

Is it fair and authentic? Representation in online media



This lesson can take up to 80 minutes. It is recommended to break it down into two shorter 40 minute lessons.

Ages 10-12

The lesson has been designed for learners aged 10-12. The “checkpoints” offer differentiation strategies to scale learning as required.

This lesson has been co-created with Dr. Chloe Gordon, Senior Lecturer at the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University, a former primary school teacher who specialises in research and teaching on media literacy, wellbeing, and digital flourishing.

In partnership with:

unicef 
AUSTRALIA
for every child

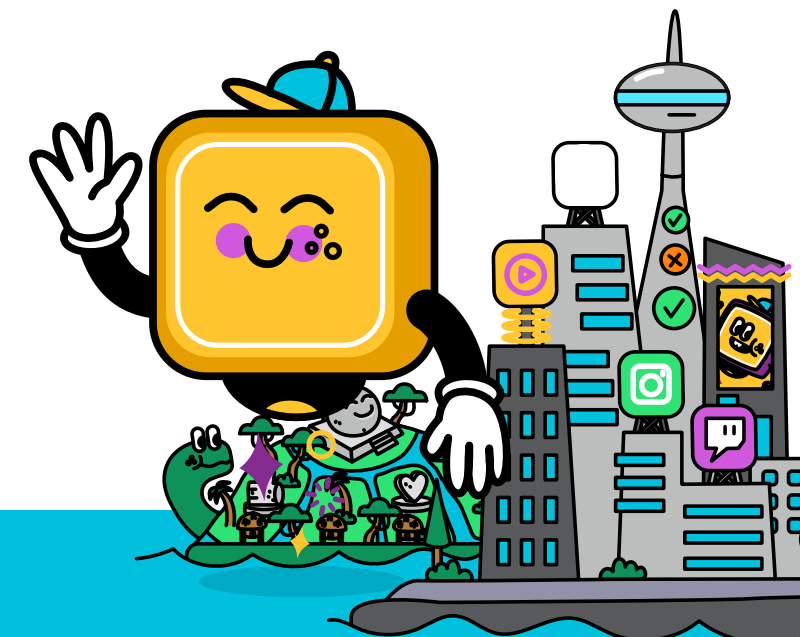


This lesson is part of the eSmart Digital Licence program

By completing just four engaging lessons, including this one, your class can earn their eSmart Digital Licences—signalling their understanding of safe and responsible online behaviour. Start now and guide your learners toward becoming confident and positive digital citizens.



Learn more about the program
be.esmart.org.au/digital-licence/overview



Overview

This lesson empowers learners to critically examine media through the lenses of fairness, authenticity, and inclusion. Using real-world examples like movie posters, book covers, advertisements, and articles, learners will explore the importance of fair representation in media and its connection to child rights.

This lesson aligns with and promotes several principles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It supports the right to freely express one's identity and individuality (Article 13) by encouraging learners to explore and discuss what fair and authentic representation means to them. The lesson also upholds the right to enjoy and share one's culture, language, and religion (Article 30) by analysing how media can reflect and respect diversity in meaningful ways. Additionally, it fosters access to reliable information (Article 17) by guiding learners to critically evaluate media content for fairness and accuracy, helping them become responsible and informed media consumers.

Setup

- Project slides and worksheets onto a central screen, and/or provide digital and hard copies as required.
- Access to computers, tablets, or other devices with internet.
- Access to child-friendly websites for media exploration. Suggested sites:
 - ABC Kids (TV shows, games, and articles)
 - Common Sense Media (reviews of movies, books, and games)
 - The Office of the eSafety Commissioner website.

Learning intentions & success criteria

Learners will:

- Understand the concept of child rights, particularly the right to fair representation in media.
- Explain why fair and authentic representation matters in media.

These intentions are evidenced when learners can:

- Explain the concept of "identity" and how this relates to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Provide at least one example of how media can be fair and authentic.

Educators will:

- Facilitate learner understanding of child rights, focusing on the right to fair and authentic representation in media.
- Guide learners in critically analysing media using the principles of fairness and authenticity.

These intentions are evidenced when educators can:

- Use effective questioning and discussion to help learners connect media representation to child rights, including gender, age, inclusion, and race.
- Observe learners identifying and describing key elements of fairness and authenticity in media.

What makes media representations fair and authentic?

Fair and authentic representations should:

- Include diversity: Show people from different backgrounds, cultures, abilities, genders and experiences.
- Avoid tokenism (e.g. including one person just to "check a box").
- Avoid stereotypes: Represent individuals with complexity, not as one-dimensional characters.
- Avoid overused or harmful portrayals (e.g. gender roles, racial caricatures).
- Accurately reflect real-life experiences: Represent individuals and groups in a way that aligns with their lived experiences.
- Base representations on consultation or collaboration with those being portrayed.
- Promote positive and respectful messaging: Avoid sensationalism or making a group look "less than".
- Highlight unique contributions and perspectives without bias.

How can learners assess fairness and authenticity in media?

Encourage learners to ask these questions:

- Who is being represented?
- Are people of diverse backgrounds shown?
- Is anyone noticeably absent?
- How are they being shown?
- Do they have active, meaningful roles or are they just in the background?
- Are they portrayed with respect and dignity?
- Is the portrayal realistic and nuanced?
- Does the character or depiction feel genuine, or does it rely on clichés?
- Are multiple perspectives within the group represented?
- Who created this content?
- Was the group being represented involved in creating it?
- Could the creators have biases or limited knowledge about the group?

What can learners do if media representations are unfair or inauthentic?

Identify the issue

- What specifically feels unfair or inaccurate? (e.g., stereotypes, misrepresentation, exclusion).

Discuss it

- Encourage learners to share their concerns with a trusted adult, teacher or peer group.
- Use this as an opportunity to learn more about why the representation might be harmful.
- Be open about areas where media has improved and where it still falls short.

Explore alternatives

- Encourage learners to seek out media that does a better job of representing people fairly.
- Discuss positive examples in class to reinforce what good representation looks like.

Take action

Please note: while speaking up about unfair and potentially harmful media representation is important, leaving comments on videos or directly messaging content creators may not be safe. Instead, learners can try the following.

- Report, flag and/or block potentially harmful media content via the platform's mechanisms.
- For older or more advanced students, consider a class project where they write a letter to content creators or campaign for better representation online.

1

Introduction to child rights and media representation

Help learners think about their identity and fair representation.

The internet is like a mirror that should reflect everyone's unique stories. But sometimes, it doesn't show everyone fairly. Today, we'll talk about what makes representation fair and why it's important to include and value everyone.

Ask (think/pair/share or individually)

If someone told your story online, what are four things you'd want them to get right? Would it be about your hobbies, family, culture, or something special about you?

Once learners have written down four things, share and discuss:

- Why is it important to show that part of you?

Define identity

Explain that all of the things they listed form an important part of their own identity.

Come up with a class definition of the term and discuss: Do we have just one identity, or multiple? And, how would it feel for those parts of us to be shown unfairly or inauthentically?



Explain child rights and link to fairness in media representation.

Introduce child rights using the UNICEF Australia poster provided.

- Child rights protect every child and ensure fairness. One right is to share your culture, language and religion.

Ask (think/pair/share or individually)

Which rights could be affected by unfair or inaccurate representation online? Focus on Article 30: "You have the right to share your culture, language, and religion."

Brainstorm

- Why is it important to share your culture, language or religion?
- How can kids share these things online?
- How can media companies or organisations do better to make things fair and authentic?

Checkpoint: Make it work for everyone

Differentiate the lesson by assessing the discussion. Modify instruction as appropriate, based on whether learners can:

- Identify key concepts: fairness, authenticity, and child rights.
- Connect rights to media representation.

Options:

- Play the video "What are Child Rights?" by UNICEF Australia to help unpack the concept of child rights.
- Revisit key terms using simple examples (e.g. fair = making sure everyone gets a turn in a game).
- Share specific examples of media that highlight or neglect diverse perspectives.

2

Media analysis

Discuss

When we look at media, there are different ways we can think about fairness and authenticity. These are like lenses that help us see things in a certain way. Here are four examples:

- Gender: Are boys and girls shown in different roles? Are they treated equally?
- Age: Are kids, teens, and adults all included? Are older people shown as important too?
- Inclusion: Are people with disabilities or from different backgrounds included? Are they shown respectfully?
- Culture: Are different cultural backgrounds shown? Are they represented accurately? Were people from those cultures involved in writing or creating media about it?

Find media (think/pair/share or individually)

Using a tablet or computer, encourage learners to explore websites like ABC Kids, Common Sense Media or National Geographic Kids to find a piece of media that interests them. This could be a movie poster, book cover, advertisement or article. Learners can pick something that stands out as a good or bad example of fairness and authenticity. They might consider things like gender balance, diversity and inclusion.

Examples

- Movie Posters: Do they include different types of people?
- Toy advertisements: Is there an equal focus on boys and girls? Could it include kids with disabilities?
- Articles about different cultures: Does the article include voices or perspectives from those communities?

Fill in the media analysis worksheet (Slide 6)

Once completed, each pair/group shares their example and findings. Discuss common patterns:

- Were there examples of good and fair representation?
- Are certain groups frequently left out or misrepresented?
- What makes some examples better than others?

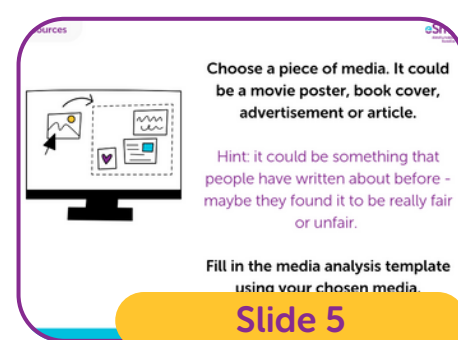
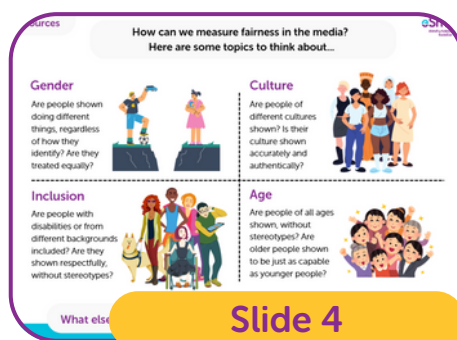
Checkpoint: Check understanding

Observe activity participation. Modify instruction if learners struggle to:

- Locate examples of media that represent people, groups, or cultures.
- Articulate why a representation feels fair or unfair.

Options:

- Simplify the task by pre-selecting media examples and focusing on only one lens for them to consider in their media analysis.
- Pair learners strategically to enable peer knowledge transfer.
- Stretch: Visit a site such as [ABC News Fact Check](#) or [Reuters Fact Check](#) to find examples of biased or stereotypical misinformation and discuss.



3

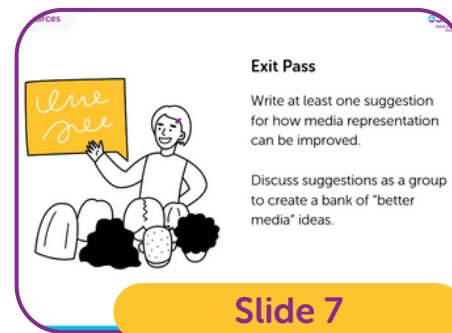
Exit pass

In-class activity or set as homework.

Create a “Better Media Ideas” board:

Use sticky notes or a digital tool to compile ideas for improving media representation. Each learner should have at least one suggestion. Learners can take the prompt home to parents, carers, or a trusted adult so they can also contribute a suggestion to the discussion.

Prompt: “What should media creators do to make representations fair and authentic?”



Slide 7

Checkpoint: Learning intentions & success criteria

Assess the “Exit pass” to ensure learners have met the following success criteria:

Explain the concept of “identity” and how this relates to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Provide at least one example of how media can be fair and authentic.

Next steps

If some learners didn’t meet the criteria, do the “Top-up” activity in the following section. Discussion about the lesson’s themes can be continued at home, by setting the extension task as homework.

Important Note

If this lesson is part of the eSmart Digital Licence, you’ll need to ensure that all learners have met the success criteria before accessing the Digital Licences.

4

(Optional) Top-up or extend the lesson

Top-up the lesson

For learners who need more help meeting the learning intentions & success criteria.



Slide 8

Extend the lesson

For learners who have met the learning intentions & success criteria and need a bit more of a challenge.

Support learners to complete the word finder worksheet (Slide 8) to enhance their understanding of key words and concepts. This activity can be done throughout the lesson as new terms come up. Alternatively, it can be used as an additional activity after the lesson to reinforce understanding.

Have learners create their own inclusive media poster, book cover, or ad as a follow-up activity using the “Better Media Ideas” board in the Exit Pass for inspiration.

If someone told your story, what are four things you would want them to get right?

Why is it important to show these parts of you?





All of these things (and more) form part of our

Identity

Do we have just one identity? Or many identities?



Why is it important
that we are
represented fairly,
and authentically?

Fair

Treating everyone in a
way that is right and
respectful.

Authentic

Being real and true,
not fake or pretending

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Just like adults, children have rights too!
No matter who you are or where you live, these rights belong to every child in the world.

- #1 Every child under the age of 18 has all of these rights
- #2 You have the right to be treated fairly by everyone
- #3 Adults should do what's best for you
- #4 Governments should support these rights
- #5 Your family will help you with your rights
- #6 You have the right to live and grow
- #7 You have the right to have a name, to belong to a country and know your family
- #8 You have the right to have your own identity
- #9 You have the right to live with your family unless it isn't safe
- #10 You have the right to see your parents if they live in another country
- #11 You have the right to be protected from kidnapping
- #12-13 You have the right to share your ideas and be listened to on things that impact you
- #14 You have the right to think for yourself
- #15 You have the right to choose your friends
- #16 You have the right to privacy
- #17 You have the right to access safe and reliable information
- #18 Your parents or guardians should always consider what is best for you
- #19 You should be cared for and protected from harm
- #20-21 You have the right to be cared for if you do not live with your parents
- #22 You have the right to help and protection if you are a refugee
- #23 You have the right to special help if you need it
- #24 You have the right to care when you are sick and to live in a healthy environment
- #25 If you can't live at home, where you live should be checked regularly to see if it's the best place to be
- #26 Governments should provide support if you need it to keep you healthy and safe
- #27 You have the right to food, clothes to wear and a safe place to live
- #28 You have the right to go to school and to learn
- #29 You have the right to learn to be the best you can
- #30 You have the right to share your culture, language and religion
- #31 You have the right to play and rest
- #32 You have the right to not do unsafe work
- #33 You have the right to be kept safe from dangerous things
- #34 You have the right to never be hurt by others
- #35 You can not be kidnapped or sold
- #36 You have the right not to be exploited
- #37 You have the right to be treated fairly, even if you break the law
- #38 You have the right to be protected during war
- #39 You have the right to special help if you are hurt by war
- #40 If you break the law, you have the right to access legal help
- #41 You should enjoy the protection of any Australian law that protects you better than these rights
- #42 You have the right to know your rights
- #43-54 Governments, the United Nations and organisations must work together to make sure your rights are protected

unicef AUSTRALIA for every child

Which rights could be affected by unfair or inauthentic representation online?

Download a copy of the poster from the Resources section of the lesson page, or visit [UNICEF Australia](https://www.unicef.org/australia)

How can we measure fairness in the media? Here are some topics to think about...

Gender

Are people shown doing different things, regardless of how they identify? Are they treated equally?



Culture

Are people of different cultures shown? Is their culture shown accurately and authentically?



Inclusion

Are people with disabilities or from different backgrounds included? Are they shown respectfully, without stereotypes?



Age

Are people of all ages shown, without stereotypes? Are older people shown to be just as capable as younger people?

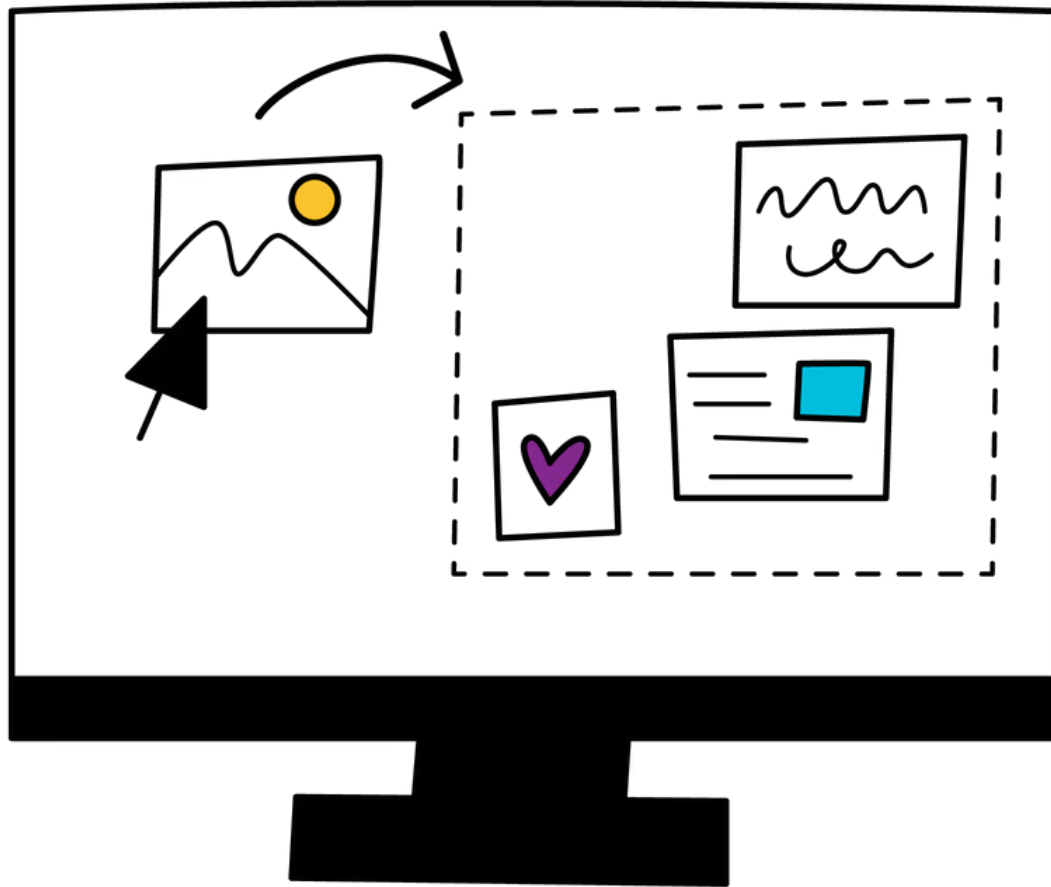


What else could we look for, to make sure media is fair and authentic?

Choose a piece of media. It could be a movie poster, book cover, advertisement or article.

Hint: it could be something that people have written about before - maybe they found it to be really fair or unfair.

Fill in the media analysis template using your chosen media.



Chosen media



Explain your choice

Filter(s)

Examples: Gender, culture, age, inclusion (or, choose your own).

Explain what you have found.

Is it fair?



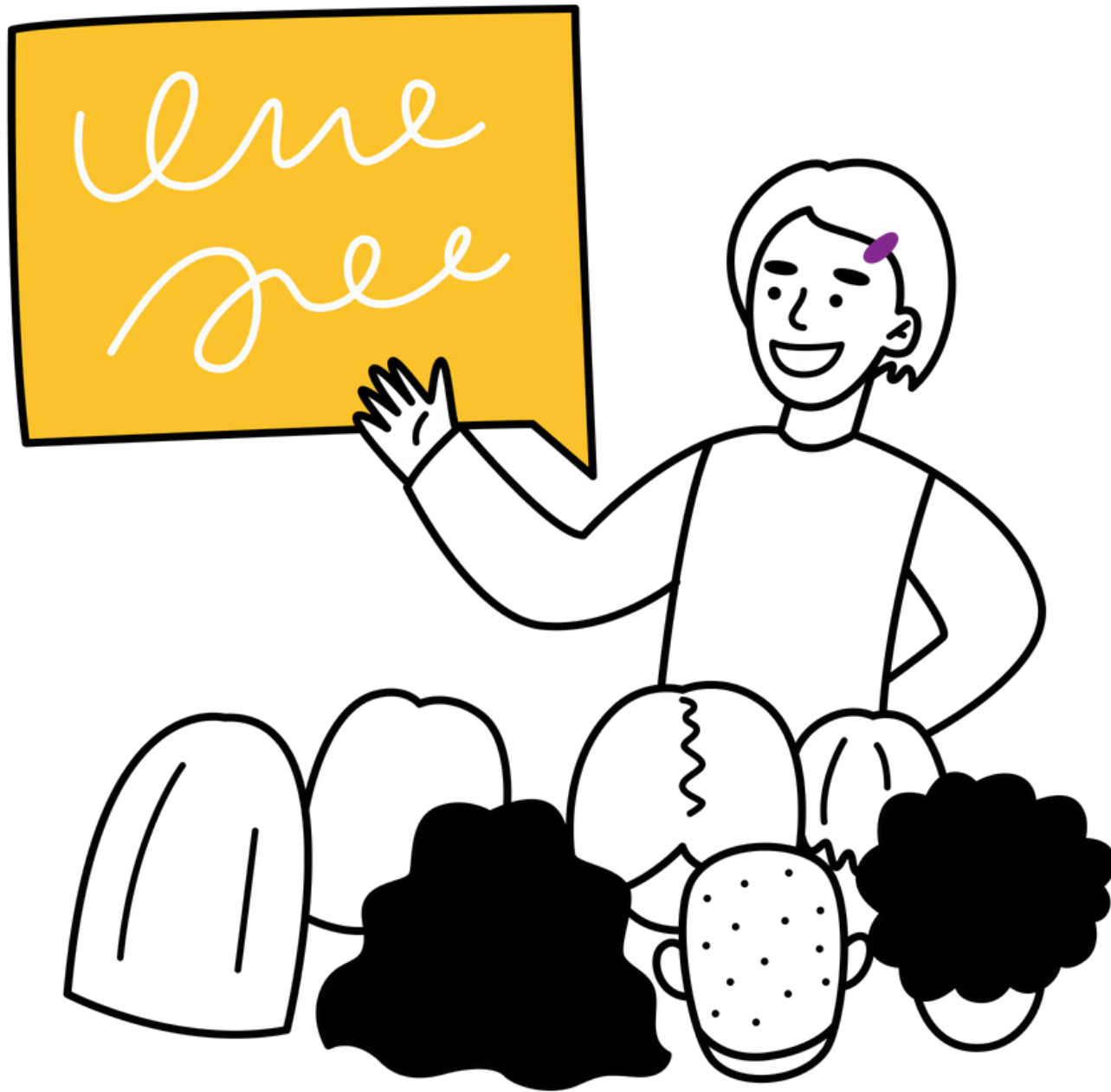
Explain why the representation is fair or unfair:

Exit Pass

What should media creators do to make representations fair and authentic?

Write at least one suggestion for how media representation can be improved.

Discuss suggestions as a group to create a bank of “better media” ideas.



N M N M W Q S L K G I M B P Z
 A F R L F A I R N E S S S R W
 G S E O A I I T F Y C H Y N J
 E M P A M R N K P Y L G S I D
 M Q R Z U H V C E K G D F Z O
 V F E U M T T J L E W J W X A
 Z J S Q J Z H J N U G S A X W
 S H E Y V H K E B V S D C I L
 A E N E I H I S N Y H I U D G
 O G T C C F H N K T P I O E C
 F D A L D K P Z Y V I G C N O
 I A T V A I N Q L G Q C N T Y
 D P I L R J B W Y T X M I I X
 S W O G F Y B V I R Y C L T I
 M I N W G X A E B M Z E X Y Y

Write the words under their correct definition.

Treating everyone the same way, giving everyone an equal chance, and making sure no one is left out or treated unfairly.

Being true to yourself, not pretending to be someone else, and being honest about who you are.

Who you are, including your values, interests, culture, and what makes you unique. It's what makes you, you.

Showing different people, ideas, or groups in a way that reflects who they really are and makes them feel valued.

Making sure everyone is included, accepted, and able to join in, no matter what their background or differences are.

Authenticity
Fairness

Inclusion
Representation

Identity



Stretch activity: Use each word you have found in a sentence. Write your sentences and explain them to a helper or friend.

Australian Curriculum (Version 9.0): Years 5 & 6



Year 5: English

AC9E5LA01: Understand that language is selected for social contexts and that it helps to signal social roles and relationships.

AC9E5LA02: Understand how to move beyond making bare assertions by taking account of differing ideas or opinions and authoritative sources.

AC9E5LA07: Explain how the sequence of images in print, digital and film texts has an effect on meaning.

AC9E5LY02: Use appropriate interaction skills including paraphrasing and questioning to clarify meaning, make connections to own experience, and present and justify an opinion or idea.

AC9E5LY03: Explain characteristic features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text.

AC9E5LY05: Use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning to evaluate information and ideas.

Year 6: English

AC9E6LA02: Understand the uses of objective and subjective language, and identify bias.

AC9E6LA07: Identify and explain how images, figures, tables, diagrams, maps and graphs contribute to meaning.

AC9E6LY01: Examine texts including media texts that represent ideas and events, and identify how they reflect the context in which they were created.

AC9E6LY02: Use interaction skills and awareness of formality when paraphrasing, questioning, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, and sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions.

AC9E6LY03: Analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text, and engage and influence audiences.

AC9E6LY05: Use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning, and to connect and compare content from a variety of sources.

Years 5 & 6: Health and Physical Education

AC9HP6P01: Explain how identities can be influenced by people and places, and how we can create positive self-identities.

AC9HP6P03: Investigate how the portrayal of societal roles and responsibilities can be influenced by gender stereotypes.

AC9HP6P04: Describe and demonstrate how respect and empathy can be expressed to positively influence relationships.

AC9HP6P08: Analyse and rehearse protective behaviours and help-seeking strategies that can be used in a range of online and offline situations.

AC9HP6P10: Analyse how behaviours influence the health, safety, relationships and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Years 5 & 6: Media Arts

AC9AMA6E01: Explore ways that media languages and media technologies are used in media arts works and practices across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts.

My Time, Our Place

Outcome 1: Children and young people have a strong sense of identity.

Children learn to understand their role in digital spaces and how they interact with others safely and respectfully.

This is evident when children:

- Develop awareness of their personal boundaries online and demonstrate respect for the boundaries of others.
- Explore ways to protect their identity and privacy in digital environments.

Outcome 2: Children and young people are connected with and contribute to their world.

Children learn about the impact of their actions in online communities and how to engage positively.

This is evident when children:

- Recognise the importance of fair and authentic interactions in online games and communities.
- Identify ways to contribute safely and responsibly to shared digital spaces.

CASEL Framework

Social awareness

The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathise with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. This includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behaviour in different settings, and recognise family, school, and community resources and supports.

Bournemouth University

Theory of Change

Awareness

Media literacy enables people to have a critical awareness of how media and information represent people, events, issues and places. On a larger scale, media literacy helps us to understand how the media environment we are engaging with is constructed, for example in terms of how diverse it is, who owns or controls different media sources and how digital and social media is governed, designed and manipulated. Media literacy also involves critical awareness about the role of data and algorithms in everyday life and with regard to citizenship, education, work and health.

National Association of Media Literacy Education (NAMLE)

Core Principle 1

1.2: Media Literacy Education (MLE) intersects with other literacies, such as information, digital, and social-emotional literacies.

1.4 MLE values inquiry of contemporary media experiences that are culturally relevant in both the learning environment and the everyday lives of learners.

Core Principle 2

2.1 MLE teaches that all media experiences are constructed and prepares people to engage in critical analysis and reflection of these experiences.

2.3 MLE helps learners identify biases within their own and others' media experiences.

Core Principle 9

9.3: MLE amplifies historically marginalised voices by including opportunities to examine cross-cultural media and international perspectives.

9.4: MLE explores issues of representations such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and socio-economic status.