

Hero, Villain, or Both?

Exploring Audience Through Minecraft

Subject: Drama / Media Literacy / Language

Grade: Primary (Grades 1–3)

Time: 2 periods, approximately 30–40 minutes each

Overview

In this two-part lesson, students explore an important media literacy idea: **different audiences can understand and interpret the same media text in different ways.**

Using *Minecraft* characters as familiar media texts, students consider why a character might be understood as a hero, villain, both, or neither. Through discussion, movement, role play, perspective-taking and reflection, students discover that audiences bring their own experiences and points of view to media.

The lesson begins with a simple visual provocation using *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* and then moves into students' interpretations of familiar *Minecraft* characters. On Day 2, students take on different audience perspectives and consider how the same character might be understood differently depending on who is looking.

The emphasis is not on finding the "correct" interpretation, but on **explaining, listening, considering another perspective, and recognizing that audiences negotiate meaning.**

Ontario Curriculum Connections

Media Literacy

Students:

- identify purposes and audiences for media texts;
- interpret messages found in media texts;
- consider how different audiences may respond differently to the same media text.

Drama

Students:

- use role play to explore different perspectives;
- communicate feelings and ideas through dramatic expression;

- demonstrate empathy by considering another point of view.

Language

Students develop skills in:

- oral communication;
 - explaining and justifying opinions;
 - active listening;
 - perspective-taking.
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Learning Goal

We are learning that media audiences can understand and interpret media messages in different ways.

Success Criteria

I can:

- describe what I see in a media text;
 - share my opinion about a *Minecraft* character;
 - explain my thinking;
 - listen to other people's ideas;
 - understand that other people may see the same character differently.
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Materials / Preparation

Prepare:

- *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* for the introductory read-aloud;
- images of several *Minecraft* characters, such as:
 - Creeper
 - Villager
 - Enderman
 - Iron Golem
 - Player
 - Zombie
- four signs: **Hero / Villain / Both / Not Sure**;
- chart paper and markers;
- audience cards for Day 2;

- student thought-bubble or Perspective Poster templates;
 - exit tickets/self-assessment sheets.
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Day 1: Different Audiences, Different Meanings

Minds-On / Provocation — *It Looked Like Spilt Milk*

5–7 minutes

Read *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* aloud.

Before revealing what an image represents, ask:

- What do you see?
- Does everyone see the same thing?
- Why might different people see something different?

Draw attention to the fact that **one image can have many interpretations**.

Explain that this is also true of media: different audiences can make different meanings from the same media text.

Transition to Minecraft

2–3 minutes

Show students images of several *Minecraft* characters.

Explain:

Just as we saw different things in the pictures, people can see media characters differently too.

Introduce or review the terms **hero** and **villain**.

Ask students whether some *Minecraft* characters seem "good" or "bad." Explain that the class will investigate these ideas rather than look for one correct answer.

Emphasize that students will be **sharing, listening and thinking about different points of view**.

Four Corners: Hero, Villain, Both or Not Sure?

10–15 minutes

Label four areas of the room:

Hero — Villain — Both — Not Sure

Show one *Minecraft* character at a time.

Students move to the corner that best represents what they currently think about the character.

Ask:

- Why are you standing there?
- What makes you think this character is a hero/villain/both?
- Who agrees?
- Who disagrees?
- Can anyone give us a reason that might convince someone to move?
- Did hearing someone else's idea change your thinking?

Record significant student ideas.

Repeat with several characters.

Remind students that the purpose is not to reach one answer. The goal is to notice that **people can interpret the same character differently and can give reasons for their interpretations.**

Discuss and Reflect

7–10 minutes

Use a whole-class discussion or Think-Pair-Share.

Possible prompts:

- Have you ever wondered why some characters in games are called heroes while others are called villains?
- Who decides who the "bad guy" is?
- Are villains always bad?
- Can a character do both helpful and harmful things?
- Does every story need to have a hero and a villain?
- Can two people see the same character differently?

Encourage students to support their ideas with examples.

Day 1 Consolidation / Exit Ticket

5 minutes

Students may **draw, write or record** their response.

Prompt:

Choose one character that different people might see differently.

Sentence stem:

I think _____ is a _____ because _____.

Someone else might think differently because _____.

Use the responses to assess students' initial understanding that audiences negotiate meaning.

Day 2: Why Do Audiences See Things Differently?

Minds-On: Teacher-in-Role

3–5 minutes

Enter into role as a *Minecraft* character.

For example:

"Hello, everyone. I am a Creeper. Everyone says I'm a villain. Is that fair?"

Invite students to interview the character.

Possible prompts include:

- Why do you explode?
- Are you trying to hurt people?
- How do you feel when everyone calls you a villain?
- Do you think you are a villain?
- Who might see you differently?

Use the dramatic role to move students from simply giving their own opinion toward **considering a character's and an audience's perspective.**

Audience Detective

10–15 minutes

Give students different **audience cards**.

Possible audiences include:

- Minecraft Player
- Villager
- Creeper
- Zombie
- Iron Golem

Other familiar audience perspectives could also be introduced, such as a younger child or grandparent.

Show the class one character.

Students respond from the perspective on their audience card.

Ask:

- What would **your audience** think about this character?
- Would they see the character as a hero, villain, both, or something else?
- Why?
- Would another audience see the same character differently?

For example:

If you are a Villager, what might you think about a Zombie?

What might a Villager think about the Minecraft Player?

Compare responses.

Explicitly identify the media literacy learning:

The media text has not changed. The audience has changed—and that can change the meaning.

Role-on-the-Wall

5–10 minutes

Draw a large Creeper, or another character, on chart paper.

Outside the Character

Ask:

What might other people think about the Creeper?

Record responses around the outside of the drawing.

Possible responses might include:

- dangerous;
- mean;
- explosive;
- scary;
- villain.

Inside the Character

Ask:

What might the Creeper think or feel about itself?

Record ideas inside the drawing.

Possible responses might include:

- lonely;
- scared;
- misunderstood;
- "I'm protecting myself";
- "I'm just being me."

Discuss the difference between **how a character is represented, how an audience interprets that character, and how the character might understand itself.**

Culminating Student Choice Activity

Students demonstrate their understanding using one of two options.

Option A: Audience Thought Bubbles

Students choose a character and complete:

I am a _____.

I think _____ is a hero/villain/both because _____.

Students then change perspectives:

If I were a _____, I might think _____ because _____.

Option B: Perspective Poster

Character: _____

Audience: _____

This audience thinks the character is a:

- ☐ Hero
- ☐ Villain
- ☐ Both

Because: _____

Sentence stems, drawing, oral recording or teacher scribing can be used as needed.

Performance / Assessment

Assessment for and as Learning

Throughout both days, use:

- teacher observation;
- anecdotal notes;
- student discussion;
- Four Corners responses;

- role play and perspective-taking.

Look for evidence that students can:

- describe a character's appearance or traits;
- identify the character's role within *Minecraft*;
- express an opinion about a character;
- provide a reason for that opinion;
- listen respectfully to different viewpoints;
- recognize that another audience may interpret the character differently.

Evidence of Learning

The following can provide additional evidence of understanding:

- Day 1 exit ticket;
- Audience Thought Bubbles;
- Perspective Poster;
- Day 2 self-assessment.

The goal is not to assess whether students have categorized a character "correctly." Assessment should focus on their ability to **explain an interpretation and recognize that other interpretations are possible**.

Consolidation

At the end of Day 2, return to the central question:

Why might two people understand the same character differently?

Ask students to identify something they heard from another student that was different from their own thinking.

Students then complete a simple self-assessment.

Today I Can...

- 😊 I can describe a *Minecraft* character.
- 😊 / 😐 / 😞 I can explain why I think a character is a hero, villain or both.
- 😊 / 😐 / 😞 I can listen to other people's ideas.
- 😊 / 😐 / 😞 I understand that different people may see the same character differently.

Final Check-In

One thing I learned today:

One idea that surprised me:

Media Literacy Connections

The central Media Literacy Key Concept in this lesson is:

Audiences Negotiate Meaning

Different audiences can interpret the same media text differently.

A Villager, Player or Zombie might have very different views of the same character. Students' own experiences with *Minecraft*, games, stories and ideas about heroes and villains also influence their interpretations.

The lesson also introduces several related Key Concepts.

Media Construct Reality

Minecraft characters are designed representations. Their appearance, sounds, movements and behaviours have been deliberately constructed.

Ask:

- Why do Creepers look the way they do?
- Why do Villagers have large noses and make particular sounds?
- What do these choices encourage us to think about the characters?

Media Have Social and Political Implications

Characters are often categorized as "good" or "bad."

Ask:

- Is it fair to decide someone is bad based only on appearance?
- Can someone do both helpful and harmful things?
- Who gets to decide who is a hero and who is a villain?

These questions begin to introduce young students to ideas about **representation, stereotyping and perspective** in an age-appropriate way.

Form and Content Are Closely Related

The way a character looks, sounds and behaves helps communicate meaning.

For example:

If Creepers looked fluffy and pink, would players feel differently about them?

Students begin to recognize that creators make choices about **how characters are represented**, and those choices can influence audience response.

Accessibility / Adaptations

Provide multiple ways for students to participate and demonstrate their thinking.

Students may:

- speak, draw, write or record their responses;
- use sentence stems;
- point to or select Hero/Villain/Both/Not Sure rather than explaining immediately;
- work with a partner before contributing to the whole group;
- dictate responses to an adult;
- participate in dramatic activities verbally or non-verbally.

Students do not need previous experience playing *Minecraft*. Provide a brief introduction to unfamiliar characters so that all students have enough information to participate.

The **Not Sure** option in Four Corners is important. It allows students to participate without feeling pressured to make a judgment before they have enough information.

Teacher Reflection

This lesson evolved from an earlier lesson, *Minecraft, Media and Meaning: Creating With Purpose*, in which students were going to create dramatic or visual representations of heroes and villains connected to the Seven Grandfather Teachings and Nguzo Saba.

After observing that students had limited understanding of the concept of media, the teacher recognized the need to establish a stronger foundation in media literacy before moving into media production.

Classroom discussion provided the direction. Students frequently disagreed about whether particular *Minecraft* characters were heroes, villains or both. These differences created an authentic opportunity to introduce the Media Literacy Key Concept **Audiences negotiate meaning**.

It Looked Like Spilt Milk proved particularly effective as an introductory text because students could immediately experience the idea that different people can look at the same representation and see different things.

The lesson deliberately slows down the progression toward media production. Students first learn to describe, interpret, explain, listen and take another perspective. Future lessons can revisit **audience, purpose and representation** before inviting students to create their own media texts.

A later media-production activity could return to the original idea of connecting student-created texts with the **Seven Grandfather Teachings or Nguzo Saba**, allowing students to apply their developing media literacy understanding to questions of identity, values and community.