

Representation of Older Adults in the Media

Although older adults make up 17 percent of the population, they make up only 5.4 percent of all network prime-time characters and 4 percent of characters on daytime television, according to one study. TV programs often place older adults in supporting roles, but seldom portray them as leading characters. For this activity you will analyze representations of older adults in various media forms.

ACTIVITY

As a class, brainstorm a list of magazines, newspapers, radio, or music you will examine for images of older adults. Then list types—for instance, under *magazines* you might list news-magazines, health magazines, hobby and home decorating magazines. Try to get a representative sample of each media form.

Work in groups to research one of the media forms. One group should examine magazines, one music, and so on. Tally the number of times an older adult appears in the media form you are researching. Add up your



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group's total, and then compare the results with those of other groups. Which media form most accurately represents the percentage of older adults in our population?

EXPRESS YOUR VIEWS

Write a short essay discussing which media form represents older adults in more balanced numbers. Which media form shows older adults more frequently? What suggestions can you make for portraying older adults in positive roles?