



# CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

## Young Citizens & Television Broadcasters

### LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

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## Young Citizens and Television Broadcasters

### Lesson Plan and Activities

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**Grade Level:** 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

**Subject(s):**

- Social Studies: U.S., State, and Local Government; and
- Language Arts: Reading, Writing.

**Duration:** 1-2 class sessions

**Description:** This lesson provides the opportunity for students to survey local broadcast television coverage and to analyze programming broadcast to the public.

**Goals:**

Illinois Learning Standards

*A. Social Science:* 14A, 14B, 14C, 14D; 16A, 16B; and

*B. Language Arts:* 1A, 1B; 3A, 3B, 3C; 4A, 4B.

**Objectives:**

1. Survey broadcast media coverage of local events;
2. Evaluate local news broadcasts for coverage or local issues;
3. Compare coverage of local events by different types of media; and
4. Understand how different types of media influence different people.

**Materials:**

Television guides (internet or print)

**Instruction and Activity**

Start the activity by asking students the following questions:

1. How does a television program get from the studio to a television at home?
  - Cable
  - Satellite
  - Airwaves

Television used to be delivered mainly over the airwaves, bringing programs to the viewing public for free.

2. Who owns the airwaves?

The public owns the airwaves. Think of the airwaves as a national park, that is, a valuable, limited resource owned by the public. Broadcasters are corporations seeking to make a profit

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from using the airwaves to bring their programming to the public, and are required by the government to obtain a license to broadcast on a particular frequency. Television broadcasters receive these licenses for free from the federal government. The federal government thus effectively makes broadcasters ‘public trustees of the airwaves.’ In exchange for being granted the role of guardian of the public airwaves, broadcasters must in turn show a portion of programs that are in the ‘public interest.’

Question: Ask students for examples of programs that would be ‘public interest’ programs.

- News
- Children’s educational programming
- Local programs

Question: Ask now for shows that are not ‘public interest’ programming.

- ‘Glee’ (current sitcom)
- ‘Grey’s Anatomy’ (current drama)

Question: What is the difference? What do students think the phrase ‘public interest’ means?

Clearly there is no exact answer to this question! The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is the government body in charge of giving licenses to broadcasters and monitoring broadcast use of licenses. Depending on the five members of the FCC at any given time (and that composition is always changing) the working definition of ‘public interest’ may change.

3. The definition of ‘public interest’ programming.

A. 1940’s - 1970’s - Regulation. For thirty years, the FCC highly regulated the type of programming put on television by broadcasters. In order to keep their licenses in good standing, broadcasters had to demonstrate to the FCC that they were providing the public with a reasonable mix of the following types of programming:

- Opportunity for local self-expression
- Development of use of local talent
- Licenses’ editorialization
- Political broadcast
- Weather and market reports
- Service to minority groups
- Entertainment
- Children
- Religious
- Educational
- Public affairs
- Sports
- Agricultural
- News

Question: What do students think each of these categories mean?

B. Since the 1980's, the meaning of 'public interest' has changed. Deregulation in the early 1980's led to the FCC adopting a policy which favored less government oversight of broadcasters. This change from strict oversight to less oversight of broadcaster programming led to a change in the definition of 'public interest.' The promotion of 'free market' style governance, meaning broadcasters themselves defined what public interest means, by the FCC led to the notion that in the process of competing for viewers, broadcasters would regulate themselves.

Ask students what they think about this change in policy, from broadcasters being highly regulated in what programs they aired to being deregulated. How has this change impacted programming? Which way do they think is better - highly regulated or deregulated?

### **Activity One**

What stories does the local news cover? Divide class into five groups: ABC, CBS, NBC, WGN, and FOX. Each student should keep a journal about the evening newscasts (early, late, or both) of their designated broadcaster for three nights, documenting the following:

What stories were covered by local news and how long were the segments?

How many stories were about local, statewide and nationwide issues?

Have students write a synopsis of news coverage.

Did they feel like they were informed about their community?

What kind of information did they receive?

What kind of information did they not receive?

How many news stories fit the type of coverage that was mandated in the era of high regulation?

Write a letter to the editor or a letter to broadcasters telling them about your project, your results and your opinion.

Have students read the newspaper for the same days. Were the same stories covered?

### **Activity Two**

Again divide the class into the five broadcast groups. Have students survey the kinds of programs on each station for 24 hours for three days. Students can use newspaper, magazine, or on-line TV guides.

How many of the programs would fit into the program areas required during the 1940's through the 1970's?

How would students classify or group the programs aired by broadcasters today?

If they were television broadcasters, what kind of programs do they think would be 'public interest' programs?

Write a letter to the editor or a letter to broadcasters telling them about your project, your results, and your opinion.

Sample format for a LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Date

Dear Editor:

[A short introduction to your letter. Most effective letters pick one topic, i.e. a particular piece of legislation, an upcoming or recent event, or one aspect of a problem.]

I am disheartened by the current state of public health in Illinois.

[One or two reasons why you think the above is important. Write and rewrite your sentences and pick words with the most meaning.]

[Call to action. For example, ask readers to call their legislators to vote for or against legislation or tell elected officials to change their behavior.]

I hope that Representative \_\_\_\_\_ will support meaningful public health legislation in the General Assembly.

Sincerely,  
Your name  
Title/Affiliation (optional)  
Address  
Phone number