

Mr. Don DeArmon
1406 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Cong. David Price (N.C.) 8 December 1992
(202) 225-1784

Dear Don:

I'm writing you from the Aspen Institute. Our initial session last night was quite stimulating, and the setting here is very conducive to serious contemplation and discussion.

I want to thank you for meeting with me Monday, *Ron (Oregon)* and many thanks for suggesting that I meet with Joan McCarter of Congressman Wyden's office. Joan was very supportive, and she wants to explore the possibility of a media literacy component for the Ready to Learn Act.

She also suggested that the re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act might be a quicker way of getting an appropriation for some pilot projects in North Carolina and other parts of the country. I'll be pursuing that course and would appreciate your insight and support in this effort as well.

Meanwhile, I am having sent to you various literature and research findings related to the "ready to learn" benefits of media literacy. In particular, I am contacting Dorothy and Jerome Singer at Yale University so that they can share their findings with you.

One clear impression I'm getting from this experience at the Aspen Institute is that we are embarked on historic work. I want to do all I can to make sure that North Carolina takes a leading role in this important effort. The ability of our children to control their own attentional processes is at stake as we enter this new age of "high arousal" video technology. Thanks again for your time and interest in this matter,

Sincerely,

Wally Bowen
Executive Director
Citizens for Media Literacy



CITIZENS FOR MEDIA LITERACY

34 Wall Street • Suite 407 • Asheville, N.C. 28801

704-255-0182 • Fax 704-254-2286

8 March 1993

Dr. George Gerbner
Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Dr. Gerbner:

Citizens for Media Literacy has created a critical viewing skills comic book on the topic of TV and advertising, with special emphasis on Channel One. The comic book, "Get a Life," is designed for middle school and high school students. We expect to go to press around April 1.

Enclosed is the script plus a couple of representative page drafts of the actual comic book (these drafts are xeroxed from the original pencil renderings and do not capture the full flavor of the final ink drawings).

I'm writing to solicit your endorsement and/or the endorsement of your organization. We originally created "Get a Life" for our local school districts, but we've been encouraged by Renee Hobbs of the Harvard Graduate School of Education to make the comic book available to a national market.

If you would like to add your endorsement to this project, please fax us your consent ASAP at 704-254-2286. And if you have any comments or critique, we would certainly be glad to hear them. Thanks for your consideration.

All the Best,

Wally Bowen
Executive Director

See you soon!

March 15 1993

Wally Bowen
Executive Director
Citizens for Media Literacy
38 1/2 Battery Park Ave.
Asheville, N.C. 28801
Fax: 704 254 2286

Dear Wally:

Thank you for your letter of March 8 and the script.
It's a fine job and I am glad to endorse it. If you want a
comment, here it is:

"Get a Life" is the get-away for a captive
audience...A good lesson in critical viewing.

See you on April 29 at 11:55.

Sincerely yours,

George Gerbner
Professor of Communication and Dean Emeritus

“GET A LIFE”

*Julia Smillie
Wally Bowen
Final Draft*

“Get a Life!” or “The Awakening of Billy Bored”

Our story begins in the classroom where our hero, William Bored — avid TV watcher — joins his classmates for their first presentation of Whittle Communication’s “Channel One.”

(Bill sits slumped at his desk, talking to his friend, Charlie)

Bill: It’s a dream come true, man. Now there’s no reason that school should cut into our TV watching.

Charlie: No doubt, dude. Whoever thought of this is a genius.

(The class settles in to watch the show and all of them zone out. Bill is watching the screen)

Announcer: Coming up next . . . a feature report on how basketball shoes are made. Stay tuned. Not like you have a choice. Ha ha ha.

(The screen cuts to a commercial featuring the advertising guy, a really clean-cut, slick, good-looking guy in a business suit)

Advertiser: Psssttt . . . Bill. Hey, Bill!

(Bill looks around. Turns to Charlie.)

Bill: Did you hear that, Charlie?

(Charlie’s too zoned out watching Channel One to respond)

Adv: Bill! We’ve only got 12 minutes. C’mere.

(Bill hesitantly gets up and walks over to the set)

Adv: Put it there, Bill.

(The advertiser sticks his hand out of the screen. Bill reaches out to shake the guy’s hand and he’s jerked through the screen. He looks around, dazed, amazed and generally overwhelmed)

Bill: Whoa. Am I inside the TV?

Adv: In a way.

Bill: Cool. Hey, who the heck are you, anyway?

Adv: After all this time, you don’t even recognize me? Well, I guess that’s the way it’s supposed to be.

“GET A LIFE”

Julia Smillie
Wally Bowen
Final Draft

Bill: The way what’s supposed to be?

Adv: Advertising. I’m the Advertiser. And this, my friend, is the World of Advertising. C’mon.

Bill: Just a sec. How do you know who I am?

Adv: I’ve had my eye on you for years. Say, let’s you and me take a stroll together. I’ve got some things I want to show you. I think you’re gonna like this a lot.

(The two begin strolling down a hallway. As they walk, they pass billboards, posters, and spokesmodels, all advertising products aimed at teenagers: acne creams, records, hair spray, jeans, sneakers, etc.)

Bill Hey, what are the chances of my hanging here ‘til lunch? At least past Chemistry? See, we’ve got this quiz today and . . .

Adv: Bill, if it were up to me, you’d stay all day.

Bill: You know, this place seems a lot like the real world.

Adv: I know. That’s how we planned it.

(Ad man suddenly drops to his knees and genuflects before a monument to a pudgy, balding, bespectacled late-60s business-type.)

Bill: Who’s that? *(Ad man continues genuflecting in ecstatic oblivion.)* Uh, excuse me? What are you doing?

Adv: Paying my respects to the Great and Wonderful, the Most Worthy and Wise, the Marvelous and Magnificent, the . . .

Bill: The Wizard of Oz?

(As the advertiser tells the story of Krugman, the panels indicate the events. First off, the secretary with the bouffant with the electrode strapped to her head.

Adv: Not. It’s Herbert Krugman. Herbert Krugman’s the ad-man who -- way back in 1969 -- wanted to know what happened to alpha waves in the brain when people watch TV. So he hooked his secretary up to a monitor, and the rest is history.

Bill: Cool. What’s an alpha wave?

Ad: That’s the electrical pattern in our brain when we’re alert and focused. But Herbert -- forever we praise him -- made a breathtaking discovery. He found that when his secretary watched TV, her alpha waves switched to beta waves!

“GET A LIFE”

*Julia Smillie
Wally Bowen
Final Draft*

Bill: So what's a beta wave?

Ad: A beta wave, Billy boy, is one of the Seven Wonders of AdvertisingWorld. It's the brain-state of aimless daydreaming, unfocused fantasizing.

Bill: Big deal. Everybody zones while watching the tube.

Ad: Krugman discovered that watching TV relaxes the logical, analytical part of our brain and plugs directly into viewers' feelings and emotions. And that, my friend, is why advertising is big, big business.

(They pass a big-screen TV monitor with a bikini-clad woman seductively stroking a bottle of beer at the beach. Beads of sweat appear on Billy's forehead.)

Bill: I see what you mean. Man, Charlie would get a kick out of this.

Adv: Don't worry, Bill. We'll get Charlie in here. And all the others, too.

Bill: The others?

Adv: Teenagers, Billy-boy. You crazy, wacky kids 12-17. As many as we can get. This whole place is especially for you guys

Bill: Man, that's pretty decent of you. But how come all of this just for us?

(The advertiser puts his arm around Bill's shoulder, takes him under his wing)

Adv: Let me tell you a little something about teenagers, Bill. I'm telling you this 'cause I like you. You're a good kid, the model kid. The truth of the matter is — and it chokes me up to think about it — we really love you guys. We love the fact that you spend almost \$100 billion every single year . . .

Bill: I gotta ask for a bigger allowance . . .

Adv: . . . and we love that you watch about 3 hours of TV *every* day. Do you know how many commercials we can slip through your beta waves in that amount of time, Bill? Half a million by the time you're 18!

Bill: Yeah, it's a drag. Seems like the ads are more important than the shows. No offense.

Adv: Oh, none taken. You're exactly right.

Bill: Hold up. Are you saying the whole point of TV is to bring us commercials?

“GET A LIFE”

Julia Smillie
Wally Bowen
Final Draft

Adv: Close, Bill, close. What did you think it was for — entertainment? Not. TV is a vehicle. It brings you here to us, the advertisers.

Bill: But I’ve never been here, before.

Adv: Of course you have. You’ve just never really realized it, that’s all.

Bill: So how’d I get here today?

Adv: Because of this.

(They arrive at a huge, high-tech door marked “Channel One.”)

Adv: Let’s take a quick look around, let you get a feel for the place

(Advertiser whisks opens the door and ushers Bill in. He is struck by the brightness)

Bill: Yikes! It’s so bright in here.

Adv: You betcha. It’s the glitz, the glamour, the shine — the whole place just sort of sparkles, doesn’t it?

(The first work station they pass is the news desk. A skeleton sits in the chair, cobwebs growing over everything. On his desk are boxes marked “fragments”, “bits” and “pieces”. Cobwebs cover books with titles such as “Historical Context,” “Intellectual Depth,” “Complexity and Contradiction.”)

Bill: Um, your news guy doesn’t look so hot.

Adv: Who?

(At the next work station, a bunch of people with huge pairs of scissors are cutting furiously through reels and reels of film)

Bill: Check it out! They’re chopping up the news.

Adv: They’re editing, Bill. Fast cuts, short shots. Nothing too demanding for your attention span.

(They pass a guy in the corner, laid back, feet up, browsing through a stack of books with commercial and product-oriented titles “The World According to Corporate Advertisers,” “Surface Glitz: The Making of Images,” “Keep It Simple Stupid,” “Consume Today . . . and Tomorrow!”, “Happy Endings,” “Upbeat Analyses,” etc)

Bill: How come that guy gets to goof off?

“GET A LIFE”

*Julia Smillie
Wally Bowen
Final Draft*

Bill: Well, I for sure wouldn't waste any more money on a bunch of over-priced clothes, basketball shoes and junk food. And I wouldn't be helping kill the planet by buying a lot of garbage I don't really need. I'd be my own man.

Adv: Whoa, Billy boy. You're sounding like one of those environmental extremists. Not cool. And your own man? Ha! You haven't been on your own since we first met you. We've been making important decisions for you from the git-go. We've told you exactly what was in, hip, happening, cool, now and wow.

Bill: So here you are jerking us around, and you want me to be grateful for that?

Adv: Why not? We're helping you. We're giving you and everyone else exactly what you want. Life's complicated. People want direction. And we deliver. We construct reality for you — and, I'm glad to say, get paid big bucks to do it. Think about it, Bill. TV is your reality.

Bill: But it's not real! You make that stuff up as you go. I saw what was going on back there, and it's the same on every channel. Fancy graphics, bright colors, cool sounds, quick cuts. Whose life is really like that?

Adv: Precisely, Bill. We're paid good money to create a TV reality that makes your life look pretty darn dull by comparison. But it's not like we leave you hanging. You can get in on the action simply by buying what we have to sell.

Bill: You're right. But what would happen — hypothetically speaking, of course — if we were to watch TV differently?

Adv: Differently?

Bill: Yeah. I mean, now that I know exactly what you're up to, I don't have to buy into it, do I? What if we all became media . . . what's that phrase?

Adv: Surely you don't mean media literate?

Bill: Yeah! That's it! Media literate.

Adv: Listen, Bill, I really don't think that media literacy is something you ought to just rush into. Maybe you should consult a physician first . . .

Bill: Humor me for a sec, would ya? Suppose I did become media literate, and I used critical skills to analyze programs like Channel One and — with all due respect — question sleazy people like yourself. Then I'd have more power to make my own decisions about my lifestyle, right?

Adv: Well, I suppose so, but that's a lot of responsibility, Bill . . .

“GET A LIFE”

*Julia Smillie
Wally Bowen
Final Draft*

Adv: He’s doing current events research, Bill! He’s coming up with fun facts, easy pop-quiz questions, simple story-lines, soothing information – nothing to offend our clients. They don’t want their products associated with any kind of negative feelings.

(At the next work station, a doctor and nurse stand around a table, working on a news package. The package is bright, colorful, sparkling, etc.)

Dr: High-tech graphics? Funky camera angles?

Nurse: Check!

Dr: Nurse, give me some music. Something with a beat — and pump up the bass.

Nurse: Yes, doctor.

Dr: Uh oh. This piece is fading! I’m running out of ideas. Give me 2,000 amps of MTV! Clear!

(The doctor applies MTV electric shock pads in an attempt to resuscitate the news piece.)

Bill: Yo, what’s in the fancy package?

Adv: That’s the news, Bill.

Bill: Could’ve fooled me.

Adv: Yeah, well . . . let’s get out of here.

(The two step back out into the hallway)

Adv: Ah, the genius of Channel One. For that we are forever thankful.

(The Advertiser drops to his knees and bows his head)

Bill: Thankful?

(The Advertiser stands back up and whisks Bill along to continue their stroll)

Adv: Think of all the things Channel One brings to your school?

Bill: You mean free TVs and stuff?

Adv: It’s more than just free stuff, Bill. See, TV is high-tech. It’s quick, hip, full of color and speed. Everything your teachers with their old-fashioned textbooks are not. Face it, Billy. Your schools can’t compete with the reality of TV. So we cut them a deal. It’s just good business.

“GET A LIFE”

Julia Smillie
Wally Bowen
Final Draft

Bill: I guess you’ve got a point.

Adv: Oh, Billy, that’s just the tip of the iceberg. Channel One’s a dream come true! You kids are good to us, but — no offense — you’re a little squirrely, a little hard to pin down. What with remote controls and cable TV, you’re zipping through the channels and zapping our commercials.

Bill: Sorry, man.

Adv: Well, just thank heavens for Channel One. We come into your schools, we get a captive audience with no remote controls, and we get 12 solid minutes of your time without worrying about our competitors.

Bill: So, wait, just anyone can waltz into Whittle Communications and buy 12 minutes of our attention?

Adv.: Hold on now, Bill. You think Channel One would sell your precious attention to just anyone? Not just anyone can pay \$160,000 for a 30-second spot. We’ve got standards, you know. Plus, you’ve been watching TV for years, Bill. Your attention span’s so short by now that we have to create a lot more snap, crackle and pop just to make an impression on you guys.

Bill: Yeah, well, maybe. But I thought Channel One was supposed to be about news, not advertising.

Adv: C’mon, Bill. How much news can you really expect from TV sound bites? You kids have been watching the tube your whole life, yet most of you think “Chernobyl” is Cher’s full name! Besides, TV’s not made for depth and complexity. We need familiar formulas, simple stories, happy endings. That’s why your teachers have such a hard time competing with TV!

Bill: Well, I just thought we were supposed to be there to learn, that’s all. And don’t go telling the other kids I said that. I’ve got an image, you know.

Adv: But you *are* learning, Bill. Channel One’s teaching you how to be the ultimate consumer, to feel rather than think, and you’re at just the right age for that. Our research says you guys are really into finding your identity. So you don’t have to tell me about your image. I know all about it. In fact, we helped create it!

Bill: You?

Adv: Sure. We’ve spent billions of dollars over the years to get inside the heads and hearts of kids. I know exactly what you eat, what you think and — most importantly — what you feel. I know what music you like to hear . . . everything.

“GET A LIFE”

Julia Smillie
Wally Bowen
Final Draft

Bill: I don't buy it. Even Charlie doesn't know that much about me, and I've known him since first grade.

Adv: First grade? Ha! That's nothing! I've known you since you were in diapers. And I knew your parents before that. Tell me, why'd you buy those sneakers, Billy-boy?

Bill: Cause they're cool.

Adv: Because we made you think they were cool. We made you think that having a pair would make you a basketball star, get you a girlfriend, and make you popular. Or even better — we actually made you think you'd be unpopular if you didn't have them.

Bill: You mean you wanted me to feel that way? Even if you knew it wasn't true?

Adv: We didn't create those feelings, Bill. We know you already feel that way, so we just remind you of it while we're showing off our products. It's simple. People -- especially teen-agers -- are just walking bundles of needs and insecurities begging to be fulfilled. That's where we come in. And you've always fallen for it. Go home and check your closet, your refrigerator, your record collection.

Bill: Wait a second. I mean, I guess I always knew you were trying to persuade and manipulate us to feel, think and buy a certain way. But for some reason, it's really starting to bug me.

Adv: That's because you're making it sound so sleazy. It's just the way it is, Billy. *Everyone* falls for it.

Bill: Still sounds pretty bogus to me.

Adv: Frankly, Bill, you're disappointing me. I expected you to be a little more grateful.

Bill: Grateful?

Adv: Why, yes. For us, and especially for TV. We help you get through life. We're there to pump you up when you need it, be your friend when you're lonely, and take the edge off when things get a little too uptight . . . kind of like a . . . well, never mind.

Bill: You mean, kind of like a drug?

Adv: Get with the program, Bill. TV's the most important thing around. If it's not on TV, it doesn't exist. TV's instructional, educational. It tells you how to live. It's as much a part of your life as your family, or Charlie . . . or even school.

Bill: Man, you're making me want to just turn the TV off.

Adv: Billy, there you go thinking critically again. Don't you realize you'd be lost without TV?

“GET A LIFE”

*Julia Smillie
Wally Bowen
Final Draft*

Bill: Hey . . . I could even turn the TV off, couldn't I?

Adv: Don't even think about it! Besides, you *have* to watch Channel One! You don't have a choice!

Bill: Au contraire, mon frere. When are *you* people going to realize that even though we're young, we can think for ourselves. Now that I'm on to you guys, I guess I'll just change the way I watch TV and Channel One.

Adv: That's not cool.

Bill: I know cool when I see it, and you're not. Besides, this place gets kinda creepy after a while. How can you stand it? I think the first decision I'll make for myself is to get the heck out of here.

Adv: Bill, wait! Come back!

Bill: Hey, this empowerment thing's a real trip!

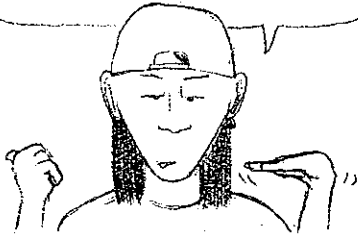
Adv: At least do me one favor, okay, old pal? Don't mention this media literacy stuff to any of the other kids, will you?

Bill: Yeah, right. Get a life.

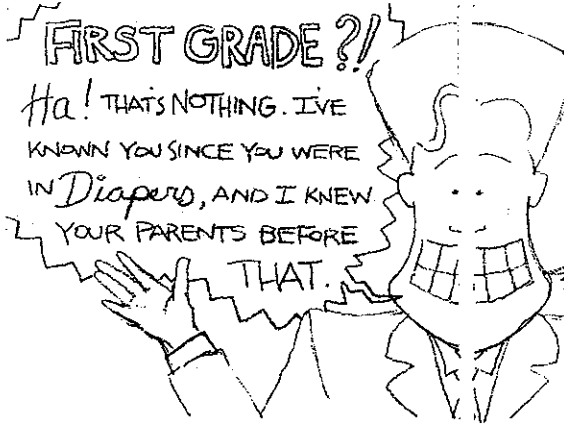
(The other kids look up, as if snapped out of a trance)

All: Yeah! Get a life!

I DON'T BUY IT, MAN.
EVEN CHARLIE DOESN'T
KNOW THAT MUCH ABOUT
ME, AND I'VE KNOWN HIM
SINCE THE FIRST GRADE.

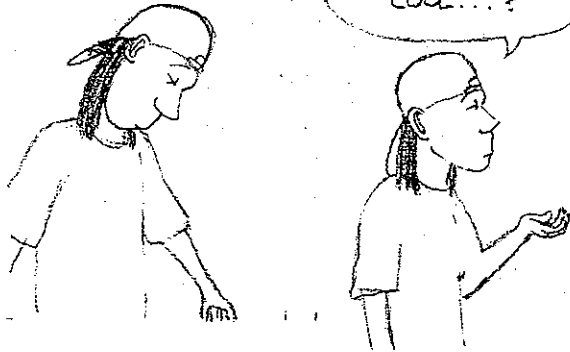


FIRST GRADE?!
Ha! THAT'S NOTHING. I'VE
KNOWN YOU SINCE YOU WERE
IN Diapers, AND I KNEW
YOUR PARENTS BEFORE
THAT.

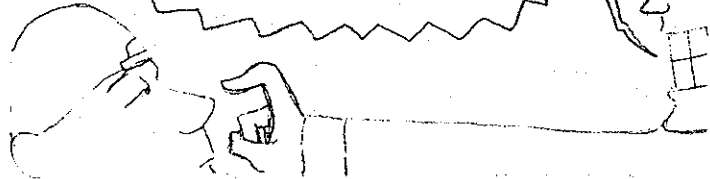


Tell me, BILLY
BOY,
Why DID YOU BUY
THOSE
SNEAKERS?

BECAUSE THEY'RE
COOL...?



BECAUSE WE MADE YOU THINK THEY WERE COOL. WE MA
YOU THINK HAVING A PAIR WOULD MAKE YOU A Basketball
★, GET YOU A GIRLFRIEND, MAKE YOU POPULAR -
EVEN BETTER - WE ACTUALLY MADE U
THINK YOU'D BE UNPOPULAR IF YOU
DIDN'T HAVE THEM!



YOU MEAN YOU WANTED ME
TO FEEL THAT WAY? EVEN IF
YOU KNEW IT WASN'T TRUE?



WE DIDN'T CREATE THOSE FEELINGS, BILL. WE KNOW YOU
ALREADY FEEL THAT WAY, SO WE JUST Remind U
OF IT WHILE WE SHOW OFF OUR PRODUCTS. IT'S SIMPLE:
PEOPLE - ESPECIALLY Teen-agers - ARE WALKING BUNDLE
OF NEEDS AND INSECURITIES BEGGING TO BE FULFILLED.
THAT'S WHERE WE COME IN. AND YOU'VE ALWAYS
fallen for it! GO HOME AND CHECK YOUR CLOSET,
YOUR REFRIGERATOR,
YOUR RECORD COLLECTION.



WAIT A
SECOND...



I MEAN I GUESS I
ALWAYS KNEW YOU
WERE TRYING TO
MANIPULATE US TO
FEEL, THINK, AND BUY
IN A CERTAIN WAY,

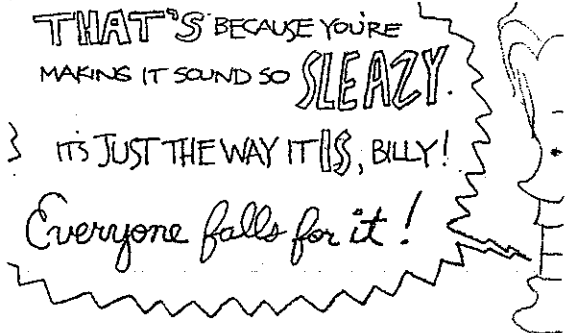


BUT FOR SOME
REASON...
IT'S REALLY
STARTING TO
BUG ME.

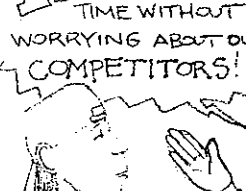


THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE
MAKING IT SOUND SO SLEAZY.

IT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS, BILLY!
Everyone falls for it!



WELL, THANK HEAVENS FOR CHANNEL ONE. WE COME INTO YOUR SCHOOLS, WE GET A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE WITH NO Remote controls, AND WE GET 12 SOLID MINUTES OF YOUR TIME WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT OUR COMPETITORS!



SO, WAIT... JUST ANYONE CAN WALTZ INTO WHITTE COMMUNICATIONS AND BUY 12 MINUTES OF OUR ATTENTION?



HOLD ON NOW, BILL. YOU THINK CHANNEL ONE WOULD SE YOUR Precious ATTENTION TO JUST ANYONE? NOT JUST ANYONE CAN PAY \$160,000 FOR A 30-SECOND SPOT, WE'VE GOT STANDARDS, YOU KNOW. PLUS, YOU'VE BEEN WATCHIN TV. FOR YEARS, BILL. Your ATTENTION SPANS SO SHO BY NOW THAT WE HAVE TO CREATE A LOT MORE

Snap, ~~POPP~~ AND

POPP JUST TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION ON YOU GUYS.



YEAH, WELL, MAYBE... BUT I THOUGHT CHANNEL ONE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE ABOUT NEWS, NOT ADVERTISING.



CMON, BILL. HOW MUCH NEWS CAN YOU REALLY EXPECT FROM TV. SOUND BITES? YOU KIDS HAVE BEEN WATCHING THE TUE YOUR WHOLE LIFE, YET MOST OF YOU THINK "CHERNOB" IS CHER'S FULL NAME. BESIDES, TV'S NOT MADE FOR DEPTH AND COMPLEXITY. WE NEED FAMILIAR FORMULAS, SIMP STORIES, Happy Endings. THAT'S WHY YOUR TEACHERS HAVE SUCH A HARD TIME COMPETING WITH TV.

WELL, I THOUGHT WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE THERE TO LEARN, THAT'S ALL. AND DON'T GOTELLING THE OTHER KIDS I SAID THAT. I'VE GOT AN IMAGE, YOU KNOW.



BUT YOU ARE LEARNING, BILL.

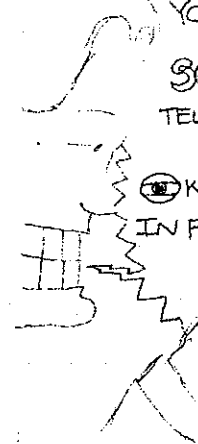
CHANNEL ONE IS TEACHING YOU HOW TO BE THE ULTIMATE CONSUMER, TO FEEL RATHER THAN THINK, AND YOU'RE AT JUST THE RIGHT AGE FOR THAT.

OUR RESEARCH SAYS YOU GUYS ARE REALLY INTO FINDING YOUR Identity.

SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME ABOUT YOUR IMAGE.

KNOW ALL ABOUT IT.

IN FACT, I HELPED CREATE IT!



YOU?!



SURE, WE'VE SPENT BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OVER THE YEARS TO GET INSIDE THE HEADS AND HEARTS OF KIDS. I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU EAT, WHAT YOU THINK, AND -MOST IMPORTANTLY- WHAT YOU FEEL

EVERY THING!

