Why Media Literacy is Important

1. The influence of media in our central democratic processes.
   In a global media culture, people need two skills in order to be engaged citizens of a democracy: critical thinking and self-expression. Media literacy instills both of these core skills, enabling future citizens to sort through political packaging, understand and contribute to public discourse, and, ultimately, make informed decisions in the voting booth.

2. The high rate of media consumption and the saturation of society by media.
   When one considers videogames, television, pop music, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, the internet — even T-shirts! — we are exposed to more mediated messages in one day than our greatgrandparents were exposed to in a year. Media literacy teaches the skills we need to navigate safely through this sea of images and messages -- for all our lives.

3. The media’s influence on shaping perceptions, beliefs and attitudes.
   While research disagrees on the extent and type of influence, it is unquestionable that media experiences exert a significant impact on the way we understand, interpret and act on our world. By helping us understand those influences, media education can help us separate from our dependencies on them.

4. The increasing importance of visual communication and information.
   While schools continue to be dominated by print, our lives are increasingly influenced by visual images — from corporate logos to building-sized billboards to Internet websites. Learning how to “read” the multiple layers of image-based communication is a necessary adjunct to traditional print literacy. We live in a multimedia world.

5. The importance of information in society and the need for lifelong learning.
   Information processing and information services are at the core of our nation’s productivity but the growth of global media industries is also challenging independent voices and diverse views. Media education can help both teachers and students understand where information comes from, whose interests may be being served and how to find alternative views.

   --With thanks to Len Masterman, Teaching the Media