Using Television in the Curriculum

Rosemary Lee Potter

PHI DELTA KAPPA
EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION
ROSEMARY LEE POTTER

Member of a Master's swim team, Scout coordinator for a troop and pack, Drama Club sponsor — these are a few of the outside interests of on-the-go author, Rosemary Lee Potter. A veteran of 22 years of classroom teaching, Potter is currently a reading specialist with the Pinellas County Schools in Clearwater, Florida.

Potter has written several texts on the positive use of television with children, as well as numerous related articles, booklets, filmstrips, and kits. Her syndicated weekly newspaper column, "Making the Most of TV," has run in the St. Petersburg Times, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Seattle Times, the San Antonio Light, and the Sacramento Union. In 1983 she wrote a story for the NBC situation comedy "Diff'rent Strokes" on the subject of teacher moonlighting.

Potter frequently consults with school systems, media and professional organizations, parent groups, and reading councils on the use of television as a powerful resource for motivating and instructing students. She particularly enjoys helping television producers, writers, and directors to understand better the needs of youth with regard to television.

At home, Potter enjoys the company of her twin teenage sons (expert computer programmers) and husband, Robert, a technical services librarian. She is a member of the Clearwater-St. Petersburg Florida Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa.

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by

Rosemary Lee Potter

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Tuning In

Many educators are alarmed because TV is a constant and time-consuming presence in the life of just about every American student. Yet thousands of teachers routinely harness this popular, pervasive, home-viewed medium as part of regular classroom instruction in many curriculum areas. How teachers deal with the problems TV presents, how they tap its potential in specific content area lessons, and why they bother sets the plot for the story of TV use in the schools — a tale of teacher ingenuity as well as applied technology.

So what are the major ways schools use television today? How about a few dozen TV-use ideas in eight different subject areas? Can teachers of science, math, reading, music, physical education — any area — find a TV idea that works, costs nothing, and integrates with the lesson plans tomorrow morning? Where can teachers get special TV-related materials? The answers — and more — are presented here in the shared experiences of teachers who, amid the challenges of crowded classrooms, packed curricula, and tight budgets, have decided to make television work for students.
Problems of TV

Too Much TV?

That students view too much TV at home remains a source of concern among school people. Many think it has direct negative effects on students' studies and other behavior. Probably the most common judgment is that students watch too much television, often as much as 4-5 hours a day during the school week, more on weekends. By graduation, students actually see more of TV than they do of teachers!

Up Too Late?

Extensive TV viewing worries teachers and parents, not only because it creates an unbalanced time schedule but because such important activities as reading books, doing homework, and leisure pastimes necessary for growth are being excluded; and so is sleep. A teacher saw a second-grader in the media center carefully setting up a long, complicated pattern of dominoes with the intent to start a chain reaction by tipping over a key domino.

"Where did you get that idea?" asked the teacher.

"Last night on Johnny Carson," replied the youngster.

The teacher realized this seven-year-old had a scant six hours of sleep before coming to school, because at that time the Carson program was on until 1:00 A.M. With cable television now providing access to all-night movies, it is not unusual for some middle and high school students to drag into class with no sleep at all! When teachers call parents about weary, red-eyed students, the news often surprises the parents. Small wonder many schools at PTA meetings now promote bedtime, along with eating a good breakfast and bringing absence excuses.
Violent Content?

Teachers think the content of many television programs that students watch is inappropriate. Students of all ages generally make their own choices of what to watch. Younger students usually pick animated cartoons, highly adventurous action shows, and situation comedies. Older students choose more complicated dramas, soaps, and movies, many with violence and sexual incidents or themes, which are considered by many parents and teachers to be unnecessary to serve the plot. Another criticism is that too many problems on TV are seemingly solved with a violent act.

TV as a Model?

Teachers worry that students may mimic what they see on TV. Indeed, in two well-publicized court cases in which youths were tried for murder and rape, attempts were made to blame the crime on TV’s influence. Jerome and Dorothy Singer, researchers at Yale University, report evidence that very young heavy viewers of action-adventure programs do become more aggressive after watching aggressive acts on TV. However, there also is evidence that watching positive TV role models can lead to positive behaviors. So will students try to drive their cars as stunt drivers do in “The Dukes of Hazzard”? Some teachers are concerned in a different way about the aggression, the violence, students see on TV. By becoming so used to seeing simulated violent incidents, often casually handled, will students fail to react to real-life violence or get involved enough to call the police?

Television and Sexuality?

Teachers report that students make frequent references to sex in class, not in the old shock-value sense, but openly and matter-of-factly, often about certain TV characters, TV stars, and specific TV plots. “Is television,” they say, “robbing students of their childhood innocence, not only about sex, but about many other topics once thought reserved for adults and no longer taboo on TV?” Talk shows, popular soap operas, and dramatic specials use incest, abortion, prostitution, and
homosexuality for dramatic interest and often with an eye toward increasing their Neilsen ratings. Students watch.

There are few programs that present a positive or balanced view of human sexuality. Regular shows and commercials often deliver the message that one must be beautiful, young, slender, and sexy, which when interpreted by an average-looking, flat-chested eleven-year-old means having to buy expensive, tight-fitting designer jeans for peer status. Many teachers see this phenomenon daily in class and consider it a distraction.

The Other Messages

Less discussed, but receiving growing attention from the education community, are other, more subtle, messages that TV transmits to students. For example, is life so simple that problems can be neatly solved, say in a half hour or even in a day as they can be on TV? Are people as often rich? As usually middle-class? As white-collar? As Caucasian? As male? As promiscuous? Are older citizens so senile, so fragile, so vulnerable? Are young people so disrespectful and untrustworthy? Need TV plots and dialogue be so trivial? So repetitious? Teachers agonize because students love TV. Do students believe the impressions received there that may create stereotypes?

TV Sell

And then there are commercials. Students watch them — thousands of them in a year. Younger children often see commercials as the program. To them, that is what they are — complete little “stories,” often over in less than 30 seconds. And they are often the most expensive part to produce of any hour of TV seen. Commercial TV programs are aired and deliberately structured so that people will watch the ads. That’s how the commercial TV industry makes its money. Selling. So commercials must work. To do this, many clever persuasion techniques are used. Younger students tend to believe the ads. Older students tend to see through the selling pitches and laugh about it. But both age groups end up wanting to buy the products.

How young do viewers respond to commercials? A two-year-old boy
in St. Petersburg, Florida, was riding along in a shopping cart. As his mom walked by a shelf with feminine hygiene products, the child piped up excitedly, "Buy me some Stay-Free Maxipads so I can do tricks like Cathy Rigby!"

Television and School Work

Every student may not be viewing as much TV as studies suggest, but the variety of concerns that teachers express about TV and that social researchers are studying does involve the school. Are students really showing shorter attention spans because of their TV viewing? Do they neglect homework because of TV? Are they looking for quick answers and shorter assignments? Are they bored with school and the teachers' procedures and lessons? Are they trying to act like adults or imitate TV personalities? Many teachers think so, but they are not waiting around until research provides answers on these matters. They are beginning to devise strategies to counteract those factors related to TV that may be affecting school progress.
Potential of TV

Television is not going away. Despite its problems, many educators take the position that students' extensive TV viewing is providing them with a vast amount of data, some of it useful, some useless. Some teachers are developing TV-related lessons involving ideas students have picked up from TV. And some even use less distinguished TV programs to help students examine why they choose such shows.

High Interest Appeal

Teachers are finding that the distinguishing characteristics of TV — motion, pace, color, currency, action, and bringing the world into the home — are the same characteristics that appeal to students when TV material is woven into regular lessons or when classes just talk about particular programs. No TV set need be used in class, yet students eagerly participate during discussions about TV programs they have seen at home. Most become so involved, there are little if any behavior problems.

Let's say the teacher's objective is to help students understand characterization. She might begin by having the class first discuss well-known TV characters. There is high interest as students describe their favorite TV characters. When the teacher widens the discussion to include characters in books, there is still high interest shown. Even those students who usually are reluctant to participate in class discussion will join in as "experts" when they can share what they have seen on TV. And they stay aboard when the discussion moves on to book characters. One teacher recalls having the full attention of all 13 students with emo-
tional learning problems for more than 20 minutes after she asked them to list the names of their favorite shows and then helped categorize the titles. "It was the first time I ever saw all of these students working together in such a way — thanks to TV," she reported.

There's Help Out There

Resources for ways to use TV effectively have been available for some years, and more are appearing all the time. For 15 years Teachers Guides to Television has offered advance information on distinguished TV programs with ideas for relating these programs to unit studies, specific lessons, and follow-up book reading. In 1973 the International Reading Association published a booklet by George Becker on using TV to teach reading. Prime Time School Television, a Chicago firm, develops and distributes teaching materials for special television programs and also provides a unit on economics titled "TV and the Marketplace" and recently a unit on stereotyping of aging on television. For 31 years the American Council for Better Broadcasts in Madison, Wisconsin, has conducted its annual "Look-Listen Poll" among students and other citizens, who learn about TV by sharing rating information as to its quality. The rating sheets are provided free to classroom teachers.

The Action Picks Up

By the late Seventies, enough concern had been expressed about children's heavy viewing habits that both the federal government and other organizations began to produce materials to develop critical viewing skills in students. In recent years whole issues of education journals have been devoted to using television in classroom lessons. Another new resource is the quarterly Television and Children, which provides background TV information helpful to teachers, parents, and schools. Even the widely distributed TV Guide frequently runs articles on how TV can be used to help children learn.

Many students are now involved in various TV-related curriculum projects, funded under Title IV-C. For example, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, elementary students regularly produce in-school TV programs
to supplement social studies and science lessons. Students in Woodmere, New York, have dramatically improved reading skills by producing a well-researched television documentary in a program called Graphic Expression Reading Improvement System (GERIS).

Most teachers use TV as a tie-in with regular school work. They see it as a natural way to capitalize on student interest and experience, and they can implement it without using class time for TV viewing and without any special funding. For instance, a teacher in North Carolina developed a homework program that gets students to practice writing by identifying TV characters and writing books about favorite shows. In Raymond, Maine, a teacher involves elementary students in evaluating TV programs by having them fill out personal TV questionnaires.

Changes in Teacher Attitude

Teachers need not compete with television. If they tried, the consensus is that they would lose. Teachers are certainly not as slick or as entertaining, nor should they have to be. That many teachers now recognize TV's multifaceted potential as an instructional resource does not mean that they approve of all TV programming. What it really means is that they have discovered that TV can be helpful in teaching regular lessons more efficiently. Students who are able to display their special TV knowledge in regular school assignments begin to get a new perspective on TV they watch at home. Instead of being criticized for watching so much TV, they are rewarded in school for being able to use their TV knowledge. Also TV viewing can lead to follow-up reading in books. The two forms of media are no longer adversaries. Students are enthusiastically learning from both print and video.
Major Uses of TV in Schools

Assigned Home TV Viewing

Perhaps the most common use of TV is the assignment to view a program in support of specific class topics. For example, a National Geographic special on polar bears or sharks might be assigned to tie in with a study of mammals or marine environment.

Teachers are sometimes reluctant to require all students to view a particular program because of differing home situations. Other members of the family may want to watch another program, or the family may have made previous plans for the time the program is scheduled. In such situations the TV assignment might have to be an extra-credit project, or the teacher will have to provide alternative activities for those students who cannot see the show. Sometimes schedule conflicts can be overcome with programs on cable TV and PBS, because they are repeated during the week.

Distinguished dramas such as “Les Miserables” or “The Miracle Worker” and other specials of an educational nature are well-publicized in advance. With this advance information teachers can send letters to parents several days before the broadcast explaining the importance of having students watch the show as part of their school work. Such letters gain parental support for the TV-related study and they definitely increase student viewing.

Showing TV Programs in Class

The way to ensure that everybody sees a quality TV program is to show it during class time. (This practice still bothers some teachers and
parents because it means additional student viewing.) There are hundreds of video cassette programs for classroom use available from public TV, firms, instructional TV agencies, and, in some cases, network television. An example of the latter is the release to schools several years ago of "Reading, Writing and Reefers," a TV program on drug awareness.

**Reading Tie-Ins**

A third way TV can be used in the curriculum is for tie-ins with reading. A decade ago Harlan Hamilton reported in his doctoral dissertation that more than 40% of the book preferences of junior high students he surveyed were either movie- or TV-related. Most teachers with classroom libraries will concur with Hamilton, as will many reading teachers and media specialists. In addition to TV-related books, many students like to read about TV itself — the shows, the stars, and the behind-the-scenes events.

TV programs have actually revived interest in reading books that have been sitting on library shelves for years. A good example are the books of Laura Ingalls Wilder, true sagas of pioneer days on the plains. Suddenly "Little House on The Prairie," based on one of the Wilder books, came to TV and the books were immediately in demand, reprinted, and distributed in colorful new editions. The same thing happened with the *Hardy Boys* books, a formula-plotted youth mystery series. When TV aired its version of the boy sleuths, there was again such a demand that libraries ordered multiple copies of the books. Many boys and girls insisted on reading all of the books — more than 50 in all.

That students want to read books on which TV programs are based should not really be so surprising. Adults wanted to read *Shogun*, the sequel to *Winds of War*, and *Roots* for the same reason. The same motivation holds for children who want to read *The Cat in the Hat* or *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* the day after a Dr. Seuss TV special. Publishers have learned to anticipate demand for books following a new TV program based on a book, and bookstores and school and public libraries step up orders for these titles. Networks even have the stars of
specials based on books come on afterward to promote the reading of them.

Scriptreading

During the past 10 years thousands of teachers have used another TV resource in their reading programs — TV scriptreading. Reading plays has long been a standard curriculum practice, but teleplays are a new form of drama for most students. They include shot directions for the camera operators as well as the usual scene descriptions.

Two Philadelphia remedial reading teachers, Bernard Solomon and Michael McAndrew, taped popular TV shows and transcribed the dialogue so that each student would have a script to read while watching the taped segments. They report that reading scores and interest improved, chronic absentees showed up, and students who did not need remedial reading tried to come to their reading classes. Scripts literally disappeared!

The results of the scriptreading experiences were so successful, Solomon and McAndrew convinced TV producers to authorize them to experiment with this approach to reading. McAndrew arranged distribution of scripts from popular network shows. As of this writing, the main source of television scripts, usually four per year, is through the CBS Television Reading Program, which distributes millions of scripts through local CBS affiliates and newspapers. The project is funded by local businesses and provides each student with a free script to read and to keep.

There are other sources of scripts. Films, Inc. sells copies of famous movie scripts that appear periodically on television, for example, “The Time Machine,” “Benji,” and “The Wizard of Oz.” The scripts come with discussion questions and skill lessons. Scholastic Magazines and Xerox Publications also provide condensed versions of the scripts from popular programs on commercial and cable networks in their classroom magazines. The scripts are often rewritten at lower reading levels. Teachers find that scripts are popular reading material even when they are read several years after the programs involved were aired.

Teachers use scripts for student dramatizations and oral reading
lessons. Sometimes they are used as homework or make-up assignments. In classroom libraries they are popular free-reading materials. Students enjoy comparing the script with the finished TV production as aired.

**Using TV in Regular Classroom Lessons**

Many teachers integrate TV information into regular classroom lessons. For example, a first-grade teacher, who had long used an alphabet poster with the traditional B is for ball, C is for cat items, decided to rejuvenate the posters using TV examples. She enlisted the children's help, and they came up with such suggestions as D is for "Dukes of Hazzard" and "Diff'rent Strokes"; and later, when working on consonant blends, they suggested Sm is for "Smurfs," among many others. Still later they added nursery rhymes, as well as their own names to the poster.

At the secondary level, more sophisticated activities are possible. A high school debate teacher had students research and debate the issue, "Resolved: There should be no commercials during programming designed primarily for children." A social studies teacher used a mock trial approach and put TV "on trial" as if it were a person, with students taking the roles of prosecuting attorney, defense attorney, judge, and witnesses. An English teacher introduced the concept of synopsis by having students study the TV program listings in *TV Guide* or other TV schedules found in newspapers. Students are then asked to write concise summaries of episodes they have seen. Since they know the content of the program, they can concentrate on the skill of synopsis writing.

Categorizing TV programs as to type is a good way to teach classifying skills. Similarly, note-taking skills can be taught by having students take notes while watching some program and having them prepare an outline in class from those notes. TV programs can be used to help children distinguish between reality and fantasy. Young people are often convinced that shows about the Loch Ness monster, for example, are true because the material is presented as if true. Even though such programs usually include disclaimers, students tend to overlook them because to them the programs appear to have a documentary format.
like students are used to seeing in films at school. Teachers can use such programs as a basis for discussion and analysis of what is true, what is speculation, and what is fantasy.

**Critical TV Viewing Skills Projects**

During the late Seventies there arose a demand to teach students more about TV itself — to help them become more critical of the medium and more selective in viewing. Proponents of critical TV viewing skills urge schools to include units of study about TV as part of the regular curriculum. It is known, for example, that young children have difficulty distinguishing between commercials and the actual programs. Teachers can help them learn to discriminate between ads and programs by using clips of TV programs and ads in class.

In 1978 the then U.S. Office of Education invited proposals for curriculum development in critical viewing skills. Nearly $1,000,000 in contracts was awarded to the following organizations:

- Elementary: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)
- Middle School: WNET, Channel 13, PBS, New York
- Secondary: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development
- Post-Secondary: Boston University School of Public Communication

These organizations took on the task of developing critical TV viewing skills and materials for first grade through college to teach the following critical viewing skills:

1. Distinguishing program elements such as music, special effects, costumes, settings, color, etc.;
2. Making judicious use of viewing time;
3. Understanding psychological implications of advertising;
4. Distinguishing fact from fiction;
5. Recognizing and appreciating differing views;
6. Understanding content of dramatic presentations, public affairs, news, and other programming;
7. Understanding style of dramatic presentations, public affairs, news, and other programming; and
8. Understanding the relationship between TV programming and the printed word.

During this period of high interest in critical TV viewing skills, other projects were developed for classroom use. Under a grant from the ABC Television Network, Jerome and Dorothy Singer at the Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center developed classroom lessons and video tapes based on their research to teach critical TV viewing skills to elementary students. The National PTA has also developed materials for both elementary and secondary levels, which are distributed by Phi Delta Kappa. Other projects similar in intent were developed and published by teachers in Idaho, Maryland, New York, and Florida.

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the federal government and other groups to teach critical TV viewing skills in daily classwork, the idea has not caught on. While many teachers deplore the amount of time children spend viewing TV, few find time to include the study of the medium in an already overcrowded curriculum and limited school day. At the conclusion of the federal projects mentioned above, grant money ceased and so did the publicity. Although the materials developed are available to teachers at a reasonable cost, the materials are often consumable, thus making the per pupil cost still too high. Current priorities in reading and math, among many others, have made the purchase of critical TV viewing skills materials unlikely. And although the materials can be incorporated in many content areas, no one curriculum area is pushing the idea strongly enough to raise its priority on the curriculum shopping list.

It is ironic that the campaign for TV literacy of five years ago has been usurped by another electronic medium — computers. Computer-related instruction has been installed in many school systems recently because of the widespread availability of relatively inexpensive microcomputers and because of high interest and pressure from both students and adults. Video arcades combine the appeal of TV and the computer for leisure purposes, and video games share the home TV
screen with regular programming. Students and adults alike are interacting with TV via computer.

Computer literacy may have replaced TV literacy in the education marketplace, but concerned teachers will continue to incorporate critical TV viewing skill material as it applies to teaching critical thinking in both print and video.

In-School Television Production

At many schools and at many grade levels, students are now producing their own TV programs in a variety of curriculum areas. Video cameras and playback equipment are now relatively inexpensive. Some schools have their own television studio with several video cameras, special effects equipment, and even an editor. More commonly the school has a single portable camera, a video recorder-playback unit, and maybe a few blank video cassette tapes. Students love the hands-on TV production work. Videotape segments they produce are used as book and science reports, as weekly closed-circuit news shows, and as special material for specific units of study. For example, in a Title IV-C project in Albuquerque, fifth-graders did the technical camera work on a short teleplay about teeth, which was written and performed by third-graders and used in first-grade dental health studies.
Using TV in Specific Curriculum Areas

The most common use teachers make of TV is integrating it with regular lessons. In this section samples of specific uses are described at various levels in eight curriculum areas.

Language Arts/English

*Listening* is a skill that needs to be developed at every level of the curriculum. Some teachers combine practice in listening with vocabulary development by asking students to listen for a new word each day on TV, then to define it and bring it to class to add to the vocabulary list. Older students can be asked to jot down idioms, to note mistakes and grammatical errors, or to list such special uses of language as alliteration or onomatopoeia. Once the teacher sets the instructional purpose for listening, TV gives the students a chance to practice the skill.

*Speaking*. Just bringing up the subject of TV is likely to motivate younger children to talk. They can be invited to talk about their favorite programs, explaining their preferences, or about a TV character or incident that impresses them. A teacher reports that she had a first-grader who appeared withdrawn and shy at the start of the year. He was vocal at home, but the teacher never heard him say a word for two weeks. Finally, she asked him to draw a picture about his favorite TV show. When he was through, she asked him to talk about his picture, which was filled with colorful TV sets and busy creatures. He did talk. He talked all about “Planet of the Apes,” then a favorite program of many
children. In fact, he would not stop talking! After that day, he conversed regularly in class about TV and everything else.

Intermediate and secondary students can make oral reports on TV-related topics. One teacher reports organizing students into small groups according to their favorite new TV programs. Students take turns describing the programs and predicting the chances for success among all the new shows presented. This is a popular activity. The teacher reports that it makes a good ice-breaker each fall and gets students on their feet without the usual self-conscious beginnings.

Writing. TV is an ideal way to motivate writing. In younger grades students can write about popular shows and their favorite characters and stars. Older students can write reviews, summaries, and critiques. They also can create and produce scripts based on known program formats as well as their own original ideas.

Writing letters is a natural outgrowth of TV viewing. Students can write to sponsors and TV producers, making suggestions, offering praise if warranted, and giving constructive criticism. Teachers should discourage students from writing individual fan letters because it is not likely that each student will get a reply. There is greater likelihood of a reply from a network or producer if the teacher encloses all letters in one envelope with a cover letter requesting a single reply. Addresses for most networks and producers are obtainable from local TV affiliates or the reference desk of the public library. The library can also supply the addresses of sponsors.

Another way that TV can stimulate writing is through logging and listing. Teachers at many grade levels ask students to keep a log of all the programs they watch for a week. Then students list the shows by type and add data from their own logs to a classroom log chart. The individual and class logs give students a record of their viewing habits. They then write paragraphs interpreting their involvement with TV. Many of these paragraphs reflect the students' surprise that they watch so much TV, and some decide to watch less.

Spelling. At the elementary level, writing sentences using spelling words is a common assignment. Some teachers elaborate on this assignment by asking that each sentence have a spelling word and also be about TV. A typical sentence for the word friend might be: "The boy on
‘Silver Spoons’ thinks his dad is a good *friend.*’ Students like this variation on the traditional assignment, and it fosters the learning of spelling in an interesting and meaningful context.

At older levels, words that commonly cause difficulty can be incorporated into sentences based on specific TV programs. The teachers can do this or, better yet, get students to provide a pool of sentences. One teacher reports good results when she provides TV-type sentences that include misspelled words and then asks that students identify them. An example is a sentence based on ‘Star Trek’: ‘The Starship Enterprise learned that the *ancient* ship had received the message.’

*Reading.* Very young children learn to read the names of cereal boxes and other products in stores because they repeatedly see them on TV. Knowing this, teachers can ask children to tell words they have learned from TV. They can also ask about books featured on TV. Some programs, of course, such as ‘Sesame Street’ include word recognition as part of the program format. Others such as PBS’s ‘*Reading Rainbow*’ promote and motivate the youngest readers to read specific books.

Teachers at many levels are making sure that TV tie-in books are in classroom libraries. Teachers are also showing students how to read TV schedules and guides. The layout of such schedules makes them hard to read. Students need to know the meaning of the abbreviations and symbols used and how to interpret the grid-like formats.

Older students can be assigned to read TV-related magazine articles and newspaper features, using them for current event reports. Students’ interest in TV makes it a natural topic for class discussions or research reports. In doing research, students can be assigned to read information on the Federal Communications Commission, parent groups who work for better TV programming such as Action for Children’s Television, research studies on the effects of TV, technical reports on how TV works, articles on television in other countries, and ways to use television in school.

*Literature.* TV has a literature of its own in the dramas written or adapted expressly for its use. Teachers can use TV effectively to compare versions. If a program is based on a book, students compare the original with the TV adaptation. If a book is based on a program, students note differences in how the story is changed from TV script to a
regular story line in a book. For example, in the paperback based on "Sooner or Later," a popular teenage TV special, the point of view was changed from that of omniscient author to first person, giving a quite different tone to the story when read instead of viewed. Such differences also show up in the way the show is cast, the types of audio track used, the balance of dialogue and description, and the use of close-ups and various camera angles, to mention just a few of the narrative techniques that make TV different from a book.

Sometimes a student will become angry when the book and TV versions are very different. One teacher reported that a girl who had read "Les Miserables" and then saw it on TV thought the TV version was far too beautiful for the scenes she had pictured in her mind. Other students enjoy seeing the way television depicts some of the funny or despicable characters they have first met in print. However, young children like things to be "just the way they are in the book," as is true of the Dr. Seuss and Charlie Brown TV specials. Students protested against a musical TV version of "Alice in Wonderland" because it strayed too far from their idea of the book story and the way they thought it was "supposed to look." Students can learn much about literary techniques by comparing TV and book version.

Study Skills. Teachers realize that students often sit in front of the TV set while doing homework. Even when they try to discourage this practice, it continues. Some teachers have asked students to try the following experiment: Spend 10 minutes working on homework as fast as you can with the TV on. Time the work and note the quantity of the work that has been accomplished. Then spend 10 minutes on the same homework without TV, again as fast as possible. Examine the work completed this time and compare the results of the two trials. Students often make the honest observation that TV slows down the work and influences the quality of the work completed. At the least, the experiment may lead to a conscious effort to limit TV homework periods. One teacher conducted the same experiment in class by turning on a rerun of a popular program for distraction. That experience really made an impression on the students.

Taking notes is an important skill. Teachers can encourage practice of this skill by assigning students to take down recipes, addresses, and
program credits from the TV screen — any interesting collection of TV-related data will give students an opportunity to learn the skills of note-taking.

Mathematics

Surveys and Graphs. Math teachers are using TV for surveying, tabulating, graphing, and interpreting. For example, students can conduct a poll on “What’s your favorite TV program?” or “How many hours of TV do you watch a day?” After collecting the information, the students classify it, breaking it down into categories for boys and girls and perhaps for primary and intermediate grades, depending on how extensive the survey is. After the poll responses are tallied, a decision has to be made as to how the information can be reported. A circle graph could be used to show what percent of a student’s day is given to sleep, school, homework, TV, etc. A bar graph would work well for the data on TV favorites. Once the bar graph is completed, the students discuss it and interpret it. Why did more boys than girls choose “The A-Team.” Why was “Diff’rent Strokes” the favorite of 44 students? Why didn’t anybody say that “Smurfs” was their favorite show? What makes a show the favorite of many people?

Students then take the graphs around to the other classes surveyed and discuss the results. Finding out about TV habits and preferences is information that teachers may also find valuable in understanding TV’s influence on school learning.

Math Terms and Uses. Students can learn about math in action by making a list of math terms and the use of math as heard and seen on TV. Does a character measure something as part of the plot? Are different denominations of bills mentioned or distances estimated? Is time a crucial factor in the plot or its solution? How about weight? One student provided five sheets of math terms and uses after viewing TV sports events over a weekend. The list included batting averages, scores of games, and new track records, among others. Another student used commercials for her list, which included such terms as price, economics, budget, pennies per ounce, 16 oz. package, etc. “When is it on?” was the title of one student’s list, which named all the references heard on TV about scheduling and time of shows, by day and hour.
Science

Reporting. Science teachers can stimulate students’ creativity by having them present reports using TV program formats. Chemical elements become contestants on quiz shows or guest panelists on a news program. Sometimes teachers videotape the presentations so that the science programs can be shown to other classes.

Science Terms and Uses. One science teacher has a contest to determine how many ways TV might be used in the study of science. At first students list such obvious things as meteorological terms and news of medical breakthroughs. After some thought and further discussion and some additional viewing, students expand their list of uses to include science vocabulary, science specials, and first-hand viewing of scientific procedures; also, ecology, zoology, geology, health, careers in science, and “visits” to outer space. As the list grows the teacher asks each student to read one science book related to a science topic seen on TV. From their reading, students often add new science-related TV uses to the list.

Social Studies

The News. TV can supplement a variety of social studies lessons. For current events lessons, TV news can be backed up by reading news clippings, while newspaper stories can be enriched by late information from TV coverage. Often TV has information first, especially when the local newspaper is a morning paper. However, the newspaper will have more in-depth information. Studying both sources of news can help students understand the TV news itself and its problems — sensationalism, bias, brevity, and ratings.

Stereotyping. Teachers find TV a good resource for teaching about stereotyping, whether it be by minority, gender, or age. Students ask, “Why are there so many rich Caucasian male characters on prime-time programs?” “Are older citizens on TV supposed to be the objects of admiration and assets to the community or are they dependent, cantankerous, and unwanted objects of pity?” TV offers many characters as examples for the discussion of stereotypes.

Propaganda. TV is a natural springboard for teaching about prop-
agenda techniques. The "bandwagon" technique can be taught by asking students to look for examples of it in TV commercials. After this good start, the teacher moves on to look for bandwagon techniques used in magazine ads.

Time-Lines. Time-lines are useful in giving students a sense of historical sequence. Some teachers use a chalkboard time-line and ask students to place familiar TV programs on the time-line. For example, "Little House on the Prairie," "Happy Days," "Shogun," and "Star Trek" would fall at quite different spots on the time-line. TV programming covers a wide span of historical periods, and the time-line helps students put events in historical context.

Fine Arts

Art. Art teachers can use TV for examples of good design and for vocational guidance. Art students can be asked to monitor TV, especially commercials, for examples of graphic design, animation, multiple images, and other techniques so that students will have exposure to some of the works, the motion, color, and style of commercial TV artists. Students need to realize that graphics, costumes, and set designs all are the work of creative people who make their living through art.

Music. TV uses many forms of music. Most TV programs (many with a laugh track as well) have an individual musical theme. Such themes are instantly recognized by students. Sometimes catchy theme music written for commercials and intended to jog buyers' memories about a product gets into the school music program and choruses sing it. A prime example is the theme from a famous soft drink commercial that begins, "I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony." Another begins, "Sing. Sing a song." Many TV themes have been arranged for marching bands and are played at football halftime shows.

Aside from theme recognition, music teachers can encourage students to view the varied kinds of music presented on TV and then discuss the musical talent of the performers. Many students never have attended a live performance of any kind. For them, TV may be their only source of seeing quality musical performances. Even if students can't go to Central Park for a rock concert or to the Met for an opera, they
can “attend” via TV and are guaranteed a view of the performers that is better than that of most people actually attending the concert. Music teachers should continue to encourage students to see live performances whenever possible, but the rich musical resources of TV can be incorporated into the music education program in a variety of ways.

**Drama.** Drama teachers have a fine teaching resource in the many excellent TV plays presented each year. Sometimes the TV play is the same one currently in rehearsal as a school play, or it is one by a playwright that the class is studying. Drama students can observe many models of acting in TV plays from which they can learn about characterization, stage movement, and timing. They can discuss the differences between acting in TV and in a stage performance. Television is a career possibility for students interested in drama. In addition to acting, they need to be made aware of the variety of jobs such as make-up artists, costumers, set designers, camera operators, and other technical areas.

For younger children TV sketches and situation comedies can be models for short skits or dramatic improvisation. Children often like to simulate game show formats or commercials when making classroom presentations. Teachers who use these formats find that students feel less self-conscious and more willing to get on their feet and talk.

**Dance.** The resources of TV in the area of dance are bountiful. Through TV, teachers can introduce students to all forms of dance — folk, square, jazz, modern, and classical ballet. Many commercials feature elaborate choreography in ads that are less than a minute long.

Students can be asked to monitor TV to observe different kinds of dance. Right now there is a strong resurgence of interest in tap dancing. Jazz dancing now is popular on TV in such programs as “Dance Fever.” Dance as an art form has never received much attention in the public schools, but for teachers who want to enrich the arts curriculum, TV offers rich resources.

**Museum Literacy.** Several years ago, Rosemary Lehman, a television researcher in Madison, Wisconsin, conceived the idea of linking TV viewing as a preparatory experience for students’ visits to museums. Many museums and schools have since implemented the idea. Here is how it works. Before teachers take their classes to museums, they discuss with their students the TV experiences they can recall concerning
historical places, periods, customs, and events. As these are recalled, they are brought to bear on the planned museum visit.

A teacher getting ready to visit a special exhibition of 1950s memorabilia began preparation by talking with students about "Happy Days" and "Laverne and Shirley," which are set in the 1950s. One student remarked, "I didn't know museums had any new stuff!" When "Roots" and "Shogun" were shown, teachers who were headed to museums found immediate class tie-ins with family genealogies, U.S. and African history, the slavery issue, and artifacts from old Japan. After discussing their TV experiences, students showed increased interest in and understanding of the exhibits at the museum.

As one teacher of history pointed out, "Not every student could get to the King Tut exhibit when it was in the United States. However, when we studied Egypt that year, I found that many students had seen some of the King Tut treasures on the TV special." When the teacher showed them a picture of King Tut's golden sarcophagus, which she had obtained at the exhibit in New Orleans, 10 students were able to identify it because they had seen it on TV. One girl commented that the TV lighting made the treasure far more beautiful than the picture showed. The TV program helped to increase students' interest in their study of ancient Egypt.

**Foreign Language**

Foreign language teachers can make use of TV, particularly when dealing with the cultural aspects of the country whose language the students are learning. Both TV news and specials shot on location in foreign countries give students some feeling for the geography, architecture, and lifestyle of the country. TV can also be used to show students how the foreign language they are studying is involved in American life. One teacher asked students to keep a record of all references on TV to France and French phrases, costumes, foods, etc., they observed in the news, on specials, and in regular programming. In two weeks of viewing, many students turned in dozens of French references.

Role playing is often used in foreign language classes to practice conversation. Students enjoy using familiar TV situations, TV characters,
and even TV program formats as the basis for their practice dialogues. One teacher reported that her classes enjoy preparing and presenting brief snatches of “Fantasy Island” in Spanish.

**Home Economics**

*Cooking.* TV provides many tie-ins for the home economics classroom. Cooking shows are familiar to many students. When teachers conduct classroom cooking demonstrations, they often find that students know about utensils, cooking procedures, recipes, and pricing, which they have learned from TV.

The home economics teacher also needs to make students aware of distortions about foods and cooking on TV. For example, they need to realize that the actual cooking time of a recipe is longer than the brief period during which the TV chef is on camera. Many recipes are cooked ahead. They should know that food shown on TV may be injected with dye to look better, especially for commercials, and that some food commercials are shot hundreds of times before they are acceptable for broadcasting.

TV also presents some good opportunities for consumer education. Let students repeat on-camera tests given to food or home laundry products to see if the ads are telling the truth. Is bigger really cheaper? Does that catsup really run? Are those clothes brighter? Is the old product really improved? Students might also discuss sex stereotyping as it relates to cooking. Why is it often Mom who is frying food in the kitchen? Why is cooking itself so often made a hilarious disaster on situation comedies?

*Sewing.* TV provides opportunities for students to become aware of fashion. TV stars are indeed well dressed; some students think they are overdressed. One girl reported that she couldn’t see why “a boy on the show was always wearing an argyle sweater inside his house, even if he was preppy.”

One teacher used TV for beginning a unit on historical costuming. Each student picked a different period in this century and did research to find out the style of clothes worn. Then the student tried to select some TV programs past or present when the style was worn. One stu-
dent made a special study of futuristic designs used in TV science-fiction programs such as "Star Trek," "Battlestar Galactica," "Mr. Merlin," and "Mork and Mindy." Another girl compared the clothing worn in "Little House on the Prairie" with her readings in a book on historical dress. She concluded that the TV show was reasonably accurate but reported that the TV costume designer could have been even more accurate as to costume details. Another student found out that TV costume designers are called on to perform special tasks such as making the costume become bloody when the performer is "shot," or making a costume that is light enough to run in but that looks like it is really heavy or armored. Becoming familiar with TV costuming could inspire students to pursue a career in the field.

Physical Education

TV, of course, has brought sports to millions of young people. Not only do students see a wide variety of sports but they become accustomed to commercial breaks during the game, edited versions of events, instant replays, and cutaways to other events. Some physical education teachers introduce new sports by having students view TV coverage of them. One middle school has a giant bulletin board in the gym with a TV and newspaper section. Students are encouraged to contribute information for either section. The TV section carries notes on upcoming TV sporting events or gives results of various events viewed. Some physical education teachers send TV sports questionnaires home each season to be filled out with the help of parents as the family watches a football, basketball, or baseball game. Parents respond positively to this assignment because it provides a purposeful family communication experience.

The TV-related lessons described here are but a few of the hundreds that teachers have devised to harness TV as a learning resource. Most teachers using TV in the curriculum report strong support from parents, who see it as a way for their children to make better use of the time spent viewing TV. As more teachers recognize the potential of using TV in the curriculum, many more and varied uses of this powerful medium will emerge.
Resources

The following items include all those mentioned in the text as well as a few additional materials selected to help with specific curriculum uses of TV.

Specific Curriculum Support Materials

*Teachers Guides to Television*
699 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10219


Prime Time School Television
212 W. Superior
Chicago, IL 60610

Information About Television

American Council for Better Broadcasts
120 E. Wilson Street
Madison, WI 53703

*Television and Children*
National Council for Children and Television
20 Nassau Street, Suite 200
Princeton, NJ 08540
Student Production Projects

Video Curriculum Project
Griegos Elementary School
1620 Van Cleve Road
Albuquerque, NM 87107

GERIS-Graphic Expression Reading Improvement System
Woodmere Middle School
1170 Peninsula Blvd.
Hewlett, NY 11557

Reading Tie-Ins


Scriptreading

Potter, Rosemary Lee. "An Interview with a Pioneer." Teacher (April, 1978): 44-48. (This is an interview with Michael McAndrew who, with a colleague, first developed the idea of television script-reading in school.)

CBS Television Reading Program
CBS, Inc.
51 West 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019

(CBS requests that teachers contact their local CBS affiliate first since scriptreading is a promotional project under the auspices of local CBS stations. Neither local stations nor the network provide individual or class copies directly. There must be an arrangement with schools or school systems, funded by local business.)

Movie Scriptreader Program
Films, Inc.
50 Rindge Avenue Extension
Cambridge, MA 02140
Critical TV Viewing Skills Projects

U.S. Office of Education Grants:

Elementary: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)
   211 E. 7th Street
   Austin, TX 78701

Middle School: WNET, Channel 13
   356 West 58th Street
   New York, NY 10019

Secondary School: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research
   and Development
   1855 Folsom Street
   San Francisco, CA 94103

Post-Secondary: School of Public Communication
   Boston University
   640 Commonwealth Avenue
   Boston, MA 02215

Jerome and Dorothy Singer
Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center
405 Temple Street
New Haven, CT 06511
(These researchers have a bibliography concerning effects of TV as well as curriculum materials for teaching critical TV viewing skills.)
The Way We See It: Instruction in Critical Receivership
N. Craig Ashton
Idaho Falls School District #91
Idaho Falls, ID 83401

Potter, Rosemary Lee; Faith, Camille; and Ganek, Lynne Brenner. CHANNEL: Critical Reading/TV Viewing Skills
Educational Activities, Inc.
P. O. Box 392
Freeport, NY 11520
(Provides specific skill lessons that teach critical viewing as well as reading.)

National PTA Critical Viewing Skills
Phi Delta Kappa
P. O. Box 789
Bloomington, IN 47402

Government Agency Dealing with TV
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Parent-Activist Group on TV
Action For Children’s Television
46 Austin Street
Newtonville, MA 02160

Museum Literacy
Rosemary M. Lehman
In Touch With . . . Centering Television
5513 Thunderbird Lane
Monona, WI 53716
Additional Materials to Help With Specific Curriculum Use


This fastback and others in the series are made available at low cost through the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, established in 1966 with a bequest from George H. Reavis. The foundation exists to promote a better understanding of the nature of the educative process and the relation of education to human welfare.

Single copies of fastbacks are 75¢ (60¢ to Phi Delta Kappa members). Write to Phi Delta Kappa, Eighth and Union, Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402 for quantity discounts for any title or combination of titles.
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