



Five Introductory Tasks

Asvestas Tasos¹

Here are some steps to make students take into consideration some crucial things about the impact of the media on their lives and to get them involved in a media project²

STEP 1. Divide the class into small groups of three or four students according to their interests, abilities or skills and let them choose a task.

STEP 2. A week later the groups will have to present to the classroom the task they have been engaged with. After this presentation they should discuss their findings and the context of the representation of the ideal body and the way of living.

STEP 3. The students divide into bigger teams, decide to produce something that has to do with the media, such as

- an advertisement for a magazine,
- a spot for the TV, radio or the web.
- a story/ fairy tale
- a song (lyrics or a video clip)
- a web-page or a blog on the internet
- All of the above must promote ideas for a healthier lifestyle.

STEP 4. The students will present their media message to the others. They will discuss their ideas arising from this message. Evaluation from the others is an option, too.

¹ Asvestas Tasos, Teacher, M Sc in Counselling and Vocational Guidance,
Secretary of the Transnational Interdisciplinary Society *SYNTHESE*, asvestas@ppp.uoa.gr

² Read more at *Hottmann, A.* (2000,2002)



Starting activities (Tasks for STEP 2)

The following activities are for brainstorming. After the discussion of these ideas coming from the students they will then have the opportunity to get more deeply and critically involved with the media.

Group A. The Letter

Explain to this group that it has been chosen to write down a letter³ to a young woman explaining what it is to be a woman in their country. Melina is a young woman who grew up in a rural village in Georgia. She has never seen television, movies or read magazines, and she has never been to another country. She has been living with her family and her primary duty has been to take care of her young brothers and sisters while working at her family farm. This summer she is going to visit your country and settle down at her aunt's house. She has high hopes of succeeding in her new life, finding a job and making friends.

Group B. The Journalists.

This group has been chosen to do some research or interview their peers. They can ask them how many hours they use the internet, watch TV and play videogames. Another interesting point is to explore the multitasking abilities of the new "*generation M*". They can ask their peers how many different media are used by them simultaneously and for how long. What is behind such a media consumption?

Group C. Fairy Tales and Transformations

Let the students read and bring along books with tales about beauty and the possibility of transformation, such as Cinderella, Frog Prince, Ugly Duckling, Beauty and the Beast etc. They then have to find advertisements in magazines that promise some kind of transformation to the reader. Another task is to search and bring some facts about plastic surgery and its promises. An alternative task is to visit the web page of a reality show called *Extreme Makeover* where people who participate have to undergo plastic surgery in order to change their image. They then discuss their thoughts and feelings following these changes.

Group D. The Music and the Lyrics

This group has been chosen to read the lyrics from a song called Stupid Girl. Afterwards they have to search for other songs or video clips that promote the same or the opposite from Pink's thoughts.

³ This is an idea taken from the Media Education Foundation Study Guide.



Group E. Myths and Reality

This group will read about the ancient Greek myth of Procrustes. Followed by the discussion about the allegorical meaning of the Procrustes' bed and how the media tries to promote unrealistic body shapes and force people into having a particular body type. They will explore the way advertisements and media productions such as movies, video clips and soap-operas affect their representation of the ideal body. They can then visit the official web page of national disorders (<http://nationaleatingdisorders.org>) to find the effects on health.



Sheet for GROUP A

A letter to Melina

Melina is a young woman who grew up in a rural village in Georgia. She has never seen television, movies or read magazines, and she has never been to another country. She has been living with her family and her primary duty has been to take care of her young brothers and sisters while working at her family farm. This summer she is going to visit your country and settle down at her aunt's house. She has high hopes of succeeding in her new life, finding a job and making friends.

► You have been selected to write her a letter explaining what it is to be a woman in your country.

► After reading these letters let each student make a list of assumptions he/she feels that the other students have about what it is to be a woman.

► Discuss these assumptions and the differences between these and existing stereotypes?



Sheet for GROUP B

► Write down some questions for your research or interview.

Here are some examples that you can use:

- *How many hours a day do you watch TV (including watching a videotape / DVD)?*
 - *How many hours daily do you spend surfing the internet?*
 - *Do you play video/java games (at a console, computer or a cellphone) every day?
For how long?*
 - *Do you listen to music (CD's, tapes, mp3's) every day? How much time do you spend?*
 - *Do you read magazines/newspapers every day? How much time do you spend?*
 - *Add all the above time you spend on media.*
 - *Do you like listening to music or watching TV while you are doing something else, like working at your PC or surfing the net? Why?*
 - *How many things do you usually do at the same time?*
 - *Is it easy for you?*
 - *Does it sound a healthy way of working or having fun?*
 - *Have you thought of possible bad affects on your health?*
 - *Do you have a TV in your bedroom?*
 - *Do you have a PC in your bedroom?*
- Present the results of your research to the other students
- Discuss the influences of the media and the possible effects on their lives.
- Talk to your teacher or perhaps a doctor about the possible effects on your health from media multitasking.



Sheet for GROUP C

- Bring some books with tales about beauty and the possibility of transformation, such as Cinderella, Frog Prince, Ugly Duckling, Beauty and the Beast etc.
- Read the paragraphs that promote the idea of transformation.
- Find advertisements in the magazines that promise a transformation to the reader.
- Try to remember films, reality shows or soap-operas with similar ideas of transformation.
- Discuss the possible effects on their own lives.
- Search the internet and collate facts about plastic surgery and its promises.
- Visit the web page (<http://abc.go.com/primetime/extrememakeover/index.html>) of a reality show called *Extreme Makeover* where people who participate have to undergo plastic surgery in order to change their image.
- Discuss the possible effect on the participants' physical, mental and emotional health.
- Visit the follow link <http://www.nydailynews.com/front/story/347520p-296543c.html> and read the articles '*Extreme*' tragedy & *The dark side of reality* by M.Caruso
- Visit the following link http://www.yestheyrefake.net/body_dysmorphic_disorder.htm and discuss the symptoms of body dysmorphic disorder.



Sheet for GROUP D

- ▶ The students read part of the lyrics of a song called “Stupid girl”

PINK “Stupid girl”

“Stupid girl, stupid girls, stupid girls

Maybe if I act like that, that guy will call me back

What a paparazzi girl, I don't wanna be a stupid girl”

.....

Disease's growing, it's epidemic

I'm scared that there ain't a cure

The world believes it and I'm going crazy

I cannot take any more

I'm so glad that I'll never fit in

That will never be me

Outcasts and girls with ambition

.....

[Interlude]

Oh my god you guys, I totally had more than 300 calories

That was so not sexy, no

Good one, can I borrow that?

[Vomits]

I WILL BE SKINNY

Lyrics retrieved by <http://www.lyricstop.com/s/stupidgirls-pink.html>

- ▶ Now you can discuss with your students the topics that came up e.g. eating disorders, etc, then they can find lyrics of songs that promote the same or the opposite ideas.



Sheet for GROUP E

► Read the story of Procrustes :

In Greek mythology Procrustes ("the stretcher"), also known as Damastes ("subduer") and Polypemon ("harming much") was a bandit from Attica. He had his stronghold in the hills outside Eleusis. Here he had an iron bed into which he invited every passerby to lie down. If the guest proved too tall he would amputate the excess length; if the victim was found too short, he was then stretched out on the rack until he fitted. Nobody would ever fit in the bed, because it was secretly adjustable. Procrustes would stretch or shrink it upon sizing his victims from afar. Such cunning ruses were common practice in mythology... He continued this reign of terror until he was captured by Theseus who tied Procrustes to his own bed and cut off his head and feet. (Since Theseus was a stout fellow, for him the bed had been set on the short position.) Killing Procrustes was the last adventure of Theseus on his journey from Troezen to Athens.

Derived meaning:

A Procrustean bed is an arbitrary standard to which exact conformity is forced.

Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procrustes>"

► Discuss with your students the procrustean method.

A “procrustean” method is one that relentlessly tries to shape a person, an argument, or an idea in a predetermined pattern. (The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition. Edited by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil. Copyright © 2002 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.)

► Find similarities between the way the media tries to shape us. Discuss the way media influences the way we think about the successful, healthy and handsome man /beautiful woman.

► Is there a similarity between the procrustian bed and the bed of plastic surgery?

