

This reply comment expresses my support for the DMCA exemption request submitted by Renee Hobbs for Media Literacy Education (classes 4c and 4d). I support this because I am a Sociology teacher whose curriculum often touches upon race and the media. I would like to use a series of Hollywood or TV DVD clips in order to illustrate the concept of racial “tokenism” in dramas (as opposed to comedies). This is an incredibly common but under-observed practice of giving white characters the bulk of the screen time, major plot-lines, and moral complexities. At the same time, and in contrast, racial or other minorities are often marginalized: though they may be given characters that are occupationally prestigious or morally superior, they are severely limited in screen time or plot/character development.

In order to effectively present my thesis to my students, I need to utilize **multiple** examples from a variety of TV shows. Some clips might focus on how the characters dress, while other clips might measure the amount of screen time a minority actor receives in contrast to the main character. The main issue I face is that my classes are only 40 minutes long. It may seem trivial to someone outside the educational world, but the challenge of showing multiple clips from more than a single DVD can be insurmountable. If I had the ability to excerpt and contextualize these clips before I went to class, I could accomplish my educational purpose.

Instead, I literally have to go back and forth from the front of the class to the DVD player, switch the DVDs, then wait for the disc to load, watch the unskippable FBI warning, and then navigate the often artistically designed, yet user-unfriendly menus, just to find the exact moment which will illustrate my argument. Accomplishing this task, while managing a classroom of 30 students, is impossible in the space of 40 minutes.

After demonstrating to my students what the above concept of racial tokenism is, I might then ask them to find examples in the kind of media more often consumed by a younger demographic than my own. They would need to follow the same technological process I described above. If my students could extract their own clips from DVDs, ahead of time, then our entire class could easily share and critique each other’s examples using a minimum of precious classroom time.

Unfortunately, the teachers in my school found out the hard way that DVD copy-protection circumvention is illegal. After several staff development sessions teaching faculty how to extract clips from DVDs, classroom teachers enthusiastically embraced the process, and even started designing lessons to allow their students to create media-literate projects. However, once the students got involved, the technology staff was reluctant to support the extra load. Subsequently, the Director of Technology consulted a school lawyer who told him to shut down the entire process. Today at our school, our technology policy prohibits the extraction of DVD clips by either students or staff, to the great frustration of both groups.

Because the sheer amount of media has exploded with the internet and cable, my students are consuming unfiltered information at an unprecedented pace. As an educator, I would argue that it is as much my responsibility to teach my students how to decode these outside “texts” as the books I use inside my classroom. Quoting my own students (with their permission) here are some examples of how using DVD clips has helped them to become more media-literate:

“When writing a paper, teachers always tell students to ‘show, not tell’. A visual gives the actual evidence for students.”
— Julia

“From now on I will look more critically on media and how they attempt to ‘prime’ targets like myself.”
— Walt

“It allows [sic] you to view a variety of material back to back making [sic] it easier to make comparisons”
— Ellery

“Like many other students, I have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). Part of my IEP is that I have difficulty with Auditory Processing. By actually visually seeing the clips I can further understand the viewpoints of my teachers.”
— Danny