



Messages in a Bottle

Empathy Skills through Media Education

This material has been produced in cooperation with the National Audiovisual Institute, Metka Centre for Media Education, the Finnish Society on Media Education, Finnish PEN, Yle Oppiminen and Yle Uutisluokka

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Media Literacy Week



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Empathy Skills through Media Education

How are media and empathy connected? Do forms of media increase loneliness or communality? Can types of media be used to create more understanding between people?

‘Messages in a Bottle’ studies media in particular in relation to access to information, listening, interaction, self-expression and involvement. Overarching themes include promoting wide-ranging competence in empathy and freedom of speech.

A message in a bottle is a familiar communication method from adventure stories. Sending a message in a bottle can be seen as a form of media. In this case, the bottle is the media device or tool, and the message itself is the media content.

Media technologies developing and becoming more common has given people many different ways to express themselves, be exposed to other people’s thoughts and interact with others. However, communication and interaction through different types of media is not simple; it requires many different kinds of competencies and understanding.

One illustrative aspect of modern society is the diversity of different media devices and content. In the last few decades, technological developments and media becoming more widespread have brought many different kinds of media devices into people’s lives. In addition to television, radio, newspapers and books, among others, there are now smartphones, computers, tablets, the internet and other new technologies. This has expanded and diversified the media landscape.

The first section of the material looks at the importance of media from the points of view of self-expression, interaction and understanding the



world. In terms of empathy skills, it is important to be aware of the opportunities for interaction offered by different types of media. Media texts can be spoken, written, visual, or a combination of different modes of expression. Even though different kinds of media offer many opportunities for interaction, they also come with limitations. Depending on the media and the mode of expression, it may be impossible to judge the other party's body language, tone of voice or context, for example. By practising interaction we can try to understand other people better, avoid potential misunderstandings and communicate more clearly.

Medialisation, or the growing importance of different types media, is linked to the way these media convey information about the world to people. Much of the information we have about the world has been brought to us through different types of media. For example, we can hear about issues, events or people from all over the world, despite being hundreds or thousands of kilometres away. In this way, media acts as building material for our worldview. Often issues presented in the media may have been condensed into simplifications of a complex reality.

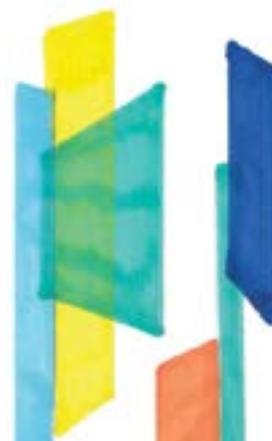
The second section of the material uses investigative analysis methods to explore media content and media culture. Special attention is paid to the ways in which feelings, people and groups of people are represented in different media. The goal of this section is to improve interpretation and analysis skills and understanding of stereotypes, norms and their meaning. The section also reflects on how people can challenge the generalisations presented by the media and increase the diversity present in media representations.

From the point of view of freedom of speech, medialisation means that people are better able to access information, interact with other people and express their own thoughts. It is important that this is taken into consideration in media education, because benefiting from the opportunities free speech brings requires not only media equipment but also media-related competence. However, there are many different perspectives

when it comes to freedom of speech and its promotion, and there is no one perfect solution; many issues require a great deal of reflection and discussion. The third section of the material looks at freedom of speech through means such as debate exercises. Debate does not in itself mean arguing or negative discussion; the point of debate is to find different reasoning and points of view, and to take a range of different perspectives into account. The aim of the exercises is to improve understanding of the diversity of freedom of speech as a theme, promote consideration of different perspectives, and develop argumentation skills.

Different types of media offer a variety of opportunities to act and participate actively. The fourth section of the material reflects on sending messages in a bottle and related methods and objectives. Active participation is important for democracy and civic society. In connection with empathy, this may mean a desire to work on issues important to oneself and others. The exercises pay attention to people's opportunities to influence matters and the importance of participation. The goal of the section is to develop media production skills and to promote active citizenship in today's medialised society.

In many ways, the themes of the material are related to human rights and their promotion. The material can, therefore, be used in a variety of ways in human rights education. Human rights refer to the basic rights to which all people are entitled. Their objective is to ensure that every person lives a life with human dignity, to ensure a basic living, and to guarantee the opportunity to participate in society. All people are entitled to human rights, and they are valid everywhere, regardless of the person's background, gender or social status.



Human rights are:

- **universal.** All the people of the world possess these same rights, and they are valid everywhere.
- **inalienable.** They cannot be taken away from anyone, not even with the person's permission.
- **interrelated and interdependent.** Promoting one right has positive impacts on the realisation of other rights. Similarly, breaching one right often affects the realisation of other rights negatively.
- **indivisible.** Only the most important rights have been listed as human rights.

You can find more information about human rights here, for example:

[The website of the UN Association of Finland](#)

[The 'Ihmisoikeudet' \(Human Rights\) online service \(in Finnish\)](#)

How to use the material?

The four sections of the material can be implemented either independently or as a more comprehensive whole. The sections include background information and operating models aimed at media education for different age groups. All assignments are designed so that they can be adapted to suit your own work.

The assignments can be implemented in different environments and with participants of different ages. On page 26, you can find more information on how the material relates to the policy definitions guiding education, library work and youth work.

Unless otherwise noted, the links lead to websites or documents in Finnish.

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1. Reading messages in a bottle

Towards a mutual understanding



GOALS:

- Increasing understanding of the importance of empathy in human interaction.
- Understanding the opportunities and importance of media in human interaction.
- Understanding the possibilities forms of media offer in describing the diversity of life and people.
- Developing information searching and critical thinking skills.

INTRODUCTION

In many ways, we interact with each other through different forms of media. The messages transmitted through media can be in different formats, and they can use e.g. text, images and sound. However, in media-based communications we cannot necessarily use the same methods as in face-to-face interaction.

When sending messages, it is important to understand and pay attention to their recipients and the interpretations they make. Different people can interpret the same message in many different ways. Even though we can never decide how other people will interpret a message, it is important to try to take the recipient's interpretation into account in advance.

It is important to pay special attention to understanding others in media-based communication, because this is not always easy. Certain elements are often omitted in communication through media. We do not necessarily hear the other person's voice or see their body language.

In the assignments in this section, empathy skills are approached through understanding media-based communications, identifying emotions, and taking different points of view into account. In this assignment, empathy is considered as aiming to understand other people equally and taking other points of view into account.

Assignment 1: What can you see behind the screen?

Target groups: children under 8, 8–12-year-olds

The assignment involves reflecting on receiving and interpreting different kinds of messages. By studying how different kinds of messages are received, you can reflect on the effect of communication on people's feelings. By paying attention to media-based communication and sending and receiving messages, we can try to improve how we take others into account. In the assignment, the participants determine what kind of messages people have just received based on their expressions. You can find a set of images via [this link](#) (pdf). Or, you can also look for new images or make ones yourselves.

Start by dividing the participants into small groups, and show one picture at a time to the whole group. You can use a projector to show the example picture to everyone, or print out pictures for the groups in advance.

Ask the groups to discuss and think about the following questions:

- How do you think the person in the picture feels? How can you tell this?
- What kind of message has the person received?
- Who sent the message?
- How do you think they replied to the message?

Review the group discussions together at the end.

- Was it easy to identify emotions?
- Was it easy to establish the kind of message that the people in the pictures had received?
- Why is it important to consider other people's feelings?
- What kind of messages would you like to receive?
- What kind of feelings would you like to evoke with messages?

Tip: You can also study the Media Literacy Week materials from previous years at the Media Literacy School. There you can find, among other things, the [Sävyisästi yhdessä](#) ('Good-natured coexistence') material suitable for media education produced by the City of Helsinki's Department of Early Education and Care and the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, as well as the [Explorers of the Media Map](#) material (in English), which discusses feelings evoked by different types of media.



Assignment 2: From misunderstandings to understanding others

Target groups: children under 8 years old, 8–12-year-olds, those 13 years old or over

The assignment involves reflecting on understanding other people and being understood. In the assignment, the participants create a media production and use it to process situations in which people have not understood others or have not been heard themselves. In this assignment, a media production means storycrafting, grassroots comics, a digital story or a video, but the production can also be created using other methods.

BECOMING FAMILIAR WITH TYPES OF MEDIA

Increasingly often, we are in contact and interact with other people through different kinds of media. For example, we can call a friend on the phone, catch up with relatives on social media, write an e-mail to a friend, or talk about things via a video call. We can be directly in contact with someone we know, or have discussions with strangers online. Our message can reach even large numbers of people all over the world, and we can participate in discussions using different kinds of equipment.

The communication can be based on text, images or sounds, or it can use all of these methods. Start by discussing different kinds of media. You can list the different types of media together on a board, or you can use digital equipment.

Examples of media equipment:

- Television
- Newspaper
- Mobile phone or smartphone
- Tablet
- Computer
- Book
- Camera
- Games console

You can also include media content, software and applications on the list.

With the youngest participants, you can complete the [media equipment colouring assignment](#) and discuss the use of media in connection with it.



In some of the forms of media, professionals produce and publish the majority of the content. In other forms of media, almost anyone can produce content and express themselves or interact with others. Next, choose and mark the types of media that you could use to send messages to other people. Discuss the communication possibilities of different types of media together.

- To whom could you send a message with the medium in question? Who could the recipients of the message be?
- Media can be related to communication between people, or mass communication to large groups. In your opinion, in which category do different kinds of media belong? How large a group could you reach with a certain medium? Could you use it to target the message at a specific person, such as a friend or family member?
- How would you send a message using a certain medium, and what would you need (such as publishing an opinion piece in a local newspaper or making a video call on a smartphone)?
- What would the message format be? What aspects of communication would it include (image, sound, written text)?

CREATING A MEDIA PRODUCTION

Next, we consider the importance of media in its different forms for human interaction. Sending and receiving messages requires both production and interpretation. For successful communication to take place, the sender must be able to produce a message that the recipient can understand. On the other hand, it is also important that the recipient makes an effort to understand the message.

Communication may fail if the message was sent in an unclear format or using the wrong method, or if the recipient cannot or does not want to understand it, for example. It is important to note that the recipient of the message can personally affect how they interpret the message and how they act based on it.

In the second part of the assignment, we pay attention to the ways in which you can promote understanding of others, and create media productions based on them. Form small groups and create fictional examples of communication and interaction situations where some form of media is being used. Think of situations where communication can either succeed or fail. You can use your imagination in these fictional situations. Think about the following questions in groups:

- Who is communicating with whom? Which people are involved in the situation?
- What is the communication about?
- Where does the situation take place?
- What medium is used to communicate?
- How does the situation progress in the example situations? How does the situation evolve if the communication fails? What happens if the communication is successful?

Next, create media productions in which you describe two versions of the events: a situation with successful communication and a situation in which the communication fails. Watch or listen the productions you have created together at the end of the session and discuss the situations presented in them.

- What happened in the situation?
- What would you do in a similar situation?
- What things affected the success or failure of the communication?
- What kind of tips or advice would you give in a situation like this?



Depending on the target group, the resources available and the goals, the media production can be created in different ways, such as 1) storycrafting 2) grassroots comics 3) a digital story or 4) a video.

OPTION 1: STORYCRAFTING

Storycrafting is a good way to listen and give a space to other people's voices. It is a narrative method in which a new story, tale or fable is created between the storyteller and the storycrafter. The method is suitable for everyone, regardless of age or culture. You can tell stories individually or as a group. The stories created through storycrafting can be collected into a storybook or recorded as a radio play or podcast.

OPTION 2: GRASSROOTS COMICS

Grassroots comics are a simple visual storytelling method that can be used in a variety of ways for different purposes. A grassroots comic strip usually consists of four panels, and it can convey information without words. The comic strip can also include text, but it should be understandable even without it. You can make the task easier by having everyone show the comic strip to their neighbour before adding text (if any), so they can see first how well the message is communicated without words. You can find more detailed [instructions](#) for creating grassroots comics in the Media Literacy School.

OPTION 3: DIGITAL STORY

In a digital story, the work or story is created, recorded and told with digital equipment. A digital story can be created as a group assignment.

A digital story is created by:

1. Creating the idea for the desired story or message
2. Planning the story and writing a script (including the sounds, sound effects, narration, music, photographs)
3. Collecting the necessary photographs, sounds, music and videos from different sources or creating them yourselves
4. Compiling and editing the story as an independent whole, using video editing or presentation software, for example. The length of the video should be decided on in advance. You can tell your story in an interesting way in a concise video (e.g. 60–90 seconds).

Tip: You can find more information about digital stories and using them in the [Maailmanpiiri](#) materials produced by Metka Centre for Media Education, for example. You can find more information on photographs in the public domain through [this article](#) by Yle Oppiminen, for example.

OPTION 4: VIDEO

Videos and short films make it possible to show and tell others about a situation in a range of different ways. For example, you can create imaginary documentary videos or tutorials together, or you can record acted situations. You can find support for making videos and short films in the [Meidän jutusta tuttu](#) ('Our kind of story') material, the [Videovinkit](#) ('Video tips') assignment produced by the Media Literacy School, or the [Kaikki kuvaa](#) ('Everybody makes films') website.

Assignment 3: Changing the point of view

Target groups: 8–12 year olds, those 13 years old or over

Through forms of media, we can hear about other people's experiences and thoughts, which gives us an opportunity to learn to understand others. With television shows, series, movies, games, literature, social media, and different kinds of blogs or vlogs, we can try to empathise with others and see the world, its events and phenomena from other people's perspectives.

This assignment involves analysing the points of view presented in types of media.



Start by thinking about your own experiences with forms of media. Discuss the media productions that have made an impact on you and that have helped you learn more about new people, cultures or world-views. Next, choose a media production to analyse. You can choose a work to analyse in advance, or you can guide the group members in choosing a work to be analysed themselves.

Analyse the media production with the help of the following questions:

- Who are featured in the media production? Who is its main character?
- Who are the other characters in the media production?
- What happens in the production, what are its most important events?
- How does the main character influence or react to the events?
- What would you do in these situations?
- What did the events feel like for the main character? Why?
- If you were in the main character's position, how would the events make you feel?

Finish by reviewing the results of the analysis and present the productions together. What kind of impression did you get from the media productions and how did you like them? Was it easy to identify the main character and their point of view? In your opinion, do the points of view and ways of acting presented in the media production correspond to reality? You can compile a media exhibition on the productions, in which you present the characters and points of view. You can also make recommendations: for whom would the media productions be suitable and why?

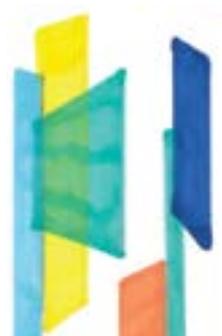
EXTRA ASSIGNMENT: LEARNING FROM OTHERS

If you wish, you can also adapt the analysis to study different blogs or vlogs.

Media in its different forms makes it easy to express yourself and produce and share works in different ways, which allows almost anybody to tell others about their thoughts, share their experiences or talk about their lives. Through self-produced media content, such as blogs and vlogs, we can learn about different ways of thinking, acting and living. Through this we can learn to appreciate other people, take them into account, and work together with them.

Discuss different kinds of blogs or vlogs together. Which ones are popular at the moment? Do the group members follow any blogs or vlogs? Next, instruct the participants to choose one of the options that came up in the discussion and review it either alone, in pairs or in small groups. You can also find a few different options in advance, so that inappropriate content does not come up while searching for information.

- Who is/are the creator/s of the content you chose?
- Do other people in addition to the creator appear in the videos or texts, and who are they?
- Are the videos targeted at a specific group?
- What kinds of subjects do they discuss?
- What kinds of feelings did the creators have? What caused the feelings? How can you identify the emotions?
- What new things could you learn from them?



EXTRA ASSIGNMENT: BURSTING SOCIAL MEDIA BUBBLES

If social media communities have a prejudiced worldview or perspective, they can create too narrow a picture of different kinds of opinions and ways of thinking. In such cases, the community may be a social media bubble, where like-minded people have formed their own network. It is important to be aware of social media bubbles, so that you can burst them if you see fit.

Watch [this video](#) about social media bubbles by the vlogger Ronja Salmi on the Yle Uutisluokka website.

Discuss behaviour on social media, social media bubbles and their significance with the help of the following questions.

- Based on the video, what does the term ‘social media bubble’ mean? How would you explain a social media bubble to a person who has never used social media services?
- What kind of impact might social media bubbles have on people’s lives, or more broadly speaking, on society?
- How can a social media bubble affect our attitudes towards people with opinions that differ from our own?
- In what kinds of situations can a social media bubble be a good thing?
- In your opinion, how could a social media bubble be burst? You can gather the methods and tips together and turn them into instructions that can be shared as a poster, text or image, for example.

Assignment 4: Media expedition

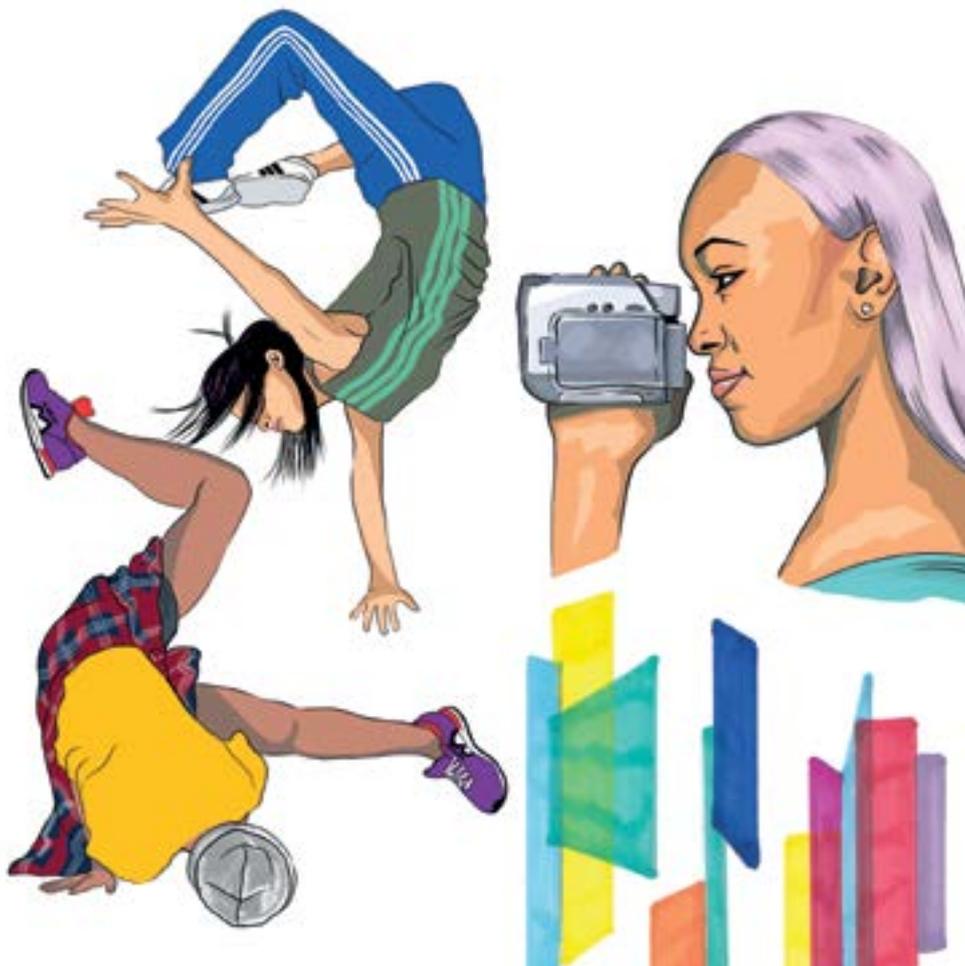
Target groups: 8–12-year-olds, those 13 years old or over

The assignment involves learning about people and cultures from different countries through the media. The objective of the assignment is to illustrate how important a role the media plays in how we form ideas about people living in different parts of the world.

You can choose a daily newspaper or a specific online news site, for example, to review and find all foreign news about other countries. Collect the news or stories together and see which countries of the world they discuss. What kinds of subjects do the news articles talk about? Based on the story in question, what can we deduce about the country featured in the story and the people who live there? What kind of image does the story build of the people living in that country? Discuss the countries you found. What kind of information and ideas do the group members have about different countries, the people who live there and their cultures? How have the ideas about different countries formed, and where does the information come from?

Divide the participants into groups so that each group can study one country in more detail.

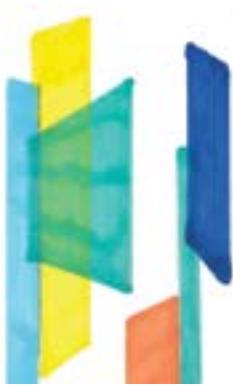
Assign a task whereby the group members use several different sources to find information about the country and the people who live there, and ask them to create a presentation describing local life and cultures. Depending on the time and opportunities available, you can instruct the group members to choose and design the presentation format themselves.



You can find information in places such as:

- local news sources online
- social media, using keywords about different countries
- various tourism or information sites
- map services
- online video services
- the library

The aim is to use different types of media and sources to expand and diversify the image of people who live in different areas of the world, their cultures and lives. Finish off by comparing the results with the original story and the picture it creates about a certain country and the people who live there. Was the information conveyed about the citizens of the countries generally similar, or was there conflicting information?



Discuss different types of media and the information found through them. Which types of media did you use to find information? What kind of information could you find using different media forms? Did the information seem reliable in your opinion? From whose point of view was the information presented? What kind of differences were there between sources and types of media?

There are plenty of things to report on all over the world. At the end of the session, think about and discuss how events and the citizens of a specific country are selected to become news? Sometimes no news is reported about people from some countries; which ones? What kinds of things about Finns become news elsewhere in the world? What kinds of things about Finland should be reported elsewhere in the world, in your opinion?

2. Examining messages in a bottle



GOALS:

- Increasing understanding of stereotypes, norms and their meaning in human interaction.
- Understanding the importance of types of media as part of the development of identity.
- Promoting media interpretation and analysis skills, as well as critical thinking.

INTRODUCTION

While media texts describe people, they also help to establish our understanding of groups of people and phenomena. For example, media texts include ideas of who is one of ‘us’ and who is perceived as ‘the other’. Such divisions can affect our own actions, whether we are aware of them or not.

Media texts are always a result of the choices people make, which means they involve the use of power. The use of power may consist of intentionally shaping ideas or sparking consumer desire. Media texts also describe the social norms attributed to people and help to establish them. Norms refer to assumptions of what certain people are like or what they should be like. In media texts, norms are formed when a certain way of describing people is repeated often enough. Media literacy helps people to understand the limitations of media texts better and how they are used to build certain kinds of identities. The identities described in media texts do not necessarily correspond to people’s own identities, but different types of media can still be used to form one’s own identity.

Norms can be seen in the stereotyping of people, i.e. making generalisations. To some extent, generalisations are necessary for human interaction so that we can talk about things and understand concepts. Generalisations become harmful

when they are used to control people and limit their opportunities to fulfil themselves. Stereotypes never describe everybody in a certain group, and some may feel that norms are too narrow and discriminatory. Norms and stereotypes are related to divisions between people that may put them into unequal positions. Such divisions may be based on factors such as gender, skin colour, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion or views, disability, sexual orientation or financial situation. Media texts also present an opportunity to challenge and change harmful norms.

Media literacy provides the ability to study the norms portrayed media texts critically. When reading media texts, you should ask: From what point of view is the text written? Who has the power to define a norm or stereotype? Whose position and what kind of activity do they reinforce? To whom might they be harmful? In this case, empathy can be seen as taking another person’s point of view into account or trying to put yourself into a similar position. Examining harmful norms and stereotypes gives people the ability to change them, if possible.

You can find more information here:

[Normit nurin](#) (‘Down with norms’) material

Assignment 1: What kind of everyday lives do people lead?

Target groups: children under 8, 8–12-year-olds

Start by finding photographs of people (from different parts of the world) in magazines, newspapers or books, or on social media sites or other websites. Depending on the age level, the pictures can be related to topics such as everyday tasks, conflicts or other themes. Choose a picture to examine. Look at the picture together quietly. Ask the children or the teens to think about the following questions out loud:

- What do you think is happening in the picture? Why? What things in the picture make you think that?
- How is the person in the picture feeling, in your opinion? Why?
- What in the picture looks similar to your own neighbourhood? What is different?

If the picture has a caption, read it – along with where the picture was taken – out loud only afterwards. Ask the children or the teens to think about what the everyday life of the person is like. You can think about the following questions, for example:

- What might the person in the picture do when they wake up in the morning? What is the last thing they might do before they go to sleep?
- What are their favourite games or hobbies?
- What things might you find in common between the everyday life of the person in the picture and your own life?
- Did your opinion about the picture change after you heard the caption and where the picture was taken? If it changed, can you work out why?

After this, you can create a story, play, statue, picture or video together based on the picture, explaining what the person in the picture did before the picture was taken and what they are going to do after it. Alternatively, you can create works where you invent a story for the person in the picture where they do something completely different from your first impressions based on the picture. Present your work to each other at the end of the session.

Links:

[Maailma 2030](#) ('World 2030') album of the magazine Kehitys

Website: [Everyday Africa](#) (in English)

Instagram profiles:

everydayafrica, everydayasia, everydayeasterneurope, everydaymiddleeast

Facebook pages: Humans of New York, Humans of Myyr York



Assignment 2: What kind of people can you see in media?

Target group: 8–12-year-olds

This assignment involves studying the people shown in the media and creating a picture collage together. The assignment can be done in small groups, pairs, or individually.

Start by choosing the media to be examined. The assignment can be done by media genre so that one group focuses on sports news, another on foreign news, a third on advertisements, and so on. In addition to print media, social media websites or online advertisements can also be used in the assignment, for example.

Start by cutting out pictures of people. Glue the pictures you have cut out on one piece of paper or cardboard, creating a collage. You can also do this exercise electronically, so that the collage is created on a tablet or computer.

Place the collages you have created in different parts of the room. After this, you can walk around the room to see the collages the other groups have made. Think about the following questions while looking at the different collages or afterwards in small group discussions:



- What kind of people are shown in the pictures?
- What kind of people are not shown in the pictures?

You can project or write out a list of keywords to help with the discussion, with words such as: the pictured gender, age, skin colour, disability/lack of disability, financial situation, body size, religion and nationality. You can also think about whether it is even possible to see some characteristics in the pictures, such as religion, financial situation or nationality?

Discuss the things that surprised you or did not surprise you in the assignment together at the end. You can also think about what it may mean if only certain kinds of people are shown in the media? Why is it important that different kinds of people are represented in the media? How could the image in the media be diversified?

EXTRA ASSIGNMENT: You can continue this assignment by drawing more people into the collages or printing out more pictures to add to them, for example.



Assignment 3: Headline exercise

Target group: those 13 years old or over

The aim of the exercise is to study how media texts describe different kinds of people. The assignment can be done in small groups, pairs or individually. The different phases should be scheduled clearly to make sure that the assignment progresses smoothly. For example, you can spend 20–30 minutes on phases 1–3, another 20–30 minutes on phase four, and 10–15 minutes on phase five.

1. Choose one of the following subjects and examine media texts about it:
 - a gender (male/female/gender minorities)
 - a sexuality (heterosexuality/homosexuality/other sexual minorities)
 - disability/lack of disability
 - an age group (children/young people/adults/the elderly)
 - a national minority (such as Sámi, Roma, or linguistic minorities)
 - a nationality, a country or an ethnic background
 - refugees or asylum seekers
 - a religion
 - a body size
2. Find 3–4 articles about the subject on the websites or in paper editions of different newspapers or magazines. The search engines on the newspaper or magazine websites are useful in this assignment.
3. Read through the articles so you can discuss them later. You do not need to remember the texts by heart, but their main message should be clear.
4. Create a simple poster with headlines based on the articles you have found, where you summarise the main message and tone of your article in one attention-grabbing phrase. Draw a picture related to the content of the article and add one to each headline, too.
5. When your work is done, walk in pairs around the room and look at the posters others have made. While walking, talk about what kind of picture you think the headline creates about the group of people in question. The following helpful questions can be projected or written out:
 - What kinds of thoughts do the headlines provoke in you?
 - Is the image created by the headlines positive, negative or something in between?
6. Break down the assignment by writing about or discussing the following questions:
 - How did the articles or headlines describe the group of people you studied?
 - In your opinion, did the headlines feature harmful stereotypes or norms?
 - Whose points of view were heard and seen in the article? Who was speaking – was it representatives of the group of people in question themselves, a politician, a researcher, an expert or another party?
 - In your opinion, whose voice cannot be heard or seen in the articles?
 - Is there anything that disturbs you in the ways the news are presented? How could they be changed?

EXTRA ASSIGNMENT: You can create new headlines about the same subjects and think about what kind of news you would like to see about the group of people in question in the future.

More information: The report [‘Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Press Coverage’](#) (in English)

3. Defending freedom of speech



GOALS:

- Increasing understanding of freedom of speech and its importance.
- Strengthening understanding of the importance of media in its different forms from the point of view of access to information, interaction and self-expression.
- Promoting communication, interaction and argumentation skills.

INTRODUCTION

Freedom of speech is a human right, and it is key to the realisation of many other human rights, as well as forming a pillar of democratic society. Freedom of speech means everyone having the right to express their opinion publicly and receive and disseminate information in different forms without being prevented by anyone. This means that freedom of speech gives people an opportunity to hear the thoughts of others, have discussions with them and also express themselves.

You could say that the new opportunities created by different types of media have supported people's opportunities to exercise their freedom of speech. However, defending freedom of speech requires taking other people into account. It is important to be aware that other people also have freedom of speech, and it must be respected. In addition to rights, freedom of speech also entails various responsibilities, and freedom of speech is not completely unlimited. For example, you cannot discriminate against other people, insult their honour or incite people to violence in the name of freedom of speech. The limits drawn for freedom of speech are, nevertheless, not always clear, which is why it is good to discuss them in media education.

One of the lines drawn is related to the limits between freedom of speech and hate speech. **Hate speech** refers to all kinds of defamation and hate towards an individual person or a group of people, as well as supporting, promoting and in-

citing such things. Hate speech can also involve harassment, insults, negative stereotypes, labelling and threats. Hate speech is often targeted at people based on skin colour, language, religion or views, nationality, ethnicity, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation or some other characteristic. Hate speech can occur in many different forms, such as writing, speech, images, symbols, music, videos, plays or paintings.

In Finland, people encounter hate speech in particular in public spaces and on social media, and the people who experience it are often members of a minority group. The relationship between hate speech and freedom of speech is conflicted. In fact, hate speech may restrict freedom of speech and make people censor their own expression. At the same time, defining hate speech may be challenging, and it is important not to limit freedom of speech without due cause. Definitions are a subject of continuous legal negotiation, but it is also important to consider them at an everyday level. Ethnic agitation, or threatening a specific group of people, is expressly prohibited by the Criminal Code of Finland.

Freedom of speech includes the possibility of discussing difficult subjects, too. However, there are different ways of discussing issues. It is important to pay attention to how things are discussed. Discussing issues together requires interaction skills from all parties. Presenting your own thoughts, communicating with and listen-

ing to others are skills that you can practise. In connection with interaction skills, this section includes assignments related to expressing your own opinions and listening to others, as well as discussion and debate. The concept of debate may evoke the idea of an argument or a fight, but here debate is seen as a constructive discussion and a way of investigating issues together. It can be used to put yourself into another person's position and understand the value judgements of others too. This makes it possible to develop empathy skills, and it encourages critical thinking and reflection on the multidimensionality of things.

More information and links:

- Leena Kurki & Tuukka Tomperi (2011), *Väitely opetusmenetelmänä: Kriittinen ajattelu, argumentaatio ja retoriikka käytännössä*. Tampere: niin & näin.
- Yle Oppiminen: [a logical deduction test](#)
- Yle Oppiminen: [a freedom of speech test](#)
- Yle Uutisluokka: [a programme about freedom of speech](#)
- Ihmisoikeudet.net website: section [Sananvapaus](#) ('Freedom of speech')
- The [No Hate Speech Movement](#) website
- Reeta Pöyhkäri, Paula Haara and Pentti Raittila (2013) [Vihapuhe sananvapautta kaventamassa](#). Tampere: Tampere University Press.





Assignment 1: Finding opinions

Target groups: children under 8, 8–12-year-olds

This assignment involves expressing yourself and your opinions. During the assignment, the space you are in is imagined as a line where one end is ‘disagree completely’ and the other end is ‘agree completely.’ If desired, the line can be marked on the floor using masking tape, for example, and ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’ can be projected or written visibly at either end of the line.

Read the following statements to the participants one by one, and instruct them to move to the point that represents their opinion on the line. The statements presented are not necessarily right or wrong; they can also divide opinions. It is important to be aware that several different opinions and related reasonings about the same issue may exist.

Statements:

- All people should be able to state their own opinion.
- It is important to listen to other people’s opinions.
- It is important to justify an opinion.
- Everyone must agree on things.
- When arguing, you can insult others and use bad words.
- A child’s opinion is as important as an adult’s.
- Mean messages can be very frightening.
- You should be able to post anything you want on social media.
- It is good that films have age ratings.

You can also come up with other statements for the opinions exercise.

To finish, discuss opinions and expressing them: what kind of opinions can be expressed? How did it feel to express your opinion? Was anything especially difficult or easy? Which reasons were the best, and which ones did not really work and why? Why is it important to justify your opinion? When can an opinion insult another person? What are the limits of an opinion?

It is also important to justify opinions so that different opinions can be taken into account and assessed. There may be several different justifications for the same opinion, and they may be based on information, experience or emotion. It is important to respect another person’s opinions. You can continue the opinion exercise by collecting and compiling the participants’ opinions and related justifications on an opinion board. You can collect the opinions as drawings or pieces of writing on your group’s own opinion board, using either traditional or digital tools and equipment. Collect the opinions on a two-part board, where you continue the following sentences:

- 1) In my opinion (choose one of the following, or come up with your own starting phrase):
 - a) children should have...
 - b) a day care centre or school should have...
 - c) adults should...
- 2) Because...

Finish by discussing how it felt to express opinions. Was it easy, or was it challenging to come up with or justify your own opinion? You can also review the opinions together and consider whether you could promote some issues that came up in the opinions. What could you do for them as a group, and should the opinions also be presented to others?

Assignment 2: Argumentation and debate exercise

Target group: those 13 years old or over

A number of issues relating to freedom of speech are associated with many different points of view that you should be aware of or take into account. This assignment utilises debate pedagogy, which can be used to highlight points of view related to the subjects, illustrate the complexity of issues and promote argumentation skills. Thinking skills and self-expression are also important abilities when it comes to active citizenship.

Debate is one of the oldest methods of teaching and learning, and it can be used to develop different kinds of thinking, speaking and acting skills. Debate can also be used to gain skills to resolve conflicts in a constructive way. Debate and its purpose should be discussed with pupils and students. As a part of teaching, debate must also be set up and broken down well. This includes agreeing on rules, for example. The goal is not just to focus on public speaking skills; it is also to learn how to argue and debate different kinds of arguments and their justifications. In a debate, you may need to justify a position that is not in line with your own opinions. Debate should be seen as a part of a larger learning process. Preparing for a debate and gathering basic information is an important part of debate.

Start by telling the group about the assignment, discuss debating together on a general level, and go through the style, rules and goals of the debate together. Together, agree on the duration and progress of the debate, asking for permission to speak, roles, ending the debate and determining the end result (a vote or a judge decides on who is the winner).



Divide the participants into two groups or several small groups. In a debate in small groups, one pair may debate on a specific topic while the others act as judges. After the debate, you can change roles. Draw lots to decide which side of the debate the participants are on. The participants in the debate are either for or against a motion. It should be emphasised that the debaters themselves do not need to be for or against the motion; this task involves developing argumentation skills, and people take on different roles in a debate situation. This means that the participants may not be representing themselves or their own views in a debate; instead, they are representing an argument for or against the motion. The starting point and the content of the debate are opposing arguments and positions, not disagreements between people.

Give the debaters or groups time (e.g. 20 minutes) to prepare and, if necessary, find information about the selected debate topics from different sources. If the debate is to be carried out in teams, the teams can prepare arguments initially on paper and agree on how they are to be presented. After this, the debates are carried out according to the rules agreed on together. During the debate, people speak in turn so that each member of the team can state their own argument. After everyone has stated their argument, the teams can have a few minutes to speak freely. You can act as the judge, or you can instruct the other participants to judge the debate.

Choose the debate topic from the following example statements:

- Everyone has a right to present their opinion in any situation.
 - Online discussions should be moderated or screened in advance by the site administrator.
 - There is no right to censor discussion boards.
 - It should be possible to punish people based on opinions they have expressed.
 - Using a mobile phone during class should be allowed.
 - People have the right to read other people's messages.
 - Media in its different forms increases people's loneliness.
 - A journalist or a politician should be able to tolerate more aggressive commentary than other people.
- You can also come up with other statements.

Finish by reviewing the debate together. The parties to the debate can shake hands and thank each other for the debate at this stage. The parties to the debate can also give constructive feedback on the other party's arguments. What was good about them? What worked? After the decision by the judges or the popular vote, it is also important to reflect on the debate situation and emotions together. In the final discussion, you can focus on how the debate felt, what was surprising in the debate, which end results and arguments were the best in your opinion, and what kind of additional justifications could have been presented in the debate.

When breaking down the assignment, it is important to ensure that none of the participants stay upset or agitated by the debate, even if the debate also included the dramatisation of issues. It has been found that debate is at its most effective when the debaters act empathetically in their role (Kurki & Tomperi 2011, 129). In the final discussion, it is important to emphasise that debate involves practising argumentation skills, not stirring up conflict. The debate exercise should not affect the relationships between the participants after the debate.

If you wish, you can also try to hold a debate using digital equipment, such as messaging applications.

Extra assignment: Based on the experiences from the discussions, you can draw up rules for a good discussion together with your group. Choose a presentation method you like for the rules and put them somewhere other people can see them.

4. Sending messages in a bottle



GOALS:

- Increasing understanding of the opportunities and meanings of different types of media from the point of view of inclusion and involvement.
- Developing interpretation and production skills concerning types of media.
- Promoting inclusion and involvement skills.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of a message in a bottle is to convey the desired message from the sender to the receiver. A message sent in a bottle may have a clear goal, but the target is selected randomly based on who picks the bottle out of the water. In this section, the message in a bottle refers generally to producing and sending different kinds of messages.

Due to the development of media technologies and different kinds of media equipment becoming more common, more and more people have found different ways of expressing their own thoughts, interacting with others and finding information. We can use different ways of expressing ourselves in spoken, written or visual language, and we can reach different target groups or people.

With different types of media, we can share our thoughts with the person next to us just as easily as we can send the same message to the other side of the world. We can send a message privately to a particular person, or reach large numbers of people. Therefore, different types of media as a whole form an important channel for participation and involvement.

In fact, sending messages in a bottle can also mean the desire to act, participate and be involved. However, utilising the opportunities given by different forms of media requires many kinds of skills. The aim of this section is to pay attention to the appropriate use of types of media, the skills related to producing and interpreting media, and promoting them.

Assignment 1: Feel-good messages in a bottle

Target groups: children under 8, 8–12-year-olds

This assignment involves sending a feel-good message in a bottle to another person. The message in a bottle can be created on paper with traditional methods, or digitally. The purpose of the message in a bottle is to convey happiness, increase communality, and illustrate the opportunities types of media offer for positive communication.

Start by discussing in what kinds of situations you often send feel-good messages to other people (name day or birthday greetings, holiday greetings, greetings for celebrations)? What could a feel-good message contain? Guide the group members in thinking about how they could make another group member happy with a message, and what kind of message they would like to create.

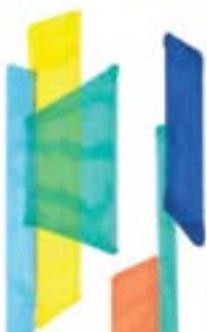
You can choose the medium for creating feel-good messages in a bottle. For example, they can be written messages or drawn pictures, photos, or video greetings. Just like in a real message in a bottle, the recipient cannot be chosen; the messages are sent randomly. Gather the messages together and distribute them to the group members at random. You can also collect the messages yourself and distribute them so that if necessary, you can ensure that every message has positive content.

In the end, you can talk about what it felt like to receive a positive message and greeting. Who are some other people you would like to make happy, and to whom could you send the next feel-good message in a bottle? Alternatively, you can also send messages in a bottle to family members, friends, or other people close to you, or make random people happy by putting the messages in a bottle on display for others.

Assignment 2: People who change the world

Target group: those 13 years or over

Empathy skills also include the desire and ability to act for other people and issues. This assignment involves reflecting on and finding information about people or parties that have worked to make the world a better place. The goal is to increase understanding of different ways of making a difference and thinking about in which ways everyone can make the world a better place. You can carry out the assignment as individuals, in pairs or as a group assignment.



WARM-UP:

The assignment begins by discussing people or parties who have worked to better the world, people or the environment. You can find pictures of well-known influential people or benefactors in advance and ask if the participants recognise the people in the pictures. Discuss with the participants the kinds of people they know of who have made a difference in the world. Collect the examples that come up on a board or by using digital tools.

[A list of Nobel Peace Prize laureates](#)

SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION:

Give the participants a task of choosing one of the people mentioned, and studying them more closely to find out more information about them. You can find information via a variety of sources, such as by searching online, in textbooks or in the library. In the information search, attention should be paid to the person's background and what they have done to change the world.

Background questions

- Who is the person?
- When were they born and when did they live?
- Where are they from and where did/do they live?
- Did/do they have a family?

Questions related to activities

- In what ways has the person changed the world? What did they do, or what kind of an influence did/do they have?
- Which causes did/do they work for?
- What could this person or their actions teach people today?
- What kinds of actions could other people take to work for the same goal? Find examples.

PRESENTING THE RESULTS AND FINAL DISCUSSION:

Next, present the results of your information search and analysis to others. You can choose the presentation method. For example, you can create:

- a poster exhibition
- a blog post
- a video presentation
- or you can present the results using presentation technology (PowerPoint, Open Office, Prezi, etc.)

Finish by reviewing the work together so that everyone can hear more about the different people, and discuss different forms of involvement. What kinds of things would you like to change about the world? Who could do something about it? What could you do for the cause? It is important to note that everyone can act, by taking steps such as intervening in bullying, donating things or being a friend. You can learn more about solidarity actions people take at solidaarisuusteot.fi.

Assignment 3: Writing digital messages in a bottle (opinion vlog)

Target group: those 13 years or over

Traditionally, opinion pieces have been published in newspapers, but nowadays there are also many other channels for expressing your opinion. This assignment involves creating an opinion piece on video. The purpose of the assignment is to use videos to present your own thoughts and opinions and to understand the possibilities offered by different kinds of media as a way of influencing issues. In the assignment, the participants create videos they can use to present their own opinion and work for a cause that is important to them.

Discuss problems to be solved that affect different people, and for which the participants think it is important to act. For whom would they like to act? The issues can be, for example, concretely con-



nected to your own neighbourhood and living environment, or they can be wider, more general issues. Note down the issues together where everyone can see them. Guide the group members in choosing one of the issues or problems mentioned and thinking about justifications related to it: Why is it important to promote the issue, who can do something about it, and how can it be promoted?

Guide the group members in creating an opinion vlog about the issue. You can choose the video format depending on the time and opportunities available. At its simplest, the video can be a spoken commentary about the issue, shot in a single take, or it can be a longer and more extensive depiction of the subject. At the end, watch the videos together and discuss the subjects raised on the videos and the solutions presented. You can agree on publishing the ‘messages in a bottle’ that were created based on the discussion.

Tip: You can find instructions and tips for making a video in the Media Literacy School’s [Videovinkit](#) (‘Video tips’) assignment (pdf) or at the [Kaikki kuvaa](#) (‘Everybody makes films’) website.

EXTRA ASSIGNMENT: CREATING A MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE TOGETHER

Petitions, appeals and citizens’ initiatives as ways of making a difference

One of the most famous petitions in Finnish history is the [Great Petition](#) in 1899, in which over half a million names were collected against the February Manifesto signed by Grand Duke of Finland, Tsar Nicholas II. At the time, the names were collected by means such as skiing cross-country from one town to another, but today, the internet has made it easy to get involved.

Different kinds of petitions, appeals and citizens’ initiatives are popular channels for presenting opinions and demands. They provide an opportunity to try and influence issues by means such as spreading awareness, putting forward people’s views on certain issues to the authorities, for example, and suggesting new laws or changes to existing laws. The internet has made it easier to inform people about various petitions, appeals and citizens’ initiatives and to participate in them.

This assignment focuses on petitions, appeals and citizens’ initiatives as ways of influencing issues and disseminating information. Start by discussing them in general as ways of influencing issues. What are they and why do people make them? Have you seen petitions, appeals and citizens’ initiatives being signed somewhere, or have you signed them yourselves?

Study petitions, appeals and citizens’ initiatives found online and discuss their subjects. Which of them would you sign yourselves, and which would you not? Do you think they are an effective method of influencing issues? Justify your views.

You can find petitions and appeals online on websites such as [adressit.com](#). You can find out more about citizens’ initiatives at [kansalaisaloite.fi](#).

Tip: You can continue on these themes using the assignments found in the Finland 200 section of the [Time Travellers](#) material found in the Media Literacy School, for example.

The material as part of media education in different fields

In early childhood education and pre-primary education, the material can be used with children of different ages. The transversal competence areas described in the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care are taken into account in creating the material:

- Thinking and learning
- Cultural competence, interaction and expression
- Multiliteracy and information and communications technology skills
- Participation and involvement

The material ‘Messages in a Bottle’ can be used to support children’s skills in analysing, identifying and describing their environment and its phenomena in connection with **thinking and learning**. Children are encouraged to ask questions and challenge things. Celebrate their successes, and they learn to encourage others. Children will grow up in a world with a great diversity of cultures, languages and worldviews. This highlights **the importance of social and interaction skills and cultural competence**.

The material can be used to learn about other cultures, strengthen children’s social skills, and practise putting yourself in another person’s position. It can also be used to practise listening to, identifying and understanding other viewpoints, as well as supporting the children’s self-expression and interaction skills.

In accordance with the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, **multiliteracy** is a key basic skill from the point of view of interaction as well as understanding culturally diverse messages and the world around us. The material can be used to promote the skills needed to interpret and produce messages based on a broad-based understanding of texts as part of multiliteracy. **Participation and involvement** create a foundation for a democratic and sustainable future. The material can be used to support the children’s op-

portunities to participate and get involved, and related skills.

In basic education, the material ‘Messages in a Bottle’ can be used in different subjects. In addition to the subject-specific goals, the material can be used to promote objectives in accordance with the following transversal competence units, for example:

- Thinking and learning-to-learn
- Cultural competence, interaction and expression
- Multiliteracy
- Participation, involvement and building a sustainable future

Thinking and learning skills are developed in the material by guiding the pupils to notice different ways of structuring information, for example. The pupils are instructed to think about things from different points of view, find new information and use it to examine their own ways of thinking. The material can be used to guide the pupils to use information both independently and in interaction with others for problem-solving, argumentation, deduction, drawing conclusions and coming up with new ideas.

The material can also support **cultural competence** based on human rights, which is necessary for a culturally sustainable way of life and operating in a diverse environment. The material can be used to develop respectful interaction skills and ways of expressing yourself and your views.

In accordance with **multiliteracy**, the material can be used to develop interpretation and production skills based on a broad-based concept of texts. Multiliteracy helps in interpreting the world around us and understanding its cultural diversity.

The material ‘Messages in a Bottle’ can be used to practise **participation and involvement skills**

and a responsible attitude towards the future. The material can support pupils' development into active citizens who use their democratic rights and freedoms responsibly. The material can be used to strengthen the pupils' inclusion in accordance with the duties of the school. The material can also help the pupils to assess the effects of different kinds of media and use the opportunities they provide.

In upper secondary schools, the material can be used in a variety of ways in several different subjects and when handling different themes. Among others, the following themes in accordance with the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools can be promoted by using the material:

- Active citizenship, entrepreneurship and working life
- Knowledge of other cultures and internationality
- Multiliteracy and media

The material 'Messages in a Bottle' promotes students' **active citizenship**. In accordance with the theme, the material can promote initiative, cooperation skills, responsibility, and a constructive and knowledge-based criticism. The material can also help to promote students' **cultural knowledge** and strengthen them as actors in culturally diverse operating environments. The material can be used to improve understanding of human

rights and promoting them in communities with diverse cultures and worldviews.

In accordance with the theme of **multiliteracy and media**, the material promotes media literacy and an understanding of different types media and their central position and importance in culture and personal growth. The material promotes multifaceted skills in searching for information and interpreting and producing forms of media. It can also be used to deepen interaction and involvement skills in different kinds of communication environments and using different tools, as well as to improve understanding of freedom of speech and enable students to analyse ethical issues related to different kinds of media. In accordance with the theme, self-expression and interaction skills can be developed along with the skills required to act responsibly as a producer, user and distributor of media content.

As part of the work done by **libraries**, the material supports active citizenship, the development of diverse literacy and the promotion of freedom of speech, among other things. From the perspective of freedom of speech, the material provides various points of view regarding gathering information, interaction and self-expression.

In youth work, the material can be used to support social and cultural inclusion and active citizenship.