

# Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions

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Join us on Wednesdays and Fridays for Skills for Everyday Living, a series that goes beyond the classroom to prepare students for the many challenges of the real world. Our current topic is **Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions**, developed by *Facing the Future*. Series ends June 13.

## Information Overload?

Everywhere you turn, you are likely to see and hear new information. "Mass media" refers to all of the ways that we communicate information (including television, radio and the Internet) to large numbers of people. In fact, the newspaper in your hands right now is a form of mass media. In this era of high-speed global connections, we can communicate with people across the globe through mass media.

Where do you get information about current events and world news?

## Media, Democracy and Culture

While there are many benefits of mass media, there are also some issues that have people talking. One concern has to do with the topic of "democratic debate." Democratic debate means that all people can express their ideas and opinions.

In the past, United States media rules limited the number of news media outlets that one company could own, so that a variety of news sources were available to the public. Since the 1980s, however, media ownership rules have relaxed. Today the global media system is dominated by just five large companies, including Time Warner and Disney.<sup>1</sup> Some people worry that consumers may lose the variety of ideas that is essential to healthy democracies when the media are controlled by such a small number of powerful corporations.

Another concern about the role of media has to do with Western popular culture replacing traditional languages, art, music, religious practices and social values around the world.

Coca-Cola and McDonald's have already reached most countries.

On the other hand, media corporations can have a positive impact on culture when they enter countries controlled by corrupt political systems or countries that have significant state censorship over media.

## And Now a Word From Our Sponsors ...

Many forms of media rely on advertising for financial support, and advertisers are increasingly targeting youth. According to the American Psychological Association, the average young person in the United States watches over 100 television ads every day, plus many more online, in magazines, movies, video games and on cell phones.

Many people may not think twice about advertising, but others have had enough. São Paulo, Brazil, the seventh-largest city in the world, banned most outdoor advertising altogether, citing "visual pollution." In the United States, billboards are illegal in Vermont, Maine, Hawaii and Alaska.

Where do you think advertising should and should not be allowed?

## Consumer Beware and Be Wise

Advertising is not necessarily bad or good. In many cases, advertising gives us information so that we can make better choices. Commercial advertising helps potential customers learn about products. Advertising can also be used noncommercially: Think of public service announcements about health, energy conservation or security. What public service announcements can you find in today's newspaper?

As consumers, we benefit most from advertising when we think critically about its message. Many ads suggest that we need a particular product to fit in, look beautiful or seem smart. However, there are things advertisements don't tell us, such as how a particular product affects the environment.

Think about an ad that made you really want to buy a product. Why did the advertisement appeal to you? Do you think the advertisement told the whole story, or do you want more information about that product?

## Putting the "Me" in Media!

Media is like democracy — it requires everyone's participation. It's important that we not only know the events of the day, but that we also consider how these events are related to each other and what causes them.

Communicating your ideas to others through blogs, podcasts and YouTube videos are all ways you can make your voice heard and share information with others around the globe. Plus, you can help other people make choices based on information that you provide. For example, you can rate and comment on products, shopping Web sites, restaurants and all sorts of things.

In many ways, each of us is a walking message, expressing ourselves through what we wear, how we live and what we say. Whether we wear designer brands or make our own clothes, or carry disposable or reusable cups, our choices are likely to influence the choices that others make. What message do you want to send?

<sup>1</sup> *World-Information.org*, "The Big Five of Commercial Media," March 14, 2008, <http://world-information.org/wio/infostructure/100437611795/100438659010>



Horsey cartoon from June 28, 2001 – advertising

## Activity

- ❖ Do an in-depth analysis of a news article using the "iceberg model." Follow these steps to explore the facts, underlying patterns and root causes of a particular news story:
  1. Choose one article about a current event in today's newspaper. Summarize the story by writing one paragraph in your own words. Briefly, what happened?
  2. Look through the newspaper to see if there are stories about similar events that happened in different places, or think about other stories you have heard about that are related to your article. Is the event in your article part of a larger, ongoing story or series of events?
  3. Consider the root cause(s) of the event based on the pattern you see. "Why" the event occurred may not be included in the article, but try to think about the most important reasons for this pattern of events. If you are not sure, what information would help you to determine the root cause(s)? Why do you think that information was not included in your article?

## Take Action!

- ❖ Add your voice to the growing number of online customer reviews. Choose a Web site (such as [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) or [yelp.com](http://yelp.com)) where you can review a product you have bought or a restaurant where you have eaten, and write a short review of your experience to help inform other consumers.