

Wordle Processing Provides Perspective

Written by mImoment

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Tweens and teens often know the words to popular songs, but don't always think about them. Wordles, also known as word clouds, make the familiar unfamiliar by scrambling the words in a text. They also magnify the size of words which appear most frequently, which provides the audience with clues for interpreting significant themes or ideas in the original text. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to examine song lyrics from a different perspective, and use powerful new media tools to help them identify the values, lifestyles and points of view embedded within them.

Have students use "word clouds" to analyze the lyrics of popular songs.

AHA!: Songs use the same words over and over to emphasize values and points of view!

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Grade Level: 5-8

Materials: Computer with high speed internet connection, projection screen; documents containing song lyrics which can be copied and pasted to a Wordle document window (which can be accessed at: <http://www.wordle.net>)

Activity: You may wish to break this activity into two parts. On the day before the lesson, you can ask students to write down the name and artist of their favorite songs and submit their

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selections to you. With this option, you'll need to spend a few minutes selecting from among student choices, as well as finding the lyrics online and copying and pasting the lyrics into a document. Or you can choose one or more of the songs listed below, which were among the 20 most popular songs in 2010 or 2011 (and are free of profanity or abusive language):

Katy Perry, "Teenage Dream"

B.O.B., "Nothin' On You"

Adele, "Rolling in the Deep"

Train, "Hey, Soul Sister"

Many websites provide lyrics to pop songs, but A to Z Lyrics is among the best. Their selection is extensive, the copy isn't cluttered by advertisements or pop-up windows, and the service offers options for printing and e-mailing lyrics. You can listen to audio tracks and and/or purchase mp3 downloads as well. The URL for A to Z is <http://www.azlyrics.com>

On the day of the lesson, set up your equipment, display the Wordle site, and explain how wordles work. You may also want to withhold the name of the songs that you "wordle process" in class, and ask students to guess the song as each word cloud is generated. Display or distribute copies of the complete lyrics for each song as well. Play the audio track if you wish. With each word cloud, ask students, what is this song about? What do the big words in the cloud tell you about the song? Direct the attention of students to Key Question #4 and ask, what can the larger words tell them about the ideas or values in the song?

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of

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the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework.
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