

**A C M E**  
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# Food For Thought:

Challenging Big Food/Media's Monopoly  
Over Our Media Culture



“Moopheus” image from “The Meatrix” at [www.themeatrix.com](http://www.themeatrix.com)

## Overview

You know the old saying – “you are what you eat”? Many Americans don’t give much thought to the food and drink we consume daily. We are busy and over-extended – trying to work (to put food on the table, remember?), pay our bills, raise our families, and find some time in our days for rest and re-creation. We are overwhelmed with too much information. And, we are conditioned to accept certain ways of thinking about our relationship to food, a value system shaped by family, habit tradition, and the endless “food-related” stories told by a corporately-owned media culture supported by the advertising, marketing, and public relations power of giant multinational food-producing corporations (Think McDonald’s sponsoring of “Sesame Street,” or Archer Daniels Midland’s underwriting of National Public Radio.)

Americans often don’t consider what “cheap food” means to the whole agricultural system. Factory produced, highly processed, inexpensive food in our grocery stores means below-poverty income levels for family farmers across the U.S., and, as global trade expands, across the world. Just as some citizens have become more aware of what it means for young workers in Asian countries when we buy a pair of Nikes, consciousness is being raised around what cheap meat, milk, and grain means for our farmers and farm workers. The global food supply is becoming horizontally and vertically integrated in much the same way as the global media is, and studying agricultural issues can open windows through which to view media consolidation. Knowledge is power. Even one simple fact – i.e. one out of every ten dollars American consumers spend on food goes to one giant corporation (tobacco giant Altria – formerly Philip Morris) – can begin to shift thinking about the importance of designing and supporting alternatives to our current food production, distribution and consumption patterns.

“Food For Thought” is an ACME-created collection of activities and resources designed to use media literacy education – teaching ourselves how to access, analyze, evaluate and produce media - to help us raise important questions about our relationship to our food. “Food For Thought” is especially interested in focusing on how powerful media players, including large multi-national corporations, and large corporate agribusiness organizations use our media systems to persuade us to adopt certain ways of thinking, buying, and eating that run counter to our long-term concerns: health, wealth, wisdom, and sustainability. “Food For Thought” also seeks to offer viable food-based alternatives and grassroots

solutions to challenge and change the monopoly Big Food/Big Media has over our “eating culture.”

## **Food For Thought: A Sampling Of Classroom Activities**

We encourage you to adapt these activities to suit your own purposes. We also suggest proceeding with sensitivity, as our relationship to our food is an incredibly personal one. Have fun, exercise respect for others, and learn much!

*Food For Thought:* Here are some introductory activities you may consider doing with students to begin asking questions about our relationship to food. Have students make a list of their favorite foods together. Then, have them each select one favorite food item, and write about why it is their favorite food. Encourage them to talk in personal terms. Share their stories with each other.

Follow this up with some fun investigative research, including questions like:

- Who makes their favorite food?
- Where is this food made?
- Who grows the ingredients, and where are they grown?
- Who is the food’s “processor”?
- If produce, how much of the retail dollar goes back to the farmer?
- How is the food produced, packaged and transported to market?
- How is this food advertised, if at all?
- Who pays to advertise for this food?
- What is this food item’s nutritional content?
- How does this nutritional content compare to the amount of nutrients added to the soil where the food is grown?
- How many calories of energy are expended for each food calorie produced?

Can students chart, graph or creatively present any or all of this information for their class or community? All of the above questions

and activities are fun ways to begin raising questions about why we eat the kinds of foods we eat.

*Media Analysis:* Have students tape Saturday morning or prime time television and bring in various TV commercials, or collect magazine ads from magazines they read or look at. Then, using the QUESTIONING MEDIA and SPECIFIC PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES handouts, teach students how to analyze (or “deconstruct”) various media examples related to food – print advertisements, commercials, news articles, editorials, films, books, and the like. This requires continual practice and will provide students with a life-long set of media literacy skills.

*Book Review:* Have students select age-appropriate books related to media and food, and write book reviews on what they learned from reading different chapters or all of the book. Present the book reviews in class as a formal presentation, or tape them as a “radio spot” for playing in other classrooms or on community radio.

*Film Screening:* Have students view one of the films below, or any other film related to “media and food,” and then discuss the film in class, drawing on our QUESTIONING MEDIA principles and related discussions.

*Web Research:* Have students find one web site related to food – perhaps it is a local farm’s web site, or Coca Cola’s home page, or Archer Daniels Midland’s URL – and apply the QUESTIONING MEDIA principles to a close analysis of it. Begin to build a list of food-related web sites to draw on in considering the relationship between media and food.

*Food Survey:* Deputize your students to be “food” reporters. Together, develop a short list of questions related to “media and food,” and have students go out into their classrooms, cafeterias, and communities to find out why people eat what they eat. If possible, have students bring clipboards and/or video cameras when they interview. Then, share your findings and develop some sort of a chart, graph, Power Point, or iMovie presentation to share with the larger community.

*Cereal Box Design:* A fabulous media production activity! Collect old cereal boxes, and then have students design their own brand of cereal by decorating a box with construction paper, logos, saying, and the like. Throw down a challenge – design TWO cereal brands – one that is for a “hyper-sugary” cereal and one that is for a “healthy” cereal. (This will lead to a conversation about what makes a cereal healthy or unhealthy.) OR one that is “corporate” and one that is “local” – what local products could be used to make a cereal, and how would the student market it? This activity can be adapted to create ANY food-related piece of media or package in student-centered small groups. When the boxes are done, have each group present their boxes to the rest of the class, and talk about the various media techniques they used to make the cereal seem appealing. Take photographs of your students with their boxes! Create a digital slide show! Display the boxes in your school hallway!

*Farm Tour:* Take students on a tour of a local farm or farmer’s market. Farmers are busy people, but see if you can arrange a conversation with a farmer about some of the challenges and rewards farming presents. There are many opportunities for this across the country. In Vermont, there is the FEED program, run through NOFA VT that works with farmers and educators to do just this. Similar programs exist in other states as well.

*Fast Food Franchise Tour:* Take students on a tour of a local fast food franchise. Develop some questions to ask before you go, and have students chart their observations as you tour. Afterwards, discuss their findings. Follow up with deeper questions: Does our fast food culture condition us to desire the same kinds of food throughout the year, instead of “eating with the seasons”? What are the trade-offs of this kind of relationship to food?

*Market Mission:* Have students “tour” their school cafeteria or community grocery store. Together, develop a set of questions to answer as they tour. How much of the available food is local? Organic? (The changing definition of what makes a food “organic” makes for fascinating conversation.) How much of the food is owned by large corporations? How much of the food is purchased locally? Regionally? How is the food packaged? How much advertising and

product placement (shelf space, which products get which shelf locations in a grocery store, is fascinating) is present?

Compare the perimeter of the store to the aisles – whole food vs. processed food. Also, ask store manager how shelf space is allocated. What is the cost to the wholesaler? Note corporate advertisements in store and how displays are made to highlight these items (look at the end caps, especially). Find some products that have a farm name in their label or have a farmer's picture on the package (or a farm animal). See who is actually selling this product, where are they located? Are they a corporation or a farm? Are any farmers benefiting from the way this product is marketed?

*Exploring The "Organic" Label's History:* "Organic" is a process based, marketing designation. A great activity for older students would be to explore the history behind *why* organic standards were first implemented and how large agricultural corporations are trying to change the standards to fit their model of agriculture. Have students find news items about these issues in magazines, trade press, and major newspapers (or local ones, for that matter).

*Student Debate:* Select a "media and food" related debate question – "Should McDonald's be allowed to sponsor "Sesame Street" or other programs for young children?" – and have students research, write, and debate the question. This would be an interesting debate to conduct after reading *Fast Food Nation*. Another question: Does the "Got Milk?" campaign help dairy farmers? It would be interesting for students to learn how check-offs, which all farmers pay, are funneled to Big Agricultural corporations to run multimedia advertising campaigns to influence consumer buying decisions. Example: The pork producers and the beef producers just sued over the pork and beef check-offs because they were actually hurting family farmers. The case was recently heard in the Supreme Court, and a decision is pending. Students could find many articles on this case and the 10-year struggle these farmers have been through to get to this point.

*Community Information Night:* Sponsor a "Food For Thought" community information night, and invite school and community members to an informal night of presentations, dialogue, and fun around food-related topics. Show clips of various "food related

media,” including student work! Invite local farms and restaurants to help co-sponsor the event and provide free or low-cost food items to sample! Have students create information sheets on various “media and food” related topics! Have fun and educate each other!

## **Food For Thought: A Sampling Of Print-Based Resources**

*Born To Buy* by Juliet Schor (2004). Sociologist takes a hard look at the marketing relationship between large multinational corporations and our kids. Revelatory.

*Chelsea Green Press* ([www.chelseagreen.com](http://www.chelseagreen.com)). This Vermont-based independent publishing house prints books about sustainable living, agriculture, and health.

*Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover Of Childhood* by Susan Linn (2004). Center for Commercial-Free Childhood director examines how our corporately-owned media culture targets kids as consumers from birth through adolescence. Eye-opening.

*Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser (2003). *Rolling Stone* journalist reveals the “dark side” of the fast food industry in this well-written, comprehensive and engrossing investigative book, which is a “must-read” for all Americans.

*Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy Of Industrial Agriculture* by Andrew Kimbrell (2002). Powerful examination of the failures accompanying our dominant agricultural paradigm.

*FedCo*. This Maine-based seed company provides an exhaustive and humorous catalogue of garden seeds, including organic and heirloom varieties, for purchase.

*Food Politics: How The Food Industry Influences Nutrition And Health* by Marion Nestle (2002). This insider’s account explores the relationship between public health, government policy and corporate lobbying.

*Gene Traders: Biotechnology, World Trade, and the Globalization of Hunger*, edited by Brian Tokar (2004). A short and comprehensive examination of the trade-offs involved in the production and use of

genetically-modified foods. This little book is an excellent resource for high school and college classrooms.

*Inside The Bottle: An Expose of the Bottled Water Industry* by Tony Clarke (2005). An in-depth investigative look at the nature of bottled water corporations. Eye-opening!

*Kids Can Make A Difference: Finding Solutions to Hunger* by Stephanie Kempf (2001). Engaging classroom lessons for middle and high school students on the roots causes of and real solutions to domestic and international hunger. A fine teaching resource!

*Mad Cow USA: Could The Nightmare Happen Here?* by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton (1999). Eye-opening book that looks at the dangers “mad cow disease” poses to the U.S. food supply.

*Mothering* magazine ([www.mothering.com](http://www.mothering.com)). This New Mexico-based bi-monthly regularly publishes courageous articles related to food, nutrition, and health.

*Reversing Addiction*. Produced by the New Mexico Media Literacy Project ([www.nmmlp.org](http://www.nmmlp.org)), this CD-ROM features six different multimedia presentations that include dozens of TV, movie and video clips teachers can use to teach about commercialism, fast food, substance abuse, and obesity-related issues.

*Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies About The Safety of the Genetically Engineered Foods You’re Eating* by Jeffrey Smith (2003). This book’s title says it all. A well-researched and engaging read for an older audience.

*Understanding Media*. Produced by the New Mexico Media Literacy Project ([www.nmmlp.org](http://www.nmmlp.org)) , this ground-breaking CD-ROM introduces basic media literacy education concepts connected to dozens of Big Food-related media issues, including advertising, marketing, and sustainability.

*Worldwatch Institute*. This non-partisan think tank regularly reports on sustainability and “the state of the world” in their magazines and annual report.

## **Food For Thought: A Sampling Of Useful Web Sites**

*Action Coalition for Media Education*

<http://www.acmecoalition.org>

This continental coalition of organizations champions critical media literacy education, independent media production, and grassroots media reform and justice initiatives.

*Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood*

[www.commercialexploitation.org](http://www.commercialexploitation.org)

A national coalition of health care professionals, educators, advocacy groups and concerned parents who counter the harmful effects of marketing to children through action, advocacy, education, research, and collaboration among organizations and individuals who care about children. Download their FREE “marketing to kids” Fact Sheets!

*Center for Science In The Public Interest*

[www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/](http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/)

Fabulous resource for communities and classrooms interested in transforming their relationship to food, including their “School Foods Tool Kit.”

*Commercial Alert*

<http://www.commercialalert.org>

This non-profit’s mission is to keep the commercial culture within its proper sphere, and to prevent it from exploiting children and subverting the higher values of family, community, environmental integrity and democracy.

*The Costs of Cheap Food*

[http://www.iatp.org/enviroObs/library/uploadedfiles/Costs\\_of\\_Cheap\\_Food\\_The.pdf](http://www.iatp.org/enviroObs/library/uploadedfiles/Costs_of_Cheap_Food_The.pdf)

As Americans, we are told that cheap and abundant food is the backbone of a thriving economy. The fact is that cheap

food often comes with trade-offs that are often not reflected in the supermarket price tag. Find out more here.

*Crop Choice*

[www.cropchoice.com](http://www.cropchoice.com)

An alternative news source for agriculture issues.

*Factory Farm Bibliography*

<http://www.factoryfarm.org/resources/books/>

This web site provides a wide array of print resources related to factory farming.

*Farm Aid*

[www.farmaid.org](http://www.farmaid.org)

This is a useful site for challenging factory farms, and supporting small organic and family owned farms. Willie Nelson's twenty-year effort has raised millions of dollars annually to keep small farmers on their land and educate the public on food safety issues.

*Food Project, Boston*

[www.foodproject.org](http://www.foodproject.org)

A youth-focused agricultural organization whose mission is "to grow a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a sustainable food system."

*Farm Bureau*

<http://www.ageducate.org/>

Farm Bureau "educational" website features "ag mags" for kids sponsored by corporate agribusiness. Also has a "teachers toolbox."

*Farms as Factories*

[http://www.humaneteen.org/farms\\_as\\_factories/default.asp](http://www.humaneteen.org/farms_as_factories/default.asp)

Written for high-school students and their teachers, *Farms as Factories* explores the problems associated with modern methods of animal agriculture. Complete with recent statistics and color photographs, this 32-page, full color booklet also contains a wealth of critical-thinking questions, writing assignments, citizenship projects, and meaningful activities appropriate for student activists or animal protection clubs. Included is an extensive list of resources.

*Global Agrimedia*

<http://global.agrimedia.com/go.php?sid=e63cde3330dc844621227637b6460bd9>

Bringing you agribusiness publications from around the globe, with a bookstore for publications about feed, grain, potatoes and much more, and a web directory that offers many useful links to agricultural resources.

*IATP's Agribusiness Center*

<http://www.agribusinesscenter.org/>

An online resource for activists, academics, and citizens housing a clearinghouse of information on the impacts of agribusiness firms on consumers, investors, farmers, workers, and the environment. Also provides links and information on organizations and campaigns around the world that are working to hold agri-food companies accountable for their actions and to promote more sustainable food systems.

*Is Your Meat Fit To Eat?*

[http://www.factoryfarm.org/docs/GFFP\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.factoryfarm.org/docs/GFFP_Brochure.pdf)

This fact sheet answers the basic questions about factory farms and their impact on the environment, human health, animal welfare, and family farms. Includes information on sustainable solutions and how to take action. Can be freely printed or quoted as long as the GRACE Factory Farm Project is credited.

*Massachusetts Public Health Association*

[www.mphaweb.org](http://www.mphaweb.org)

Offers a "Community Action To Change School Food Policy" Organizing Kit. Very useful!

*The Meatrix*

<http://www.themeatrix.com>

Narrated by a well-dressed bovine named "Moopheus," this short and clever Flash animation movie exposes the trade-offs embedded in the corporate meat industry, and has an excellent "activism" resource and links collection.

*National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service*

<http://www.attra.ncat.org>

An information service featuring up-to-date news on sustainable agriculture and organic farming.

*New Farm Network*

[www.newfarm.org](http://www.newfarm.org)

This is a great site for farmers to get the latest updates on new farming trends, organic farming nationwide, updated news, laws, and resources for farming environmentally.

*Organic Consumers Network*

[www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org)

The best site for finding out the latest news on organic farming, products, organic foods in schools, legislative action, environmental concerns, and organizations to support.

*Whole Hog Website*

[http://checc.sph.unc.edu/rooms/school/whole\\_hog/index.htm](http://checc.sph.unc.edu/rooms/school/whole_hog/index.htm)

## **Food For Thought: A Sampling Of Useful Films and Videos**

### **Deconstructing Supper (2002) - 47 minutes**

[www.bullfrogfilms.com /Bullfrog Videos/1-800-542-2164](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/Bullfrog_Videos/1-800-542-2164)

Canadian chef John Bishop travels from his restaurant to England and India, talking with scientists and activists about GMO issues and the food supply. Good production and graphics.

### **Fed Up (2003) - 58 minutes**

[www.wholesomegoodness.org](http://www.wholesomegoodness.org) / 415-339-7866

Excellent look at genetic engineering, industrial and sustainable agricultures, including use of old TV and film clips.

### **Food for Thought (YEAR) - 30 minutes**

[www.videoproject.net](http://www.videoproject.net) / 1-800-4PLANET

This video contains interviews with half a dozen people, including farmers and activists, and provides an informative introduction to GMO issues, with engaging production and graphics.

### **The Genetic Takeover (1999) - 52 minutes**

[www.NFB.CA](http://www.NFB.CA) (Nat'l. Film Board) / 1-800-542-2164

This film provides a solid, informative, critical look at GMOs with good talking head information. Some previous knowledge about GMO issues would be useful for audiences.

### **Global Banquet: Politics of Food (2001) - 50 minutes**

[www.olddogdocumentaries.com/vid\\_gb.html](http://www.olddogdocumentaries.com/vid_gb.html) /212-929-9557

Divided into two 25-minute segments. Deals with a variety of food issues: trans-nationals, sustainability, family farms, GMOs, pesticides and animal cruelty are addressed. GMOs are only a small part of the video, but it is very good for putting many of these issues in context.

### **Globalization and Nature (2001) - 30 minutes**

[www.envirovideo.com](http://www.envirovideo.com) / 1-800-ECO-TV46

Excellent discussion of food issues with a lot on GMOs, with a broader perspective on related subjects. Vandana Shiva ties together diverse threads together well.

**Grains of Truth (2001) - 12 minutes**

[www.greenpeaceusa.org](http://www.greenpeaceusa.org)

This film features interviews with farmers, primarily about how GMOs affect their livelihood. Good introduction for lay audience.

**Killing Seeds (2002) - 45 minutes**

[www.denkmal-film.com](http://www.denkmal-film.com)

Focus on Canadian farmer Percy Schmeiser and his battle with Monsanto. Good presentation of how GMO issues impact farmers.

**Life Out Of Control (2004) – 90 minutes**

[www.denkmal-film.com](http://www.denkmal-film.com)

Provocative and wide-ranging exploration of the “bioengineering revolution.”

**Super Size Me (2004) – 90 minutes**

[www.supersizeme.com](http://www.supersizeme.com)

Director Morgan Spurlock puts his body on the line, literally, in this humorous and provocative look at the fast food industry.

**Think Globally, Eat Locally (2003) – 27 minutes**

[www.greenworks.tv/tvshow/](http://www.greenworks.tv/tvshow/)

This GreenWorks video walks viewers through an explanation of why supporting local food alternatives makes sense.

**Toxic Sludge Is Good For You (2002) – 50 minutes**

[www.mediaed.org](http://www.mediaed.org)

An in-depth look at the public relations industry and the various techniques the PR industry uses to construct “realities” that aren’t necessarily true, with an excellent focus on a variety of food and sustainability issues.

**The True Cost of Food (2004) – 14 minutes**

[www.truecostoffood.org](http://www.truecostoffood.org)

This short animated video explores the true costs of food in an entertaining and provocative way.

**Privatizing the World (2003) - 52 minutes**

[www.isca@videotron.CA](http://www.isca@videotron.CA) / 1-514-273-9795

Focuses on the relationship between corporate capitalism and the “public commons.”

## **Food For Thought: A Sampling of Vermont-Based “Sustainable Food” Resources**

(If you know of a Vermont resource not listed here, please contact ACMEVermont at <http://www.acmevermont.org> and we will add it!)

American Flatbread

<http://www.americanflatbread.com>

The nationally-renowned pizza production company seeks to re-define American consumers' relationship to food through a remarkable blend of the pragmatic and philosophical.

Center For Whole Communities ([www.wholecommunities.org](http://www.wholecommunities.org))

Located in Mad River Valley, this farm and retreat center offers a wide variety of workshops and retreats on issues related to food, agriculture, land conservation, and sustainability.

Chelsea Green Press ([www.chelseagreen.com](http://www.chelseagreen.com))

Based in White River Junction, this independent press publishes a variety of resources on food, agriculture, and sustainability.

Farmer's Diner ([www.farmersdiner.com](http://www.farmersdiner.com))

Tod Murphy's Barre diner features traditional diner food with a fabulous twist – just about everything on the menu is acquired from business partnerships with local and regional farms.

Food Works at Two Rivers Center ([www.tworiverscenter.org](http://www.tworiverscenter.org))

A Montpelier-based organization that “empowers people to take control of the food they eat by cultivating sustainable food systems that are firmly rooted in each region's natural and cultural heritage.”

LOVE IS...PEACE program ([www.rootswork.org](http://www.rootswork.org))

Stands for “Let Organics Vitalize Everyone In School, Partnering Education, Agriculture, Children and the Environment.” Currently working with the six local elementary schools in Mad River making strides in designing local gardens and transitioning healthy, local, organic foods into schools.

Northeast Organic Farming Association – Vermont ([www.nofavt.org](http://www.nofavt.org))  
This organization provides information and support for northeast organic farmers.

Rootswork – ([www.rootswork.org](http://www.rootswork.org))

The Mad River Valley's local community non-profit organization to support sustainable agriculture and small organic farmers and food producers. For several years, Rootswork has made progressive changes in how the Mad River Valley relates to agriculture and environment.

Rural Vermont ([www.ruralvermont.org](http://www.ruralvermont.org))

A Montpelier-based nonprofit farm advocacy group that represents those who are opposed to corporate industrial agriculture, and committed to supporting a strong rural economy that is environmentally sustainable and economically just.

Vermont Farm-Fresh Network ([www.vermontfresh.net](http://www.vermontfresh.net))

The Vermont Fresh Network, located in Montpelier, builds innovative partnerships among farmers, chefs and consumers to strengthen Vermont's agriculture.

Vermont Guardian ([www.vermontguardian.com](http://www.vermontguardian.com))

Independent subscriber-supported statewide news weekly devoted to consistent coverage of issues impacting the state of Vermont, including farm policy, GE seed labeling, and other “media and food” related issues.

# Questioning Media

## Ten Basic Principles of Media Literacy Education

ACME at [www.acmecoalition.org](http://www.acmecoalition.org)

1. **Medium: a form of communication – i.e. television, a video game, or a magazine article – that transmits messages, tells stories, structures learning, and constructs a “reality” about the world.**
2. **Media Literacy:** an educational approach that seeks to give media users greater FREEDOM and CHOICE by teaching them how to **access, analyze, evaluate** and **produce** media. ACME-style media literacy education emphasizes: **knowledge, skills, and activism!**
3. **“REALITY” CONSTRUCTION/TRADE-OFFS: Media construct our culture and involve trade-offs (goods and bads).** Consuming media always involves choices that enhance or degrade our lives. We should ask ourselves, "What are the trade-offs of this media experience?"  
*ASK: Who produced this media? What kind of reality does this media create? How accurate is this “reality”? What stories are NOT being told and why?*
4. **PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES: Media use identifiable production techniques.** Advertisers, the public relations industry, and other powerful media makers spend massive amounts of time, energy, and money carefully creating media to influence the ways we think, behave, and buy. "Deconstructing" or analyzing production techniques – camera angles, lighting, editing, sound effects, colors, font styles, symbols, etc. - can build awareness, leading to more careful and "literate" consumption of media.  
*ASK: What kinds of production techniques does this media use?*
5. **VALUE MESSAGES: Media contain ideological and value messages.** Some value messages are intended, while others are unintended. Messages can be positive or negative, and messages target specific groups.  
*ASK: What kinds of value messages does this media promote?*
6. **COMMERCIAL MOTIVES: Media are business and commercial interests.** Most media are produced within the commercial industry – researching questions of ownership, production, and distribution is vital to fully understanding media's influence.  
*ASK: What are the commercial motives behind this media? Who or what paid for this media and why? Who or what owns this media product?*

7. **INDIVIDUAL MEANINGS: Individuals construct their own meanings from media.** If parents, teachers, students and citizens are to learn about media, let's honor, discuss and debate each other's meanings.  
*ASK: What meanings do YOU find in reflecting about this media? What differing meanings might other individuals or groups find?*
  
8. **EMOTIONAL TRANSFER: Commercials and other multi-media experiences operate primarily at an emotional level** and are usually designed to transfer the emotion from one symbol or lifestyle onto another (usually a product or behavior).  
*ASK: What emotions does this media tap? What might we consider if we think more deeply about this media?*
  
9. **PACING: Media Pacing - TV runs at 30 frames per second (movies at 24).** The conscious mind can process about 8 frames per second; hence television and movies tend to keep us from conscious analysis and reflection about individual messages and larger industry contexts.  
*Ask: What do you observe about this media upon reflection? (After showing media multiple times, slowing media down, or stopping media regularly for discussion).*
  
10. **SYMBOLIC RHETORIC/Techniques of Persuasion:** Symbols, flattery, repetition, fear, humor, powerful words and sexual images are especially common and effective techniques of media persuasion.  
*Ask: What persuasive techniques is this media using?*

**See ACME at [www.acmecoalition.org](http://www.acmecoalition.org) for more information about media literacy education curricula, activities, and resources.**

# From Persuasive Techniques to Analytical Tools: Developing A ML Language

ACME at [www.acmecoalition.org](http://www.acmecoalition.org)

*"A democratic civilization will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for critical reflection - not an invitation for hypnosis."*

*Umberto Eco*

1. **Symbols:** Persuading through the use of idea-conveyances (an American flag on a lapel pin) that associate one thing (a politician) with another (support for his speeches or policies). Symbols are often phrases ("Just Do It"), images (the famous "Earth seen from space" photo) graphic brands (McDonald's Golden Arches), or icons (well-known politicians, athletes, or artists). Symbols are rarely used by accident or chance; they are usually employed very carefully.
2. **Big Lie:** Persuading through dishonesty; not telling the truth about X. An easy technique to spot in advertising ("Smoking makes you glamorous," "Drinking makes you cool"), but sometimes harder to spot in political propaganda. This is where reading a variety of independent media sources comes in handy.
3. **Flattery:** Persuading by complimenting insincerely or excessively. Advertisers use this technique all the time ("You deserve a break today"), and television programs (including so-called "reality TV") uses this technique in a more subtle way, suggesting that the audience is more smart, cool, etc. than people on the screen.
4. **Hyperbole:** Persuading by making exaggerated claims. Found all the time in advertising media ("The best smoke ever!"), and often in political propaganda.
5. **Bribery:** Persuading through the offering of a bribe - money, favors, savings, or a little something extra. Advertisements use this technique all the time ("Act now and we'll throw in extra X or save you Y dollars.")
6. **Bandwagon:** Persuading by insisting that "everyone's doing X." Works in both advertising and political propaganda.
7. **Scapegoating:** Persuading by blaming problems on one individual or group (The Nazis blaming Jews, for example, for Germany's problems during the 1930s).
8. **Simple Solutions:** Persuading by offering a simple solution to either a manufactured or more complex problem. ("Take these pills and lose all the weight you need!" What about a responsible diet, regular exercise, the influence of genetics on one's weight, and a healthy sense of individual self-esteem despite being larger than some?)
9. **Rhetorical questions:** Persuading through the asking of questions designed to provoke further exploration or generate a certain predicted response. ("Do you want greasy hair?" "Why did politician X lie about Y"?)
10. **Fear/Defensive Nationalism:** Persuading by appealing to an enemy - Communists, terrorists, or godless liberals. (The Bush administration has leveraged the 9/11 tragedy to attack so-called "rogue nations" - Iraq, Korea, and Iran - that comprise an "axis of evil.")
11. **Humor:** Persuading through appeals to the funny bone. Laughter is often the best medicine, especially if you don't want people to think too deeply about something.
12. **Testimonial:** Persuading by invoking support from respected individuals (like athletes, movie stars, and doctors) or institutions (Like having the AAP approve media literacy curricula or a former Surgeon General endorse pharmaceutical products.)
13. **Plain Folks:** The opposite of testimonial; persuading by appealing to the common man or portraying yourself as "just one of the guys/gals." (Used in many beer advertisements, as well as

by millionaire politicians who stage “photo ops” of themselves chopping wood, fishing, or reading to school children.)

14. **Repetition:** Persuading through, you guessed it, repeating the same image, word, symbols, or phrase over and over. (Advertisers use it – “diamonds are \_\_\_\_\_” as do politicians – how many times have you heard the phrase ‘weapons of mass destruction.’?)
15. **Nostalgia:** Persuading through appeals to a more simple or romantic (and often mythical) past. (See Brokaw’s book *The Greatest Generation* or any Hollywood World War II movie).
16. **Diversion:** Persuading by diverting attention away from damning information or an alternative point of view. (The alcohol and tobacco industries use this technique in all of their advertising).
17. **Denial:** Persuading by avoiding (or seeming to avoid) an attachment to unpleasant symbols, moments, or stories.
18. **Warm Fuzzies:** Persuading with appeals by cute little children, large furry animals, or anything else that warms your heart. (Think “Little Debbie” snack cakes – a classic example).
19. **Beautiful People:** Persuading through images of good-looking individuals to sell products, lifestyles, behaviors, or ideas. Common in advertising and politics.
20. **Group Dynamics:** Persuading by building a sense of solidarity; replacing the “I” aloneness with “we” togetherness. Look for “we,” “our” and other GD power words. (“We the people,” begins the US Constitution).
21. **Either/Or:** Persuading by appeals to simplistic black and white and either/or thinking. (To quote Mr. Bush – “you’re either for us or against us.”) Used all the time by lazy journalists and our mind-numbingly shallow mainstream McNews culture.
22. **Maybe:** Persuading with promising but “hedgy” language – words like “might,” “could,” or “maybe.” (“Play the Lottery – you could win a million dollars!”)
23. **Strength:** Persuading by appeals to strong leadership – be strong, aggressive, bold, firm, and “in charge.” (Watch any action movie or State of the Union message).
24. **Scientific Evidence:** Persuading with scientific (or pseudo-scientific) language – graphs, diagrams, charts, statistics and “jargon.” (“4 out of 5 dentists surveyed...”)
25. **Card Stacking:** Persuading by taking information out of context or not providing the whole story. (Movie advertising featuring critics’ one liners – “the best movie I’ve ever seen!” – does this all the time).
26. **Name Calling:** Persuading with personal attacks that features colorful, offensive, crude and humorous language. (Listen to Rush “FemiNazi” Limbough or H. Stern).
27. **The Race Card:** Persuading through appeals to race, often mythical notions of racial harmony (advertising) or race-based fear appeals (politics).
28. **Timing:** Persuading through the orchestrating of various story elements or production techniques to enhance media’s meaning and power. (Study scary or tear-jerking movie scenes, or effective advertisements, to see this at work).

*Adapted from Bob McCannon/New Mexico Media Literacy Project at [www.nmmlp.org](http://www.nmmlp.org)*