



Action Canada  
for Sexual Health & Rights

Comprehensive Sex-Ed Resource

# Optical Illusions (Media Literacy) Activity

Grade Level: 1+

This activity is from **BEYOND THE BASICS**,  
a resource for educators on sexuality  
and sexual health.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1 Reflect on the types and functions of different kinds of media.
- 2 Critically reflect on the illusions inherent in media representation, including the news.

Learn more about *Beyond the Basics* at  
[www.actioncanadashr.org/beyond](http://www.actioncanadashr.org/beyond)  
For more activities like this one, go to  
[www.actioncanadashr.org/sex-ed-activities](http://www.actioncanadashr.org/sex-ed-activities)

1. Choose 2 or 3 optical illusions from the Optics4Kids website (see below).
2. Project the images on a large screen and print out copies.
3. Ask students:
  - In the optical illusions, what is the difference between our perception and reality?
  - How do you think optical illusions work?
  - Are there optical illusions in the media? What about other kinds of illusions (where perception and reality are different)?
  - Images in the media are called “representation.” What do you think representation is and how do you think representation is different from reality?

Optics4Kids. (2016). What is an Optical Illusion?

Retrieved from:

<http://www.optics4kids.org/home/content/illusions/>

## Background Information for Educators

Although media has become more widely available than ever through digital platforms, the media formats and channels that are most available to young people still vary depending on different factors. Class, age, geography, culture (including family culture), gender identity, sexual orientation, and social connections all shape their media consumption.

What is consistent is that media, in whatever form, is representation: even media that we think of as reflecting an objective reality, like the news, is a subjective representation of reality from a certain perspective. This perspective or subjectivity is also called bias. Sometimes the perspective or angle is obvious and central, like opinion editorials, other times it is subtler and can only be uncovered after asking questions like, what stories are not being told or whose voices are missing from this story?

Media bias in the news is different than “fake news.” Bias is not inherently wrong or inherently untrue, it is a series of choices made in reporting what happened and why, which are based on the subjective perspectives that we as people all have. “Fake news” is when false facts and events are represented as truths in order to advance an agenda.

As consumers of media, it is important to develop critical thinking skills to see the difference between reality and representation and to uncover media bias that purports to be objective or unbiased. Developing critical thinking skills helps media consumers analyze: how intentionally media is constructed; how it can reflect some peoples’ realities, while distorting that of others; who media is constructed for; whose voices, realities, and experiences media centers around; and whose voices experience marginalization.

## Educator Answer Key

- Optical illusions highlight how much our perception shapes what we see as reality. When looking at optical illusions, our perception easily masks the reality of the image. Once we see the optical illusion for what it is, this allows us to clearly see the differences between our perception and reality.
- Optical illusions work by misleading the brain through the use of colour, shades, light, and patterns. As the brain is trying to process an image, the optical illusion deceives the visual brain pathways into perceiving things that may or may not be there (Optics4Kids, 2016).
- Optical illusions exist in the media in the form of airbrushing and photoshopping models, actors, and pop-stars. In general, illusions exist in the ways that perception is passed off as reality, when it is in fact just one way of seeing and representing reality. Representations of gender, sexuality, race, class, love, relationships, and connection are often illusions in media because there are a diversity of realities that get distilled into one way of perceiving these diverse experiences.
- Representation in the media is a representation of reality based on perception. Representation is one way of perceiving reality. Representation involves distilling a diversity of experiences into one consumable image or story.

## Resources

Media Literacy Week in Canada  
<http://www.medialiteracyweek.ca>

Media Smarts—Media literacy skills regarding bias  
<http://mediasmarts.ca/lessonplan/bias-lesson>

# BEYOND THE BASICS

A Resource for Educators on Sexuality and Sexual Health



Beyond the Basics is a resource for educators on sexuality and sexual health. It offers the tools to teach young people about sexuality and sexual health from a sex positive, equity, and human rights perspective. It covers anatomy, consent, healthy relationships, and more! Choose from a wide range of chapters, modules, and activities that fit the different age, grade, and curricular goals for your students.

## Get Your Copy Today

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