

FRAMES, FOMO, and VIRAL TRENDS

Recommended: Do or review the Framing for Beginners or Framing and Storytelling activities as a lead in to this activity.

Grades 4-5 (30 minutes, easily dividable into two sessions; with optional activity, add at least one hour)

In this media analysis activity, students will view and discuss examples of social media videos and viral trends. They'll learn how to spot some common framing techniques and the pitfalls of comparing oneself or attempting to replicate actions of influencers who make things look easy by editing out the hard parts. They'll also be asked to think about the ethics of posting videos that leave out important information and consider the difference between fun and deception.

Students will learn that

- All media makers use frames and make choices about what to include and exclude.
- Frames can be used in ways that change the message (which means people can use framing to mislead).
- There's a difference between being fooled for fun or entertainment (like, say, a magic trick or puppet show) and "misinformation," when people use framing to intentionally mislead us into believing a lie.
- Common framing techniques include: excluding "helpers" from the frame, editing out failed attempts, hiding safety precautions, practice, & other preparation, and excluding any negative consequences (e.g., being arrested or punished for pranks).

Students will practice

- Analyzing videos and asking "What's missing that is important to know"?
- Considering the ethics of posting videos with misleading edits
- Discussion, viewing, & listening skills
- Linking answers to evidence

Materials: A way to show videos to the group

Videos

[Throwing Markers in the Glass](#) (:49 seconds) – [link also on Slide #7](#)

[Japan Pen Prank](#) (:30 seconds) – [link also on Slide #8](#)

[Dude Perfect Highest Basketball shot](#) (:21 seconds) – [link also on Slide #9](#)

[The NEW World's Highest Basketball Shot](#) (to save time, start at 5:27 and only go long enough to make your point, or fast forward to show the number of days – 2-3 minutes total) – [link also on Slide #9](#)

[@HowRidiculous "This shot took 13 years"](#) (:55 seconds) – [link also on Slide #10](#)

Step 1

Check to make sure students understand the concept of framing (making choices about what to include or exclude). Then introduce them to a central question for analysis that helps us notice and interpret framing choices: **“What’s left out that might be important to know?”**

Tell students you’re going to show a video with something very important left out. See if they can spot what it is:

Show: [Throwing Markers in the Glass](#) (slide #7 – Girl tosses markers into glass, making every shot



If they aren’t sure what’s missing, or to confirm their guess, show the [Japan Pen Trick](#) (slide #8) video. This video labels the trick a prank and shows how it’s done by zooming out (including more in the frame).



Step 2

Show one shot attempt from the first video again and invite students to identify clues in the video that indicate that she was using the same technique as the men in the second video. What was missing that is important to know?

If they have trouble, teach them what to look for: *If the person tosses the marker high enough to arc out of the frame and hard enough to land behind the camera, our eye fills in what we think is happening when we see a marker drop into the cup. The key to spotting the deception is that the throw always takes the marker out of the frame and the camera is always pointed at the thrower from behind the glass and is close to it (so that no hand above it is visible in the frame).*

It is possible that the girl in the video is actually talented enough that she never misses. But it’s much more likely that the girl and a helper did what the men in the second video did.

Step 3

Take a few minutes for students to share their feelings about being deceived. You might ask: *Is the first video ethical? Should the girl have posted an explanation of how she accomplished the trick? Why or why not? The title of the video says “trick.” Does that make a difference?*

To ensure that students don’t leave the lesson thinking that everyone online is deceptive, share with them something like this: *It’s important to know that some people post fake videos to gain attention, but most people don’t post videos to intentionally mislead. If you search on TikTok for “pen in cup challenge” videos, you’ll find hundreds of videos where people mostly miss the cup, but then, either because of practice or luck, succeed at getting the pen to land in the cup. The framing in these videos nearly always includes the entire flight of the pen. That’s important because it shows why we don’t just dismiss everything online as fake. Instead, we learn to ask questions that help us spot the fakes. And now you know one thing to look for: objects in motion that go out of the frame.*

If you want to divide the lesson into two sessions, this is a natural stopping point.

Optional Step: If you have the time and equipment, students could attempt to recreate the shot. This will solidify the framing concept in their memory (and it’s fun!). However, having students make deceptive media could be teaching them the wrong lesson. We don’t teach about misinformation so that students can become skilled creators of deceptive media!

To prevent that outcome, media production exercises must be accompanied by a discussion of ethics. Students who know how to use misleading video editing and framing techniques will get better at spotting those techniques when used by others, which is a good thing. They should also understand that it is unethical to post things they know to be false or deceptive (with intent to mislead).

Step 4

Introduce students to a different type of framing that excludes important information. In this case, the framing is accomplished by editing out content.

Prepare students to view the video clip by inviting them to look for things that are missing from the video that might be important to know.

Show Dude Perfect's ["Highest Basketball Shot"](#) (slide #9). After viewing ask: *What was missing?*

The answer is that there were dozens of attempts over many days to get the shot, and lots of safety precautions. If you have time and students want proof, you can play Dude Perfect's explanation of the stunt: ["The NEW World's Highest Basketball Shot"](#) (slide #9). This is a long video but you can save time by starting at 5:27 and only watching long enough to make your point, or fast forward to show the number of days it took to complete the stunt.

If you want shorter proof, show this video from Dude Perfect's [competitors](#) (slide #10). Prompt students to listen carefully to the voice over for indications about the number of attempts and days it took to get video of made shots.

Step 5

Now that they know to ask "What's missing that is be important to know?" ask: *Can you think of any other media examples you've seen where the question is important to ask?* Perhaps they've seen other stunt videos (e.g., skateboard tricks, or billiards trick shots).

They've also probably seen videos with product recommendations or product placement in which the influencer or celebrity doesn't mention being paid (common in unboxing videos or clips that share game "cheats"). It's also important to ask what's missing from those videos.

Optional Step: If you have students who are ready to learn some lateral reading skills, you could pause after the first Dude Perfect video and have them do a search for "Dude Perfect videos" or "Does Dude Perfect fake their trick shots?" What do others think? Is Dude Perfect fooling us, or are they likely to be showing us something real? What sorts of evidence would prove that they are for real or that they are definitely faking it?

Step 6

Wrap up the activity by discussing:

- What's the difference between the type of framing that allows us to enjoy storytelling with photography, video, or film without distraction (like a puppet show), and the type of framing where someone leaves things out to fool us so we'll believe or buy something we otherwise wouldn't.
- When is it okay to keep things out of the frame and when is it misleading?

Acknowledge that: *It's fun to watch people doing trick shots, but we have to be careful about relying on things we see in such videos before we take action based on them, especially if someone could get hurt.**

Sometimes people just got lucky, and sometimes we see real shots made by people who practiced for years before they could do the shot reliably. And even the best miss sometimes (e.g., the Harlem Globetrotters consistently do amazing things with a basketball, but even they sometimes miss shots).

Let students know that the question, "What's left out that might be important to know?" is especially important when we are tempted to measure ourselves against the videos we see: *If a video makes us feel bad about ourselves because we can't do things that we see others do in their videos, we need to remember that there is always framing in a video. Knowing what might be left out could explain why people on video can do things that we can't.*

*Optional: If your school has experienced an issue with TikTok trends, you may want to use the lessons in the Framing Activity to jumpstart a discussion. Ask students if what they've learned makes them think about the viral videos any differently.

Typically students want to copy TikTok trends because they want the same attention (likes) that the original posters received or they want to feel like they were part of the trend. But they may not realize

that the original might not be showing them the entire picture, including precautions that were taken to avoid harm, or negative consequences of their actions (like people being arrested or having to pay for damage). Now students know to ask "What's missing that might be important to know?" before choosing to copy a viral video.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Engage students in a STEAM activity in which they create a special effect on video. For example, let them brainstorm different ways they could make it appear that a stuffed animal was moving across the room by itself.

Experiment with different techniques and have the class vote on which worked best. Help them notice what stays inside the frame and what is unseen by the viewer (e.g., a person outside the frame tugging on a string or moving a magnet under the "floor," or the person moving the toy in an animation sequence).

Have students use what they've learned about framing and editing to work with the physical education teacher(s) to create their own video stunts (safely, of course!), including a "reveal" showing how they accomplished their amazing feat.

AASL Standards Correlations

A. II. 2. Adopting a discerning stance toward points of view and opinions expressed in information resources and learning products.

A. VI. 2. Understanding the ethical use of information technology and media.

A. VI. 3. Evaluating information for accuracy, validity, social and cultural context, and appropriateness for need.

B. I. 1. Using evidence to investigate questions.

C. I. 1. Interacting with content presented by others.

C. II. 2. Contributing to discussions in which multiple viewpoints on a topic are expressed.

D. I. 3. Enacting new understanding through real world connections.

D. III. 1. Actively contributing to group discussions.

D. VI. 3. Inspiring others to engage in safe, responsible ethical and legal information behaviors.