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by getting them to think more critically about media, and then, by channeling their thinking into the creation of entertaining video projects that educate how media work on us. Sometimes, kids will do the shooting, while we assist. Other times, we’ll do the primary shooting, with kids assisting as boom operators, cable wranglers, A.D.s, and, of course, doing much of the writing and all of acting.

In addition to teaching the basics of video production (camera work, lighting, sound, etc.) we follow three cardinal rules for video production, making MemeFILMS that are:

1. **Short:** We keep most of our projects short. (30 seconds to 3 minutes seems an ideal length). Like many of us, kids dream big, but then get frustrated when they can’t execute their ideas. We start by limiting the time length of any MemeFILMS project. This eliminates a ton of needless energy expended on unworkable ideas that are simply impossible to film with the amount of time and money available.
2. **Simple:** We strive to keep all of our concepts simple. Squeeze as much as you can, for example, out of a single statistic (Here are two: teens see as many as 3,000 ad messages a day, while six Big Media corporations own as much as 90% of children’s media content). Challenge kids to do a lot with a little. This also makes editing a snap — do most of your (pre) production work on site, rather than in the editing room (unless you have the time and money to spend on editing programs like iMovie, Final Cut, or Avid).
3. **Sophisticated:** We don’t need a billion dollar budget to create media that is “layered” and inter-

esting to watch. We use camera angles and motion, ambient noise and special sounds, whip pans, lighting, simple FX, funky settings (bathrooms are always fun) to hold a viewer’s attention. And showing students how to play with “audience attention” gets them excited about coming up with easy and creative ways to tell the story.

Instead of using storyboards (blasphemy in many production circles, I know), we’ve bottled a number of MemeFILMS “prototypes” — simple field-tested formulas that offer kids various ways to conceptualize and structure their projects — and we’ve made these prototypes available in both text and video formats. One of our earliest and most successful prototypes, called “The Rant,” featured a young woman walking and talking about how the tobacco industry uses media to target kids. (You can use “The Rant” prototype with kids to tackle ANY topic of interest to them). Another early experiment led to the “The Appeal,” featuring a young man, framed by patriotic bunting on a baseball diamond, talking directly to tobacco industry executives and asking them to “please stop targeting us.” Kids’ voices are more powerful than they (and we) realize. Having students talk directly to parents, or corporate executives, or advertisers is empowering, and makes for powerful media, too.

**H**OW DO WE DISTRIBUTE OUR FILMS? Any way we can. I use our Memes in both DVD and QuickTime movie formats to educate kids in the media literacy education workshops and keynotes I give all over the country. Many of our MemeFILMS are aired on Vermont’s community cable TV outlets; we’ve even had PEG producers compress our videos for hosting at their web sites! (Kids like this, because then they can call friends and relatives and share the URL link — movie stars in cyberspace!) We also use MemeFILMS video experiences to create entire “awards shows” for school auditoriums full of kids. This past winter, we designed an entire “Oscars”-type awards assembly — “Butts of Holly-



*MemeFILMS filming high school voices at a statewide leadership summit*