

LESSON: Critique of MTV's Teen Mom Series

Overview

In the show *16 and Pregnant*, which aired in a previous season, the girls featured in the MTV series *Teen Mom* were moms-to-be. Now, viewers are able to follow Farrah, Maci, Amber, and Catelynn as they face the challenges of their first year of motherhood. As the *Teen Mom* website informs us:

"Each episode interweaves these stories revealing the wide variety of challenges young mothers can face: marriage, relationships, family support, adoption, finances, graduating high school, starting college, getting a job, and the daunting and exciting step of moving out to create their own families."

Objectives:

- Analyze and evaluate how effectively the TV show *Teen Moms* portrays the challenges confronted by a teen mother and teen father
- Analyze and evaluate the messages that different audience groupings might take away from this TV series

Level: Middle / High School

Time: 1 class period

Preparation and Materials:

- White Board
- Paper and Markers

Procedures

1. Ask the class how many of them are familiar with the MTV series *Teen Mom*. Have those students that are familiar with the program give a brief overview of the show for those in the group that may not be familiar with it.
2. Tell the class that today you're going to divide the class into 4 different teams. They can do this by numbering off in 3's, etc. They are going to form 4 different types of teams. Each team is going to critique the TV series from the perspective of the group they represent. Then they will be asked to come back together and share their views about the series and how well it works for the group they represent. If they are not at all familiar with the series, they will first want to visit the *Teen Mom* website at MTV.
3. The teams are as follows:
 - MTV executives that make the decision as to whether a series should be canned at the end of this season or continued into the next season.
 - Health teachers and school nurses who are trying hard to prevent teen pregnancy at their schools.
 - Parents of teens
 - Teens (When possible, have them consider the program from the perspective of someone slightly younger; consider how the younger teen might react.)

Activity

In small group break-out sessions, questions for each team to consider include: (Have each team appoint a recorder to take notes.)

- Would this show capture the attention of a teen audience? That is, would teens be drawn to watch it and/or follow it online? Why or why not?

- How might a series' target audience influence the way a series is scripted? What if the target audience for this series were parents? How about if it were teachers?
- Do they think this series will continue for several seasons? (e.g. Will it draw a large youth audience making it one an advertiser would want to support?)
- Should any changes be made to the series to make it more appealing to teens? If yes, what? Is there anything missing from the portrayals in the series? What parts of the series seemed to reflect reality? Is there anything that seemed not quite real?
- How might filming of this series and careful editing have affected what we are viewing?
- What messages does the show give about teen pregnancy that might support pregnancy prevention efforts? Is there anything that might be viewed as not helpful in promoting pregnancy prevent?

Group Discussion

Have each team appoint one member to report to the class some of their team's conclusions.

Assignment

Following the group presentations, ask the class to visit the Teen Mom website for more information. Based on their findings, instruct the students to write a critique of the site from the perspective of a teen and their parent/guardian, comparing and contrasting their views. Consider for instance, what should be kept the same, enhanced, added, omitted or altered? Present your findings in an essay.

Assessment

Assessment is based on the essay. Among the questions to ask is does the author offer a critique that involves deconstructing of the website, analyzing and evaluating various sections and the way in which material is presented? How is the essay structured? Does it demonstrate well organized development of key points along with strong supporting detail? Does it demonstrate any attempt to reflect on the subject matter, offering personal insight; are the grammar, spelling, etc. correct?