

A UNIT ON TELEVISION FOR A NINTH GRADE  
JUNIOR HIGH ENGLISH CLASS

by 45

MARILYN LOUISE DAVIS

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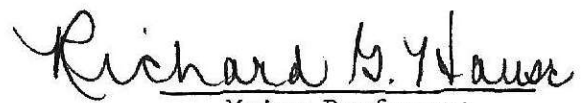
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## INTRODUCTION

It is apparent to most parents and teachers that the medium of television plays an important role in the lives of school-age boys and girls. TV, "the mechanical baby-sitter," has relieved parents of a large share of their responsibility of providing leisure time activity for their children.

Like the weather, to paraphrase Mark Twain, everybody talks about the quality of programming on television, but seemingly nobody does anything about it. Some parents are beginning to realize that everything with which the "baby-sitter" entertains their children is not of the highest and most desirable quality. Educators have long been concerned (as parents, teachers, and as members of the adult viewing audience) about program quality.

Present programming seems to suggest that someone considers the viewing audience to have very little in the way of discriminating taste. It is generally known and accepted that television advertisers, the sponsors, have the greatest voice in determining which programs stay on the air and which are cancelled. As Richard K. Doan, TV Guide New York bureau staff columnist, said in a recent TV Guide article, "TV programming is governed by the law of survival of the fittest. The fittest being the shows best liked by certain people. Certain people being those the advertiser wants most to reach."<sup>1</sup> Popularity polls, such as those of the A. C. Nielsen Company of Chicago, are very influential to the sponsor. The sponsor in turn exerts influence upon the network which makes the decisions. The

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<sup>1</sup>Richard K. Doan, "How Could You?" TV Guide, 16 (June 15, 1968), 32.

few attempts to put quality programs before the public, such as ABC's Stage 67, have largely been failures according to Nielsen. The incentive is to capture the largest viewing audience, and hence, the best buying market for the advertiser's product. Therefore, because the largest viewing audience is the one preferring poorer quality programs, the sponsor and the network cater to the majority.

### The problem

Can something be done to improve the quality of TV programs? An educated audience would demand better quality programs, and the sponsors and the networks would be forced to comply with this new majority. One critic in a recent editorial in TV Guide<sup>2</sup> suggested that teachers take the initiative in training children and young people to be a more critical viewing audience. It is the purpose of this study to develop a unit in the general area of mass communication media, specifically television, in order to educate young people to be a more critical viewing audience and ultimately to influence the initiation of better quality programming.

### Objectives

The objectives guiding this study include a) the development of a unit in the general area of mass communication media and specifically dealing with the medium of television. This specific unit will be used in a ninth grade junior high school English class with these general goals in mind:

1. The students will become a more critical and discerning viewing audience through knowledge of the medium.

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<sup>2</sup>"As We See It," TV Guide, 15 (June, 1967), 1.