



Video Literacy: A Challenge for Parents and Caregivers

Videos and DVDs can be a more desirable educational and entertainment vehicle than the television because they let you be more flexible and more selective, and they contain few commercial interruptions. Here are a few healthy ways to present videos and DVDs to children.



Videos as an Educational Tool

- stimulate positive conversations between children and adults on a wide variety of ideas presented by the video itself.
- serve as a visually stimulating introduction to nature, before children can read. This promotes both awareness and curiosity.
- provide a wide variety of folk and traditional fairy stories. This part of the cultural fabric contains key language experiences.
- provide simple instructions for skills, art activities and safety precautions. This shows children that they can direct their own learning at times.
- help the child to develop critical evaluation skills around the quality of pictures, drawings, acting, storyline, etc. Children can learn that what they see is not reality but an interpretation of reality.
- serve as a starting point for extending stories and themes into art activities and books (or vice-versa). This helps children see connections and examine some material in more depth.

Videos as a Social Tool

- provide a quiet rest time for children. Videos should not be used as an “electronic babysitter.”
- provide an enjoyable time for families to spend together. Common interests can be shared.
- be the focus of a relaxing group time in formal child care settings and expand program themes.
- help children learn how to choose.
- demonstrate that entertainment can have a finite time frame, as opposed to endless television viewing. Work into a child’s daily schedule with other physical and creative activities.
- challenge adults to more clearly define their own preferences and social values, and to make wise choices when choosing videos for children.

The following considerations can help you and your children make wise choices.

- appropriate to age – short, simple story to longer and more complex
- follows the interests of the child – e.g., bulldozers, fairy tales, dinosaurs, magic
- follows the values of parents – e.g., moral values, exposure to violence
- transmits culture – e.g., tells traditional tales in your language
- teaches or is pure entertainment
- exposes children to other cultures
- supports music, dance or art

Video and DVD rentals include a rating sticker that suggest the suitability of the movie to various age groups. The Internet offers numerous sites with advice and independent video and movie reviews (see below). A librarian can also help you choose wisely. Preview a video before you decide to purchase it. Don’t forget the many timeless classics that children love.

Web Resources

www.media-awareness.ca Offers many tools to help parents and educators deal with the media influences in children's lives.

www.rottentomatoes.com Use the “tomato picker” to sort movies by genre, age suitability and more.

www.tvguide.com/movies Over 40,000 videos independently reviewed and rated.

www.nfb.ca National Film Board of Canada has many selections for children.