5a

Why We Communicate: Three Basic Tasks

Knowing why a media message is being sent is important because it gives us a context for interpretation and clues for how to respond. Students begin their exploration of motive by generating ideas about why people communicate and organizing them in the three basic categories that media scholars identify: to *inform*, to *persuade* or to *entertain*. They will then choose one topic and create three media texts that communicate that topic in each of the three ways: *informing*, *persuading* and *entertaining*. By stimulating the process of questioning motivations of media messages, this activity prepares students for understanding the deeper motivations of *power* and/or *profit*.

Objectives: Students will be able to…
1. Identify the three common reasons for communication: information, persuasion and entertainment.
2. Create media messages for different purposes.
3. Develop understanding about how the purpose of a message shapes the message.

Correlation With McRel National Standards:
Language Arts Standards and Benchmarks
- ➢ Grades 3-5: (S10/B2)
- ➢ Grades 6-8: (S10/B2)
- ➢ Grades 9-12: (S10/B1)

Materials/Preparation:
1. Blackboard, whiteboard or overhead projector to chart student responses.
2. Paper for teams of students to make their own posters.
3. Markers or crayons.

Teaching Strategies:

I. Extracting Student Knowledge

- ➢ Begin a class discussion about the different reasons people have for communicating. Generate a list of their reasons by asking the following questions:
  - ▮ Why do people talk?
  - ❓ Why do you think people write, take pictures, make movies, play music?
  - ❓ Why do people put messages on clothing, posters, flags, bumper stickers, milk cartons, medicine bottles, advertisements, etc.?

II. Organizing and Classifying

- ➢ Explain that some academics who study communication have identified three common categories as reasons why people communicate:
  - • to *inform*
  - • to *persuade*
  - • to *entertain*
- ➢ Have students work in teams to separate the class list of reasons that they generated into these three basic categories. Some messages may have several purposes and some might not

fit any of the three categories. For the messages that don't fit the three basic reasons, create a fourth category that for the time being can be labeled, *miscellaneous*. (Other motivations could include self-expression, warning, celebration, questioning, challenging, etc.)

➢ Discuss the choices the teams made and check for class consensus. If issues arise in which agreement is difficult, use the miscellaneous category as a positive opening to demonstrate that there are more than just three reasons but these three are very common.

III. Creating Messages for Multiple Purposes

➢ Have each team choose any topic of interest and challenge them to create three media texts that transmit a message about their topic for three different purposes. For example:

• If they choose football, they could create an advertisement to *persuade* boys to join a football league, then a wall poster to *inform* people about the rules of football, and finally a cartoon to *entertain* others about some aspect of football.

➢ To conclude the activity, have teams present their three messages and how each message accomplishes the goal. With each presentation have all students consider:

? Are there still other possible motivations behind each poster/message?

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Assessment Tip: Independent Thinking

While the goal of this activity is for students to organize their ideas into three basic categories of motivations, students should be encouraged and praised for finding and arguing for other motivations that don't fit the basic three groups.