



VOICE METHODOLOGY

Ethical Journalism 101
How to start, create, share, and
include



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Notes from Authors

This publication has been created as a resource for learning and education, contributing to the goals of the international **VOICE Project**. The project is coordinated by **Ofensiva Tinerilor Arad** (ofetin.ro) and implemented in partnership with **The Future Now Association** (tfn-bg.com), **Celje Youth Center** (mc-celje.si), **ED** (europskydialog.eu), **Fundación Docetes Omnes** (doceteomnes.es). Originally published on the [VOICE platform](#), this document is a part of a larger effort to inspire positive change in the youth sector.

The **VOICE Project** aims to empower youth workers and young people to navigate the complexities of media and digital communication. By enhancing critical thinking, fostering inclusivity, and supporting innovation in youth work, VOICE contributes to creating a more inclusive and equitable future. The methodology outlined here is designed to provide youth workers with practical tools and frameworks to engage young people in meaningful discussions and activities related to media literacy, ethics, and accessibility.

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Written By: Raya Tsvetkova, Ali Honaramiz, Emma Gorova, Sergiu Mir, Dorothea Elek, Katja Kolenc, Ana Mladenović, Denisa Karabová, Martin Maška

Edited By: The Future Now Association

Designed By: Andrej Ignatov

Produced and Published By: The VOICE partnership

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This document is part of our commitment to inclusiveness and innovation in youth work. It showcases the value of digital tools and methodologies while supporting youth workers in creating accessible, thoughtful, and engaging educational environments. We hope this resource sparks inspiration, fosters collaboration, and empowers youth across diverse communities.



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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, media is everywhere. It shapes how we see ourselves, how we understand others, even how we imagine our future. For young people especially, media can influence how they feel about their identity, their community, and their role in society. That's why the VOICE Methodology was created- to help youth workers and young people make sense of the media around them, use it thoughtfully, and create spaces where everyone feels included and heard.

The methodology is a practical tool designed to explore how media works and how we can engage with it in smarter, kinder, and more ethical ways. By learning to think critically about the media we consume, share, and create, we can ensure it has a positive impact - not just on ourselves but those around us too.

What will you learn in this Methodology?

The VOICE Methodology is organized into five key areas, each touching on an important part on how we interact with media. Together, these chapters offer ideas, tools and activities to help youth workers support young people in navigating the world of media.

1. Media's influence on Youth Identity and Society

This chapter looks at how media shapes the way young people see themselves and the world. It highlights both the good and bad sides of media and encourages reflection on questions like "Who is represented in the media I see?" and "How does it make me feel about myself?"

2. Advanced Media Literacy and Critical Evaluation Skills

Here, we dive into how to figure out what's trustworthy in media, how to spot biases, and how social media algorithms shape what we see. This chapter focuses on building skills to ask smart questions such as "Why was this made?" and "Who benefits from me seeing this?"

3. Storytelling and Narrative Understanding for Social Awareness

Stories are powerful tools to share experiences, challenge stereotypes, and inspire change. This chapter explores how to tell meaningful inclusive stories and helps youth workers encourage young people to share their own voices in ways that connect with others.

4. Accessible Media Concepts and Inclusive Content Design

Creating media that's accessible means making sure it works for everyone, no matter their ability or background. This chapter offers simple ideas- like adding captions or using clear language - to ensure media reaches and represents a wider audience.

5. Media Ethics and Social Responsibility.

This chapter is all about making thoughtful choices in how we use media. It explores big questions like "Am I respecting someone's privacy?" or "Could this content hurt someone?". It's like a reminder that the media we create and share has real-world effects.

How Can We Make It Work?

We know that youth workers are busy and work with groups that are interested in diverse abilities, and learning styles. That's why this methodology includes practical tools like discussion questions, activities, and examples. Whether it's a "media mood board" activity, a trust scale for evaluating news, or ways to explore accessibility through simple demonstrations, these tools are designed to make your sessions engaging, inclusive, and adaptable.

Why Does This Matter?

The VOICE methodology is more than just a methodology - it's a way to empower young people to think critically, act responsibly, and use media as a force for good. By helping youth understand how media works, they can learn to challenge stereotypes, celebrate diversity , and share their stories in ways that make a difference.

As you explore this methodology, we'll get you feeling inspired to spark conversations, share insights, and help young people find their voice in the media world. Together, we can build a future where media is more inclusive, ethical , and empowering for everyone!

Enjoy!

CHAPTER 1

MEDIA INFLUENCE AND HOW IT SHAPES US

1

Introduction to Media Influence

Media is like a mirror and a megaphone - it reflects the world we live in while amplifying the voices, ideas, and trends that shape our lives. For young people, this influence is particularly strong, as media became a companion during the critical years of self-discovery and identity formation. Whether it is a TikTok trend that sparks creativity, a viral meme that builds community, or a movie that makes someone feel seen, the media we consume plays a central role in defining who we are and how we connect to the world around us.

2

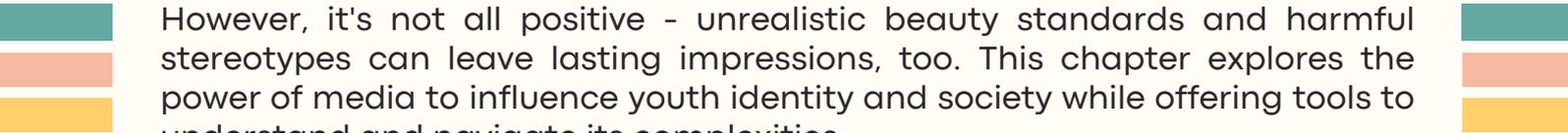
The Power of Media to Shape Identity

Media's impact on youth identity is twofold. On the one hand, it provides inspiration and helps young people discover new ideas, communities, and perspectives. On the other, it can create unrealistic expectations and foster self-doubt. For instance:

- **Positive Impact:** Platforms like YouTube have given rise to creators from diverse backgrounds who share their authentic stories. Creators like Abigail Thorn aka Philosophy Tube (an actress/playwright and Youtube Creator who publicly shared her transgender identity) have inspired millions to embrace who they are in her critical analyses.
- **Negative Impact:** Social media filters and Photoshop culture often present an idealized version of beauty and success that is unattainable for most. This can lead to comparisons, body dissatisfaction/dysmorphia, and anxiety.

Consider a viral trend like the #10YearChallenge, where users posted pictures of themselves a decade apart. While it celebrated growth and transformation for many, it also pressured some to focus on physical appearance, with critical comments often directed at weight gain or aging.

For instance, consider how music genres like K-pop or Hip-hop bring together fans from different countries, creating a sense of shared cultural identity. Hashtags like #SelfCareSunday encourages positive behaviours, promoting mental health awareness among youth.



However, it's not all positive - unrealistic beauty standards and harmful stereotypes can leave lasting impressions, too. This chapter explores the power of media to influence youth identity and society while offering tools to understand and navigate its complexities.

Media doesn't just show us the world - it shapes the way we see it. Whether it's a Youtube series about climate change, an influencer promoting a new fashion trend, or an ad campaign redefining beauty, media has the power to set the agenda for what matters.

On the positive side, campaigns such as **#BlackLivesMatter** (BLM) have shown how media can drive social change, inspiring young people to take action and feel part of something bigger than themselves. Mental health awareness initiatives have encouraged open discussions among youth, promoting well-being. On the flip side, media also perpetuates stereotypes and unrealistic norms. **Glossy Instagram Posts** often depict "perfect" lifestyles, while movies may portray certain groups in a limited way, reinforcing harmful stereotypes.



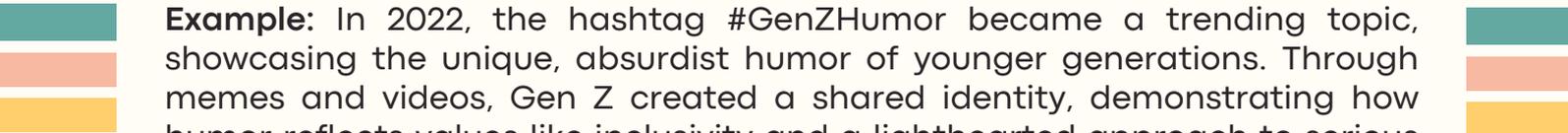
For youth, understanding this dual role of media is key. It's important to ask questions like, "What values does this content promote?" and "Who is included or excluded from this story?" By doing so, young people can engage with the media more critically and choose the messages they want to amplify.



Youth Identity in the Digital Age

For young people, identity formation is a dynamic process, influenced by family, peers, education, and now more than ever, media. Platforms like TikTok, which exploded in popularity during the pandemic, became hubs for creativity and self-expression. Trends like the "It's Corn" song or "Savage Love"

The dance challenge not only entertained but also allowed youth to participate in a global community.'



Example: In 2022, the hashtag #GenZHumor became a trending topic, showcasing the unique, absurdist humor of younger generations. Through memes and videos, Gen Z created a shared identity, demonstrating how humor reflects values like inclusivity and a lighthearted approach to serious issues.

However, not all influences are positive. The rise of influencer culture has led some youth to pursue likes, followers, and trends at the cost of authenticity. For instance, influencers who promote unattainable lifestyles or products (e.g., promoting “detox teas” or editing travel photos) can create unrealistic aspirations.

Media also fosters a sense of belonging by creating communities around shared interests and values. Online spaces, from fan clubs to activist groups, allow young people to connect with others who share their passions.

1. **Fandoms:** Communities like **BTS’s** ARMY have created global networks where fans share artwork, stories, and their love for the band. These groups provide support, especially for those who might feel isolated in their offline lives.
2. **Activism:** Social media platforms are often used for social good. Movements like #ClimateStrike, led by Greta Thunberg, have united millions of young people to advocate for environmental change.

(YWC)Reflection: “How has being part of an online community made you feel connected to others?”

Another one of the media's most important roles is reflecting societal trends, values, and issues. News, advertisements, films, and social media posts serve as snapshots of what society values at a given time. For example:

- **Representation in Advertising:** Companies like Dove have embraced diversity through campaigns like Real Beauty, which feature models of various body types, skin tones, and ages. This representation has helped challenge narrow beauty standards.
- **Movements in Media:** The rise of #BlackLivesMatter in 2020 highlighted systemic racism police brutality. Media coverage, viral videos, and hashtags mobilized millions to join protests and advocate for change, reflecting society’s growing demand for justice and equity.

(YWC) Reflection Prompt: “Think of a recent ad or viral post you saw. What does it say about what society values today?”

3

Media as a Mold

Moreover, while media mirrors society, it also acts as a mold, shaping behaviors, beliefs, and values. Advertisements, films, and influencers don't just reflect what's popular—they create trends and shape aspirations.

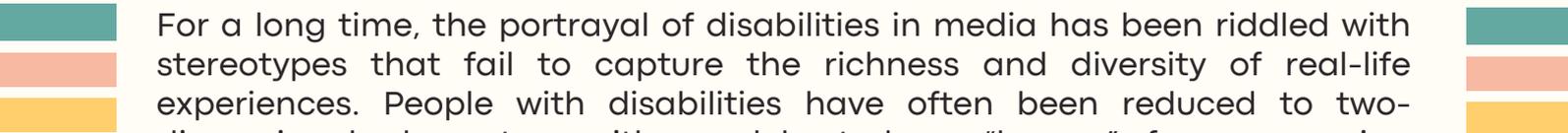
1. Positive Influence:

- **Activism:** Social media has become a powerful tool for activism. Movements like #MeToo and #ClimateStrike began online, empowering youth to raise their voices and demand systemic change.
- **Healthy Habits:** Influencers like Joe Wicks, known as “The Body Coach,” encouraged millions to stay active during the pandemic with accessible, at-home workouts. This showed how media could promote physical and mental health.

2. Negative Influence:

- **Unrealistic Beauty Standards:** Platforms like Instagram often prioritize content that conforms to specific beauty ideals—slim bodies, flawless skin, and unrealistic lifestyles. Filters and editing tools exacerbate this issue, making it difficult to separate reality from illusion.
- **Echo Chambers:** Social media algorithms are designed to show users content they're likely to engage with, often reinforcing existing beliefs. This creates “echo chambers,” where users are exposed only to ideas that align with their own, limiting critical thinking and understanding of opposing perspectives.

For a long time, people with disabilities were either invisible in media or misrepresented in ways that reinforced harmful stereotypes. They were often portrayed as one-dimensional characters, either as “heroes” overcoming insurmountable odds or as objects of pity. This limited representation failed to capture the complexity and diversity of the disability community. However, in recent years, there has been progress toward more accurate and empowering portrayals, reflecting a growing demand for inclusivity.



For a long time, the portrayal of disabilities in media has been riddled with stereotypes that fail to capture the richness and diversity of real-life experiences. People with disabilities have often been reduced to two-dimensional characters—either celebrated as “heroes” for overcoming challenges or pitied as tragic figures needing rescue. These narratives, while sometimes well-intentioned, can be harmful because they reinforce limited views of what it means to live with a disability.

Equally problematic is the complete absence of representation, which erases the voices and visibility of millions of individuals from mainstream narratives. Such depictions not only shape public perceptions but also influence how people with disabilities view themselves. However, positive strides are being made as creators push for greater authenticity and inclusion in storytelling, breaking down barriers and offering audiences a more comprehensive understanding of disability.

Films like [CODA](#), which authentically portrays the deaf community, or campaigns that feature athletes with disabilities, are helping to change perceptions.

Representation matters. When people see themselves reflected in media, it validates their experiences and fosters a sense of belonging. On the other hand, misrepresentation or lack of visibility sends the message that certain stories don't matter.

One of the most common portrayals is the “supercrip” trope, where characters with disabilities are shown achieving extraordinary feats despite their challenges. These narratives often aim to inspire audiences but risk reducing individuals to their disabilities or framing their worth around their ability to “overcome” them. For example, in *The Theory of Everything*, Stephen Hawking’s groundbreaking work is rightly celebrated, but the story disproportionately emphasizes his ALS diagnosis, overshadowing other dimensions of his personality and life.

Another frequent stereotype is the pity narrative, where people with disabilities are portrayed as tragic or helpless figures who evoke sympathy rather than understanding.

Charity advertisements often rely on this framing, focusing on suffering and hardship without showcasing the independence or agency of individuals with disabilities. While these stories may elicit emotional responses, they perpetuate the idea that disability is inherently tied to struggle or despair.

Lastly, there is the issue of erasure—the absence of representation. Many mainstream media outlets neglect to include characters with disabilities entirely, sending a message that their stories are not worth telling. This lack of visibility contributes to the ongoing marginalization of people with disabilities in society and limits opportunities for audiences to learn about their experiences.

Despite these challenges, there has been progress toward more inclusive and authentic portrayals. Creators are beginning to push back against stereotypes and advocate for stories that reflect the real experiences of people with disabilities.

1. Casting Actors with Disabilities: Films like CODA (2021), which won the Academy Award for Best Picture, authentically depicted the lives of deaf individuals by casting actors who are themselves deaf. Similarly, Netflix's Special, written by and starring Ryan O'Connell, offered a fresh and nuanced perspective on living with cerebral palsy, blending humor with depth.

2. Shifting Narratives: Increasingly, stories are moving away from framing disability as a burden and instead focusing on people's multifaceted identities. Characters like Barbara Gordon (Batgirl) in DC Comics demonstrate how disability can be integrated into a narrative without defining the character entirely.

Reflection Prompt: "Think of a show or movie you've watched recently. Were people with disabilities represented? If so, how were they portrayed?"

Guided Reflection Framework: Media and Me

4

Media influences us in subtle but powerful ways, shaping how we see ourselves, others, and the world. For young people, who are constantly engaging with social media, films, TV shows, and advertisements, it's important to pause and reflect on the messages they're absorbing. The "Media and Me" framework is a tool to help youth workers facilitate meaningful conversations about how media affects emotions, self-esteem, and worldviews. It encourages young people to move beyond passive consumption and critically analyze the content they engage with.

Why Reflection Matters

Reflection helps young people identify patterns in the media they consume and understand its impact on their feelings and beliefs. For example, a teenager who follows fitness influencers may feel inspired to stay active but could also experience pressure to conform to unrealistic body standards. Similarly, seeing positive representation of diverse characters in a favorite TV show can foster a sense of belonging, while a lack of representation might lead to feelings of exclusion.

The goal of this framework is to empower young people to ask questions like:

- “What message is this media trying to send me?”
- “How does this content make me feel about myself or my community?”
- “Who is represented, and who is missing?”

By encouraging these reflections, youth can develop a critical lens that helps them engage with media thoughtfully and intentionally.

Engaging Activities for Reflection

To make reflection engaging and relatable, the framework includes interactive activities that cater to different learning styles:

Media Diary: Over the course of a week, participants track the media they consume (e.g., TV shows, TikTok videos, ads) and reflect on how it made them feel. At the end of the week, they review their entries to identify patterns or surprising insights.

Mood Boards: Participants create visual collages using images, words, or symbols that represent how media influences their emotions and identity. This activity is especially effective for visual learners.

Rewriting Stories: Take a popular movie, show, or ad and imagine how the message would change if it included missing perspectives. For example, participants might rewrite a story to include more diverse characters or explore a different cultural viewpoint.

“Media Bingo”: Create bingo cards with prompts like “Find an ad with unrealistic beauty standards” or “Spot a video with positive representation of diversity.” Participants mark off squares as they observe these patterns in their media consumption.

Youth workers are the bridge between media literacy and young people. To make these discussions meaningful, it’s important to adapt techniques to suit different settings, learning styles, and abilities. Here are some practical ideas:

1. Media Mood Boards: Invite participants to create visual collages using images, words, and symbols from the media they engage with. This activity helps them see how media influences their identity and values.

2. Scenario Workshops: Present scenarios like “A friend posts an edited photo to look thinner—how would you respond?” These can spark discussions about self-esteem and the media's impact on body image.

3. Role Play: Assign participants roles like media executives, activists, or audience members. Have them debate the pros and cons of a media campaign. This makes abstract ideas tangible and engaging.

4. Inclusivity Challenges: Task participants with redesigning a favorite piece of media to make it more inclusive. For example, they could add captions to a video or rewrite a story to include more diverse characters.



Adaptable Techniques for Youth Workers

Youth workers play a vital role in helping young people navigate and critically engage with media. Every group is unique, with its own mix of interests, learning styles, and abilities, so having adaptable techniques is essential for fostering meaningful discussions and activities. This section outlines practical, flexible strategies that youth workers can use to explore the media's influence in a variety of settings.

Young people come from diverse backgrounds and have different needs when it comes to learning. Some thrive in group discussions, while others prefer hands-on or visual activities. Similarly, youth with disabilities or impairments may require tailored approaches to ensure the experience is inclusive and impactful.

For example, a visually impaired participant might benefit from audio descriptions during a media analysis activity, while a kinesthetic learner could connect more with a hands-on project like creating a media collage. Adaptability ensures everyone can actively participate and engage with the content.

Reflection Prompt: “What kinds of activities help you learn best? How can we make media discussions more accessible for everyone?”

Techniques for Different Learning Styles

1. For Visual Learners:

- Use infographics, charts, and video clips to illustrate key points.

- Activities like creating mood boards or analyzing social media feeds with visual cues can help visual learners process abstract concepts.

2. For Auditory Learners:

- Incorporate podcasts or recorded interviews that explore media topics.
- Play sound clips or ads, and ask participants to reflect on the emotions and messages conveyed through audio.

3. For Kinesthetic Learners:

- Engage participants in hands-on activities like crafting storyboards or redesigning advertisements to be more inclusive.
- Use role-playing exercises where participants take on roles such as a media critic, creator, or consumer to analyze content.

Tips for Inclusivity

Inclusivity should be at the heart of every activity. Here are some tips to ensure all participants feel valued and included:

- **Use Accessible Media:** Incorporate captions, alt text, and audio descriptions when presenting content.
- **Facilitate Group Equity:** In discussions, ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak. Use prompts or written cards for those who might be shy about sharing verbally.
- **Simulate Accessibility Needs:** Use tools like screen readers or magnification software to give participants firsthand experience of accessibility features.
- **Adapt for Disabilities:** For youth with mobility challenges, prioritize activities that don't require extensive physical movement, like group discussions or visual storytelling.

CHAPTER 2

ADVANCED MEDIA LITERACY AND CRITICAL EVALUATION SKILLS

1

Introduction to Media Literacy

In today's world, young people are constantly surrounded by media – from social media feeds to news sites and advertisements. Media literacy is the ability to understand, analyze, and critically evaluate the messages we encounter daily. It's not just about identifying "fake news." Media literacy involves questioning sources, recognizing biases, and considering the intent behind media messages. These skills empower youth to navigate a complex media landscape, helping them make informed decisions and form well-rounded perspectives.

Why media literacy matters

The sheer volume of media consumed by youth today underscores the importance of media literacy. Media can shape opinions, influence behavior, and even affect mental health. Understanding how media works and why certain messages are created allows youth to:

- Recognize manipulative tactics, such as clickbait headlines or sensationalized stories.
- Develop critical thinking skills to evaluate the reliability of sources.
- Foster informed decision-making in both personal and civic contexts.

Media literacy is not just an academic skill but a life skill, enabling young people to engage more thoughtfully with the world around them.

2

Source Evaluation and Bias Detection

Evaluating sources and detecting bias is a cornerstone of media literacy. Youth should learn to assess who created the content, why it was made, and who benefits from it. Bias can take many forms, including:

- **Partisan Bias:** Favoring one political party or ideology.
- **Confirmation Bias:** Presenting information that aligns with preconceived beliefs.
- **Advertising Bias:** Influencing opinions to promote products or services.

Steps to Evaluate Sources

HOW TO DETECT BIAS?

STEP 01

Check the source

Is it a well-known and reputable organization? Look for verified credentials.



STEP 02

Assess the Purpose

Determine whether the goal is to inform, persuade, entertain, or sell something.



STEP 03

Find Supportive Evidence

Reliable media will cite credible sources and provide data or references.



STEP 04

Cross-Check Facts

Consult multiple sources to verify the accuracy of claims.

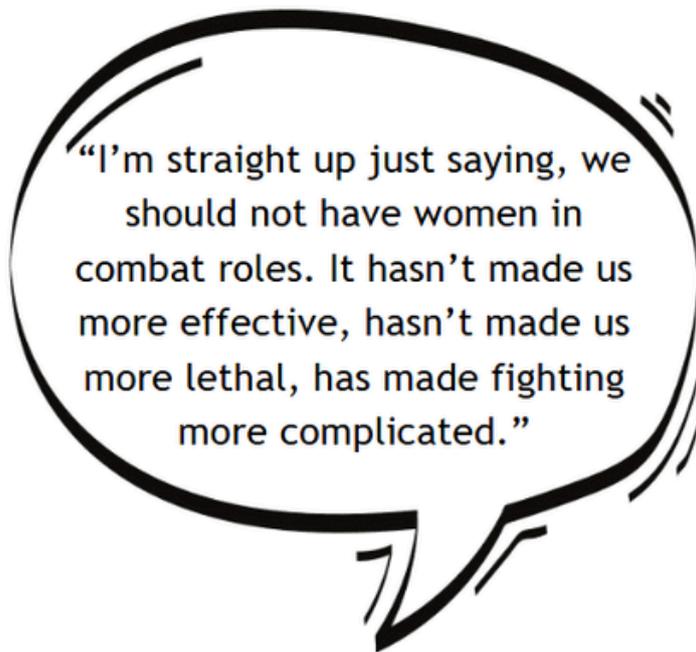


Example of contrasting news headlines and reporting

If you are eager to start detecting bias and evaluating sources with this new knowledge, there are different websites that can offer additional practical insights for developing these skills even further. Platforms such as [AllSides](#) or [Ground News](#), which specialize in presenting contrasting headlines from various perspectives, can be a great start. Let's use an example from AllSides and take a look at how different media outlets cover the same piece of news from different political angles.

- [What Pete Hegseth thinks of women in combat roles?](#) Trump's nominee for Secretary of Defense has reignited debates over women in combat roles.

What he said



Opinions from the Left

[»There are many reasons to disqualify Pete Hegseth. His opinions on women are enough.«](#)

»Writing for MSNBC (Left bias), activist and military veteran Charlotte Clymer highlighted allegations of personal misconduct and sexual assault against Hegseth, and said she doesn’t understand why Hegseth’s public comments on women in combat roles didn’t disqualify him for the position before any of the other issues surfaced. Clymer went on to claim Hegseth is “stridently opposed to women in combat” because he “feels threatened by women who do meet the standard of excellence.”«

Opinions from the Right

»Why Pete Hegseth Is Right About Women in Combat«

»Victor Joecks, writing for The Daily Signal (Right bias), argued Hegseth's opinion wasn't popular with the "propaganda press." He opined that differences between men and women are not imposed by society, but rather by biology, while recognizing that many disagree over this sentiment. He then pointed to U.S. military physical fitness requirements being lower for women than men, saying these differences matter in combat, alluding to a 2015 Marines experiment comparing all-male squads' performance against mixed-sex ones.«

Just by looking at the headlines of these two media pieces on the same topic, we can see how different angles or positions they take. We are left with two completely different opinions on the same topic. It is on us, as readers, to evaluate this and form our own opinion. It's one thing if we are exposed to both accounts, however, more often than not, we as audience get caught in something we call a 'filter bubble', which will only serve us one side of the story. Let's have a look at what filter bubbles are more closely in the next chapter.

3

Algorithm Awareness and Filter Bubbles

Algorithms determine much of what we see online, especially on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. These platforms use algorithms to prioritize content that keeps users engaged, creating so-called »filter bubbles«—personalized environments that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints.

How algorithms work

Algorithms analyze user behavior, including likes, shares, and watch time, to predict what content will hold their attention. While this personalization can enhance the user experience, it also:

- Reduces exposure to diverse opinions and viewpoints.
- Reinforces existing biases by showing content aligned with past behavior.
- Makes it harder to access balanced information.

Real-life examples of algorithm work

- Have you ever had a feeling your phone is reading your thoughts? You swear it only crossed your mind that you need a new frying pan and the next thing you know, Facebook is flooded with ads for pans. Whaaat?

This is a prime example of how algorithms work. Don't worry, they don't read your mind (not yet, at least), but they do predict your needs and desires, based on your online behaviour and can be very specific and accurate in their predictions.

- Another example can be observed if you and your friend conduct an experiment. Try searching for the same topic on Instagram – don't be surprised if you see completely different posts based on your browsing histories. It's similar in how TikTok's »For You« page curates videos that align with individual preferences, creating unique but narrow content streams for individual users.

Breaking out of filter bubbles

I want to break free! Breaking out of filter bubbles can admittedly be hard, but it is not completely impossible. Try encouraging youth to take steps such as:

- Actively seeking out diverse sources of information.
- Following accounts or channels with differing perspectives.
- Using tools like incognito mode to explore unbiased search results.

Media Inclusivity and Representation

4

Inclusivity in the media ensures that diverse voices and perspectives are seen and heard. Representation matters because it shapes how people view themselves and others. It is important to include different backgrounds, voices and perspectives to see the full picture. Media often reflects societal norms and values, but it can also perpetuate stereotypes or reinforce systemic inequalities.

Evaluating representation

Encourage youth to ask questions such as:

- Who is represented in this story, and who is missing?
- Are characters portrayed in a fair and multidimensional way?
- Does the media challenge or reinforce stereotypes? Why do you think so?

Examples of inclusivity

To really show young people what you mean when talking about representation, you can highlight different films, books, or advertisements that feature diverse casts or address social justice issues. Then, contrast these with examples where representation is absent or tokenistic (i.e. only symbolic, superficial and not meaningful), prompting discussions about the impact on audiences. If you need help starting, we are offering a few examples:

Examples of Media with Genuine Representation or Social Justice Themes

Film:

Black Panther (2018): Celebrated for its predominantly Black cast and Afrocentric storytelling, it provided meaningful representation and challenged stereotypes in mainstream cinema.

Hidden Figures (2016): Showcases the real-life contributions of African-American women mathematicians to NASA, highlighting systemic racism and sexism while celebrating their achievements.

Books:

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas: A young adult novel that explores police brutality and systemic racism through the eyes of a Black teenager.

Beloved by Toni Morrison: Addresses the lingering trauma of slavery through powerful storytelling.

Advertisements:

Nike's »Dream Crazy« Campaign: Celebrates women in sports, challenging stereotypes about female athletes and emphasizing empowerment.

Dove's »Real Beauty« Campaign: Features diverse body types, ages, and skin tones to promote self-esteem and challenge beauty standards.

Examples of Absent or Tokenistic Representation

Films:

The Lone Ranger (2013): Casts Johnny Depp as Tonto, a Native American character, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and ignoring opportunities for authentic representation.

Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961): Features a stereotypical and offensive portrayal of a Japanese character played by Mickey Rooney in yellowface.

Books:

Older editions of classic Western literature often omit or misrepresent people of color, such as the one-dimensional depictions of Native Americans in James Fenimore Cooper's **The Last of the Mohicans**.

Books like **Gone with the Wind** romanticize historical periods while sidelining or stereotyping the experiences of marginalized groups.

Advertisements:

Pepsi's 2017 Kendall Jenner Ad: Attempted to appropriate the imagery of social justice movements without addressing the underlying issues, trivializing activism.

H&M's »Coolest Monkey in the Jungle« Ad: Featured a Black child wearing a hoodie with problematic wording, demonstrating a lack of cultural sensitivity.

When talking about these examples with youngsters, try to highlight the key differences between different media representations. You can focus on:

- **Purpose and Depth:** authentic examples integrate diversity and social issues as central themes, while tokenistic examples use them superficially or for aesthetic appeal, without real thought behind.
- **Involvement:** genuine works involve people from the represented communities in key roles (writers, directors, consultants), ensuring authenticity.
- **Reception:** authentic representation fosters connection and education, while tokenism often leads to backlash for being insincere or offensive.

By understanding different aspects of inclusivity, you can help youngsters to become advocates for more equitable media practices and develop a deeper appreciation for diverse narratives.

Guided Reflection Framework



Reflection is crucial for developing critical media literacy skills. Youth workers can use structured tools to guide discussions and evaluations. You can develop your own method of guided reflection, or you can try using tools such as:

“Questioning Media” Checklist



Media Literacy Glasses

Introduce the concept of »Media Literacy Glasses«, a metaphorical tool that encourages youth to view all media with a critical lens. You can explain that the glasses represent a metaphor or, if you so wish, you can use literal glasses (cheap plastic costume frames without lenses) to get the youngsters into the mood. Invite them to put the media literacy glasses on and think critically about the media they consume. By »wearing« these glasses, they learn to:

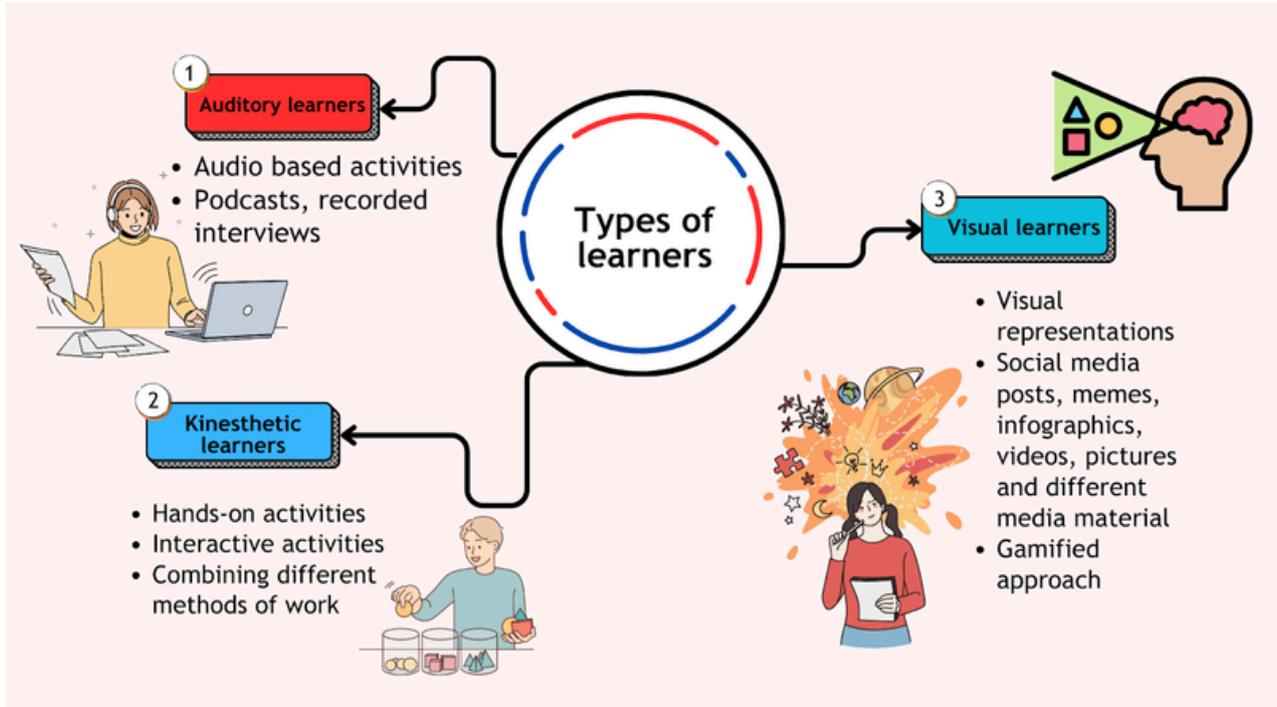
- Analyze content in-depth.
- Recognize underlying intentions and biases.
- Develop a habit of questioning rather than passively consuming.

Adaptable Techniques for Youth Workers

6

Engaging diverse learners is important in order to keep discussions inclusive. It is also important for youth workers to be flexible and adaptable to different settings. We list some techniques for youth workers to use if working with a diverse group of youngsters. All materials listed here are good examples for sparking conversations about how to consume media responsibly and navigate the digital landscape critically.

Different types of learners



If your group consists of different learner types, you can split them into smaller groups based on whether they are auditory, visual or kinesthetic learners and adapt activities you prepared for each specific group:

1. Auditory Learners: they will benefit the most from audio-based activities. You can use podcasts or recorded interviews to illustrate media literacy concepts. These podcasts offer accessible, engaging ways to foster critical thinking and awareness about media literacy in young audiences. Examples include:

Podcast »Your Undivided Attention« by the Center for Humane Technology:

- **Topic:** it explores how technology and media influence attention, behaviour, and societal norms and delves into the ethical design of media platforms, as well as the impact of algorithms on information consumption.

- **Why it's Useful:** episodes break down complex media concepts like algorithmic bias, misinformation, and the role of social media in shaping public opinion, making it relatable for young audiences.

- **How to use these podcasts?**

- **Interactive Discussions:** play an episode and pause at key moments for group discussions or questions.

- **Media Analysis Activities:** ask young people to evaluate the media tactics discussed in the episode and how they relate to their own media consumption.

- **Practical Projects:** use episodes as a springboard for creating counter-narratives or practicing fact checking.

- **How do these work for media literacy?**

- **Teach Critical Thinking:** by highlighting how media influences perception and behaviour, these recordings encourage listeners to question what they consume.

- **Real-World Examples:** topics like fake news, filter bubbles, echo chambers, and clickbait provide tangible examples for discussion.

- **Actionable Tools:** practical tips help young people apply concepts in their daily interactions with media.

2. Visual Learners: they take the most out of visual representations, concrete examples that they can see and examine with their own eyes. With a group of visual learners, you would do best to analyse social media posts, memes, or infographics. Bring different media material and start the discussion. By pairing visual resources with discussions and hands-on activities, youth workers can help visual learners develop the tools to navigate today's complex media landscape. If you want to upgrade the sessions, you can also include:

BBC Learning English – [Unit 1: »Fake News: Fact and Fiction«](#):

- **Topic:** this is a series of sessions on the topic of fake news. It includes different activities, consisting of short videos, useful links and a quiz.

- **Why it's useful:** even though the main focus is language (developing the vocabulary), the series is interactive in its nature and informative in covering the topic of fake news, developing media literacy skills of young people.

- **How to use it?**

- **Watch the Videos:** start each session by playing the short videos to introduce the topic.

- **Interactive Activities:** use the quizzes and activities to reinforce understanding.

- **Group Discussion:** discuss how fake news affects them personally and what tools they can use to verify information.

- **Why it works for media literacy?**

- **Interactive and Engaging:** combines videos, quizzes, and practical activities to keep learners engaged.

- **Real-World Application:** offers relatable examples and practical tips for identifying fake news.

- **Media Skills:** strengthens critical media literacy.

- **Step-by-Step Structure:** gradually builds knowledge, making complex concepts easier to grasp.

YouTube Channel: CrashCourse Media Literacy:

- **Topic:** offers bite-sized, engaging videos on topics like media bias, propaganda, and the role of journalism.

- **How to use it?**

- Play a 10-minute episode, and then assign learners to spot examples of media bias or ownership concentration in real-world media.

- **Why it works for media literacy?**

- Visually dynamic, with animations and clear examples.

- Episodes like “**Media Ownership**” simplify complex concepts.

Interactive Website: News Literacy Project's »Checkology«:

- **Topic:** offers interactive lessons on evaluating news, spotting bias, and recognizing credible sources.

- **How to use it?**

- As a classroom activity, follow up with a group discussion on what they learned.

- **Why it works for media literacy?**

- Gamified approach engages visual learners with scenarios where they »fact-check« articles or identify manipulated content.

»The Social Dilemma« Documentary:

- **Topic:** explores the impact of social media algorithms on behavior, decision-making, and the spread of misinformation, highlighting ethical concerns about tech design.

- **How to use it?**
 - **Pre-Watching:** reflect on personal social media habits to connect experiences to the film.
 - **Watch Key Sections:** focus on algorithms, filter bubbles, and misinformation.
 - **Post-Watching:** Discuss takeaways and explore solutions through media mapping and fact-checking activities.

- **Why it works for media literacy?**
 - Visually illustrates complex concepts like algorithmic influence.
 - Relatable dramatized scenarios engage learners.
 - Encourages critical thinking through real-world applications and discussions.

3. Kinesthetic Learners: for the kinesthetic learners it is best to create hands-on activities, such as building a mock social media feed to explore biases. You can also employ different interactive activities that combine different methods of work. Here's an example:

Interactive activity: Fact-Checking Relay or Media Bias Role-Play.

- **Topic:** hands-on exploration of media literacy concepts such as misinformation, bias, and critical evaluation of sources.

- **How to use it?**
 - **Fact-Checking Relay:** divide students into teams to verify claims in articles using reliable sources.
 - **Media Bias Role-Play:** assign groups roles as journalists or editors with specific biases and have them create or critique headlines.

- **Why it works for media literacy?**
 - Encourages active engagement and critical thinking.
 - Makes abstract concepts tangible through physical and collaborative tasks.
 - Promotes teamwork and problem-solving skills while analyzing real-world examples.

4. Structuring Sessions

Youth workers must be adaptable also in the ways of structuring sessions. Different participants and groups of young people require different approaches. Also, different topics can be structured very differently, so pay attention to the time component when structuring your session. A general guide to follow is:

- **Short Sessions:** usually focus on a single topic, like bias detection, to maintain attention.
- **Interactive Discussions:** use real-life examples relevant to youth, such as viral TikTok trends or popular YouTube channels.

Youth Worker's Corner!



Now it's your turn! Here are some of the activities you could facilitate with youth and tips on how to make the best use of this Methodology.

Activities for Youth Workers

»Trust scale activity«:

- **How to:** youth rate the reliability of different sources using gestures or numbers. For example, present different news sites/social media/personal blogs and have youth rate them from highly trustworthy to less reliable. Define the scale beforehand – it can be simply on a thumbs up/down principle, or by gesturing with your hand (low position for low reliability, high position for high reliability). If you need more range you can use the fingers on one hand (1 finger for low, 5 for high).

- **Tips:** use simple gestures or a 1-to-5 rating to assess source reliability. Use relatable examples to connect media literacy concepts to youth's daily lives. Lead the conversation with some discussion questions:

- What makes you trust one media source more than another?
- What are the "red flags" for unreliable content?
- Point out whether there is a general consensus or possible disagreements on specific examples and discuss why.

»Algorithm Comparisons«:

- **How to:** contrast two individuals' social media feeds to show how algorithms shape content. You can use volunteers from the group.

- **Tips:** use personal examples (with consent, of course) to demonstrate how algorithms influence their online experience. Here it is especially important to foster a judgment-free environment where participants feel comfortable sharing opinions and questions.

»It's all in the title«:

- **How to:** compare contrasting headlines about the same event from different news outlets to identify framing techniques.

- **Tips:** use resources such as [AllSides](#), to discover the contrasting reporting on the topic and to help you systematically analyze it.

»Have you read the news?«:

- **How to:** this is a news analysis exercise, where youth compare coverage of the same event across multiple platforms to highlight framing differences.

- **Tips:** when comparing stories, explore how different outlets cover the same topic, prompting critical discussions about framing and bias. Incorporate multimedia tools to make sessions dynamic and engaging. You can help yourself with different resources.



»No two influencers are the same«:

- **How to:** discuss examples of influencers promoting products or ideas and analyze their motivations and potential biases.

- **Tips:** use real life examples – choose relatable influencers that the youth follow or recognize. Present a mix of content – such as product endorsements, advocacy campaigns, lifestyle content etc. to keep the discussion engaging and relevant. Encourage critical thinking – use guiding questions like:

- Why do you think this influencer supports this product/idea?
- How might their motivations impact their message?
- What should viewers consider before trusting endorsements?

Use an interactive approach, dividing participants into small groups, incorporate how to's on media literacy and wrap up with reflection.

»That's an Immediate Red Flag For Me«

- **How to:** teach youth to identify warning signs they should look out for.

- **Tips:** alert them to pay attention to different elements, such as overly emotional language or sensational headlines, lack of author attribution or unclear source citations, content designed solely to provoke outrage or gain clicks.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Articles:

Kiely, E. and Robertson, L. (2016). [How to Spot Fake News](#). Published on: FactCheck.org.

Kim, M. (2016). [Why tackle the filter bubbles, you ask?](#) Published on: medium.com

Videos on YouTube:

[How to detect bias in media – Explained by Common Craft](#)

[How to choose your news – Damon Brown](#)

[How news feed algorithms supercharge confirmation bias – Eli Pariser – Big Think](#)

Podcast: [Populism and its effects on youth](#). The podcast focuses on the rise of populist narratives in the context of the digital age, where social media plays a significant role in shaping political views.

Useful Platforms:

Fact-checking sites like [Snopes.com](#) or [PolitiFact](#).
Tools like [Google's Fact Check Explorer](#).

CHAPTER 3

STORYTELLING AND NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING FOR SOCIAL AWARENESS

1

Introduction to Storytelling as a Social Tool

Storytelling is one of the most ancient and universal methods humans have employed to make sense of the world. Across cultures and time, stories have served as a vessel for preserving history, communicating values, and fostering social bonds. From oral traditions to written narratives, and now to digital storytelling, the act of sharing stories transcends mere entertainment. Instead, it functions as a fundamental social tool, enabling individuals and communities to connect, empathize, and reflect on their shared and diverse experiences.

Understanding storytelling as a framework for social awareness

At its core, storytelling offers a framework for understanding and navigating the complexities of human existence. It allows individuals to organize their experiences into coherent narratives, making sense of events and emotions that may otherwise seem chaotic or fragmented. Through stories, people can articulate their identities, share wisdom, and create a sense of continuity between past, present, and future. Bruner (1991) emphasized that narrative is a primary mode of human thought. Unlike paradigmatic thinking, which relies on logical categorization, narrative thinking allows for the interpretation of experiences in a contextual and meaningful way. By constructing stories, individuals shape their perception of reality and communicate that perception to others. This process is inherently social, fostering a shared understanding and collective identity.

A medium for sharing values and experiences

Stories are not just about recounting events; they carry moral, cultural, and social significance. They provide a medium for transmitting values and norms across generations. For example, fables and parables have long been used to teach ethical lessons and social codes. In contemporary settings, stories shared through media, literature, and digital platforms continue to shape societal attitudes and beliefs. Moreover, storytelling is a tool for empathy. By stepping into the shoes of characters or narrators, audiences can experience perspectives that differ from their own. This fosters a sense of connection and understanding across boundaries of culture, class, or identity. Studies have shown that exposure to diverse narratives can reduce prejudice and increase social cohesion (Green & Brock, 2000).

Inclusive storytelling and diverse voices

One of the most significant aspects of storytelling as a social tool lies in its potential for inclusivity. By featuring diverse voices and perspectives, storytelling can challenge dominant narratives and offer a more comprehensive view of society. This inclusivity is particularly important in addressing social inequalities and fostering a sense of belonging among marginalized groups.

Elevating underrepresented perspectives

Historically, many narratives have centered on dominant cultural or social groups, marginalizing the voices of minorities, women, individuals with disabilities, and other underrepresented populations. Inclusive storytelling seeks to redress this imbalance by amplifying these perspectives. For example, the works of authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie highlight the richness of African narratives, while projects like the Disability Visibility Project foreground stories from people with disabilities.

Including diverse voices is not merely an act of representation; it enriches the collective understanding of human experience. Narratives that incorporate varied perspectives provide insight into the challenges and triumphs of different communities, fostering empathy and awareness among wider audiences (hooks, 2000).

Storytelling as advocacy

Storytelling also serves as a powerful tool for advocacy and social change. Organizations and movements have increasingly used personal narratives to highlight social issues and mobilize support. For instance, movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter have relied heavily on the storytelling of lived experiences to expose systemic injustices and drive societal transformation.

Personal stories humanize abstract issues, making them relatable and compelling. Research has shown that storytelling can be more effective than data or statistics in influencing attitudes and behaviors (Falk, 2017). When individuals share their authentic experiences, they invite others to connect with their humanity, breaking down prejudices and inspiring action.

Stories featuring disabilities: A case for accessibility and inclusion

Narratives that include individuals with disabilities are a critical aspect of inclusive storytelling. Historically, these narratives were either absent or perpetuate harmful stereotypes, portraying individuals with disabilities as objects of pity or inspiration.

However, contemporary storytelling efforts are shifting toward authentic representations that celebrate the agency and diversity of disabled individuals. Projects like Netflix's "Crip Camp" and campaigns led by organizations such as the World Institute on Disability illustrate how storytelling can challenge societal perceptions and promote disability rights. Moreover, including narratives that feature individuals with disabilities helps to create a more inclusive society by normalizing diverse experiences and highlighting systemic barriers.

The role of storytelling in bridging social divides

In an increasingly globalized world, storytelling has emerged as a critical tool for bridging cultural and social divides. Digital platforms, social media, and global communication networks have democratized storytelling, allowing voices from around the world to reach diverse audiences. This interconnectedness has the potential to foster cross-cultural understanding and solidarity.

A tool for empathy in a divided world

Empathy is one of the most profound outcomes of storytelling. When audiences engage with narratives from different cultural or social contexts, they are often prompted to reflect on their own biases and assumptions. This reflective process is essential for fostering mutual respect and reducing social tensions. Narrative empathy—the ability to understand and feel for characters in a story—has been shown to enhance intercultural sensitivity and decrease xenophobia (Kidd & Castano, 2013).

Storytelling is far more than a mode of entertainment; it is a vital social tool that shapes how individuals and societies perceive and interact with the world. By sharing experiences, expressing values, and fostering connections, stories contribute to the development of social awareness and empathy. Inclusive storytelling, which features diverse voices and perspectives, plays a crucial role in addressing societal inequalities and enriching collective understanding. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the power of storytelling to bridge divides and inspire social change will only continue to grow.

Principles of Effective Storytelling



Storytelling is a powerful tool that can inspire, teach, and bring people together. However, not all stories achieve these goals equally. Effective storytelling requires careful attention to several principles that ensure the story resonates with the audience, delivers a clear message, and creates an emotional impact. This section explores these foundational principles and illustrates them with accessible, youth-friendly examples.

Connecting with the audience

One of the most critical aspects of effective storytelling is forging a connection with the audience. A story resonates most deeply when it reflects the values, experiences, or emotions of its listeners. To achieve this, storytellers must understand their audience—what they care about, what challenges they face, and what inspires them.

Relatability: Telling stories that reflect shared experiences

Relatability is at the heart of audience connection. Stories that feature everyday struggles, joys, or aspirations are more likely to captivate and engage. For example, a story about a student overcoming stage fright before a school play resonates with young listeners who have faced similar fears. By highlighting familiar challenges, the storyteller fosters a sense of empathy and shared understanding.

Personalization: Speaking from the heart

Sharing personal experiences is another way to connect with an audience. Authenticity in storytelling builds trust and creates a more intimate bond between the narrator and listeners. A story about how a young person navigated their first day at a new school not only draws listeners in but also reassures them that they are not alone in facing life's uncertainties.

A Clear Message

A story without a clear message can feel aimless or confusing. Effective storytelling involves identifying the main point or lesson of the narrative and ensuring every detail supports that central idea. A focused message ensures the audience understands the purpose of the story and takes away something meaningful.

Identifying the core takeaway

Before telling a story, it is essential to ask: What do I want my audience to remember? For instance, a story about a group of friends solving a problem together might carry the message that teamwork is essential. The storyteller should focus on moments that illustrate collaboration and unity, avoiding unrelated side stories.

Staying focused: Avoiding distractions

Effective stories avoid unnecessary tangents or details that dilute the central message. For example, when narrating a story about how someone learned the importance of honesty, the storyteller should stay on the events that led to this realization. Straying into unrelated anecdotes about hobbies or unrelated experiences can distract the audience and weaken the impact.

Creating an emotional impact

Emotion is a powerful tool in storytelling. Stories that evoke laughter, tears, joy, or reflection leave a lasting impression. To create emotional impact, storytellers must tap into universal feelings and present them authentically.

Emotionally charged moments make stories memorable. For example, telling a story about a child who saved their allowance to help a friend in need can inspire feelings of warmth and admiration. This kind of narrative demonstrates kindness and selflessness in a way that touches the audience deeply.

Balancing emotion: Not overloading the audience

While emotion is crucial, overwhelming the audience with extreme drama or sentimentality can backfire. A good storyteller knows how to strike a balance, using emotional moments to highlight key points without overshadowing the entire story.

Making the story relatable

Relatability ties back to understanding the audience, but it also involves crafting characters, settings, and events that listeners can envision themselves in. This principle applies to stories across all mediums, from literature to film to oral traditions.

Stories that revolve around universal themes, such as growing up, facing challenges, or learning from failure, have wide appeal. For example, a story about a teenager preparing for their first job interview touches on feelings of nervousness and hope that many people experience. These shared themes help bridge gaps between storyteller and listener.

Accessible language

Youth-friendly storytelling often involves using simple, clear language. Complex vocabulary or abstract ideas can alienate younger audiences. A storyteller recounting a personal journey of learning to ride a bike, for instance, can describe the fear of falling and the exhilaration of success in straightforward terms, ensuring the story is engaging and easy to follow.

Staying focused on the main point

Effective storytelling is as much about what is excluded as what is included. Keeping a story focused means avoiding distractions and ensuring each element contributes to the overall message.

Structuring the story: A well-structured story has a clear beginning, middle, and end. For instance, when telling the story of how someone learned the value of perseverance, the storyteller might start with the challenge, describe the struggle, and conclude with the resolution and lesson learned.

Cutting the fluff: Effective storytellers know that less is often more. Details that do not support the main point can be omitted to keep the audience engaged. For example, when narrating a story about a sports team's journey to victory, focusing on key moments of teamwork and determination is far more impactful than detailing every game.

Youth-Friendly Examples of Effective Storytelling

Overcoming a challenge A story about a young girl who struggled with reading but worked hard and eventually won a school writing contest demonstrates perseverance. This story resonates with anyone who has faced difficulties and highlights the importance of not giving up.

A personal journey A boy who was shy but gained confidence after joining a school theater group can illustrate the value of stepping out of one's comfort zone. This relatable narrative encourages young audiences to embrace new experiences.

Learning a new lesson A tale about a student who learned the importance of kindness after befriending a classmate who was often left out serves as a reminder of the power of inclusion and empathy.

Effective storytelling relies on a combination of relatability, emotional resonance, clarity, and focus. By connecting with the audience, delivering a clear message, creating emotional impact, and staying on point, storytellers can craft narratives that inspire, teach, and entertain. Youth-friendly examples like personal journeys and lessons learned make these principles accessible and demonstrate their real-world application.

Social Narratives and Advocacy



Stories are not just a reflection of the world as it is; they are also a powerful means of shaping the world as it could be. Through social narratives, storytellers can bring attention to critical issues, challenge stereotypes, and inspire collective action.

Whether through pop culture, animated films, or real-world campaigns, stories have consistently been used to advocate for causes such as accessibility, equality, and community-building. By evoking empathy and offering alternative perspectives, narratives can influence public opinion and drive social change.

The role of stories in advocacy

Advocacy through storytelling is based on the principle that narratives can be both persuasive and empowering. While data and statistics provide essential information, stories give issues a human face, making them more relatable and emotionally impactful. By tapping into shared values and experiences, stories can shift mindsets, galvanize communities, and push for systemic change.

Advocacy in pop media Pop culture has long been a platform for addressing social issues through engaging narratives. From blockbuster films to television series, creators have used storytelling to challenge societal norms and advocate for marginalized communities.

Representation of disability rights

One notable example is the movie *Wonder* (2017), based on the novel by R.J. Palacio. The story follows Auggie Pullman, a young boy with Treacher Collins syndrome, as he navigates school life. Through Auggie's perspective, the film addresses themes of kindness, acceptance, and the importance of treating everyone with respect. *Wonder* not only raised awareness about craniofacial differences but also promoted inclusive values among young audiences.

Similarly, the television show *Speechless* (2016–2019) centered on J.J., a teenager with cerebral palsy, and highlighted the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities and their families. By portraying J.J. as a complex character with agency and humor, the show broke stereotypes and fostered empathy for the disabled community.

Environmental advocacy

Animated films have also been instrumental in advocating for environmental awareness. *WALL-E* (2008), a Pixar film, tells the story of a small waste-collecting robot left on a polluted Earth. Through its narrative, the film critiques consumerism, waste, and environmental degradation while emphasizing the importance of sustainability. The poignant storytelling encourages audiences to reflect on their own environmental impact and consider ways to protect the planet.

Another example is *Avatar* (2009), directed by James Cameron. This visually stunning film uses the fictional world of Pandora to highlight themes of environmental preservation, indigenous rights, and the dangers of exploitation. Its narrative, centered on the conflict between a mining corporation and the planet's native inhabitants, serves as a metaphor for real-world struggles faced by indigenous communities.

Advocacy in animated films

Animated films have a unique ability to simplify complex social issues and make them accessible to audiences of all ages. Their visual and emotional appeal often leaves a lasting impression, making them effective tools for advocacy.

Equality and inclusion: Disney's *Zootopia* (2016) is an animated film that cleverly addresses issues of prejudice and systemic discrimination through the lens of a city inhabited by anthropomorphic animals. The story follows Judy Hopps, a rabbit police officer, as she uncovers biases within her society and learns about the power of understanding and cooperation. By presenting these themes in a family-friendly format, *Zootopia* encourages viewers to reflect on real-world issues of race, gender, and equality.

Community building: *Encanto* (2021), another Disney production, highlights the importance of family, community, and understanding individual strengths. The film's exploration of intergenerational dynamics and the value of collective support resonates with audiences worldwide. By focusing on inclusion and celebrating diverse identities, *Encanto* advocates for stronger and more empathetic communities.

Real-World examples of social narratives in advocacy

Beyond fictional narratives, real-world campaigns often rely on storytelling to shed light on pressing social issues and mobilize action.

Disability Rights Advocacy: The Disability Visibility Project, founded by Alice Wong, is a prime example of how storytelling can elevate marginalized voices. The project collects and shares personal narratives from people with disabilities, highlighting their experiences and advocating for systemic change. These stories challenge stereotypes and provide a nuanced understanding of the barriers faced by disabled individuals.

Another impactful campaign is the "#WeThe15" initiative, which seeks to promote inclusion for the 15% of the global population living with disabilities. Through personal stories and media representation, the campaign raises awareness of accessibility issues and pushes for equality in education, employment, and society at large.

Environmental advocacy: Environmental movements often use storytelling to emphasize the urgency of protecting the planet. Greta Thunberg, a prominent climate activist, gained global attention by sharing her personal journey and expressing her fears for the future. Her speeches, often grounded in her perspective as a young person, resonate deeply with audiences and have inspired millions to join the fight against climate change.

Documentaries like *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) and *The True Cost* (2015) use storytelling to present scientific data in a compelling and relatable way. By combining statistics with personal accounts and vivid visuals, these films advocate for action on environmental issues such as global warming and ethical consumption.

The emotional power of advocacy narratives

The effectiveness of advocacy narratives lies in their ability to evoke emotion and inspire action. Stories can:

1. **Humanize social issues:** By focusing on individual experiences, narratives make abstract problems tangible and relatable.
2. **Foster empathy:** Stories encourage audiences to see the world through someone else's eyes, breaking down biases and fostering understanding.
3. **Inspire action:** Emotional engagement often leads to increased motivation to support causes or participate in change-making efforts.

For example, in *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (2019), the true story of William Kamkwamba, a young boy in Malawi who builds a windmill to save his village from famine, demonstrates how determination and innovation can overcome adversity. The narrative inspires viewers to believe in the power of individual action and community collaboration.

In conclusion, social narratives are a powerful tool for advocacy, capable of shedding light on critical issues and inspiring change. From pop media to animated films and real-world campaigns, stories create empathy, challenge stereotypes, and build bridges between diverse communities. Whether addressing disability rights, environmental challenges, or social inequalities, storytelling serves as a vehicle for progress, reminding us of our shared humanity and collective responsibility.

Selecting Narrative Styles for Inclusion

4

The way a story is told can shape its impact. Different storytelling styles—such as personal stories, documentary-style narratives, and fictionalized accounts—serve distinct purposes and resonate with audiences in unique ways.

For youth, understanding these styles is crucial, as choosing the right approach can amplify marginalized perspectives, foster empathy, and encourage inclusivity. By exploring these narrative forms and their applications, youth can see how their choices affect how their stories are received and understood.

Personal stories: authenticity and connection

Personal storytelling involves sharing firsthand experiences. This style is highly relatable and often emotionally impactful, as it offers a direct, unfiltered glimpse into the storyteller's life. Personal narratives build trust, authenticity, and empathy, making them a powerful tool for inclusion and representation.

Purpose and strengths

- **Relatability:** Personal stories resonate because they come from real experiences.
- **Empathy Building:** Audiences connect with the emotions and challenges of the storyteller.
- **Authenticity:** Sharing one's own story reduces the risk of misrepresentation.

Example: Amplifying Marginalized Voices

Malala Yousafzai's memoir, *I Am Malala* (2013), shares her personal journey as a young girl advocating for girls' education in Pakistan. By recounting her lived experiences, Malala's story humanizes the broader issue of gender inequality in education and inspires readers to take action.

Another example is the narrative-driven campaign of Greta Thunberg. By sharing her own fears and frustrations about climate change, Greta personalizes an abstract issue, compelling audiences to empathize and act.

Documentary-Style narratives: Informing and inspiring action

Documentary-style storytelling uses real events, interviews, and factual evidence to construct a compelling narrative. This approach is particularly effective for exploring social issues, as it blends personal stories with data and broader context, making it both engaging and educational.

Purpose and strengths

- **Awareness Raising:** Combines emotional appeal with factual information.
- **Credibility:** Facts and real footage lend authenticity and authority.
- **Global Perspective:** Can integrate diverse voices to present a comprehensive view.

Example: Addressing systemic issues

The documentary *Crip Camp* (2020), produced by Barack and Michelle Obama, highlights the history of the disability rights movement in the United States. It uses archival footage and personal interviews to show how a summer camp for disabled teens became a catalyst for systemic change. The blend of personal narratives and historical context ensures the voices of people with disabilities are authentically represented.

Similarly, *13th* (2016), directed by Ava DuVernay, examines the intersection of race, justice, and mass incarceration in the United States. Through interviews and historical analysis, the film amplifies marginalized perspectives, shedding light on systemic racism.

Fictionalized accounts: Creative and universal storytelling

Fictionalized storytelling draws on creative elements to craft engaging narratives inspired by real events or issues. This approach allows storytellers to highlight social themes in ways that transcend specific contexts, making the story more universally relatable.

Purpose and Strengths

- **Flexibility:** Fiction allows for creative expression and the exploration of complex ideas.
- **Universal Appeal:** Symbolism and metaphor can resonate with broader audiences.
- **Safe Exploration:** Sensitive issues can be addressed without exposing real identities.

Example: Highlighting social inequities

Disney's *Zootopia* (2016) uses anthropomorphic animals to explore issues of prejudice and systemic bias. By framing these issues in a fictional world, the film makes them accessible to younger audiences while retaining their gravity and relevance.

Another example is Angie Thomas's novel *The Hate U Give* (2017), which tells the story of Starr Carter, a Black teenager who witnesses a police shooting. While fictional, the book is deeply rooted in real-world experiences and gives a voice to communities impacted by systemic racism.

Mixed-Style narratives: Combining approaches for greater impact

Sometimes, combining storytelling styles enhances a narrative's reach and effectiveness. Mixed-style storytelling incorporates elements from personal, documentary, and fictionalized approaches to create a richer and more inclusive experience.

Example: Blending styles for representation

The animated short film *Float* (2019), produced by Pixar, combines personal and fictional elements to tell the story of a father who discovers his son has special abilities. Inspired by the creator's experience raising a child with autism, the film uses metaphor to depict societal challenges and parental love. This blending of reality and creativity makes the story universally relatable while honoring its personal roots.

Choosing the right style for inclusion

Factors to consider

1. **Audience:** Who is the story for? Youth audiences may respond better to accessible and creative formats like fiction or animation.
2. **Purpose:** What is the story's goal? A personal story may build empathy, while a documentary can provide factual context.
3. **Subject Matter:** Is the issue sensitive? Fictionalizing the narrative might protect identities while still addressing the core themes.

Encouraging youth to experiment

Youth workers can encourage young storytellers to explore these styles by reflecting on the story they want to tell and the impact they want to create. For example:

- A student sharing their experience with bullying could use a personal narrative for authenticity.
- A group advocating for environmental action might create a documentary with interviews and data.
- An artistic teen might prefer crafting a fictional tale that explores prejudice through symbolism.

By understanding and selecting different storytelling styles, youth can represent marginalized perspectives accurately and inclusively. Personal stories can bring overlooked experiences into the spotlight, documentaries can contextualize systemic issues, and fictionalized accounts can universalize important themes. These approaches remind us that storytelling is not just about entertainment—it is a means of fostering connection, understanding, and social change.

Guided reflection framework: Story evaluation guide for Youth Workers

The **Story Evaluation Guide** is a structured framework designed to help youth analyze and reflect on stories from popular films, shows, and other media. Through guided questions, this framework encourages critical thinking, emotional awareness, and discussion about the elements that make a story impactful. The guide is particularly useful for exploring themes of inclusion, representation, and social awareness.

Objectives of the framework

1. **Understand:** Help youth identify the core elements of a story, such as its message, audience, and themes.
2. **Analyze:** Encourage critical reflection on storytelling techniques and their effectiveness.
3. **Empathize:** Foster a deeper emotional connection with characters and themes.
4. **Apply:** Empower youth to apply insights to their own storytelling or advocacy projects.

Step-by-Step application

Step 1: Select a popular story

Choose a well-known film, show, or book that resonates with youth and embodies diverse perspectives or social themes. Examples:

- Zootopia (2016) - A film exploring prejudice and systemic bias.
- Encanto (2021) - A story celebrating family, individuality, and community.
- Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018) - A narrative about identity, teamwork, and self-discovery.
- The Hate U Give (2018) - A film addressing systemic racism and personal courage.
- Stranger Things (2016–present) - A show blending friendship and resilience amidst supernatural challenges.

Step 2: Use story evaluation questions

Part 1: Core understanding

1. What's the main message here?

- Identify the central theme or moral of the story.
- Example: "What does Zootopia teach us about understanding others?"

2. Who is this story for?

- Determine the intended audience and why the story might resonate with them.
- Example: "Is Encanto speaking to families, individuals, or communities? Why?"

3. What makes this story stand out?

- Highlight unique features, such as the characters, setting, or style.
- Example: "Why do you think the animation style of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse makes the story impactful?"

Part 2: Emotional engagement

4. How does this story make you feel?

- Reflect on the emotional impact and why it resonates.
- Example: "Did you feel inspired, sad, or hopeful after watching The Hate U Give? Why?"

5. Which character do you connect with most, and why?

- Explore personal connections to characters and their experiences.
- Example: "In Encanto, did you relate to Mirabel or another family member? What about their journey speaks to you?"

Part 3: Inclusivity and representation

6. Do you see yourself or your community in this story?

- Analyze representation and its accuracy.
- Example: "How does Stranger Things represent friendship or growing up? Does it feel real to you?"

7. Whose voices are missing?

- Encourage thinking about gaps in representation or alternative perspectives.
- Example: "In Zootopia, do we hear enough about the prey animals' side of the story? Who else could be included?"

Part 4: Storytelling techniques

8. What storytelling style does this use, and why is it effective?

- Identify whether the story is personal, documentary-style, or fictionalized, and discuss its impact.
- Example: "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse is fictional, but how does it feel so real and relatable?"

9. How does the setting or tone shape the story?

- Explore the impact of visual or narrative choices.
- Example: "How does the bright, magical world of Encanto help communicate its message about family?"

10. What would you change to make the story more inclusive or impactful?

- Encourage critical thinking and creativity.
- Example: "If you could add a new character to The Hate U Give, who would it be, and why?"

Step 4: Apply insights to youth storytelling

Encourage participants to take lessons from the evaluation and apply them to their own stories. For example:

- If the group found Zootopia impactful due to its theme of overcoming prejudice, ask them to create a story that tackles a social issue they care about.
- If they appreciated the vibrant characters in Encanto, have them brainstorm unique and diverse characters for a story of their own.

6

Adaptable Techniques for Youth Workers

Effective storytelling activities need to cater to the diverse needs and preferences of youth. Youth workers can employ adaptable techniques to ensure storytelling is inclusive, accessible, and engaging for all participants. By embracing different formats, mediums, and learning styles, storytelling can become a tool for empowerment and self-expression, particularly for those who might face barriers in traditional storytelling methods.

Nonverbal storytelling: encouraging creative expression

Not all youth feel comfortable expressing themselves verbally. Nonverbal storytelling methods allow individuals to share their stories through alternative mediums such as art, imagery, and physical movement.

Drawing and visual narratives

- **What It Is:** Participants use illustrations, comics, or collages to convey their stories.
- **Why It Works:** Visual storytelling is accessible to individuals who may struggle with language or prefer expressing themselves artistically.
- **Example Activity:** Provide youth with art supplies and ask them to create a visual timeline of a meaningful day in their life. This could include drawings of people, places, and emotions that represent their experiences.

Photography and images

- **What It Is:** Youth use photography or curated images to tell a story.
- **Why It Works:** It combines visual impact with creative freedom, enabling individuals to represent their experiences in a tangible way.
- **Example Activity:** Ask participants to take or select photos that represent their community and narrate the story these images tell.

Accessible formats for sharing stories

Accessibility is crucial to ensure all youth can participate in storytelling activities. Adapting formats to accommodate different needs promotes inclusivity and encourages diverse participation.

Using simple and clear language

- **How:** Simplify prompts, avoid jargon, and break down instructions into smaller steps.
- **Example:** Instead of saying, "Create a complex character-driven narrative," ask, "Tell us about a moment you were proud of, using a few sentences."

Providing captions and transcriptions

- **How:** Add captions to videos, provide transcripts for audio recordings, or use subtitles in presentations.
- **Why:** These tools ensure inclusivity for youth with hearing impairments or those who prefer reading to listening.

Incorporating assistive technology

- **What:** Use tools like screen readers, speech-to-text software, or audio descriptions for visually impaired participants.
- **Example:** Pair visually impaired youth with sighted peers to create a collaborative storytelling project where imagery is verbally described.

Tailoring activities to different learning styles

Youth workers can design storytelling activities that cater to auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and logical learners, ensuring everyone can engage with the process in a way that suits them best.

Brainstorming and outlining

- **For Logical learners:** Encourage youth who enjoy structure to create story outlines, bullet points, or mind maps.
- **Activity:** Provide a template with prompts such as "Who is your main character? What is their goal? What challenges do they face?"

Verbal expression

- **For Auditory learners:** Focus on oral storytelling, discussions, or audio recordings.
- **Activity:** Pair participants for a "story swap" where they verbally share a personal story and receive constructive feedback.

Role-Playing and dramatization

- **For Kinesthetic Learners:** Use role-playing or theater activities to bring stories to life.
- **Activity:** Have participants act out key moments from their stories in small groups.

Adapting media for individuals with disabilities

Storytelling for individuals with disabilities often relies on specialized tools and approaches to ensure inclusivity and meaningful participation. These adaptations can inspire broader applications in youth work.

Conveying imagery through descriptive language

- **For Visually Impaired audiences:** Use rich, vivid descriptions to evoke imagery.
- **Example:** When narrating a story about a forest, include details like “the sound of leaves crunching underfoot” or “the cool breeze carrying the scent of pine.”

Simplifying visual media

- **For Cognitive Disabilities:** Use visuals that are simple and uncluttered to make concepts easier to grasp.
- **Example:** Illustrate a story using a few large, clear images with captions to explain key points.

Leveraging Audio Descriptions and Tactile Storytelling

- **For Blind or Low-Vision Participants:** Provide audio descriptions of visual elements or use tactile tools like embossed graphics.
- **Example:** Create a tactile book where participants can touch objects related to the story (e.g., a fabric swatch representing a character’s clothing).

Storytelling tools and techniques for youth workers

Digital Tools for accessibility

- **Applications:** Apps like Book Creator, Canva, or Storybird allow youth to create multimedia stories using text, images, and audio.
- **Example:** Encourage participants to create a digital storybook that includes voiceovers for visually impaired users.

Collaborative storytelling

- **Group activities:** Assign roles for co-creating stories—one person writes, another illustrates, and a third records audio.
- **Example:** A group can create a community story, where each member contributes a chapter reflecting their perspective.

Empowering marginalized perspectives

- **Activity:** Ask youth to create a story about someone from an underrepresented group. Provide prompts that encourage them to research and incorporate authentic details.
- **Example:** A story about a wheelchair user overcoming an accessibility challenge in their school could raise awareness about the need for inclusive design.

Adapting storytelling techniques to different settings, learning styles, and accessibility needs ensures all youth can engage in meaningful self-expression. By encouraging nonverbal communication, providing accessible formats, and using tools designed for diverse audiences, youth workers can create an inclusive environment where every story matters. These approaches empower participants to share their narratives confidently, fostering empathy, creativity, and connection.

• ✨ Youth Worker's Corner!

This section provides hands-on tips for youth workers to apply the concepts from this chapter, ensuring that storytelling is engaging, inclusive, and impactful.

Use Storyboarding for structure

Help youth organize their ideas into a clear and engaging narrative structure.

- **How to Do It:**
 - Provide a template with sections for **Beginning, Middle, and End.**
 - Encourage youth to sketch or write key moments of their story in each section.
 - Example: A student creating a story about overcoming a challenge might start with their struggle, show their efforts to improve, and conclude with the lesson they learned.
- **Why It Works:** Visualizing their story helps participants focus and ensures they include essential details without losing track of their main message.

Reflection questions to spark ideas

Use these prompts to encourage youth to reflect on their personal experiences and goals for storytelling:

- **Personal connection:**
 - "If you could tell one story about your life, what would it be?"
 - "What moment in your life taught you something important?"
- **Advocacy and impact:**
 - "What change would you like your story to inspire?"
 - "Who needs to hear your story, and why?"

Comparing storytelling styles

Encourage youth to explore the strengths of different storytelling approaches.

- **How to Do It:**
 - a. Select a story from each style: personal (e.g., *Humans of New York*), documentary (e.g., *Soft White Underbelly*), and fictionalized (*e.g., *Encanto*).

b. Discuss:

- What is the main message of each story?
 - Which style was most engaging and why?
 - Which style is best suited for a specific social issue (e.g., mental health, disability rights)?
- **Why It Works:** Comparing styles helps youth identify the best approach for their own stories and understand how different techniques amplify diverse voices.

Share Real-World examples

Showcase impactful storytelling projects to inspire youth and demonstrate the power of diverse narratives:

- **Humans of New York:** Features personal stories and portraits from people worldwide, highlighting unique experiences and fostering empathy.
- **Soft White Underbelly:** Shares raw, unfiltered interviews with individuals from marginalized or misunderstood backgrounds, focusing on personal struggles and systemic issues.
- **The Disability Visibility Project:** Provides stories from individuals with disabilities, emphasizing authentic representation and advocacy.
- **Why It Works:** Real-world examples show youth how storytelling can bring awareness to important issues and drive change.

Adapt for different learning styles

Make storytelling accessible to all participants by integrating diverse methods:

- Encourage artistic youth to use drawing or photography to outline their stories.
- Use verbal discussions or recording tools for those who prefer speaking to writing.
- Incorporate tactile tools like tactile storybooks or simple visual aids for accessibility.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Articles:

https://www.unite2030.com/insights/storytelling-for-social-good-how-to-communicate-your-mission-effectively_

<https://vawnet.org/news/how-can-i-use-storytelling-tool-raising-awareness-and-inspiring-action-social-transformation>

Videos on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nj-hdQM3uA&t=40s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVOM5l5KhE>

Useful platforms:

www.bookcreator.com - A digital tool for creating interactive storybooks that combine text, images, audio, and video.

www.storybird.com A platform focused on storytelling through art. Users can create visually rich stories by pairing their narratives with professionally designed illustrations.

CHAPTER 4

ACCESSIBLE MEDIA CONCEPTS AND INCLUSIVE CONTENT DESIGN

1

Introduction to accessibility in the media

Imagine having to navigate a website where you can't see the images or understand the text. How would that affect your user experience?

In the media field, accessibility means making content usable and understandable for everyone, regardless of their abilities. This means that the needs of people with visual, hearing, cognitive or physical disabilities must (ought to) be taken into account when designing all materials. Accessible design not only benefits people with disabilities but improves the experience for ALL users. For example, subtitles on videos not only help people with hearing impairments, but also allow anyone to view them in noisy or silent environments, or if you want to maintain privacy or not disturb others.

Youth workers committed to the concept of “accessible media” must emphasise that creating inclusive content is not just about following standards or style guides, but about carefully considering the impact of media on different audiences. By promoting accessibility, we ensure that media can be enjoyed, understood, used and benefited from by all.

2

Basic principles of accessible and inclusive media design

Accessible media design is based on several basic principles that ensure that content is truly available to everyone. These principles are in turn based on the belief that media should be accessible to all people, regardless of their abilities. The goal is, in other words, to create media that is usable by everyone, promoting inclusion and equal access to information and entertainment.

The above principles, in a first approximation, could be summarised as:

- **Alternative text (alt text) for images:** Providing text descriptions for images enables people who are blind or have low vision to access content using screen readers. Screen readers are assistive technologies that convert text into speech, allowing users to listen to digital media content. Without alternative text, images are simply blank spaces—unknowns—for these users.
- **Captions for videos:** Captions make videos accessible to people with hearing impairments and benefit everyone in situations where audio is unavailable, distracting, or potentially disturbing. Captions provide a text version of the audio track, including dialogue, sound effects, and music, allowing everyone to follow along with the content. By the way, captions are different from and should not be confused with subtitles, which are just translations for viewers who do not understand the language spoken in the video.
- **High-contrast visuals:** Using colours with sufficient contrast between the foreground and background helps people with low vision better perceive information, as poor contrast can make it difficult to distinguish text from the background.
- **Plain and simple language:** Writing in plain language, avoiding jargon and complex sentence structures, makes content more accessible to people with cognitive disabilities and benefits all users in general. Plain language can reach a wider audience by providing clarity and improving understanding of published materials.

Youth workers (you) can illustrate these principles with examples:

- Captions on a social media video allow viewers to follow along even without sound.
- A website that uses a combination of black text on a white background (or high contrast between text and background images) makes the content easily readable (for people with or without visual impairments). For example, [BBC](#) and [Patagonia](#).

Young people can create inclusive and accessible content for the widest possible audience simply by keeping these media design principles in mind. Creating inclusive media is, in any case, a process of refinement based on feedback from viewers/users and on personal experience.

Here are some links that showcase different aspects of accessibility, which you may find useful for your workshops and other activities you organise with young people:

1. The National Theatre's subtitled trailers:

- **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/@NationalTheatre/videos>
- **Why it is a good example:** The National Theatre always captions its trailers, making its content accessible to more people. This is a great example of how subtitles can be seamlessly integrated into media.

2. BBC's "See Hear" program:

- **Link:** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006m9cb>
- **Why it's a good example:** This long-running program offers news and information specifically for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, through a combination of sign language, subtitles and clear visual communication.

3. Accessible social networks of the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB):

- **Link:** <https://www.rnib.org.uk/>
- **Why it's good:** The RNIB provides excellent examples of how to make social media accessible, using alternative text for images and publishing "descriptive" posts that can be "understood" by screen readers.

4. WebAIM Accessible Web Design Examples:

- **Link:** <https://webaim.org/techniques/alttext/>
- **Why it's good:** WebAIM offers a wealth of resources on web accessibility, including examples of how to use alternative text (alt text) effectively.

5. Apple Accessibility Features:

- **Link:** <https://www.apple.com/accessibility/>
- **Why it's good:** Apple shows off the accessibility features built into its products, demonstrating how technology can be designed to be inclusive, from the ground up.

We encourage you to explore these examples and discuss with young people how these organisations and companies make their media accessible to everyone.

User experience for people with disabilities

3

"User Experience" (UX) refers to how people interact with media and their overall experience using it. For people with disabilities, user experience can be dramatically affected by media accessibility. Different disabilities require different accommodations to ensure a satisfactory user experience.

Below are some examples of how accessibility tools can help people with different types of disabilities:

- **Visual impairments:** Screen readers, which convert text to speech, are crucial for people who are blind or have low vision, allowing them to navigate websites, read documents, and interact with digital media through audio feedback. Here's a (fictional) example to illustrate: a young student named Alex, who is totally blind, uses a screen reader to access online articles and discuss them with his classmates.
- **Hearing Impairments:** Video captions provide a text version of the video's audio track, and transcripts (text versions of audio material) "make" the content accessible to people with hearing impairments. For example, a deaf college student named Maria relies on captions to follow her online lectures and watch video tutorials.
- **Cognitive disabilities:** Clear, simple language, along with visual cues and a coherent (consistent) layout, can help people with cognitive disabilities understand. For example, a young professional named David, who has dyslexia, appreciates websites that use clear fonts and simple language, which **makes it easier for him to read and understand the text.**
- **Mobility-related disabilities:** Keyboard navigation and voice control tools allow people with limited mobility to interact with media without using a mouse or touchscreen. For example, Sarah, a graphic designer with limited hand movement, uses voice control software to create and edit her work.

Youth workers (again, you) can explain these adaptations to young people, emphasising how thinking about appropriate design can have a very significant impact on many people's "ability" to interact with media content. By sharing real-world examples or creating situations or scenarios based on your knowledge of accessibility issues, you can help young people understand the importance of inclusive design and empowering people with disabilities to participate fully in the digital world, which – let's not forget – they certainly have every right to do.

Inclusion by design: beyond disability

4

Inclusive design goes beyond making media accessible to people with disabilities. It also involves taking into account the diverse needs of all users/consumers, including their cultural backgrounds, preferred languages, and technology access capabilities. This approach echoes the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which aims to create learning situations and materials that accommodate the widest possible range of learners by offering multiple forms of participation, representation, and action and expression.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that guides the design of accessible and engaging learning experiences for all learners, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. UDL is based on three core principles:

1. **Multiple Means of Engagement (the “why” of learning):** This principle focuses on leveraging learners’ interests, providing them with choice, and encouraging “self-regulation” to foster motivation and engagement in the process.
2. **Multiple Means of Representation (the “what” of learning):** This principle emphasises presenting information in multiple formats (e.g., text, audio, video) and providing learners with the ability to customise how they perceive and understand the information made available to them.
3. **Multiple Means of Action and Expression (the “how” of learning):** This principle seeks to provide students with different ways to demonstrate their learning, giving them the possibility of using different tools and methods to express the knowledge they have acquired.

The UDL framework is based on the understanding that learners are diverse and have diverse, unique needs and preferences. By offering flexibility and choice in how learners access and engage with UDL information, we aim to create inclusive learning environments where all learners can thrive.

Here are some factors to consider for inclusive media design, inspired by UDL principles:

- **Choice of language:** Using clear and concise language, avoiding jargon and complicated terms, makes content more accessible to people with cognitive disabilities and also to non-native speakers. This is in line with the UDL principles of providing multiple means of representation, such as offering text in different formats (e.g. audio, video) and using plain language.
- **Cultural Representation:** Representing diverse cultures and backgrounds in media helps to “induce” a sense of belonging and inclusion in all users, which is consistent with the UDL goal of providing multiple avenues for engagement that leverage learners’ interests and backgrounds.
- **Device Compatibility:** Making media accessible across multiple devices (smartphones, tablets, and computers) enables everyone to access content regardless of their socioeconomic status or technology preference, in line with UDL’s emphasis on multiple media of action and expression. This allows learners (or, extrapolating, media consumers) to access and interact with content in ways that best suit their needs and preferences.

It is important to note here that designing universally accessible materials benefits everyone, not just people with disabilities. Clear language, consistent formatting and well-organized content make media easier to use and understand. A clear example, discussed above, is captions on videos.

Youth workers (you!) must emphasise that inclusive design benefits EVERYONE by making media resources more accessible and user-friendly, truly inclusive, and with the all-important mission of promoting equal access to information and entertainment.

Framework for guided reflection

To facilitate a deeper understanding of accessibility in media, we propose an "Accessibility Checklist" that you and your colleagues can use to lead discussions and guide evaluations.

This checklist is designed to stimulate critical thinking and encourage young people to take into account the diverse needs of users when interacting with media

Accessibility Checklist:

Ask	Yeah	No	Grades
Are subtitles available for the videos?			
Are the images accompanied by alternative text (<i>alt text</i>)?			
Is the language used clear, concise and easy to understand?			
Does the design use high-contrast colour combinations to facilitate readability?			
Can the content be accessed through different devices (e.g. computers, <i>smartphones</i> , <i>tablets</i>)?			
Do users have the option to customise the font size and/or style?			
Does the media provide options for keyboard navigation or voice control?			
Is the use of flashing items that could trigger seizures avoided?			
Do the media use a consistent layout and clear (and hierarchical) headings to make navigation easier?			
Are diverse cultures and backgrounds presented in an inclusive way?			

Questionnaire for youth workers

Below we propose a series of questions that can help you reflect -putting yourself in the shoes of the "other"- on the need to produce correctly designed media, as far as accessibility is concerned. Of course, the questionnaire can be used as a starting point for an activity, or activities, to be carried out with a group of young people.

1. Video subtitles (please turn off your device's speaker first):

- Watch this video with subtitles: <https://youtu.be/RRzo4lvqwlw>
- Now watch this video without subtitles: <https://youtu.be/YShQiOdYeeg>
- How does the lack of subtitles affect your understanding and interest in the video?

2. Image alternative text:

- Visit this website: <https://kdesign.co/blog/how-to-write-alt-text/>
- Inspect images using your browser's developer tools (right-click an image and select "Inspect" or "Inspect Element").
- Can you find examples of good and bad alternative text? How do you think the presence or absence of (quality) alternative text can affect the accessibility of the website for people who, for example, use screen readers?

3. Linguistic clarity:

- Read this news: <https://odphp.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/write/section-2-6/>
- Now read this scientific article: <https://mathworld.wolfram.com/news/2003-04-15/poincare/>
- Compare the readability and comprehension of both texts. How do you think the choice of language impacts accessibility for people with cognitive disabilities or those who are learning the language?

4. Colour contrast:

- Check out this website: <https://www.scope.org.uk/>
- Since we don't want to give any "bad" examples here, imagine one of the typical pastel-coloured websites designed for fashion brands.
- Compare the readability of both designs. How does colour contrast affect accessibility for people with low vision?

5. Device Compatibility:

- Visit this website with your mobile, and then with your tablet or computer: <https://dequeuniversity.com/library/responsive/1-non-responsive>
- Does the design and functionality scale well to different screen sizes and input methods? How can the design's compatibility with different devices affect accessibility for people with limited access to technology?

6. Font customisation:

- Explore the accessibility settings on your smartphone or on a website you use frequently.
- Can the font size, style, or colours be adjusted? How do you think these customisation options improve accessibility for people with visual impairments or reading difficulties?

7. Keyboard navigation and voice control:

- Try browsing a website using just your keyboard, without the mouse ([here's how](#)).
- Now try [using voice commands to control your device or browse the Internet](#).
- How do these alternative entry methods improve accessibility for people with mobility issues?

8. Flashing elements:

- Think about websites or videos you've encountered that have elements that flash or rapidly change colour.
- How could these elements affect people with photosensitive epilepsy?

9. Layout and Headings:

- Compare navigation through a well-structured document with clear [hierarchical headings](#) to a document with large blocks of text and no clear organisation.
- How does design affect accessibility for people with cognitive disabilities? And for screen reader users? (If you are not familiar with the three methods of navigation with a screen reader, we recommend that you watch the video "[Screen Readers: The 3 Methods of Navigation](#)")

10. Cultural representation:

- Think about a movie or TV show you've seen recently.
- How does the representation of different cultures and backgrounds impact the perception of content by people from diverse communities or groups?

Adaptable techniques for youth workers

6

It is important to involve diverse learners to make discussions inclusive. It is also important for youth workers to be flexible and adapt to different environments. Below we list some techniques that youth workers can use when working with a diverse group of young people. The resources and materials we propose are good examples of how to start discussions about the right way to consume media responsibly and navigate the digital landscape, while always maintaining a critical point of view.

Different types of students

If your group consists of different types of young “learners”, you can divide them into subgroups based on their predominant learning profile: auditory, visual or kinaesthetic and adapt the activities you have prepared for each of the subgroups:

Auditory learners will get the most out of audio-based activities. You can use podcasts or recorded interviews to illustrate media literacy concepts. The following podcasts offer accessible and engaging ways to foster critical thinking and media literacy awareness in young audiences:

- [Podcast "Your Undivided Attention"](#) by the Center for Humane Technology :
 - **Theme:** Analyses how technology and media influence attention, behaviour, and social norms, and delves into the ethical design of media platforms, as well as the impact of algorithms on information consumption.
 - **Why it's helpful:** The episodes unpack complex aspects of media like algorithmic bias, misinformation, and the role of social media in shaping public opinion, making them relatable to young audiences.
 - **How can you use these podcasts?**
 - **Interactive discussions:** Play an episode and pause at key moments to start discussions or question rounds.
 - **Media Analysis Activities:** Ask youth to evaluate the media tactics exposed in the episode and how they relate to their own media consumption.
 - **Hands-on projects:** Use the episodes as a starting point to create alternative narratives or practice fact-checking.
 - **How do they work to improve media literacy?**
 - **Teach critical thinking:** By highlighting how media influences perception and behaviour, these recordings encourage listeners to question—to reasonedly and constructively criticize—what they consume.
 - **Real-world examples:** Topics such as fake news, [media bubbles](#), [echo chambers](#) and [clickbait](#) provide tangible examples for discussion.
 - **Useful tools:** practical tips to help young people interact consciously – “premeditatedly, critically” – with the media.

Visual learners: They make the most of visual representations – concrete examples that they can see and examine with their own eyes. With a group of visual learners, it would be best to analyse social media posts, memes or infographics. Bring in different media materials and start the discussion. By combining visual resources with discussions and practical activities, youth workers can help young “visual learners” develop or improve their own tools to navigate today’s complex media landscape.

If you want to enhance your sessions, you can also include:

- [BBC Learning English - Unit 1: "Fake News: Fact and Fiction":](#)
 - **Topic:** This is a series of sessions on fake news. It includes different activities: short videos, useful links and a quiz.
 - **Why it's useful:** Although it focuses primarily on language (vocabulary development), the series is interactive in nature, and informative in addressing the topic of fake news, which develops young people's media literacy.
 - **How to use it?**
 - **Watch the videos:** Start each session by playing the short videos to introduce the topic.
 - **Interactive Activities:** Use quizzes and activities to reinforce understanding.
 - **Debate:** Discuss how fake news affects young people personally and what tools they can use to verify information.
 - **Why does this method work for media literacy?**
 - **Interactive and engaging:** Combines videos, quizzes, and hands-on activities, keeping students engaged.
 - **Real-world application:** Provides real-world (or, rather, real-world-like) examples and practical tips for identifying fake news.
 - **Media skills:** Strengthening critical media culture.
 - **Step-by-step structure:** Gradually builds knowledge, making complex concepts easier to understand.
- [YouTube Channel: Crash Course Media Literacy:](#)
 - **Topic:** Short, highly engaging videos on topics such as media bias, propaganda, and the role of journalism.
 - **How to use it?**
 - Play a 10-minute episode and then ask youth to spot real-world examples of media bias or ["concentration of ownership"](#)
 - **Why does it work for media literacy?**
 - It is visually dynamic, with clear animations and examples.
 - Episodes like ["Media Ownership"](#) explain complex concepts in simple terms.

- **Interactive website: "Checkology" from the News Literacy Project:**
 - **Topic:** Interactive lessons on evaluating (analysing) news, detecting bias, and identifying reliable sources.
 - **How to use it?**
 - As a classroom activity, after watching the video, have the young people discuss what they have learned.
 - **Why does it work for media literacy?**
 - The "gamified" approach immerses visual learners in scenarios where they "check articles" or identify manipulated content.
- **Documentary "The Social Dilemma" (although it is not an open source resource):**
 - **Topic:** Analyses the impact of social media algorithms on behaviour, decision making, and the spread of misinformation (**fake news**), highlighting the ethical issues of technological design.
 - **How to use it?**
 - **Pre-watching:** Reflect on your personal social media habits to connect your experiences to the film.
 - Watch key sections: focus on algorithms, media bubbles and misinformation.
 - After watching the video, discuss the findings and seek solutions through media landscape analysis and fact-checking activities.
 - **Why does it work for media literacy?**
 - Visually illustrates complex concepts such as algorithmic influence.
 - Relatable, dramatized scenarios engage students.
 - Encourages critical thinking through real-world applications and discussions.

Kinaesthetic learners: For kinaesthetic learners, it is best to design practical activities, such as creating a simulated social media feed to explore biases. You can also use different interactive activities that combine different working methods. Here is an example:

- **Interactive activity:** Fact-checking gymkhana or media bias role-playing game.
 - **Topic:** Practical exploration of media literacy concepts such as misinformation, bias, and critical evaluation of sources.
 - **How to do it?**
 - **Fact-checking gymkhana:** Divide young people into teams to verify claims in newspaper articles using reliable sources.
 - **Media bias role play:** Assign groups of young people roles as journalists or editors, with specific biases, and ask them to create or critique newspaper headlines.

- **Why does it work for media culture?**

- It encourages active participation and critical thinking.
- Makes abstract concepts tangible through physical and collaborative tasks.
- Promotes teamwork and problem-solving skills while analysing real-world examples.

Structuring the sessions

Youth workers need to be adaptable in the ways they structure sessions too. Different participants and groups of young people require different approaches. Also, different topics can be structured very differently, so pay attention to the “time factor” when structuring your session. A general guide to follow could be:

- **Short sessions:** These usually focus on a single topic, such as bias detection, to maintain attention.
- **Interactive discussions:** Use real-life examples relevant to young people, such as viral trends on TikTok or the most popular channels on YouTube.

Youth Worker's Corner! ✨

This section offers practical tips and activity ideas specifically related to the core focus of Chapter 4: accessible media concepts and inclusive content design.

Questions for discussion:

- "What features make media easier or harder to use?"
- "What does it feel like to watch a video with and without subtitles?"
- "What are some ways to make websites easier to navigate for people with visual impairments?"
- "How can we ensure that images are accessible to everyone, including the totally blind?"
- "Why is it important to use clear and simple language in the media?"

Real life examples:

- Show websites or applications with good accessibility features (for example: simple and well-structured navigation, high contrast, alternative text...)
- Demonstrate use of screen readers or other assistive devices.
- Explore social networks that offer accessibility features (e.g., Instagram's alt text feature).

Simulations ("immersive" experiences):

- Encourage young people to experience media with simulated disabilities (e.g., navigating a website with a screen reader or watching a video without sound).
- Discuss how these experiences change your understanding of accessibility.



Device Features:

- Explore the accessibility features built into various devices (e.g. iPads, Android phones, etc.)
- Experiment with features like voice control, zoom, and text-to-speech.

Accessibility in daily life:



- Analyse how accessibility applies to everyday activities (e.g., reading on different screen sizes, navigating through public spaces).
- Invite young people to think about the diverse needs of people in their community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Articles:

- **"Everyday Inclusive Web Design: An Activity Perspective"** by Shaun K. Kane: The article examines the issue of website accessibility, which affects millions of people with disabilities, highlighting that a significant portion of online content is created by non-professionals and often is not accessible. The concept of "inclusive web design for everyday life" is introduced, which encourages end users to create accessible content. The study applies [activity theory](#) to analyse the design activities of end users and designers. of systems, and how the interaction between them gives rise to the final content, to end up concluding that accessibility depends on the joint effort of both groups. Finally, it is suggested that changes in social software systems can increase awareness and encourage practices of accessible design.

Link: [ERIC - EJ1104807 - Everyday Inclusive Web Design: An Activity Perspective, Information Research: An International Electronic Journal, 2007-Apr](#)

- **"Digital Inclusion: Analyzing Social Media Accessibility Features for Students with Visual Impairments"** by Mohamad Ahmad Saleem Khasawneh: This research studies the accessibility features of the most popular social media sites (Facebook, X -Twitter- and Instagram) and their impact on visually impaired students in Saudi Arabia. The study uses a quantitative analysis of 150 participants to assess the effectiveness and ease of use of these platforms. The results reveal significant disparities in the perception of the effectiveness of accessibility features, with Facebook in the lead, followed by Instagram, and X in last place. The study highlights the importance of accessibility features. tailored accessibility assessments and continuous improvements to foster a more inclusive digital environment.

Link: [Digital Inclusion : Analyzing Social Media Accessibility Features for Students with Visual Impairments](#)

Videos:

- **"Accessibility in Media"** by Disability Rights New York: Shelby Edwards, CEO, Founder and Senior Coordinator of Inclusive Communication Services (ICS) discusses the importance of accessibility in media. The video discusses ICS' services and mission, and how accessibility is being integrated into video publishing today.

Link: [Accessibility in Media](#)

- **"Why Implement UDL?"** by Katie Novak, Ed.D: This video by Katie Novak, Ed.D, from Novak Educational Consulting explains the importance of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and how it can be developed in educational settings. The video highlights Novak Education's flexibility to design professional development sessions tailored to the needs of different groups, whether in-person or online.

Link: [Why Implement UDL?](#)

Podcasts:

- **Digital Accessibility Podcasts** Ricky Onsman: This article, published on November 14, 2023, analyses several podcasts that focus on digital accessibility.
- The paper categorises podcasts into three groups: those that focus on digital accessibility, web technology or design podcasts, and podcasts that focus on digital accessibility with related episodes, and disability podcasts that include digital accessibility topics. The article highlights noteworthy podcasts and provides links to their episodes, emphasising the importance of accessibility in podcasting.

Link: [Digital accessibility podcasts](#)

Accessibility Checking Tools:

- **WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools:** WAVE is a set of evaluation tools designed to help creators make their web content more accessible to people with disabilities. It identifies many types of accessibility and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) errors and enables “human” evaluation of web content. WAVE offers browser extensions for Chrome, Firefox, and Edge, as well as a subscription API and testing engine to collect accessibility test data on multiple pages simultaneously. The Accessibility Report Impact (AIM) provides detailed test data and manual testing results from experts to provide insight into the accessibility of websites for users with disabilities.

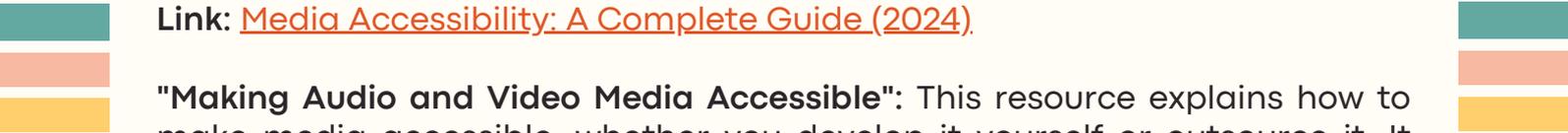
Link: [WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools](#)

- **Accessibility Checker:** This website offers a free tool to check if a website complies with ADA and WCAG accessibility standards. It identifies web accessibility issues and provides precise instructions for fixing them. The site also provides various resources and services, such as automated scans, manual audits, file remediation, and training on web accessibility best practices.

Link: [Accessibility Checker](#)

Accessible media production tools:

- **"Media Accessibility: A Complete Guide (2024)"** by Erin Shoshana, Danny Trichter, Ritvik Shrivastava: This guide discusses the importance of accessibility in media and how companies can ensure their media content is accessible to all users. It discusses requirements for audio and video accessibility, provides checklists for compliance, and explains the benefits of complying with accessibility standards. The guide also highlights the role of the [World Wide Web Consortium \(W3C\)](#), and the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) in establishing accessibility guidelines.



Link: [Media Accessibility: A Complete Guide \(2024\)](#)

"Making Audio and Video Media Accessible": This resource explains how to make media accessible, whether you develop it yourself or outsource it. It provides guidance on accessibility planning, creating accessible audio and video content, and the use of media players that support accessibility. The guide includes the requirements of the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\)](#) and provides practical advice to ensure that media content is accessible to people with disabilities.

Link: [Making Audio and Video Media Accessible](#)



CHAPTER 5

MEDIA ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

1

Introduction to Media Ethics

Ethics in media provide a framework to help us decide what is “right” or “wrong” when it comes to creating, sharing, and consuming information. This guidance is especially important in today’s fast digital world, where misinformation can spread quickly, and the line between truth and opinion often blurs.

Ethical practices are key to maintaining trust, fairness, and accountability in public discourse and journalism. Not just professional journalists should follow them, but everyone who is publishing content either offline or online - it is important to realize that we all sort of have become media creators, because most of us use social media or other platforms to share different content. Young people should understand their role in creating a respectful and responsible media environment, whether they’re writing articles or blogs, sharing a post, making a video, or engaging in online discussions. Ethics in media empower youth to make informed and thoughtful decisions in a digital age full of challenges and opportunities.

For content creators, ethical responsibilities go beyond simply following rules. Creators need to consider how their work influences public opinions and behaviors of others. Here are some examples of why ethics matter in media:

- **Avoiding harm:** Misinformation, sensationalism, and unfair reporting can hurt individuals, communities, and public trust.
- **Protecting vulnerable groups:** Media should pay special attention to carefully and ethically handling when they cover stories about vulnerable groups, sensitive topics and personal stories. They should approach them with care to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or exploiting suffering.
- **Promoting respect:** Ethical media respects the dignity and privacy of others while telling truthful and balanced stories.



Ethical Frameworks in Media

Privacy

Respecting people's privacy is critical, especially now when social media makes it easy to share personal information widely. Think about the fine line between telling someone's story and protecting their privacy. For example, using content from someone's social media without their permission can harm them, even if the intention was good.

Example of privacy violation:

In 1997, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette published a story about LGBTQ issues on college campuses, including the name of a gay student who had not publicly come out. The student participated in a campus event supporting LGBTQ rights, but he did not give a consent to being identified in the media.

Harm caused: The student faced the consequences from his family and community, which led to significant emotional stress. The article exposed him without considering the personal consequences, violating his privacy.

Factors to weigh:

- Awareness vs. privacy: The importance of publicizing LGBTQ rights versus the risk of harming an individual by exposing their identity.
- Public participation vs. assumed consent: Was the student's participation in a public event enough to justify publishing his name?

Consent

Consent means getting permission before using someone's data, story, or image. It's not just about asking, it's about ensuring the person understands how their information will be used. Imagine interviewing someone about a sensitive topic. Before sharing their story, you need to explain where it will appear and why. This builds trust and shows respect.

Example of misusing of images from tragedy:

After the 2015 European migrant crisis, some media outlets published images of drowned refugees, including the very widely shared photo of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy.

Harm caused: The family's trauma was even more painful by the viral spread of the image. While the image raised awareness, it also started debates about exploiting personal tragedies for public sympathy.

Factors to weigh:

- Awareness vs. dignity: Does raising awareness of a crisis justify exposing someone's private tragedy?
- Public good vs. family harm: How should the potential for positive societal impact be balanced against the harm to an individual or family?

Accuracy

Being accurate is about sharing the truth and avoiding mistakes. When false information spreads, it can damage trust and cause harm. Before sharing a news story or social media post, check your sources and verify the facts. Misinformation, even unintentional, can mislead people or create a fear and polarize society.

Example of spreading of COVID-19 misinformation:

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, false information about cures, vaccine risks, and the virus's origins spread rapidly online. Some influencers and media shared unverified information.

Harm caused: Public confusion and mistrust in healthcare systems. People engaged in dangerous practices, such as taking unapproved medications or refusing vaccines.

Factors to weigh:

- Speed vs. accuracy: Should journalists prioritize speed- being first who brings the information, knowing the information might not be fully verified?
- Public panic vs. responsibility: Does reporting unverified statements about cures or risks serve public interest, or does it create unnecessary panic?

Respectful representation

Media should portray people and communities fairly, avoiding stereotypes or harmful biases. For instance, if you're creating a campaign or content about a group, make sure it reflects their experiences honestly and respectfully. Ask yourself: "Will this representation strengthen harmful ideas, or will it bring understanding?"

Example of violation of respectful representation:

News outlets often highlight the race or ethnicity of suspects from marginalized groups, which strengthen stereotypes. For example, during the 2011 London riots, some media portrayed young men of colour as the primary instigators without any evidence.

Harm caused: It reinforced racial biases and stigmatized whole communities.

Factors to weigh:

- Public interest vs. reinforcing stereotypes: Does mentioning race or ethnicity provide meaningful context, or does it bring harmful biases?
- Accuracy vs. bias: Are the details fact-checked, or are they based on assumptions that could mislead the audience?

3

Media Responsibility for Marginalised or Vulnerable Groups

For the public service media it's an obligation set in the legal regulations to produce content for various social groups to make sure they are properly represented and there are also media pieces for and about them. There are TV channels specifically for kids or programmes for ethnic minorities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the [Czech public TV](#) ran a special channel for people over 60 years old. Commercial media don't have this obligation and unless it's part of their agenda or editorial strategy they produce and distribute content that is targeting basically everyone.

However, every medium needs to be fair, respectful, and considerate when portraying marginalized or vulnerable communities, including people with disabilities. At first let's mention that marginalisation is an issue inside the media industry itself. In the Czech Republic, according to the research of organisation [Women in Media](#), there is a high disproportionality between how many **women** are working in media (45%) and how many of them are editors-in-chief of the main media (7%). In the main media it's rare to see journalists who have some minority background or who have some disabilities.

What is the situation in your country in this context?

Let's explore some negative phenomena that are present in the media space and affect public perception of individuals or social groups. Especially the next sub-chapter will deal with an approach preventing these practices.

- **Misinformation**

Umbrella term which includes information that is misleading or incorrect unintentionally (misinformation) or intentionally (disinformation), or which is correct, but used in the situation when it causes harm (malinformation).

- **Misrepresentation**

This is an umbrella term, as people can be not only wrongly represented, but depending on space they get in media there is also

- under-representation
- no-representation, complete exclusion from the media (absence of media coverage supports spread of misinformation or discourage people from continuing their activities)
- over-representation (excessive media coverage, even if positive, can support prejudices and wrong assumptions; audience may ask "Why are these people always there?")

The forms of misrepresentation per se in media are:

- **Bias and discrimination** against others (when for example only people representing one side of the story are heard).
- Words used to **label** the people, such as crazy, decoration, dirty, lazy, problematic, complicated, criminal, renegade, toady, redneck, racist, etc.
- **Stereotypes** supporting overgeneralised views on the social group - both positive and negative stereotypes are creating distorted perceptions. It doesn't need to be verbal or written description, but also:
 - Environment, in which people are portrayed in photos and videos supports stereotypes.
 - Mentioning ethnicity of (alleged) culprit is a practice supporting a negative public picture of certain social groups.
 - Covering only negative stories about certain social group and omitting the positive ones.

- **Simplification**

Sometimes it's necessary to simplify the topic, but to an extent that would lead to wrong conclusions and public perception of the social group. Metaphors, referring to one thing by mentioning the other, such as crown = monarchy or Brussels = EU, should not be used in journalism. For example, it's important to accurately describe various mental health issues, their causes and effects, so that people who suffer from them are not labeled or excluded by society. The same applies when it comes to portrayal of other sensitive topics, such as human rights abuse, homelessness, or drug addictions.

- **Exploitation and objectification**

Women are exploited by the media as sexual objects. The situation is now changing and there are also initiatives that are dedicated to change of portrayal of women, for example Nicole Kidman or Reese Witherspoon produce or support production of media with different narratives.

Exploitation can concern anyone when the media are using them and their stories to gain more attention - people can be presented as sexual objects or entertaining figures. Media can easily use the fame of the people to gain money and would not care much about the mental well-being of those people or how the public behaves towards them.

Another form of exploitation is when journalists see interviewees or other people involved in the story as someone who is obliged to talk with them and be portrayed.

- **Secondary victimisation**

Victims of aggressive behaviour are negatively affected not only by the violent act itself, but later also by police investigation and related media coverage. Sometimes it's not possible to avoid it and when they see the reportage they go through the experience again in their mind.

In the case of the media, effects of secondary victimisation can be felt also by a person who was a victim of another case of similar aggression.

Any piece of media can make a difference.

4

Reflecting on Social Responsibility in Media

Although many ethical rules are embodied in the charters of ethics or codes of conduct of journalists or other media makers, there is an additional layer of media ethics which is rather unwritten and often relies on personal consideration. It's called a social responsibility - towards individuals, social groups, audiences, or the whole society. It's based on the notion that the media have the same potential to either harm or help, depending on their actions.

Socially responsible media and people involved in them (not only journalists) are aware of the effects of their actions on others. In the case of defamation, there is a procedure called a serious harm test to find out whether the content had a negative effect on someone, or not. Analogically and ex ante, the authors should do a potential harm test when in doubt about the impact of the work. They think about and consider various potential negative effects. Keep in mind that there can also be an indirect effect as described above.

The authors are critically thinking about words they are using, the way how they portray people on a video or photography, how they structure the whole story, or even how they put different content together. When they find out that something can cause discomfort or harm, they change the wording or frame - but they still publish the story and portray it accurately. Therefore the social responsibility is not a self-censorship, because in that case the content would not be published at all.

Examples of questions and considerations for critical reflection about the content:

- Is it really necessary to use this word / phrase?
- Even if the sources are credible, am I really sure the content will not include misinformation? It can happen that the author makes false conclusions even on the basis of facts.
- Isn't the content supporting some stereotypes? Also the environment in which people are filmed is influencing how people perceive the story.
- Is it really necessary to mention the ethnicity/background of the people portrayed?
- Is it necessary to mention personal background information about (alleged) culprits?
- Is there a higher possibility that my content will instigate hate-speech targeted at a specific person/organisation/social group? What can I do to limit this risk?
- It is possible that my content will cause a secondary victimisation effect. What can I do to limit this risk?
- Media often simplify things, but it can lead to a wrong perception of the topic - for example, instead of "Brussel decided..." it should be mentioned which institution decided.
- Is this content drawing attention to the culprit and their ideas (never mention names of attackers or terrorists, even if they are known) or people, institutions, or ideas that were affected?
- Is it fine to have this serious story on the same page as / broadcast it right before or after humorous news?
- Are we dedicating enough time to this topic? Aren't we dedicating too much time to this topic?

When it comes to the last point, social responsibility ultimately supports the independence of media, which are not allowing political or economic actors to influence their content. It's not necessary to be a public service medium to feel responsibility towards the audience or society.

- Social responsibility is not only about professional journalistic behaviour. Nowadays, since everyone can publish almost anything on social media, everyone should also reflect on what they write or share and ask themselves questions such as “What impact could this post or article have on someone reading it?” or “How can I share content that’s positive and constructive?” It’s always possible to send the same message across without spreading misinformation, inciting heated discussion, or creating discomfort to others.

Nowadays media are often investing into making their online presence a safe environment for the audience. Increasingly they also support media literacy by debunking hoaxes or creating content that empowers people to be resistant to misinformation and harmful content (e.g. articles or TV shows about the topic, cases, tools, and methods). By doing this they also support a broad public discussion about the role of the media. All of this falls under the social responsibility of the media. Last but not least, it should not be confused with a [corporate social responsibility \(CSR\)](#).



Guided Reflection Framework

Task: Give the participant the article you chose or ask them to choose a piece of media they've recently seen—a social media post, news article, video, or ad. Use the following questions to reflect on its ethical aspects. Ask your participants to think about how it was created, its purpose, and its potential impact on others.

Reflection questions:

- Is the information truthful and verified?
- Does the content respect privacy and consent?
- Could this content harm someone emotionally or socially?
- Are individuals or groups represented fairly, without stereotypes?
- Why was this content created - does it inform, entertain, or provoke?

Exercise: Who tells the story?

The aim is to reflect on how different perspectives shape media narratives.

Task: Choose a news story involving a controversial topic (like protests, a public figure, or a social issue). Divide participants into small groups, assigning each group a different perspective to represent (can be journalist, protester, bystander, government official). Ask each group to write or discuss how they would report the story. Reflect together on how perspectives influence the story’s tone, accuracy, and fairness.

Main questions:

- How did each perspective change the narrative?
- Were any biases or stereotypes introduced?
- What does this tell us about ethical reporting?

6

Adaptive Techniques for Youth Workers

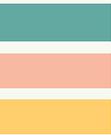
First of all, adjust the activities on the basis of where the participants are coming from - present case studies from their countries or regions, ask them to find and present concrete cases of unethical reporting themselves.

Although ethical media making applies to all formats of content (written text, audio, video, or their combination), the participants might be curious about specifics of [public broadcasting](#), [details of licensing](#), or [investigative journalism](#). Ask them in advance about what they are interested in or prepare the following session in accordance with their feedback.

Youth workers preparing and eventually delivering activities on the topic of ethical and inclusive media should be prepared to adapt the course of the event to the possibility that some participants may share misinformation or defend unethical practices. In that case, more time shall be devoted to discussion about the concrete case - analysis of the practice or debunking of the misinformation. By no means make that participant a fool during the session, but explain the facts. When the situation is escalating, go to the other topic and talk with the participant privately after the session.

Since media and journalism are dynamic fields, youth workers focusing on them should be prepared to always learn something new, be open to work with other experts on the given topic, and adjust the activities for young people on the basis of recent developments in the field, needs and profile of the participants (for example explaining European media landscape to people from the US requires use of more comparisons with what they know from their country), and unexpected situations.

Coyote Magazine of the Council of Europe published an [article with tips for youth workers](#) on how to adapt to an ever-changing world. Delivering quality activities in new situations - results or either challenges or opportunities - is not only about adjusting the content. Approach also should not stay the same and what helps to make it different is [a set of adaptability skills](#) and ways of how to improve them.



Ethical media are inclusive and so needs to be also youth work activities focusing on them. Be ready that a participant can be indirectly personally affected by some ethical considerations and especially concrete case-studies: e.g. if it concerns people from the same town or social group. Have a reserve case-study at hand and use it if the original one is causing discomfort to a participant. Even if there is only one participant with a disability, their proper involvement is to be assured. SALTO Inclusion & Diversity published a [series of articles and a booklet](#) presenting methods, tips, and tricks on how to adapt the activities to young people with various disabilities.

Youth Worker's Corner! *°

Using scenario-based discussions

Keep scenarios engaging - Use everyday situations participants might experience, like sharing a meme about some sensitive topic, posting a friend's story without permission, or deciding whether to share unverified news.

1. Encourage open debate of participants

2. Present the scenarios one by one and ask participants:

- "What would you do in this situation?"
- "What ethical principles are at play here?"
- "What might be the short- and long-term consequences?"

3. Guide the participants, but don't judge!

- Avoid labeling responses as "right" or "wrong". Instead, explore different perspectives and ask following questions supporting reflection.

4. Later make the scenarios more complex

- Start with simple scenarios, then present ones with multiple ethical challenges.

5. Involve role-playing if you have time for it

- Ask participants to take roles like a journalist, social media influencer, or a concerned friend to explore how different viewpoints shape decisions.

6. Conclude activity with action steps

- After the discussion, summarize key takeaways and brainstorm possible action steps participants can use to make ethical media decisions in their own lives.



Sample questions for discussion

“How would you describe a relationship between traditional media and social media or networks?”

“Are there some biases that influence how you are reading or creating the media piece?”

“Why is it important to use at least 2 independent sources in a journalistic informative content?”

“Can you distinguish between news and other media content, such as opinion pieces?”

“Which social groups do you perceive as the most marginalised or misrepresented by the media?”

“What impact can the media piece have on various groups of people or individuals?”

“What media practices support stereotypes - negative or positive - about certain social groups?”

“When is it okay to share a story or content, such as a picture, that isn't yours?”

“What are some potential harms of sharing unverified information?”

“When is it okay for journalists to interfere in the private life of a person?”

Eliciting discussion is an important method, as it will facilitate critical thinking about information and media, and brainstorming about the given topic. Itemized news inquiries can be used to open discussion and focus on current media coverage of certain topics, such as the European Parliament elections or the new legislation. General news announcements, which include personal disclosures, are statements that can be used to give a personal touch to the discussion, such as “Last week I saw so many click-bait headlines on social media and it was overwhelming. I don't know what was happening”.

Use eliciting also when participants ask you some questions - don't answer them directly, but ask what is their opinion about the topic first and provide your answer afterwards.

If you want to learn more about eliciting discussions, [check for example this webpage](#).



Short case studies of ethical and unethical reporting

When talking about concepts such as media ethics or social responsibility it's vital to include real-world examples of when the related principles were upheld or breached. [This website includes a description of a case](#) concerning articles whose authors were accused of defamation. The judgements and comments by the lawyer are included as well. It shows application of the serious harm test. [Another website presents a list of cases](#) when media were allegedly biased or when they completely made the stories up.

Clickbait headlines can be seen more often nowadays and people associate them often with tabloid and sources spreading misinformation. However, they have been a part of journalism since its outset as something that shows sensations or simply draws attention to the subject. Media always want to have as big an audience as possible and even serious media sometimes don't avoid the race for clicks, as [shown in this article](#).

Learning what to avoid is important, but it's equally useful to check the best and draw inspiration from what they are doing. [INMA Global Media Awards](#) have several categories directly related to the content in terms of quality of coverage, but also inclusivity. [EU-Council of Europe joint programme EQUIROM](#) awarded five Journalism Excellence Awards with a specific focus on ethical media reporting on Roma. Examples of the ethical reporting can be found on the webpage of the [Shadid Award](#) which is organised by the Center for Journalism Ethics at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Articles:

[How can the media be truly inclusive? - Minority Rights Group](#)

[Media and Minorities Understanding](#)

[Social Responsibility Theory](#)

[How to Fact Check - "Fake News" & Misinformation - Macdonald-Kelce Library at The University of Tampa](#)

Videos:

[\(21\) Media ethics: from understanding media to shaping them? - YouTube](#)

[Public Service Media | EBU](#)

[The ethics of social media and online communication](#)

Podcast:

[Podcasts Archives - Ethical Journalism Network](#)

[Media Uncovered Podcast - Public Media Alliance](#)

[Adaptive Methods - The Greg Stier Youth Ministry Podcast](#)

Useful platforms:

[Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists - IFJ](#)

[EDMO – United against disinformation](#)

[OSINT Framework](#)

[Google Fact Check Tools - Google News Initiative](#)



VOICE METHODOLOGY

Ethical Journalism 101
How to start, create, share, and
include

Thank you for reading!