However, some people think ratings are unnecessary. They think it should be up to families to decide what is appropriate. They believe it is important for families to interact with their children and actually learn what is in their video games or shows. They may also say that ratings aren’t really effective anyway, since young people can get around the rules fairly easily. Also, some children and teens dislike rating systems because they believe they should have the freedom to decide what is best for themselves. You may point out, for instance, that some movies include violence only to bring up important issues and share positive messages.

Other people believe in rating systems but think the current ratings are too simplistic or not strict enough. They worry that parents may rely on the ratings without realizing how much violent content is allowed in less restricted movies or games. They say the rating systems encourage movie studios to focus on artificial rules, rather than whether a movie has a good message. For example, a rating might focus on the number and type of violent acts. But a parent might care about whether a character faces appropriate consequences when they hurt someone. Other people simply feel that the American rating systems are not strict enough and that children need better protection from violent content.

What do you think? Should kids be restricted in what they can buy or see? Or are rating systems unnecessary? Do the current rating systems work well? Or do we need a different way of rating movies, games, and shows?

In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America began rating films. Previously, some movies had been banned or censored by the “Motion Picture Production Code” for mature content. Assigning ratings may be better than banning films, but rating movies can be complex. People disagree about the specific factors that make a film inappropriate for kids. In the United States, movies with nudity and sexual activity are often restricted. However, Europeans are more likely to restrict or censor movies in which violence occurs.

Rating systems have changed over the years. For movies, there are now five possible ratings. 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 something in the movie might not be okay for kids under 13. R, for Restricted, means children must be accompanied by an adult to even get into the theater. Finally, NC-17 means No One 17 and Under Admitted.

Today, video games, TV shows, and music also get ratings. Those who like the rating systems say they help people decide quickly if a product is right for them or their children. Parents may use ratings to approve or disapprove without having to watch an entire movie or research what a video game is about. On the other hand, a more restricted rating might let parents know to learn more about the product before letting their child see it. Restricted ratings can even prevent children from seeing or buying a game or movie without an adult. Those in favor of rating systems say they help protect all children from inappropriate content. They say this is especially important because there is evidence that watching violent media can lead to more aggressive behavior.

**Questions for Classroom Discussion:**
- What is the purpose of ratings?
- Why do some people think that rating systems should be eliminated or changed?
- Does your family pay attention to movie or game ratings?
- What does the United States rating system rate as worse: sex or violence? Why do you think that is? Do you agree?
VIOLENCE AND MEDIA: ARE RATING SYSTEMS NECESSARY?

USE THE FOCUS WORDS * and alternate parts of speech

**rating** *(noun)* a classification, an ordering

- **Sample Sentence**: Assigning ratings may be better than banning films.
- **Turn and Talk**: Do you consider a movie’s **rating** when deciding whether or not to watch it? Explain.

**ban** *(verb)* to forbid

- **Sample Sentence**: Ratings are an alternative to banning or restricting a film.
- **Turn and Talk**: If you knew that a movie was **banned**, would that make you want to see it more or less?

**complex** *(noun)* a group of related things connected in complicated ways

- **Sample Sentence**: The mayor unified the transportation complex, which included trains, buses, and streetcars.
- **Turn and Talk**: Why might someone want to live in an apartment complex instead of a house?

**rating** *(noun)*

**ban** *(noun)* a rule that forbids something

- **Sample Sentence**: The school placed a ban on disposable plastic water bottles.
- **Turn and Talk**: Should there be a ban on smoking in public places?

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

- **Sample Sentence**: Some people believe it is important for families to interact with their children and actually learn what is in their video games or shows.
- **Turn and Talk**: Do you interact differently with your parents when you want them to buy you something? Explain.

**occur** *(verb)* to happen

- **Sample Sentence**: Europeans are more likely to restrict or censor movies in which violence occurs.
- **Turn and Talk**: In the last movie you saw, would you say that violent scenes occurred too frequently?

**complex** *(verb)* complicated; of many parts

- **Sample Sentence**: Rating movies is complex because people disagree about the specific factors that should be included in the rating.
- **Turn and Talk**: Do you think rating video games is more complex than rating movies? Explain.

**Rating** can also be used as a verb (“rate”)!

**Rating movies can be complex!**
DO THE MATH

Instead of banning adult content in movies, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) 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 resubmit their movie to the MPAA until they get the rating they want. Critics of the current system point out that it seems to restrict curse words more than violence. For example, a PG-13 movie is usually only allowed one major curse word. With more than one swear word, it would likely be bumped up to an R rating. But that same movie could contain multiple instances of graphic violence, including shootings and stabbings, and still keep its PG-13 rating.

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 applied to an individual movie, how much would it be worth to a movie’s creators to have a rating changed from R to PG-13?

$26,302,500

Discussion Question: Over a decade later, average earnings per film still follow the same trend. In general, a movie with a PG-13 rating will earn much more than a 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 helps parents and kids build strong relationships. Therefore, R-rated movies may earn less money because parents don’t take their kids to see them. Is this a good explanation, or do you think the situation is more complex?
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 might make people violent in real life,” he says. “When a kid watches someone punch, mirror neurons help them understand punching, and also help them imitate it.”

“My mom read an article once that said watching violent TV makes kids more violent,” Jennifer explains. “That’s why my brother and I can’t watch anything with violence. It’s not fair! I’m not going to start being violent just from watching a show!”

“Let’s see if we can find the article your mom read online,” suggests Mr. Seemy.

Jennifer helps Mr. Seemy locate the online article her mom described: a 2002 study in Science magazine. 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).

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?

No. A higher PERCENTAGE of people who watched at least 3 hours of TV later reported aggressive acts.

Do these data support Jennifer’s mom’s decision to ban her children from watching TV shows with violence?

No. She would need data on violent TV viewing, not just TV viewing.

Discuss what other variables you would like to see included in a study like this in order to ensure that time watching TV was the ONLY factor leading to aggressive behavior.
DEBATE THE ISSUE
Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A
☐ The current rating systems are fine.

OR

B
☐ The rating systems should be eliminated.

OR

C
☐ The current rating systems are not strict enough.

OR

CREATE YOUR OWN
☐ ________________________

☐ ________________________

☐ ________________________

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

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Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

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

"I believe that..."

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

"I agree with you, but..."
TAKE A STAND

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

rating | ban | interact | occur | complex

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