



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 6 to 8

**About the Author:** *Media Literacy for Development & Children's Rights*, UNICEF Canada. Used with permission. For more teaching and lesson ideas for global education from around the world, visit UNICEF Canada's Global Schoolhouse at [www.unicef.ca](http://www.unicef.ca).

# Looking Through the Lenses

"Children are immersed daily in a dense bath of mass media images and messages. Some teach children about the world around them. Others promote deceptive, partial, stereotypical and sometimes harmful perceptions."

***Edunotes, Issue 2 Volume 3***  
**UNICEF Canada**

## Introduction

---

"Media Literacy for Development & Children's Rights" was created by UNICEF Canada to help young people in grades 6 - 8 understand the role played by the media in influencing their attitudes and perceptions about developing nations and development issues. This module contains a series of lessons, exercises and background information to help familiarize students with the issues and challenges surrounding representation of other countries and cultures by the media. There are three activities in Lesson One: *Optical Illusion*, *True or False?*, and *From Your Point of View*.

General backgrounders for this lesson:

- [Why Teach About Media Literacy?](#)
- [Definitions for Use in Activities](#)

## Activity One: Optical Illusion

---

This activity introduces the concepts of how perceptions can be distorted, and how stereotypes work.

Resources and materials needed for this activity:

- Photocopy student handout: [Optical Illusion](#)

## Procedure

---

**Step One:** Project an acetate copy of the handout, [Optical Illusion](#), on overhead (or distribute copies to student pairs). Ask students if they think the stairs are on the floor, or on the ceiling. Explain that both perceptions are valid, but it is likely that most students saw the stairs as on the floor because we would expect them to be there.



**Step Two:** Explain that just as people learn how to read, they learn how to see how to make sense out of rays of light hitting the eyes. The brain learns "rules" of seeing; for example, the farther things are from you, the smaller they appear. But when an object or drawing breaks the rules, or when it could be interpreted different ways, your brain tends to apply the "rules" and may give you wrong information or one perception of the information that makes most sense.

**Step Three:** Explain that stereotyping works the same way: we create "rules" for how we think individuals are or should be (often based on how we identify them with a group defined by race, gender, class, and so on—so that "all girls like pink" or "all Canadians live in igloos"). But thinking this way, we get an incorrect or partial view of the world.

## Activity Two: True or False?

---

This activity explores how people can form inaccurate perceptions of the world around them, particularly if they rely entirely on the mass media for information.

Resources and materials needed for this activity:

- handout: [True or False?](#)
- 2 large sheets of blank paper, marker
- map of the world
- masking tape

## Procedure

---

**Step One:** Look at a world map and locate some affluent countries, then locate what you think are developing countries (where a large proportion of the population lacks access to essential basic services, economic security and full participation in civil society). How do you think developing countries are different from Canada? How do you think children's daily lives, at home, school and work, are different from yours? How are they similar?

**Step Two:** Post a sign that reads "TRUE" on one side of the classroom and a sign that reads "FALSE" on the other side. Clear the floor in the middle of the room and paste a line down the middle (to demarcate the "TRUE" side from the "FALSE" side) with masking tape. Invite students to stand in this space. Explain that you will be reading a series of statements (from the handout): after each statement, students should move to the side of the line (TRUE or FALSE) in accordance with how they view the statement. Read the first statement, and give students a few moments to consider it and then move to a side. When the students have chosen a side (or are indeterminately standing in the middle of the room), give the correct answer. Engage in a brief discussion about where the inaccurate guesses might have originated. Repeat the process for as many of the statements as you wish.

**Step Three:** Discuss as a group:

- Generally, how accurate were your guesses?
- Why do you think this is?
- How have your media experiences (watching television and movies, reading the newspaper) influenced your responses?



## Activity Three: From Your Point of View

---

This activity looks at how personal experience affects the way people perceive the world, and the effects of perceptions on self image and images of others.

### Procedure

---

**Step One:** Ask students to name some of the problems facing Canada (or their local area). List these on the chalkboard. Ask everyone to imagine they are outsiders who know only this information (about Canada or the local area). What would they think of the place? List ideas. Ask students how they would feel if the unpleasant aspects listed were the only information others had about their area.

- Would it matter? Why?
- Why is the students' view different?
- What would students want others to know?

**Step Two:** List ideas students associate with the term "developing world" or "third world". Discuss these in light of Step One.

- Where do these ideas come from?
- What is missing from students perceptions? Why?
- How might the perceptions differ if your class had more/fewer students who have lived in a developing country?
- How do students think people from developing countries would feel about others' perceptions of their region?
- To what extent do students think that the most common impressions of developing countries are the exception and not the norm?
- What roles do family, personality, experience, beliefs and the media play in how we see the world?
- What other "filters" or "lenses" affect how we see the world?

**Step Three:** Ask students the following:

- In what ways might people from developing countries come into contact with outsiders' views of them (e.g., films, international news shows produced in the West, advertisements, Internet, aid agencies)?
- How might they feel about how they are portrayed?

Ask students to describe orally or in journals any similar experiences where they or their group, or any aspect of their identity, has been viewed in terms of a stereotype.

- What can we do to see through stereotypes?
- What can we do to discourage stereotypes?



## Extension

---

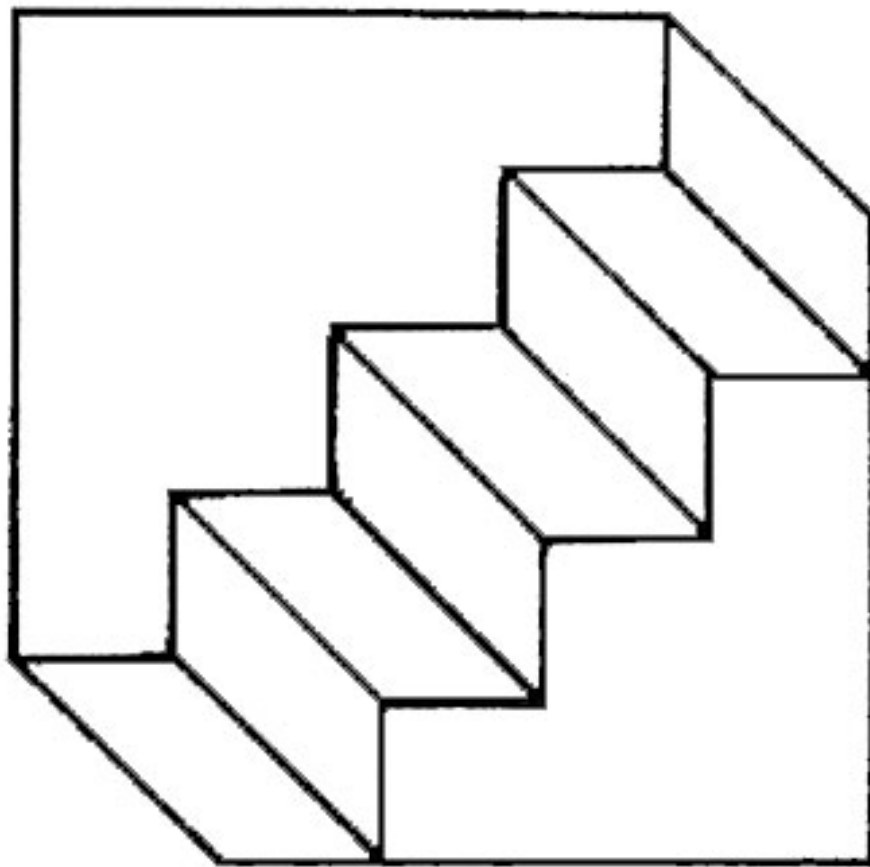
Log on to [www.onlinenewspapers.com](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com). This site will provide the students with links to hundreds of newspapers from around the world. Ask them, in groups of two or three, to find an article on a current event in a newspaper from a more developed country and another article on the same event from a less developed country, and compare them (with written analysis in their journals).

©2000 UNICEF Canada



## Optical Illusion

---



## True or False?: Looking Through the Lenses

---

### TRUE OR FALSE?

- 1. The leading cause of child death in developing countries is famine.**  
FALSE: Diarrhea (dehydration) and immunization-preventable diseases account for over half of all deaths.
- 2. Canada provides about 10 cents per tax dollar as foreign aid.**  
FALSE: About 2 cents per dollar is contributed to Official Development Assistance.
- 3. 2% of the world's children are starving (visibly malnourished).**  
TRUE: "Invisible" malnutrition is more widespread, affecting about 40% of children in developing countries.
- 4. 90% of the world's children go to primary school.**  
TRUE: About 130 million children do not have access to school; two-thirds are girls.
- 5. Half of the budget of a developing country comes from overseas aid.**  
FALSE: About 1% of the national budget of a developing country, on average, is from development assistance, and almost half is transferred from developing countries to affluent countries in the form of interest payments on debt.
- 6. Children are malnourished because they don't get enough food to eat.**  
FALSE AND TRUE: Not having enough food is one cause of malnutrition, but more common is a lack of enough types of nutritious foods and important micro-nutrients (such as vitamin A, iron and iodine), combined with lack of clean drinking water and chronic diarrhea and illness.
- 7. The rate of population growth in the developing world is decreasing.**  
TRUE: While in some places, the absolute number of people is growing, the rate of growth is declining; in time, the absolute number will also begin to decline.
- 8. There is enough money and resources in the world to meet everyone's basic needs.**  
TRUE: UNICEF estimates it would cost about \$4 billion to meet basic human needs (clean water and sanitation, adequate nutrition, health care and education). This amount is equivalent to less than half of the amount affluent countries spend on sport shoes in a year. It can be recovered if 20% of official development assistance and 20% of national budgets in developing countries were spent on basic human needs.

