

Video Guide

HEADLINES'S ON TRIAL WITHARTHUR MILLER

14 minutes, color, videotape, nd

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How does this film fit into the course?

All semester we have been learning techniques with which we can better evaluate information presented to us and evidence and sources that are cited in support of this information. We have already gained experience in evaluating written work attempting to persuade us but have yet to be given a chance to evaluate a televised program that tries to do the same thing. The film "Headlines on Trial" gives us this opportunity by examining the debate of whether television and film has any influence on the viewer. In the clip we watch as people from both sides debate the issue using various evidence to support their claim and denounce the claims from the other side of the issue.

Prior to viewing the video please read the following guide and later refer to the answer key for key questions and observations previous students made when evaluating each excerpt. Following this there is a list of what students from previous semesters got out of the film and an example of an Idea Notebook.

A Introduction

Arthur Miller, the host of *Headline's on Trial*, introduced the topic of the influence of TV. On the one side two guests say it doesn't have a major effect: Bob Mulholland from the TV information office and the former president of NBC TV, and Jack Loftus, editor of "TV Radio Age." On the other side the two guest who say that TV does have a major influence on viewer's are Dr. Thomas Radecki from the National Coalition on TV Violence, and Frank Mankiewicz, the former director of the National Public Radio. Later in the show a former actor by the name of Otis Young gave his comments on the subject and why he had quite the TV acting profession.

B We join the program already in progress:

Miller is making up a fictitious situation about Bob's supposedly best friend Charlie, who comes to Bob and says that he has been married for 20 years and his marriage is "dullsville." After sitting in front of the TV everyday and watching the soaps and seeing everybody jumping in bed with everybody else, why can't he do the same?

Bob answers that Charlie has a problem with TV but that he needs to decide for himself what society is all about, and not from what he sees on TV. If he was to judge what he saw on TV from the *Cosby* show, then everybody would be happily married and we all know that's not so. Miller summarizes by saying that if people are not mimicking the *Cosby* show, then they are not mimicking the sex on the soaps.

Miller now asks Thomas if this is just a problem for a few people. Thomas answers by saying that research suggests that a large percentage of people are influenced by the values that are depicted on TV. If someone is watching a show with inappropriate sexual

values, then those values are likely to have some kind of impact on the person watching that particular show.

Miller notices that he sees a contradiction on TV with the day time soaps showing sex during the day and the Surgeon General preaching abstinence at night.

Jack answers that you can't get away with what is shown during the day time with what is shown during prime time.

Bob joins in by saying that the only time they ever get any complaints during the day time is when the U.S. president comes on to say something and interrupts the soaps. He says that this is because the people who watch these programs are a "self-selecting audience" who know exactly what they are going to see during that time: nudity and romance.

Miller asks if that kind of programming is saying "This is okay America, go ye forth and do the same!"; concerning those sexual values. Jack answers that they would be so if TV was the only source of knowledge about society that the person had. However, there are many other influences a person has in life besides TV such as family, friends, school, and church, and that it all depends on how much time a person puts into these different areas that influences a person the most.

Bob adds that TV isn't going to influence you to do things that society says you shouldn't do.

Thomas answers that comment by saying that it is "nonsense" that TV can sell a person anything imaginable from cars, to beer, to politicians, but does not influence sex and violence.

Frank adds that plenty of social scientists who study the effects of the graphic depiction of violent acts on TV, say that violence will stimulate similar acts in some of the people watching the act.

Bob counters that statement by saying that the classic example of Russian roulette as seen in the movie "Deer Hunter" didn't cause a rise in real life incidents of that kind being reported.

Thomas disagrees by saying that there is evidence of 45 cases of young men who did commit that same act after watching that movie. Some went out and bought the very same gun to do it with. He argues that we know for sure what was influencing their behavior.

Miller now asks former actor Otis Young what evidence he has that kids copy what they see on TV.

Otis replies that he personally had seen kids running around with toy guns on an imaginary broom horse saying that he was Jamal David, Otis's character on the TV show, and that there were hundreds if not thousands of children named after his character by

their parents after seeing him on the show. He also explained that a man stopped him in the market to tell him that he liked the way he beat up those white men on his show. That man thought it was all serious when he knew he was just acting. So he quit the profession because he felt he was giving the children in the ghetto the wrong kind of impression of what it takes to get out of the ghetto by portraying the pimps on certain shows. He felt there are other more positive ways to get out of the ghetto.

Miller asks Frank if he would be worried if there were going to be a TV movie made about some terrorists who try to poison the water supply of a major metropolis. Frank answers that he'd wait a month before he drank any water.

The discussion now moves to censorship. Frank agrees with some censorship because there is already censorship on TV in that dirty language or graphic sex are not allowed.

He suggests that there be limitations of violence that could be worked out by the networks and enforced by them. If not, the viewing audience through the use of boycotts can have an influence. Once the PTA threatened to boycott the advertisers of violent program and that afterward, the level of violence dropped.

Bob disagrees by saying that more people in the U.S. get their news through TV than any other source. Once you got the government involved in programming where would it stop? Who would determine the rating system, his Senator or the person in the White House? Bob says that there is already a system in place and it's the people themselves who have the power to turn off the TV or change the channel. If the program is supported by the viewers, it stays on the air. If it is not supported that program goes off the air.

Miller now asks the members of the audience for their opinion. Some of them suggest that they were influenced earlier on in their lives when they were young but that not it does not have a major influence on them.

Thomas counters those statements by asking for a show of hands of those who saw the movie "Psycho." He gets a good showing of hands. He now asks for a show of hands from those who have felt uncomfortable in the shower after seeing that movie. Again he sees many hands. Finally, he asks if anybody has any friends who have been influenced by TV. There are many hands. These hands support his point that these people were probably wrong when saying that they weren't influenced by TV.

Miller ends the show by stating that TV does play a major role in our lives because 98% of all households have TV sets, and the average person watches 4 hours of TV a day. If you put all those hours together a person watches in a year's time, a person would watch TV for 62 days straight.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Put answers on another sheet of paper.

1. What is the central idea of each side?
2. What are the key points?
3. What evidence was presented?
4. Critically evaluate the evidence.