FILM STUDY GUIDE FOR TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD
SEEING THE FILM THROUGH THE LENS OF MEDIA LITERACY

MEDIA LITERACY

What is media literacy?
"Media literacy refers to composing, comprehending, interpreting,
analyzing, and appreciating the language and texts of...both print
and nonprint. The use of media presupposes an expanded definition
of 'text'...print media texts include books, magazines, and newspapers.
Nonprint media include photography, recordings, radio, film, television,
videotape, video games, computers, the performing arts, and
virtual reality...constantly interact...(and) all (are) to be experienced,
appreciated, and analyzed and created by students." 1

Media literacy helps students see the world through a new lens. Media
influence the way we see the world. The media "construct" a world which
may or may not truly represent things as they are.

Today, the phrase 21st Century Skills is being used in education circles
and it includes "media literacy," because, the authors' say, students
need these analytical and critical thinking skills not only to survive,
but also to become part of the competitive global economy.

Core Concepts of Media Literacy :
In order to best understand the concept of media literacy, it will help
teachers/students to study the core concepts. Core concepts are an
appropriate framework through which all media can be better studied and
understood. These 5 core concepts are based on those developed by
international media educators in Great Britain, Australia, and Canada.

Core Concepts of Media Literacy2	**Applications to Film**
All media messages are constructed	In film, scenes are shot out-of-order and then edited (constructed) to make a logical sequenced story. Who is in charge of the "construction:" the producer, the director, the cinematographer, the editor? What role does each of these people play in the production of a film? (see EDITING)
Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules	In film, a wide, establishing shot (for example) is used to tell the audience: here is where the action is taking place, take a look at this; music may also be composed to convey a mood or evoke an emotion (see also CAMERA SHOTS; LIGHTING; MUSIC; SETTING/ART DIRECTION)

Different people experience the same message differently	The audience brings its prior knowledge and experiences to its viewing of the film and thus may come away with different interpretations and understanding of what it all means.
Media have embedded values and points-of-view	After viewing the film, some viewers may get a "stereotypical" view of life in the South during the depression. In what ways does the film convey stereotypes. Are the blacks in the film subservient to the whites? (see SYMBOLISM; REPRESENTATION)
Media messages are constructed to gain power and/or profit	This film would not have been made if the studio and producers did not feel they would receive a return on their investment. (*To Kill A Mockingbird* won several Academy Awards in 1963, and was one of the most profitable films of that year.)

Critical Inquiry
Closely tied to the CORE CONCEPTS listed above are KEY QUESTIONS. "At the heart of
media literacy," says the Center for Media Literacy's Elizabeth Thoman, "is the principle
of inquiry." We want students to learn how to ask questions about the media messages
they encounter in their daily lives. Listed below are some key questions and how students
might relate them to the film, *To Kill A Mockingbird:*

Key Questions of Media Literacy2	**Some Key Questions to Consider**
Who created this message?	Who wrote the SCREENPLAY? What are the challenges of adapting a screenplay from a famous piece of literature? Who was the PRODUCER, DIRECTOR, and CINEMATOGRAPHER? What are their roles and responsibilities Could it have been EDITED differently, if so, how so? Where is the SETTING of this film?
What techniques are used to attract my attention?	Why was it shot in "black and white"?

(See: LANGUAGE OF FILM)

How do CAMERA SHOTS communicate meaning?
Identify SYMBOLS throughout the film.
Listen closely to the MUSIC; how does it contribute to the film?
In what ways does it communicate happiness; about childhood; fear and uncertainty?
What role does LIGHTING play?
Listen for SOUND EFFECTS and discuss how they influence you during a particular scene.

How might different people understand this message differently from me?

How might different viewers from me, interpret this film differently?
Why do they not "see" the same things that I see?
How do my life's experiences filter my understanding of the film?

What lifestyles, values, and points-of-view are represented in or omitted from this message?

How do the producers of this film REPRESENT the antagonist or the protagonist?
What do the SETTING, the clothes, the accents of the actors all communicate about the time period or the way of life of these characters?
How do the children learn about right and wrong; good vs evil?
What role does each character play in communicating values?

Why was this message sent?

Why was this film made? Did the success of Harper Lee's book play a part?
Do you think it was risky making this film during the Civil Rights period in American history? Why or why not?

Other questions worth consideration:
Who produced the film? Why?
What was the purpose of producing the film?
What experience did screenwriter Horton Foote have that made
him an appropriate choice for adapting Harper Lee's novel?
What techniques are used to make the audience believe the story?
What lifestyles are shown or implied?
How might other people see this film differently from me?
Is anything left out of the story? Why? (compare the novel to the film version)

More about core concepts here:

Media Literacy Core Concepts
http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/
media_literacy/key_concept.cfm

Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit
http://www.medialit.org/bp_mlk.html

What is media literacy?
http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/
media_literacy/what_is_media_literacy.cfm

Other resources:

Center for Media Literacy http://www.medialit.org

Media Literacy Clearinghouse http://medialit.med.sc.edu

See bibliography for all source material cited here