



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1984 Volume V: American Adolescents in the Public Eye

---

## **Dance Hype in Video—A Positive or Negative Force?**

Curriculum Unit 84.05.02  
by Jan Johnson

Teachers Who Use This Unit Should be Sensitive to the Strict Rules Governing the Copyright Protection of Songs, Lyrics and Music.

This unit is designed to explore the fascinating world of M.T.V. Violent, sexual, confusing video messages bombard the tuned in senses 24 hours a day. How are these suggestive verbal, musical and visual communications effecting the fluctuating emotional rhythms of our youth? It will take years of research to begin to find an answer.

Video is a whole new concept of advertising. *Hidden Persuaders* by Vance Packard and *Subliminal Seduction* by Wilson Bryan Key have clued us in to many of the manipulative techniques advertisers have used for years. M.T.V. has left out none in their constant hype to sell new and presently popular rock and roll recordings. "Inside M.T.V.", an article in *Rolling Stone* magazine (12/8/83), tells us in great detail what is going on in this fairly new media: The hypnotic quality of regular T.V. programming is multiplied through the carefully planned out structure. Free of any opposing views, M.T.V. directs its propaganda to a generation that was brought up on T.V. and rock and roll. The senses are constantly charged with visual expressions of fantasy and reality that are indistinguishable from each other.

Videos and pop music are phenomena that relate extremely well to academic subjects. Social studies, sociology and current events are continuously documented in the lyrics and visuals of these media. An excellent example of this is a video recorded by Billy Joel. *Goodnight Saigon* features photos of the soldiers in Viet Nam during the war. A robotics unit could be presented to a science class and enhanced by many pop songs and videos including *She Blinded Me With Science* recorded by Thomas Dolby, and *Mr. Roboto* recorded by Styx.

I feel M.T.V. with its negative potential and strong hold on adolescent interest can be used in a positive way as a learning tool with lots of attention getting "clout".

My unit will be part of a dance curriculum taught at the Conte Arts Magnet. Conte is a unique teaching and learning situation. All of the students in grades 5 through 8 take art courses including visual arts, drama, music and dance along with their academic courses. A preferred art form is chosen by each student to be studied twice a week. These are called arts "choice" classes. The other arts classes are termed "core" classes and continue once a week. This unit will be presented to 8th grade dance "choice" students.

The beauty of the Conte structure is the interaction of the arts as well as the arts with academics wherever possible. In this unit I plan to incorporate the academic elements of creative writing, reading and lyric interpretation. A projected robotics class by one of our science teachers may, in fact, tie in with one of my lesson plans concerning lyric interpretation. I am confident that although my unit is geared toward dance, most parts are adaptable to academics and can be adapted to many different curriculums.

Adolescence is a time of confusion. All of the ongoing emotional and physical changes create unpredictable reactions and mood swings. At this time communication is a key word. Keeping the lines open to parents, teachers and friends creates a healthy atmosphere in which this metamorphosis can take place.

My unit concerns communication. We will discover different ways of communicating and discuss how we interpret incoming messages. Our unpredictable pop culture is presently being formed by the strong messages of the media. Magazine articles and advertisements, movies and most recently video are molding our adolescents. I plan to take a step by step journey through the video process, while using these other media forms to make statements related to communication. We will discuss our reactions to different stimuli. Part of the unit will be spent delving into the motivational research tactics of advertisers. If we are unaware of these manipulative tactics, we are unable to make valid conscious decisions about many aspects of our lives. What clothes we wear, how we smell and how we cut our hair are dictated to us through our wide open communication lines to the media. I plan to question the content of the messages we have been accepting as fact. We will look a little deeper into why we've been accepting and if, in fact, we do agree with these statements. The result will be a more thoughtful consumer process as well as an in-depth study of what we really feel about the messages we hear and how we take them in and react to them.

Each step of this curriculum will give us a little more insight into the making of a video. We will finally create our own. First a song will be chosen. Lyric interpretation and music analysis will set the groundwork. As this is a dance curriculum, choreographic ideas will be the base in developing the theme. Environment will be chosen. Costumes, props and make-up ideas will be tossed around and decided upon. The complete structure of this activity is explained in detail as step seven, the final step of my unit.

Creation of our video will involve many hours of preparation, performance and final editing. It will be in a constant state of flux and will require concentration and patience on the part of the students. Video knowledge is essential and, of course, access to video equipment. I plan to work with a camera person who will be present throughout the planning stages of this project.

The completed video will be shown to other students of Conte. At this assembly, the dance students will share the experiences they have had throughout the course—the ultimate communication activity! All of our taping attempts will have been kept for documentation of the process and if we feel it will enhance our presentation, out-takes and process revealing footage will be shown. This will be the students' opportunity to evaluate, summarize and verbalize their experience. Showing their video will be the "grande finale".

The following are my objectives:

1. To turn the potentially negative force of video into a positive learning tool.
2. To de-mystify the process of making a video, therefore taking away some of the magic that draws attention to the "tube" so many hours a day. The result will be the development of a critical relationship of creator rather than consumer.
3. To develop an awareness of media tactics that are being used to influence us in what we buy,

what we wear and what we watch at the movies and on T.V.

4. To expand student awareness of incoming messages so they can consciously sort through, developing their communication skills.

5. To extend the concept of communication by exploring various methods. Speaking, writing, moving, acting and dancing will be experienced as interchangeable alternatives.

6. To incorporate academics into the dance curriculum. These will include creative writing, reading and lyric interpretation and evaluation.

As a note, I would like to mention an aspect of one activity that I feel may be especially interesting. In step three of this unit questionnaires relating to certain videos will be distributed. Students will be asked whether they feel that lyrics, music or visuals was the strongest component and communicated the message best. The answers to this activity can assist us as teachers to tune particular students in to classroom studies better by understanding what motivational tools he or she responds to best. A student attuned to lyrics would possibly respond better to concrete verbal communication, while one who responds better to music would seem to relate better to more abstract communications and explanations. The visually oriented student would possibly respond better to dynamic visual learning materials.

The more I envisioned this concept the more I felt that an entire unit could be developed around it. Rather than place unrelated activities into my already organized materials, I prefer to simply present the concept: Structuring a project that would reveal the stimulus that motivates each individual student most efficiently. This would enable the teachers to pinpoint motivational needs that, if nurtured, would create a more thorough absorption of knowledge within the classroom.

I have broken my unit into seven steps. Because each step contributes to the cohesive developmental process, I chose to include all of the information as concisely and completely as possible.

*STEP ONE* will build an awareness of verbal message communication. We will look closely at what is being said to us through the familiar verbal images of song lyrics.

*Body Language* by Queen says "Don't talk, give me your body." <sup>1</sup> Stevie Nicks tells us "I have many times run away. Oh, I have never known the words . . ." in *If Anyone Falls*.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Roboto by Styx tells us "*Machines save lives, machines de-humanize.*"<sup>3</sup> On a humorous note, Thomas Dolby says "When I'm dancing close to her I can smell the chemicals" in *She Blinded Me With Science*.<sup>4</sup> *Songs of the '80s contain messages that cover every aspect of the times. All of the lyrics I have chosen for this unit concern communication and the age of computers, robots and video.*

Discussions of these lyrics will include expressions of the theme and its method of presentation. Questions will be presented to the class to be debated:

1. What is the message of the song?

2. Do you agree with the message? Why? Why not?
3. How do you feel about the way it was presented?
4. Could it have been said better? How?

One or two of the songs discussed will be chosen for a homework assignment. Students will be asked to write lyrics that communicate identical messages or follow the same theme. These papers will be shared in the following class. Related writings by poets and songwriters will be encouraged and shared.

One class will be spent improvising movement to the lyrics of the songs we have studied together. This activity is done line by line. For example, I would read the first line and they would react to it. As they continue moving, I would begin reading the second line and they would react to that. Next, I will play the recording of the song as they improvise again. Then we will discuss the beat, rhythm and melody and how they influence the mood and help interpret the lyrics.

*STEP TWO* will concern static visual or graphic communications. The first activity will begin with the observation of magazine advertisements. Students will be asked to choose the one ad that they like the most, cut it out and mount it on construction paper.

1. Alongside of the clipping or on the back, list all of the reasons you think you were drawn to this particular ad.
2. Share the results.
3. A lecture based on *The Hidden Persuaders* will follow up on the student findings. Specifically, I will be using chapters 3, 5 and 8. These chapters cover motivational research techniques, self images and sexual overtones.
4. Develop the graphics into dynamic (movement oriented) presentations. The students will be asked:
  - A. If you wanted to sell this product on T.V., how would you do it?
  - B. Using groups of two or three and using movement, dialogue and dance if possible, present a 30-60 second skit promoting your product. Keep in mind the discussion we have just had on persuasion techniques.
  - C. Present your skit to the group.

An open discussion will follow.

As a final activity, taking the static visual to the dynamic visual, I plan to videotape the best skits. We will play them back and discuss the following:

1. Dimension, camera angles and dynamics.
2. Ways of making presentations more understandable, interesting and eye-catching.

The ads should be retaped a few different ways keeping all of the footage for documentation of the process.

*STEP THREE* goes deeper into the research aspect of the video process. Two videos that are currently being shown on M.T.V. will be brought in. Each three minute tape will be shown three or four times for full absorption of the material. The following form will be given out to be completed after each video.

NAME OF STUDENT \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF VIDEO \_\_\_\_\_

- A. What do you feel is the strongest aspect of this video—lyrics? Music? Visual? Using # 1 for strongest and # 3 for weakest, number the columns accordingly.
- B. In each column write in detail what you feel made it weak or strong.
- C. Which aspect of the video did you relate to best? In that column tell me why it appealed to you most.

- A. LYRICS # MUSIC # VISUAL #
- B.
- C.

A discussion will follow each tape viewing and questionnaire completion.

1. Was the strongest feature of the video: lyrics, music or visual (movement, story line and special effects).
2. What constructive criticisms do you have?
3. How could it be improved?
4. Do you see "Hidden Persuader" techniques being used?

*STEP FOUR* will decipher how the players are presented in video. Three videos will be presented. The following format will be followed for each one:

1. Printed lyric sheets will be passed out to be discussed in advance of the video showing.
2. The video will be shown three or four times for full absorption of material.
3. Questionnaires will be passed out.

- A. How were the females represented?  
What does this communicate to you?
  - B. How were the males represented?  
What does this communicate to you?
  - C. How were the children portrayed?  
What does this communicate to you?
  - D. Were there any adults represented?  
How? What does this communicate to you?
  - E. How were costumes and make-up used?  
What does this communicate to you?
4. Follow-up discussions will summarize our thoughts.

After the three videos have been thoroughly discussed, the structure of M.T.V. will be explained as well as the basic structure and purpose of videos. For this class reference materials will include *Rolling Stone*, *People* and *Time* magazines noted in my bibliography.

*STEP FIVE* is the showing and discussion of the hour long video *The Making of Thriller* by Michael Jackson. This special video contains footage of make-up procedures and the choreographic process. Michael Peters, Jackson's choreographer, is featured and introduced the dance element to our video exposure. I will share articles on Peters from *People* and *Focus* magazines that I have noted in my bibliography. From this point on, dance will be an integral part of each video study and dance critiquing will become an important part of our procedure.

In *STEP SIX* the class will be asked to make a list of dance-packed videos. *Maniac*, of Flashdance fame, recorded by Michael Sembello and *Footloose*, another movie soundtrack, recorded by Kenny Loggins, are two

of the current tapes with extensive dance sequences. *Party Train*, by the Gap Band, includes break dance as many up and coming videos do. The most popular videos will be brought in for observation and discussion.

- A. How is dance used?
- B. What does the dancing suggest that couldn't have been expressed in another way?
- C. Give a critical evaluation of the dancers and the choreography.
- D. Is the costuming appropriate? Is the make-up appropriate?
- E. Is dance, in this instance, a positive or negative force?

*STEP SEVEN* is the creation of our own video. Keeping in mind that special effects are something we have limited access to, we will have to use our own creative methods to make the video stimulating. The base of our video will be a currently popular song chosen by the group. My only stipulation is the use of strong dance influence. The following format will be used.

1. Choose a song. Interpret the lyrics and discuss musical qualities.
2. Consider where and how dance could be used.
3. Discuss the story line. Remember that three minutes is not a long time. Be concise and to the point.
4. What atmosphere are you trying to create? Where will the taping take place to best produce this atmosphere? Is it workable for the video equipment?
5. Choreograph the dance segments in the selected space in which they are to be performed.
6. Discuss make-up, costumes and props. Prepare them.
7. Begin rehearsals. Carefully plan each step of the filming sequence.
8. Film the video.

This is the most involved video procedure I have ever undertaken. It will be a learning process for all of us as we go along. In preparation, I plan to take a workshop at Storer Cable of New Haven. After completing the six week introduction to video equipment and techniques I will receive a certificate which will give me access to equipment rental and editing facilities. This connection will be the necessary link between an hour of footage and our finishes three minute tape.

## Notes

---

1. *Body Language*— Recorded by Queen, Queen Music, Ltd., 1982.
2. *If Anyone Falls*— Recorded by Stevie Nicks, Welsh Witch Music (BMI), Sweet Talk Music (ASCAP), and Three Hearts Music (ASCAP), 1982.
3. *Mr. Roboto* —Recorded by Styx, Stygian Songs, 1983.
4. *She Blinded Me With Science*— Recorded by Thomas Dolby, Street Music, Limited/Scale Music & Sound Hits, Limited, 1982.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

### Books

Key, Wilson Bryan. *Subliminal Seduction* . Signet, 1973.

Packard, Vance. *The Hidden Persuaders*. Washington Square Press, 1957, 1980.

*Platinum '84 Songbook Of The Superstars*. Warner Bros. Publications, Inc., 1984.

### Lyrics

Adams, Bryan and Vallance, Jim. *Don't Let Him Know* . Recorded by Prism, Irving Music, Inc. & Adams Communications, Inc. & Calypso Toonz (PROC), 1981.

Ant, Adam and Pirroni, Marco. *Desperate But Not Serious* . Recorded by Adam Ant, Jobete Music Company, Inc. and Black Bull Music, Inc., 1976.

Butler, Chris. *I Know What Boys Like* . Recorded by The Waitresses, Merovingian Music/CRI CRI Music, 1980.

Cronin, Kevin. *The Key*. Recorded by REO Speedwagon, Fate Music, 1982.

Curnin, Cyril. *One Thing Leads To Another* . Recorded by The Fixx, EMI Music Publishing, Ltd., 1982.

DeYoung, Dennis. *Mr. Roboto*. Recorded by Styx, Stygian Songs, 1983.

Dolby, Thomas and Kerr, Joe. *She Blinded Me With Science*. Recorded by Thomas Dolby, Street Music Limited/Scale Music & Sound Hits, Limited, 1982.



Fogelberg, Daniel. *Heart Hotels* . Recorded by Dan Fogelberg, Hickory Grove Music, 1979.

Hazard, Robert. *Girls Just Want To Have Fun* . Recorded by Cyndi Lauper, Heroic Music (ASCAP), 1979.

Joel, Billy. *Goodnight Saigon* . Recorded by Billy Joel, Joel Songs. All rights administered by CBS Songs, 1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019. 1981.

Joel, Billy. *Leave A Tender Moment Alone* . Recorded by Billy Joel, CBS, Inc., Columbia Records, 51 West 52nd Street, New York, NY, 1983.

May/Taylor. *Machines (or 'Back To Humans')*. Recorded by Queen, Raincloud Productions, Limited, 1984.

Mellencamp, John Cougar. *Hand To Hold On To*. Recorded by John Cougar, Riva Music, Ltd., 1982.

Mercury, Freddie. *Body Language* . Recorded by Queen, Queen Music, Ltd., 1982.

Nicks, Stevie and Stewart, Sandy. *If Anyone Falls* . Recorded by Stevie Nicks, Welsh Witch Music (BMI), Sweet Talk Music (ASCAP), & Three Hearts Music (ASCAP), 1982.

Parker, Ray, Jr. *Up Front* . Recorded by Diana Ross, Raydiola Music, 1983, 1984.

Steinman, Jim. *Read 'Em and Weep*. Recorded by Barry Manilow, Edward B. Marks Music Company/Neverland Music Publishing Co./Peg Music Co., 1981.

Taylor. *Radio Ga Ga*. Recorded by Queen, Raincloud Productions, Limited, 1984.

Twilley, Dwight. *Girls* . Recorded by Dwight Twilley Dionnio Music. Administered by Bug Music, 1984.

### *Magazines*

*People Weekly*. Time, Inc., 3435 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90010, 12/26/83.

*Right On! Focus*. D.S. Magazines, Inc., Cresskill, NJ 07626, Fall, 1984.

*Rolling Stone Magazine* . Straight Arrow Publishers, Issue # 410, 12/8/83.

*Song Hits Special Magazine* . Charleton Publications, Inc., Derby, CT 06418, Fall, 1984.

*Time Magazine* . "Sing A Song of Seeing". Time, Inc., 3435 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90010, 12/26/83.

### *Video*

*The Making Of Thriller* . Optimum Productions. 1983.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>