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VIOLENCE AND MEDIA: ARE RATINGS SYSTEMS NECESSARY?

Word Generation - Unit 2.16

Focus Words

rating | ban | interact | occur | complex

WEEKLY PASSAGE



Movies were not rated in the U.S. for many decades. Then in 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America began **rating** films for children and adults. Ratings are usually given instead of **banning** or restricting a film. Rating movies is **complex** because people disagree about the specific factors that should be included in deciding a rating, such as sex, violence, and profanity. In the United States, movies in which sexual activity **occurs** are often restricted to older viewers, while in countries such as Germany or France sexual content is not such a big deal. However, violent movies receive restrictive ratings or are censored in those countries while in the United States they are not.

Today, video games, books, TV shows, and music also get rated. Those who like the rating system say it helps people decide if a movie is right for them or their children. Parents can tell quickly if a movie might offend them and whether or not it is okay for their children. Parents who are more worried about the moral content of a movie or game, rather than how many times a swear word is used, can use an alternative rating system.

While the names and meanings of the ratings have changed over the years, today there are five possible ratings for movies. G stands for General Audiences. It means that there is no sex, violence, or profanity, and the movie is fine for all ages. PG stands for Parental Guidance Suggested. It means that some of the movie content might not be okay for kids. PG-13 gives parents a stronger caution. It indicates that some of the movie might not be okay for kids under 13. R is for Restricted. R means you

must be with an adult to even get in the theater. Finally there is NC-17 for No One 17 and Under Admitted.

Some people don't like rating systems because they may be used for maximizing profits rather than protecting the public. Movies rated PG and PG-13 make more money than those rated R and some Hollywood executives lower standards for major movie studios to make sure that the film gets a certain rating. Parents who do not **interact** with their children or pay attention to their interests may not even know what a certain rating on a video game or book mean. Furthermore, a young gamer who is stopped from buying a title because it is "too mature" might try to have someone older buy it. Making rating systems work is complex.

What do you think about this? Do you think people should be restricted in what they can buy or see? Are rating systems necessary?

Violence and media: are ratings systems necessary?

FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

rating : (noun) a classification, an ordering

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

ban : (verb) to forbid

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

interact : (verb) to communicate, to have social contact with

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

occur : (verb) to happen

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

complex : (adjective) complicated; of many parts

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:



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PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

Instead of **banning** adult content in movies, the Motion Picture Association of America gives **ratings** to let viewers know what **occurs** in a movie. The **interactions** between a movie's creators and the MPAA can be **complex**. For example, if a movie's creators are unhappy with a rating, they can edit and re-submit their movie to the MPAA until they get the rating they want.

Rating	Average Earnings Per Film 1995 – 2010
PG-13	\$41,237,141
G	\$37,692,288
PG	\$36,591,876
R	\$14,934,641
Not Rated	\$740,664

Option 1: According to the table, which of the following is true?

- A) If a movie is rated PG-13, it will definitely earn more money than a movie rated R.
- B) On average, movies rated PG-13 earned more money than movies rated PG.
- C) On average, movies rated R earned more money than PG-rated movies.
- D) Movies that were not rated did not earn any money.

Option 2: If these average earnings stay true, how much is it worth to a movie's creators to have a rating changed from R to PG-13?

Math Discussion Question: From 1995 – 2010, the average movie with a G, PG, or PG-13 **rating** earned much more than the average movie with an R rating. Why? Here is one possible explanation: for some parents, watching movies is a way to **interact** with their kids. They see a movie together, and then talk about it afterwards. This kind of **occurrence** helps parents and kids build strong relationships. Is this a good explanation? Do R-rated movies earn less money because parents don't take their kids to see them? Or is the situation more **complex**?

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THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY

Mr. Seemy's class is learning about the brain, and today's lesson is about mirror neurons.

"When I touch my ear, neurons fire," Mr. Seemy says. "When I watch *you* touch *your* ear, something interesting **occurs**. Some of those same neurons fire again. We call these neurons *mirror neurons*."

Mr. Seemy continues, "Mirror neurons help us **interact** with other people. When we see someone smile, mirror neurons remind us what it feels like to smile. They also help us imitate **complex** behavior, like dance steps."

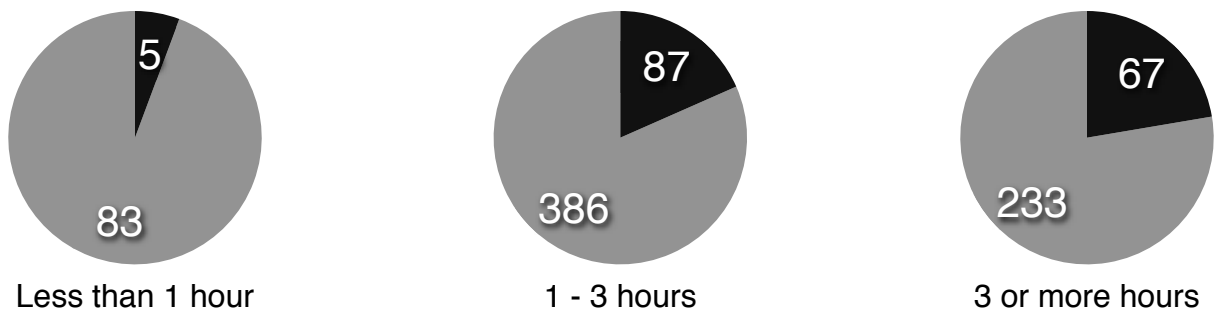
Jamal has been studying media violence, and he has an idea. "Hey, mirror neurons could explain why watching violence in the media makes people violent in real life," he says. "When a kid watches someone punch, mirror neurons help her understand punching, and also help her imitate it."

"My mom told me she read an article once that said watching violent TV makes kids more violent," Jennifer explains. "That's why my brother and I are not allowed to watch anything with any violence in it! It's not fair!"

"Let's see if we can find the article your mom read online," suggests Mr. Seemy.

→ Jennifer helps Mr. Seemy to locate the online article her mom described. Jennifer shares the information she finds with her classmates. The study compares the amount of TV children around age 14 watched with the number of aggressive acts they committed later (around the ages of 16 and 22).

Daily TV Watching
Total = 707



- At least one aggressive act reported
- No aggressive acts reported

One of Jennifer's classmates concludes that kids watching 1-3 hours of television led to the highest rate of violence because there were 87 aggressive acts committed by that population. Is she correct? Why or why not?

Discuss what other variables you would like to see included in a study like this in order to ensure that TV-watching was the **ONLY** factor leading to aggressive behavior. Examples might include incidence of childhood abuse, or hours spent playing violent computer games, etc.

Do you think Jennifer's mom is being fair by not allowing her children to watch television shows with violence?



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DEBATING THE ISSUE

Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A The rating systems in place now provide useful guidance for families.

B The rating systems we use should be improved and expanded.

C Rating systems are unnecessary. People should watch or play what they want.

D The rating systems we have are fine but parents and vendors need to pay more attention.

E _____

Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

I believe that...

I agree with you, but...

You make a good point, but have you considered...

Can you show me evidence in the text that...

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WRITE ABOUT IT

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples.
Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words

rating | ban | interact | occur | complex
