

# Lesson 2: Television Turn-off Research Project (Persuasive Style Report)

8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA

**LESSON DESCRIPTION:** In conjunction with research on effects of media in science, English students gather information and write a persuasive report.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS:** What are sources of information for a research project? What is a hook? What are the components of a persuasive style report?

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will:

- be exposed to a number of studies relating to the effects of media violence and will use writing strategies, learn vocabulary, and construct a persuasive style research report.
- access information, collect data for research, and analyze, synthesize, and communicate information.

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**
  - \* **CCSS.8.R.IT.6:** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.
  - \* **CCSS.8.R.IT.8:** Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.
  - \* **CCSS.8.W.1.a.&b:** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
  - \* **CCSS.8.W:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development,
  - \* **CCSS.8.W.7:** Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

**LENGTH OF LESSON:** Six class periods: Activities 1 – 3 take one class period, Activity 4 (research) takes one class period; Activities 5, 6, and 7 each take one class period. Activity 8 takes twenty minutes.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Persuasive essay/research report vocabulary word list.
- 4 X 6 index card or half sheets of paper and a marker
- The Outline handout for the structure of research report, one per student
- “The Trouble with Television” article by Robert MacNeil
- Introductory paragraph notes, one per student

- Computer lab with Internet, current magazines and newspapers
- Copy of “Cookie Jar” lyrics by Jack Johnson, available on the Internet (It’s great if you can let the students listen to his song. You can download the song for .99)
- Four square paragraph graphic organizers, two sided, four per student

**VOCABULARY:**

See vocabulary list handout

Teacher’s Note: English Language Arts teachers have many ways to teach standard skills, such as writing a persuasive style research report. The following activities are one teacher’s ideas. They are pertinent to this topic.

Teachers Note: If you have already taught persuasive essays, you may condense this lesson by having the whole class write one essay. After you have a class outline, assign groups: one for each of the five paragraphs, one for a graphic for each paragraph, and one to compile the citations.

One teacher had students write 30 second persuasive radio ads.

## PROCEDURES

Teacher's Note: If you have a TV in your classroom, have it on when the students enter and stand in front of it as you talk.

**Anticipatory Set:** Several weeks before the unit, begin posting information such as articles and quotes about the impact of media on a bulletin board.

### Activity 1:

1. By now, students have had experiences with this unit in their core subject areas. Begin by asking them what they have learned so far. As they give information, write it on 4 X 6 cards and post those on the bulletin board. Tell them that they are going to be doing research and using the research to convince others that watching TV is good, or that watching TV is bad. They will be learning techniques that help them be persuasive.

### Activity 2:

1. Read aloud the Robert MacNeil article, "The Trouble with Television." After reading the first sentence of the third paragraph, "The trouble with television is that it discourages concentration.", stop and talk about that. Were the students distracted by the television? What do they remember from the Activity 1 discussion or had the TV distracted them?

Finish reading the article. Discuss it, asking questions such as: Is this fact or opinion? What are some facts you remember? What were opinions? What were some things the writer did to persuade you that there is trouble with television? Add the article and some of its facts to the bulletin board.

### Activity 3:

1. Hand out The Outline and go over the structure of a persuasive research report, emphasizing the body and the amount of information they will need to gather. For homework, have each student find information about whether TV is good or bad.

Teacher's Note: Students will be researching the impacts of media in science. They should bring that information with them to English.

### Activity 4:

1. Using the research gathered, have students fill out the body of the outline.

### Activity 5:

1. Read the lyrics from Cookie Jar by Jack Johnson about the trouble with TV. Use the song to reconnect with students about the theme of their persuasive research report and ask what they have found. Encourage some students to write about positive aspects of screen use, if that is what their information supports.

Refer back to The Outline. Students should be ready to start writing by now. Hand out the Introductory Paragraphs Notes and give a focused mini-lecture about writing the introductory paragraph, including "hooks." Allow students time to work on their introductory paragraph, assigning the completed paragraph as homework for the next day.

### **Activity 6:**

1. Hand out four copies (two 2-sided copies) of the paragraph graphic organizer. Demonstrate how to write a paragraph using the first section from The body portion of the outline. Have students write sentences using their outline as a guide, making three supporting paragraphs for the introductory paragraph.

### **Activity 7:**

1. Teach the students how to write a concluding paragraph: by choosing two or three main points, beginning with a transition word, and finding a strong finishing sentence, perhaps one that ties back to the hook used in the introductory paragraph. Students should use the last of their paragraph graphic organizers to write the concluding paragraph.

For homework, students should write or type their five paragraphs.

### **Activity 8:**

1. Ask volunteers to read their papers in class. This could be after you have graded them. Alternatively, you could read a few samples of the student's writing aloud. Post or compile the papers for parents to view if you have a parents' night associated with the Screen Free Challenge.

## THE OUTLINE

### I. Introduction

A. Should include a “hook” strategy and a thesis statement. We’ll be talking about this soon.

### II. Body (3-5 main points minimum)

A. Number of hours spent could be used to do other things.

- 1) 20,000 hours by the time your 20 year-of-age.
- 2) Only thing Americans do more is sleep and work.
- 3) It takes 10,000 hours to become an astronomer or engineer.
- 4) Xxxxx

B.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

C.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

### III. Conclusion

A. Begins with transition and should summarize your main points.

B. We’ll be discussing this.

## INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS NOTES

BEGIN WITH A STRATEGY TO “HOOK” THE READER. THERE ARE FIVE THAT YOU CAN CHOOSE FROM.

1. Share an unusual fact.
2. Present a lively description.
3. Ask a question or ask your audience to do something.
4. Relate an interesting or humorous incident.
5. Use notable dialogue or quotes.

LINK YOUR “HOOK” TO THE FINAL SENTENCE (thesis statement) of the introductory paragraph WITH A CONNECTING SENTENCE.

- This sentence(s) should give your introduction a sense of flow.

FINAL SENTENCE OF INTRODUCTION IS THE THESIS STATEMENT. THIS SENTENCE IS CRITICAL, AS IT TELLS THE AUDIENCE THE MAIN PURPOSE OR IDEA OF THE ENTIRE PAPER.

- Your paper’s purpose is to persuade your audience why TV is or is not a problem.
- Sample thesis statements:
  1. There are numerous reasons why TV is a problem in our country.
  2. Television is causing serious problems in our society.
  3. There are major problems in America linked to the television set.
  4. The TV is being unfairly blamed for problems in our society.

# The Trouble with Television

Robert MacNeil

It is difficult to escape the influence of television. If you fit the statistical averages, by the age of 20 you will have been exposed to at least 20,000 hours of television. You can add 10,000 hours for each decade you have lived after the age of 20. The only things Americans do more than watch television are work and sleep.

Calculate for a moment what could be done with even a part of those hours. Five thousand hours, I am told, are what a typical college undergraduate spends working on a bachelor's degree. In 10,000 hours you could have learned enough to become an astronomer or engineer. You could have learned several languages fluently. If it appealed to you, you could be reading Homer<sup>1</sup> in the original Greek or Dostoevski<sup>2</sup> in Russian. If it didn't, you could have walked around the world and written a book about it.

The trouble with television is that it discourages concentration. Almost anything interesting and rewarding in life requires some constructive, consistently applied effort. The dullest, the least gifted of us can achieve things that seem miraculous to those who never concentrate on anything. But television encourages us to apply no effort. It sells us instant gratification. It diverts us only to divert, to make the time pass without pain.

Television's variety becomes a narcotic,<sup>3</sup> not a stimulus.<sup>4</sup> Its serial, kaleidoscopic exposures force us to follow its lead. The viewer is on a perpetual guided tour: 30 minutes at the museum, 30 at the cathedral, then back on the bus to the next attraction - except on television, typically, the spans allotted are on the order of minutes or seconds, and the chosen delights are more often car crashes and people killing one another. In short, a lot of television usurps one of the most precious

of all human gifts, the ability to focus your attention yourself, rather than just passively surrender it.

Capturing you attention - and holding it - is the prime motive of most television programming and enhances its role as a profitable advertising vehicle. Programmers live in constant fear of losing anyone's attention - anyone's. The surest way to avoid doing so is to keep everything brief, not to strain the attention of anyone but instead to provide constant stimulation through variety, novelty, action, and movement. Quite simply, television operates on the appeal to the short attention span.

It is simply the easiest way out. But it has come to be regarded as a given, inherent<sup>5</sup> in the medium itself: as an imperative, as though General Sarnoff or one of the other august pioneers of video, had bequeathed to us tablets of stone commanding that nothing in television shall ever require more than a few moments' concentration.

In its place that is fine. Who can quarrel with the medium that so brilliantly packages escapist entertainment as a mass-marketing tool? But I see its values now pervading this nation and its life. It has become fashionable to think that, like fast food, fast ideas are the way to get to a fast-moving, impatient public.

In the case of news, this practice, in my view, results in inefficient communication. I question how much of television's nightly news effort is really absorbable and understandable. Much of it is what has been aptly described as "machine gunning with scraps." I think its technique fights coherence.<sup>6</sup> I think it tends to make things ultimately boring and dismissible (unless they are accompanied by horrifying pictures) because almost

anything is boring and dismissible if you know almost nothing about it.

I believe that TV's appeal to the short attention span is not only inefficient communication but decivilizing as well. Consider the casual assumptions that television tends to cultivate: that complexity must be avoided, that visual stimulation is a substitute for thought, that verbal precision is an anachronism.<sup>7</sup> It may be old-fashioned, but I was taught that thought is words, arranged in grammatically precise ways.

There is a crisis of literacy in this country. One study estimates that some 30 million adult Americans are "functionally illiterate" and cannot read or write well enough to answer a want ad or understand the instructions on a medicine bottle.

Literacy may not be an inalienable human right, but it is one that the highly literate Founding Fathers might not have found unreasonable or even unattainable. We are not only not attaining it as a nation, statistically speaking, but we are falling further and further short of attaining it. And, while I would not be so simplistic as to suggest that television is the cause, I believe it contributes and is an influence.

Everything about the nation - the structure of the society, its forms of family

organization, its economy, its place in the world - has become more complex, not less. Yet its dominating communications instrument, its principal form of national linkage, is one that sells neat resolutions to human problems that usually have no neat resolutions. It is all symbolized in my mind by the hugely successful art form that television has made central to the culture, the thirty-second commercial: the tiny drama of the earnest housewife who finds happiness in choosing the right toothpaste.

When before in human history has so much humanity collectively surrendered so much of its leisure to one toy, one mass diversion? When before has virtually an entire nation surrendered itself wholesale to a medium for selling?

Some years ago Yale University law professor Charles L. Black, Jr. wrote: "forced feeding on trivial fare is not itself a trivial matter." I think this society is being force fed with trivial fare, and I fear that the effects on our habits of mind, our language, our tolerance for effort, and our appetite for complexity are only dimly perceived. If I am wrong, we will have done no harm to look at the issue skeptically and critically, to consider how we should be resisting it. I hope you will join with me in doing so.

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1. Homer (hō' mēr): Greek epic poet of the eighth century B.C.
  2. Dostoevaki (dōs'tō' skē): Fyodor (fyō'dōr) Mikhailovich (mi khī'lō vich Dostoevski (1821-1881), Russian novelist.
  3. narcotic (nār kät' ik) n.: Something that has a soothing effect
  4. stimulus (stim'yə ləs) n.: Something that rouses to action.
  5. inherent (in hir' ənt) adj.: Natural
  6. coherence (kō hir' əns) n.: The quality of being connected in an intelligible way.
  7. anachronism (ə nak'rə niz'm) n.: Anything that seems to be out of its proper place in history.

## Vocabulary List

### “Persuasive Essay/Research Reports”

1. outline (n)
2. thesis statement (n)
3. transition (n)
4. supporting details (n)
5. persuasion (n)
6. topic sentence (n)
7. body (n)
8. plagiarism (n)
9. introduction (n)
10. conclusion (n)

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Support/Detail Sentence:</b>	<b>Support/Detail Sentence:</b>
<b>Support/Detail Sentence:</b>	<b>Lead Sentence:</b>
<b>Summarizing Sentence:</b>	

**Beginning words for paragraphs: First the primary reason, Another, In addition, Secondly and Thirdly.**

## Lyrics for Cookie Jar By Jack Johnson

I would turn on the TV, but it's so embarrassing  
To see all other people, I don't know that they mean  
It was magic at first, when they spoke without sound  
But now this world is gonna hurt, you better turn that thing down  
Turn it around

"It wasn't me," say the boy with the gun  
"Sure I pulled the trigger, but it needed to be done  
Because life's been killing me ever since it begun  
You can't blame me because I'm too young"

"You can't blame me, sure the killer was my son  
But I didn't teach him to pull the trigger of the gun  
It's the killing on the TV screen  
You can't blame me, it's those images he's seen"

"You can't blame me," says the media man  
"I wasn't the one who came up with the plan  
I just point my camera at what the people want to see  
It's a two way mirror, you can't blame me"

"You can't blame me," says the singer of the song  
Or the maker of the movie, which he based his life on  
"It's only entertainment, as anyone can see  
It's smoke machines and makeup, and you can't fool me"

It was you, it was me, it was every man  
We've all got the blood on our hands  
We only receive what we demand  
And if we want hell the hell's what we'll have

I would turn on the TV, but its so embarrassing  
To see all the other people don't know what they mean  
It was magic at first, but let everyone down  
And now this world is gonna hurt, you better turn it around