

Understanding and Reading Media

Reading “texts” well may sound like an academic concern, but it’s not. People do care about the kinds of materials adults and children alike are encountering these days and what they may be learning from them—if anything. Major magazines and newspapers routinely run articles lamenting the hours young people are wasting, for example, playing video games, communicating on social networks, and watching reality TV. But, as always, the bigger picture may be more complex and, perhaps, even encouraging.

In this brief cluster, we offer three readings about our cultural engagement with media of various kinds. In the first piece, a former English teacher worries that books are no longer getting the kind of attention they deserve even in libraries where they’ve been displaced by a focus on information technologies and popular entertainment. But contemporary texts may have much to offer. That’s the argument made in the other two articles, one by a distinguished film critic contemplating the charms of the blockbuster summer movie and the other by a media critic who argues that watching *The Sopranos* makes people smarter. All three authors and their texts deserve your close attention as well as your creative responses.

Beyond Words: Cultural Texts for Reading and Writing
Ruskiwicz, John and Daniel Anderson and
Christy Friend. Longman: N.Y., 2009.