

### IN THE CLASSROOM: TELEVISION TO STIMULATE

#### Television to stimulate discussion and writing— Stills and clips: Looking and seeing

The excerpts below are reproduced directly or adapted from *Television Talk and Writing: Practical ideas for literacy and language work with adults*, by Jane Lawrence and Jane Mace, Cambridge UK: National Extension College, 1991, [113 pp.] With permission.

#### **Background: Linking literacy and TV**

This book for teachers and tutors suggests that adult education teachers can link literacy and television in two ways:

1. Use broadcast television as a subject for study. This can be done in two ways:
  - As a group in the classroom: Using the viewing experience of the group, with video clips as memory prompts, students can discuss and share their ideas on television, and use some of the texts...in “Read and Discuss” [a section of the book] to move beyond their own experience to other perspectives.
  - At home or elsewhere: Between class meetings, students can use class discussion to reread their television, looking out for particular features, or agreeing to record (on video, or in notes) some themes or ideas that have interested them.
2. Get in the habit of “quoting” from television. This can be done by using the video recorder and playing short clips—in all literacy and language work, and in any class discussion on a particular topic, alongside extracts from print media. (11-12)

#### **Student research**

This book stresses research by students into their learning and experience. A lot of the suggestions emphasize the oral which means listening to, and voicing, ideas and opinions, and making the effort to relate an individual’s account to a collective picture. The book offers material for structured discussion, not for individual written worksheets. This discussion...draws from, and leads back to, the work of expressing ideas in writing. (12)

There are three main groups of research methods:

- 1.) Recollecting and recording (using log sheets): noting what they see as they see it; noting how they watch.
- 2.) Interviewing another person (questionnaire): about what they watch and what they think.
- 3.) Reviewing and classifying (charts): classifying images, programmes and kinds of viewing and broadcasting activity. (13)

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## Stills and clips:

Looking and seeing While television is usually taken to be a visual medium, and looking and seeing are central to actually watching it, few of us get much opportunity to look closely at what we are seeing. It all happens very quickly. We sometimes see what is not there; sometimes we don't see what is there. "Seeing is believing," we say. Believing may sometimes mean one person seeing, in the same moving pictures, more, less, or different things from what another sees in them. This is as true for watching television as it is for any other kind of looking and seeing.

Using both still pictures and clips of moving pictures provides a means of slowing down the process of looking, so that it is possible to notice in detail what we see. Once this kind of noticing has been done, it is easier to sort out what is in the picture from what each of us brings to it from our own experience... The point is, the visual images on television usually pass so quickly that we cannot always be sure of what we have seen.

STILLS	CLIPS
<p><b>What do you see in the picture?</b></p> <p><b>What you need</b> a selection of still photographs cut from TV listings [guides]. As these are often small, it can be useful to paste them on larger squares of paper to make them easier to handle and pass around.</p> <p><b>What to do</b></p> <p>Divide students into pairs. Give each a picture, with the following directions:</p> <p>Don't show your picture to your partner.</p> <p>1.) Take turns to describe your picture as exactly as you can. The person listening should ask questions in order to get as clear an idea as possible of what is in the picture. The main rule is to stick to what is in the picture; even if you recognize the program it comes from, try not to say so. This is not a "guess the program" exercise. When the first person has finished, it is the second person's turn.</p> <p>2.) After you have both described your</p>	<p><b>What do you see on the screen?</b></p> <p><b>What you need</b> a videotape of five or six short extracts from a random selection of programs</p> <p><b>What to do</b></p> <p>With the sound turned off, show the tape to the group, with these directions: Watch without talking. Try to notice everything you see, so that you will be able to retell it in your group.</p> <p>Now group people into pairs, threes or fours, making sure that each group has one person willing to [record] what people say. Their job is to try to recall, together, what they remember seeing. Like the stills exercise, emphasize that this is not a guessing game about television programs. The aim is to try to recapture everything on the screen in each of the fragments. Different people will recall different things.</p> <p>Invite everyone to regather and replay the tape of the clips. This time, use the pause button to freeze the shot once during each clip, so that everyone has a chance to look carefully at the</p>

pictures, show them to each other. Compare what you see with what you imagined from the description.

3.) Then talk about what kind of program you think each picture comes from. Ask yourselves: What is there in the picture which leads you to know that it is, for instance, a game show rather than a news program?

## Preparation notes

1.) Pictures can be a random selection from one issue of a TV guide. Or you could select pictures from particular types of programs, such as soaps or documentaries. (This will take more preparation than a random selection; you'll need more than one week's listings to get a good range of pictures.)

2.) The exercise depends on you having introduced the idea of different kinds of program. You could ask the group to brainstorm. There is no "right" answer. For example, one group came up with this list: sport, entertainment, consumer advice, comedy, cartoons, children's programmes, education and leisure, quiz/game shows. If the list is on a board, flip chart or overhead, the pairs can use it to compare with their findings when you come together again as a group.

picture. Everyone can call out what they spotted and remembered, and notice what they didn't.

The issues that will emerge from this include:

- how much we are able to remember apparently fleeting images.
- how different people will remember different details, and how this may be influenced by our own interests, moods and social experience.
- what we don't remember — perhaps because it wasn't important, or perhaps because there is so much to take in that we have to leave something out in the recollection, perhaps for other reasons.

## Preparation notes

We have used three methods\*\* to make the clips tape. The first is the "simple clip"—simply record a few minutes from one program. The second is what could be called the "random zap" method, which results in a glimpse of four things that happen to be on, more or less at the same time, across four channels. The third could be called the "pick and mix" method, which is the result of a more detailed search for a particular range of program. The central point is this: any example of television programming can stimulate useful discussion if it's clear that there is value in every student's contribution. and out of five minutes of watching, there is at least 35 minutes of good work to be done.

\* In Canada, copyright law prohibits taping off-air for classroom use. But through appropriate requests, teachers can often obtain permission especially from public broadcasters. The Think TV Manual (Resources p.36) provides a copyright guide for TV use.

\*\* Lawrence and Mace provide detailed instructions on how to make each of these three types of clips.

**Television Talk and Writing: Practical ideas for literacy and language work with adults** is currently out of print. A copy may be borrowed from The Centre.