

Picture Perfect

Essential Question

How can photos be changed on the computer, and how can that affect our feelings about the way we look?

Lesson Overview

Students consider how digitally manipulated photos can affect the way people feel about their appearance, as well as help sell products. After learning that photos can be transformed on the computer, students first discuss how photo alteration can be both creative and, at times, deceptive. They then watch a short video that shows the evolution of a makeup-free model into a digitally enhanced billboard ad. Finally, students work in groups to analyze the messages on two magazine covers featuring digitally altered photographs.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- recognize that photos can be altered digitally, and consider the upsides and downsides of this practice.
- discuss how photo alteration can distort our perceptions and affect our self-image.
- analyze how advertising uses photo alteration to help sell products.

Materials and Preparation

- Review the **Gender and Digital Life Teacher Backgrounder (Elementary School)**.
- Prepare to show students the **Colorful Lemon Visual**. If you are unable to project the visual for the class to see, print out hard copies for students.
- Preview the Dove[®] Campaign for Real Beauty's video "Evolution" and prepare to show it to students (www.youtube.com/watch?v=hibyAJOSW8U).
- Copy the **Magazine Magic Student Handout**, one for each group of four or five students.

Family Resources

- Send home the **Boys, Girls, and Media Messages Family Tip Sheet (Elementary School)**.

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Standards Alignment –

Common Core:

grade 3: RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, RF.4a, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.6, L.3a, L.6

grade 4: RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.6, L.3a, L.6

grade 5: RI.4, RI.7, RI.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.6, L.3a, L.6

NETS•S: 1a-c, 2a-b, 2d, 3a-d, 4a-d, 5a-d, 6a-b, 6d

Key Vocabulary –

alter: to change the way something looks

product: something that a company advertises and sells

introduction

Warm-up (10 minutes)

▶ **PROJECT** the **Colorful Lemon Visual** for the class to see. Alternatively, you may print out the image for students.

TELL students to imagine that someone posted this photo online. Underneath the photo, the person typed: *This is what happens when you put food coloring in a lemon!*

ASK:

What would make this photo “real”?

Sample responses:

- If you could really put food coloring in a lemon and have it look like that
- If someone took the photo of a real lemon

What would make this photo “fake”?

Sample responses:

- If someone changed it on the computer
- If it didn’t really look like that in the original photo

HAVE students vote on whether they think the photo is “real” or “fake.”

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **alter**.

EXPLAIN that this photo was altered, using computer programs. Lemons don’t look like that in real life, even if you put food coloring in them.

ASK:

Even though the lemon in this photo isn’t real, what do you like about the image?

Guide students to recognize that this edited image is kind of magical. Wouldn’t it be cool if we could cut open a lemon and see a rainbow of colors inside?

POINT OUT that altering photos can be a fun and creative process. We can use computer programs to make places, people, and objects look like images that could exist only in our imaginations.

ASK:

Now that you know a computer program made the lemon look colorful, what do you think about the message under the photo?

Guide students to recognize that such a caption might trick people into believing something that’s not true.

What if the photo didn’t have anything written underneath it? Do you think it would still trick people?

Students should recognize that some people still might think the colorful lemon was real. They might even think that some lemons are naturally like that.

EXPLAIN that technology allows us to change photos in all sorts of ways. Altering a photo can be a fun and artistic activity. But it can also fool, or trick, people into believing things that aren’t true.

teach 1

Beauty Evolution (10 minutes)

POINT OUT that images of people in magazines, on billboards, and in commercials are usually altered. They make people look different than they do in real life. This is because editors and advertisers want the images to look perfect.

TELL students that they are going to watch a video that shows how this happens.

SHOW students the Dove® Campaign for Real Beauty’s video “Evolution” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=hibyAJOSW8U).

HAVE students share something that they remember seeing in the video – something that stood out to them.

Sample responses:

- They put a lot of makeup on a model and styled her hair
- They used the computer to make the model’s face look different
- They made the model’s eyes bigger and her neck longer

ASK:

Do you think that the picture on the billboard could fool, or trick, people into believing something that’s not true?

Draw comparisons between the photo of the lemon and the photo of the woman. Both images were changed on the computer. Neither the lemon nor the woman actually look like that in real life. The picture on the billboard could trick people into thinking that the woman really looks this way.

POINT OUT that it’s natural for people to compare themselves to others. Sometimes when we see another person – in real life or in a photo – we may think: “Do I look like that? Does that person look better than me? Do I want to look like that?” But photos in ads are often altered to look perfect. We might compare ourselves to people who look perfect in photos, but they may not look that way in real life.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **product**.

ASK:

How might making someone look “perfect” in an advertisement help sell a product?

Guide students to make the connection between admiring someone’s “perfect” appearance in a photo and being encouraged to buy products for self-improvement. People who feel unsure about their appearance might think they need to buy a certain product – makeup or hair products or clothes, for example – to look better.

teach 2

Magazine Magic (20 minutes)

ARRANGE students in groups of four or five. Make sure each group contains a mix of girls and boys.

DISTRIBUTE the **Magazine Magic Student Handout**, one for each group.

ALLOW students 10 minutes to analyze the magazine covers and answer the questions on the handout.

INVITE a representative from each group to report its findings to the class. You may use the following sample responses to guide the discussion.

For **Self Magazine/Kelly Clarkson:**

ASK:

What kind of message does this magazine cover send about how girls should look?

This cover sends the message that girls should put a lot of effort into losing weight, having perfect skin, and looking their best at all times. Students may be interested in knowing that this particular magazine cover was controversial. When this magazine issue came out, some people were upset with how much *Self Magazine* digitally slimmed Clarkson's waist, arms, and face.

What kinds of products do you think this magazine will advertise?

Students should deduce that most of the ads will be for products that make you look thin and perfect: diet products, hair and skin care products, makeup, and clothes.

How might a girl feel about herself after looking at this magazine?

Students should understand that seeing a lot of photos, articles, and ads like these could make girls uneasy about their own looks. They might feel they are too fat, that their skin and hair are not perfect enough, or that they need nicer clothes. They might feel that they need to buy products to make themselves look better.

For **Men's Fitness/Andy Roddick:**

ASK:

What kind of message does this cover send about how boys should look?

Students should recognize that this cover sends the message that boys need to be lean and muscular. They should have styled hair and tanned skin. Students may be interested in knowing that Andy Roddick commented that the magazine made his arms look much bigger and digitally erased a birthmark on his arm.

What kinds of products do you think this magazine will advertise?

Students should deduce that most of the ads will be for products that make you look lean, muscular, and perfect: diet products, fitness equipment, and hair-care products.

How might a boy feel about himself after looking at this magazine?

Students should understand that seeing a lot of photos, articles, and ads like these could make boys feel insecure about their own looks. They might feel they are too fat or too skinny, that they don't have big enough muscles, or that their skin and hair are not perfect enough. They might feel that they need to buy products to help improve their appearance.

closing

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

ASK:

What does it mean to alter a photo?

Altering a photo means changing the way it looks. Computer programs allow us to fix, edit, and touch up photos in all sorts of ways.

What are some upsides and downsides of photo altering?

On the positive side, technology allows us to edit photos so that they look like things that might exist only in our imaginations. But if people compare themselves to altered photos of celebrities and models, which are unrealistic, they might feel bad about how they look.

Why do you think so many photos in magazines and advertisements are altered? How might altering a photo help sell a product?

Students should recognize that magazines and advertisers alter images of people to improve their appearance. Consumers who see such flawless images of people may want to take steps towards looking just like them. They might buy products that promise to make them more attractive.

Extension Activity

Read aloud the first three paragraphs of *The New York Times* article “A Real Girl, 14, Takes a Stand Against the Flawless Faces in Magazines” (www.nytimes.com/2012/05/04/nyregion/seventeen-magazine-faulted-by-girl-14-for-doctoring-photos.html). Explain that Julia believes altered photos can make girls feel bad about the way they look. She also believes they give boys the wrong idea about how girls are supposed to look. So Julia started an online petition called “Seventeen Magazine: Give Girls Images of Real Girls!” for people to sign. In it, she asks *Seventeen* Magazine to promise to always include some real photos – ones that are not altered.

Ask volunteers to say whether or not they would sign Julia’s petition, and explain the reasons for their decision. Then engage students in a discussion of how Julia stood up for what she believed, and how the Internet gives people the chance to share important messages with others across the world.

At-Home Activity

Have students imagine a magazine filled with real, unaltered photographs of people who look like those they see every day in the real world. These people would come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. Everyone would look different, and no one would look perfect.

Students should design the cover of their magazine, either on paper or using an online tool such as Glogster (www.glogster.com). What would the headlines be? What image(s) would be on the cover? Encourage students to reflect on how they might feel about their own appearance after reading that kind of magazine.

Picture Perfect



**This is what happens when
you put food coloring in a lemon!**

Picture Perfect

Directions

Take a look at the magazine cover below, and the real-life photo of singer Kelly Clarkson. Discuss how the two photos of Kelly are different. Then work with a partner to answer the questions.



List the kinds of products you think this magazine will advertise:



Kelly Clarkson in real life, singing on *Good Morning America*

What kind of **message** does this magazine cover send about how girls and women should look?

How might a girl or woman **feel** about herself after looking at this magazine?

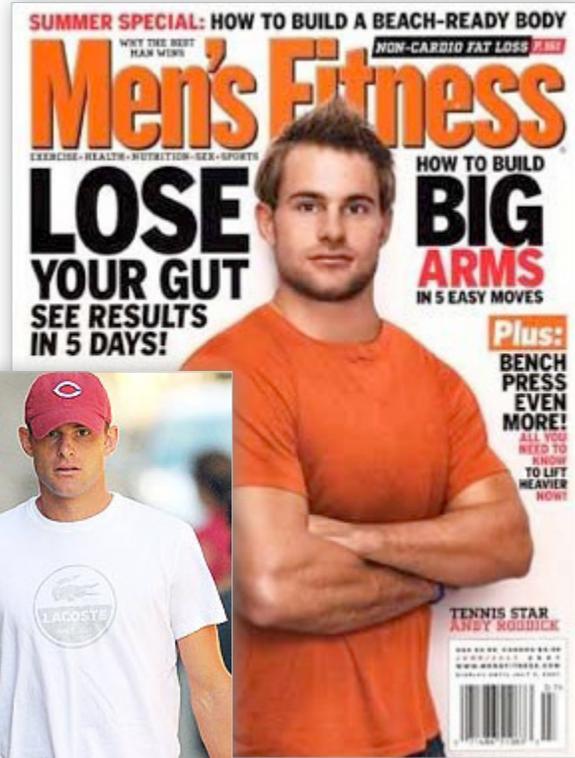
Photo Sources

Wenn, 2009. Photograph. *Kelly Clarkson Photo Retouched to Make Her 'Look Her Best.'* People.com, 11 Aug. 2009. Web. 30 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20297322,00.html>>. Mayer, Janet. PR Photos. Photograph. *In Pictures: 'Kelly Clarkson Performs on Good Morning America.'* Monsters and Critics, 02 Aug. 2009. Web. 04 Sep. 2012. <http://www.monstersandcritics.com/music/features/article_1493279.php/In_Pictures_Kelly_Clarkson_Performs_on_Good_Morning_America?page=9>

Directions

Take a look at the magazine cover below, and the real-life photo of tennis player Andy Roddick. Discuss how the two photos of Andy are different. Then work with a partner to answer the questions.

List the kinds of **products** you think this magazine will advertise:



Andy Roddick, in real life

What kind of **message** does this magazine cover send about how men and boys should look?

How might a boy or man feel about himself after looking at this magazine?

Photo Sources

Christopher Peterson/BuzzFoto. "Stars Who Love Athletes Slide: Brooklyn & Andy." *People Magazine*. 52 May. 2011. Web. 30 Aug. 2012. <http://www.people.com/people/gallery/0,,20266474_20967664,00.html>

Newman, Andrew A. "3 Magazines Are Accused of Retouching Celebrity Photos to Excess." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 28 May 2007. Web. 30 Aug. 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/28/business/media/28fitness.html?_r=1>.

What Does Gender Have to Do With Digital Citizenship and Literacy?

Imagine that you're shopping with a little girl for a Halloween costume. You see packages filled with pink princess dresses, sparkly skirts, and even bikini tops – all geared toward girls. Now imagine that you're shopping with a little boy, sifting through costumes of muscular superheroes and action-adventure characters. The messages about boys and girls that kids see in toy stores, TV shows, movies, games, apps, and virtual worlds play a powerful role in framing their sense of what's "acceptable" and what isn't. The problem is that the media often encourages narrow definitions of boys' and girls' roles. When kids absorb and accept these gender stereotypes, they can be misinformed about how the world perceives them and what they can grow up to be.

Why Does It Matter?

Overexposure to gender stereotypes can place kids' physical and mental health at risk. And because kids today are not only media consumers but also media creators, they may mirror these stereotypes while texting, messaging, posting comments, or developing their own digital works. When kids are exposed to rigid ideas about boys' and girls' roles through their peers – both online or offline – it can be hard to convince them not to adopt those ideas.

Your students need to develop media literacy skills now, not later. As elementary school educators teach kids how to read literature and informational texts, they have a unique opportunity to also equip them with media and digital literacy skills. Kids can apply questions about authorship, content, context, and validity to many different forms of digital media – online ads, websites, and even virtual worlds.

Early discussions about gender can help diffuse digital drama in the future. Preteens aren't immune to issues like online drama, cyberbullying, and even sexting. Quite often, these issues are rooted in *social* attitudes, not the technology itself. When a child chooses to be a bystander, rather than an upstander, it's often because she's concerned about social repercussions. And boys and girls face different consequences for showing separateness from their peers. If kids can unpack "gender codes" at an early age, they may be more likely to handle any drama related to them later on.

Not Your Specialty? Not a Problem!

There are more classroom connections than you think. Talking about gender roles can create an easy segue between the subject you regularly teach – whether it's history, English, or health and wellness – and a class discussion about digital citizenship. Refer to the following tips to help you get started.

SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL LIFE: IT'S NOT GENDER NEUTRAL

Every day, more teen girls than teen boys text. In the daily Twitter-verse, there are also more girls than boys, and when it comes to photo posting, it's especially a girl thing...but not always a good thing.



77% TEXT DAILY

33% EVER TWEETED

75% LOVE POSTING PHOTOS



60% TEXT DAILY

22% EVER TWEETED

42% LOVE POSTING PHOTOS

For girls, especially, putting their pictures online can be stressful:



57% girls vs. 28% boys sometimes feel left out after seeing photos of others together online

45% girls vs. 24% boys worry about other people posting ugly photos of them online

28% girls vs. 9% boys have edited photos of themselves before posting

Source: *Social Media, Social Life: How Teens View Their Digital Lives* (June 26, 2012). A Common Sense Media Research Study. <http://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/social-media-social-life>

All Teachers

Know the difference between *gender* and *sex*. Gender has to do with social identities and roles. Gender is about how a culture defines terms like “masculine,” “feminine,” and everything in between. Sex, on the other hand, is a matter of anatomy and biology. For example, when you separate a class into groups of boys and girls, you’re separating them by sex, not by gender.

Get creative with Common Core. You don’t have to stray from Common Core standards to teach media literacy. There are plenty of informational texts about media messages that elementary school students can read and interpret. Also, students can expand on concepts like “the author’s purpose” and apply them to examples of multimedia. Kids should know that videos and ads represent a point of view and that they’re meant to persuade, inform, and/or entertain their viewers.

Grab headlines, and make them teachable moments. Current events – whether in politics, sports, or popular culture – can spark meaningful conversations about gender roles. Draw connections between issues in the press and your students’ everyday lives.

Debunk stereotypes about STEM and gender. Encourage kids – especially girls – to problem-solve, design, and experiment in the areas of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). Look out for any negative attitudes in your class that might encourage girls to think they’re less capable of engaging with these subjects.

Picture Perfect

1. Which photo looks like a real girl?

- a) Photo 1
- b) Photo 2



Photo 1



Photo 2

Explain your answer:

2. If a girl told you that she wanted to look like the girl in Photo 2, what would you tell her?

3. These two pictures are of the same pig. How do you think the pig got his stripes in the second picture?



- a) He was born that way.
- b) Someone used paint to put stripes on him.
- c) Someone used a computer to put stripes on him.

Image Source: Tim Piper. "dove evolution." *The Dove® Campaign for Real Beauty*. Web. 16 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCnojf46U>>

Picture Perfect

1. Which photo looks like a real girl?

- a) Photo 1
- b) Photo 2

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **a**.



Photo 1



Photo 2

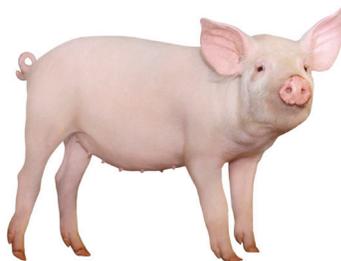
Explain your answer:

Students should recognize that Photo 2 has been altered. Sample responses may include, “The girl in Photo 2 was changed on the computer,” or “The girl in Photo 2 looks too perfect.”

2. If a girl told you that she wanted to look like the girl in Photo 2, what would you tell her?

Students may point out that the photo looks like it was changed on the computer, and that the girl in the photo couldn't look like that in real life. They also may tell the girl that she shouldn't feel the need to change how she looks; she's perfect the way she is.

3. These two pictures are of the same pig. How do you think the pig got his stripes in the second picture?



- a) He was born that way.
- b) Someone used paint to put stripes on him.
- c) Someone used a computer to put stripes on him.**

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **c**. A zebra-pig does not exist in real life. The second picture of the pig was altered on the computer to look like it has zebra stripes.

Image Source: Tim Piper. “dove evolution.” *The Dove® Campaign for Real Beauty*. Web. 16 Oct. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCnoj46U>>