Use of Media

Part of allowing students to find their voices means speaking in *their* language. Namely, I try to include current pop culture examples in my lectures. I find that students are more likely to offer their thoughts if I can tie the class material to something a bit more tangible. Students consistently comment on my use of media to explain difficult topics. For example, in my Research Methods class we discuss true experiments and how they are the gold standard because they allow us to make causal statements. We also discuss how sometimes studies can disguise themselves as true experiments and researchers can sometimes make erroneous causal statements. While this seems straightforward, students have a difficult time remembering that just because something *looks* like an experiment it does not mean it *is* an experiment. For this example I show students a clip from the ABC show *What Would you Do?* in which producers have set up a bicycle theft at a park with actors to see how bystanders react. A white male, a black male, and a white female are shown stealing a bicycle with a saw in broad daylight at different times during the day. The question is: how many times will bystanders call the police or confront the "thieves". The set up of the show mimics a pseudo-experiment. In this scenario there are three conditions (white male, black male, and white female) and there is an outcome variable (number of times police are called). To no one's surprise, the police get significantly more calls when the thief is a black male than when he is a white male and bystanders react much more aggressively to the black male than the white male. The female condition is fascinating…a bystander actually offers to HELP her steal the bicycle! On the surface, this looks like a true experiment but because of the lack of experimental control and random assignment, it is not. However, students are better able to articulate the major concepts of true experiments once they have seen the video. Also, because the video is memorable I am able to refer back to it several times throughout the semester. Finally, it allows us to have a conversation about stereotypes we hold about race and gender.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0kV_b3IK9M

While videos might be costly in terms of class time, using small clips or other types of media can also be useful. Again, for my Research Methods class I use "Brangelina" (the couple Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie) to describe correlations. I explain that correlations are like real relationships whereby the closer to 1 that relationship is the more likely you are to see Brad at a party if Angelina is there and vice versa. The closer the relationship is to 0 the less likely you are to see Brad at a party if Angelina is there and vice versa. It is also an easy way to explain other concepts related to correlations, like *the third variable problem*. The third variable problem is when two variables appear to be related to one another but there is another variable (the third variable) that is the real source of the link between the first two variables. In this case it might be that Brad and Angelina are always together because they are very close (e.g., in love), or it might be that they go to the same parties because they are both actors (third variable). Again, the important thing is to use an example that will resonate with the students and make the information easier to talk about (and memorable!) in the context of more difficult class concepts. Using these types of examples at the beginning of lecture is particularly useful because it provides students with a concrete example to reference for the rest of the class period.