



ADAM RUINS EVERYTHING

Discussion Guide*

A partnership between the National Association for Media Literacy Education and truTV



U.S. Media Literacy Week 2018



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

**Suggested for use in high school and higher ed classrooms*



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INTRODUCTION

During the 2018 U.S. Media Literacy Week, the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) and truTV are teaming up to bring episodes of the popular television show, *Adam Ruins Everything* to educators for use in the classroom. The partnership is designed to provide educators with unique content that will inspire relevant and rich discussion to their classrooms. This discussion guide can be used as a companion to the episodes to teach media literacy skills through inquiry based learning. Using these resources, students will gain knowledge about the origin of common information we accept as fact, their role in accepting knowledge without inquiry, and develop tools to think critically about the media messages around them.

BACKGROUND

Media are defined as the means of communication that reach or influence people widely (for example; radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet). Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication and represents a necessary, inevitable, and realistic response to the complex, ever-changing electronic environment. To become a successful student, responsible citizen, productive worker, and conscientious consumer, students need to develop expertise with the increasingly sophisticated information and entertainment media that affect the way they think, feel, and behave.

Media literacy is an *essential* life skill in the 21st Century.

Inquiry based learning is the foundation of media literacy education. With deep roots in research behind the Information Search Process (ISP), guided inquiry helps students construct personal knowledge and prepare to learn and participate in a mediated world. In order to guide student inquiry, students must understand the core principles of media literacy:

1. Media Literacy Education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create.
2. Media Literacy Education expands the concept of literacy (i.e., reading and writing) to include all forms of media.
3. Media Literacy Education builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages. Like print literacy, those skills necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice.
4. Media Literacy Education develops informed, reflective and engaged participants essential for a democratic society.
5. Media Literacy Education recognizes that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization.
6. Media Literacy Education affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.



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In order to effectively deconstruct the media messages they consume, students can use one or more of three categories of analysis: authorship and audience, messages and meaning, and representations and reality. These categories cover the following concepts:

- **Authors and Audiences:** Authorship, purpose, economics, effects, and responses
- **Messages and Meaning:** Content, techniques, and interpretations
- **Representations and Reality:** Context and credibility

To guide inquiry-based discussions, educators can ask a variety of [key questions](#) to provoke critical thinking about each of these concepts in relation to a specific media. Some examples of these questions include:

- Who made this message?
- Why was this message made?
- What ideas, values, information, or points of view are represented? Which are missing?
- What creative techniques are used to attract your attention?
- How might different people understand this message differently based on their own beliefs and experiences?

This discussion guide will serve as a roadmap for leading your students through a variety of discussion prompts about the series *Adam Ruins Everything*.

ABOUT ADAM RUINS EVERYTHING, Courtesy of truTV, a WarnerMedia Company

Adam Ruins Everything features comedian and host Adam Conover who uses a combination of comedy, history and science to debunk misconceptions about a variety of topics and ideas. The episodes accompanying this discussion guide include:



Episode 1: Adam Ruins Hollywood

In this episode, Adam exposes the hidden truths behind Hollywood's glitz and glamour. He spills the dirt on who's really behind stars' red carpet fashion choices, the illogical and problematic process behind movie ratings, and how reality shows are anything but real. ([Adam's sources](#))



Episode 2: Adam Ruins the Internet

In this episode, Adam shows how smartphones aren't really society-killers, why Americans pay big for the worst internet speed in the world, and how "free" sites are actually costly. ([Adam's sources](#))



Episode 3: Adam Ruins Conspiracy Theories

In this episode, Adam debunks the fake moon landing theory, discusses the Satanic Panic of the 1980s that ruined many innocent lives, and reveals how to tell the difference between a false theory and investigative reporting. ([Adam's sources](#))



Episode 4: Adam Ruins Justice

In this episode, Adam takes on the justice system, demonstrating why juries simply can't be impartial and explaining why the prosecution is always better and more well-funded than court-appointed defense lawyers.

([Adam's sources](#))



Episode 5: Adam Ruins Summer Fun

In this episode, Adam explains to his friend Jake that summer vacation is not awesome because students actually lose knowledge, how Mickey Mouse altered our copyright rules preventing the sharing and creating of many works, and how decades of marketing have convinced us videogames are for boys. ([Adam's sources](#))

Disclaimer: Some episodes of Adam Ruins Everything contain strong language and/or mature content. We strongly encourage all educators to review the content of each episode before viewing with students. Viewing of each episode is at the discretion of the educator. NAMLE and truTV are not responsible for the content of these videos.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Overview

For each video, students will discuss how the media constructs and perpetuates information that is widely accepted as fact. Students will critically analyze both the content and format of each video, and then evaluate the credibility of Adam's claims.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Gain knowledge about the origins of information and how it is reinforced in media
- Understand that media messages are constructed and inform the way we think and feel about the world around us
- Learn to ask questions to deconstruct authorship, audience, format, content, and purpose of different media messages
- Understand how their own experiences, feelings, and biases affect how they interpret the media they consume

Part 1: Class Discussion (engagement)

Each episode of Adam Ruins Everything contains three segments during which Adam debunks different myths. After each segment, students will discuss their initial reactions to the segment by answering the following prompts:

- What key ideas grabbed your attention?
- What were your emotions and feelings as you watched?

Part 2: Group Discussion (analysis)

In small groups, students will answer the following questions (one question per group). Students may choose to re-watch the segment.

1. Adam makes a number of claims in each segment. How does he support his claims? What sources does he use?
 2. What film-making techniques does this part of the episode use to make its point and to attract and keep our attention?
 3. Describe the characters (both central and background) introduced in this part of the episode. How do different characters (including minor ones) help the authors of the episode to make their point?
 4. What are the different media that Adam names? Why were these media criticized?
 5. What arguments does Adam use to defend his point of view?
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Part 3: Independent analysis (create + share)

Each student will select one writing prompt below to investigate independently. Students will use the prompt to critically evaluate one segment of an episode of Adam Ruins Everything and then share their analysis with the class through a written, verbal, visual, or multimedia presentation method of their choice.

1. Review Adam's sources for one of the episode segments and consider the following questions:
 - a. Who created/authored each source?
 - b. Is it fact, opinion, or something else? How do you know?
 - c. Who is the target audience?
 - d. Who might benefit or be harmed by this information?
 - e. Do you think the sources are reliable? How do you know?
2. Select one segment and analyze the various production techniques used to capture and hold your attention such as cameras (cinematography), lighting, sound (music or other special effects), the set, editing and post-production effects, and the actors and characters including wardrobe, body language, etc. and consider the following questions:
 - a. How did the techniques convey the message?
 - b. Do you think the production techniques in the video were effective?
 - c. What techniques are most effective?
 - d. Are those techniques necessary to convey the message or are they designed to make you think or feel a certain way? Provide at least three specific examples.

3. Select one segment and critically analyze at least one character from the segment. Consider the following:
 - a. Describe the character you are analyzing (e.g. name, profession, gender, race, etc.)
 - b. Did the character's behavior tell you something about them (e.g. happy, sad, mad, shy, etc.)?
 - c. How were they dressed? Did their appearance tell you something about them?
 - d. Do you think the character is realistic in its representation?
 - e. Is the character a stereotype?

 4. Select one segment in which you were provided new information that contradicted your prior knowledge of the topic. Consider the following:
 - a. Where did you acquire your original thoughts or ideas about the topic? Was your prior knowledge based on your personal experience or information you were given by someone or experienced through media?
 - b. How did the new information make you feel? Did those feelings affect how you interpreted the new information?
 - c. Did you agree or disagree with Adam's arguments?
 - d. What did you learn about yourself from your reaction or interpretation? Do you have any personal feelings or biases which affected your response to Adam's argument?
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Part 4: Compare and Contrast (wrap-up)

For classrooms that viewed more than one episode of Adam Ruins Everything, review each of the episodes as a class and consider the following questions in your discussion:

1. Were the quality of the sources and experts used in each segment equivalent? Why or why not?
 2. Did some segments appeal to your emotions or feelings more than others? What techniques were most effective in appealing to your emotions or feelings?
 3. Were there production techniques used in some segments and not others? Did this impact the effectiveness of Adam's argument?
 4. Which segment of Adam Ruins Everything most effectively debunked a myth? What element of the segment (e.g. experts, sources, characters, production techniques, etc.) made the argument more effective?
 5. Have you seen these techniques and strategies for creating a message used in other forms of media? Provide a specific example.
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Acknowledgement: Some of the content in this discussion guide was adapted from the lesson plan, "[Internet: Indispensable or Evil?](#)" written by Elizaveta Friesem and Renee Hobbs for the Media Education Lab.