

Week 5

August 23 to August 29, 2021

Critical Thinking and Modern Myths – How TV Programs Slant Evidence to Sell a Product



Success Criteria

Students will gain an understanding of the business model that TV shows operate on and the need to sensationalize their programs to sell a product. This week we will examine the famous Don Decker 'Rain Man' case. It has been the subject of several TV programs including *Unsolved Mysteries*. These programs suggest that Mr Decker has supernatural powers. While many people have considered this event to be one of the best cases of the paranormal ever documented, when I investigated this case with American detective Joe Nickell, we found that the two TV programs had left out key information and twisted facts to make it appear that something supernatural was going on, when there was no credible evidence to support their claims.

Lesson 1: Given that we have covered a lot of material on myths and legends over the first 4 weeks of term 3, I want all students to use lesson one to catch up on any homework that they may have missed.

We will also be meeting up in class to see how we are all doing and to answer any questions students may have.

Week 5 Lessons 2 & 3:

Paranormal Witness – Season 1 Episode 6 – The Don Decker Case (How TV Shows often create their own Myths to Sell a Product)

I planned to show this in class, but we are now in lockdown. I originally wanted you to watch the Don Decker episode that aired on the well-known American TV series, ‘Paranormal Witness.’ However, I have decided just to show the segment from the TV series *Unsolved Mysteries*. Both shows leave viewers with the impression that the claims about Don Decker are real, WHEN THEY WERE NOT. This lesson is an exercise in critical thinking.

Students can answer the questions by just doing the reading, you DO NOT have to watch the Unsolved Mysteries segment, but you will get more out of it if you watch the ‘Unsolved Mysteries’ segment which is perfectly acceptable for your age. Remember, what is being claimed in the show DID NOT HAPPEN. We are looking at how some TV shows twist the truth or leave out certain information, to promote a product, get more viewers and make money.

I have removed the ‘Paranormal Witness’ video because some students might find it scary. Yes, I have showed it in my DEEP classes without any problems – but to avoid any confusion, we are just watching the one clip. Again – what is shown in the clip is not true – the purpose of the lesson is to show how TV shows can twist the truth. So I am going to err on the side of caution. Below is the ‘Unsolved Mysteries’ segment I want you to watch.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgF79n6otjc&t=1314s> (*Unsolved Mysteries*)

Task 2: After watching the video, read the article, ‘The Devil and Don Decker’ by myself and Joe Nickell. While the reading level is fairly high (about the level of the *New Zealand Herald*), I have helped students by giving you the page numbers where the answers can be found.

- 1. Why has this case often as being very credible? Hint: what were the jobs of some of the people who were witnesses?**
- 2. In the Section ‘In the Eye of the Beholder,’ the authors raise an odd aspect of the case: despite ‘paranormal happenings’ supposedly taking place over a series of days, what had everyone failed to do? (pp. 15-16)**
- 3. What is so odd about officer Baujan’s first visit, when he reported that a drop of water materialized out of thin air and flew horizontally through the room? (p. 16, 1st column)**
- 4. Why shouldn’t we put too much weight on the fact that police officers are trained observers? (p. 16, column 1)**
- 5. When Officer Baujan arrived at the house, what did he think was causing the strange events? (p. 16, column 1, bottom)**

6. Under the section 'Decker's Return to Jail,' how does the documentary maker twist the evidence given by Mr Keenhold? Of the claims that were made by him – which ones did he actually see for himself? (p. 16)

7. How did Mr Keenhold's story change from 1993 to 2011? (see p. 17)

8. What is an alternative explanation for the water that appeared on Mr Keenhold's chest? (p. 17)

9. Summarise the evidence for an ice dam on the roof (pp. 17-18)

10. On the bottom of page 18 and the top of page 19, how did certain TV shows exaggerate what happened?

How TV has exaggerated what happened

What happened

Decker was shown to be levitating off the ground

How TV distorted it

No one witnessed him levitate; he could have easily thrown himself against the wall when no one was looking.