be the best source for these maps, but you may be able to use Google Maps for this activity. The base map from Open Street Maps (http://www.openstreetmap.org) may also be useful.

Size may be the biggest challenge in assembling your materials. Students should have plenty of room to write on these maps, and this activity is best conducted in groups of 4 or more so that students will be able to easily compare notes. If possible, print your maps 20" x 20" or larger and post them on the walls of your classroom.

Activity:

First, ask the class how people use maps, especially city maps. What kind of information do people usually get from these maps?

Introduce the base maps that students will be using for this activity. These are the kinds of maps that you’ve just been talking about. Let them know that they’re going to create a “user” map that will help make the original map better. To help students orient themselves, and to help them understand the kind of information they will add to the maps, ask them to circle one or more of the public places already printed on the map with pencil or plain ink and check for understanding.

Next, ask your students to mark the locations of public places they use everyday -- streets, bus stops, malls, businesses, parks, playgrounds, supermarkets. Ask them to mark these in pencil or plain ink. Ask them to draw them in if they don’t already appear on the map. Students do not need to make an exhaustive list.

Next, ask your students to locate and mark one or two of their favorite public places with a blue marker, and to write a sentence at each marking which explains why this is one of their favorite places. Is there something they like to buy there? Is it a place with a lot of room to play? Finally, ask your students to locate and mark one or two public areas that they have some problem with. Is it a place where they avoid riding their bikes? Is it part of their school
playground that should have another yard duty? Is it a barrier to access to part of their favorite
park? A library with internet stations that are always full? Ask them to mark the locations with a
red marker, and to write one sentence which describes the problem.

When students have finished, ask your students questions to help them understand the kind of
map they’ve created. Is the information in their “favorites” and “problems” markings different in
some way from the service information on the base map? How is it different?

Students are ready for the AHA! (or turning point) of this lesson once they begin to understand
that they’ve added information that is evaluative as well as factual. At that point you can let
students know how important their opinions really are. Their maps of public places don’t just
document their personal preferences. Their maps are an invaluable source of information to
other community members (For example, a librarian would definitely want to know about
students’ frustration with the relative lack of internet access. Many store owners would want to
know whether students felt welcome at their store).

As you lead this discussion, keep a list of the people who might want to see their maps, and use
this as a potential list of real-world contacts for future lessons.

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.
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