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WHAT PRICE BEAUTY?

Grades: 8 and up

Time: A few days to several weeks

Materials: Resource sheet; large sheets of paper to stick on walls; markers; tape; black/white board and chalk/markers; ads; personal care products; suggested resources

Relevant Subjects: Chemistry, Social Studies, Science, Economics, Marketing, and Language Arts

This activity encourages students to examine the potential impacts of the ingredients in personal care products on humans, animals and the environment. You could also tie this activity into an exploration of the impact of product marketing and branding.

Preparation:

1. Ask students to bring their favorite personal care product(s) to class and an ad promoting that product. (It could be a print ad or a printout from an online ad.)
2. Prepare an initial list of useful, credible resources for helping students find information about ingredients in their products, such as:

Coalition for Consumer Information on Cosmetics:

<http://www.leapingbunny.org/indexcus.php>

The Good Guide: <http://www.goodguide.com/>

Household Products Database from the U.S. Department of Health &

Human Services: <http://hpd.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/household/list?tbl=TblChemicals&alpha=A>

Skin Deep Cosmetic Safety Database from the Environmental Working

Group: <http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/index.php>

Toxnet: The U.S. National Library of Medicine Toxicology Data Network:
<http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/index.html>

1. Invite students to share the product and ad they brought to class, why the product is their favorite and what made them initially choose to purchase that product.
2. Let students know that they're going to research the ingredients of their product and the ingredient's impacts on them and others. (If they brought more than one product, have them choose one product to research.) Have students gather with others who have chosen the same type of product (hair care, toothpaste, soap, lotion, etc.). Some students may be the only one who chose a particular product, which is fine. On large sheets of paper, have the groups/individuals write their type of product at the top (e.g., toothpastes), then list the brand names of the products underneath, then list all the ingredients for their product below that.
3. On another regular sheet of paper, have students make note of any special claims made about the product (or its ingredients), either on the product packaging or in the product ad.
4. Post the large sheets (with product type, brand & ingredients) on the walls around the room, and place the claim(s) next to them.
5. Have students choose an ingredient from their product and conduct research about that ingredient to discover:
 - What are the origins and components of that ingredient?
 - What is its impact (both positive and negative) on people, animals and the planet?

Note: Depending on how much time you want to spend on this lesson, you may want to have students choose one ingredient, a few sample ingredients, or research all the ingredients that make up their favorite product. You may also want to have students do the research in small groups, rather than individually. You may also want to verify that groups/individuals are researching different ingredients, as some of the same ingredients will be found in different types of products.

Ask students to use a variety of sources and to cite their sources. Give them a few suggestions to start, such as those mentioned above.

6. Have students bring in the results of their research to share.

7. Post a chart on the wall with the following headings:

Ingredient researched	Product type & brand ingredient is from	Effects on People	Effects on Animals	Effects on Planet	Product does more good than harm? (yes/no)

8. Have students fill in the chart information, based on the research they conducted. Give students time to view others' research results. Ask volunteers to share their results.
9. Lead students in a discussion about what they learned and refer them back to the ads for the products that they brought. What conclusions can they draw about their product and its impact on people, animals and the planet? What conclusions can they draw about its marketing?
10. If time allows, have students find healthier alternatives (if possible) to the product they originally chose and bring in the product (or a photo of it). Otherwise, provide students with information on alternative personal care products, both those produced for and sold in stores, and homemade products. Be sure to emphasize that, just because a product uses words like "organic" and/or "natural" doesn't mean it doesn't contain harmful chemicals.

Extensions:

1. Using recipes available, have students make their own personal care products and compare the impact of those ingredients to those in their original products.
2. Have students analyze and compare the information on ingredients from an industry source such as the Personal Care Products Council (<http://www.cosmeticsinfo.org/index.php>) with the information from a non-profit source such as the Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep Cosmetic Safety Database (<http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/index.php>).
3. Have students research not just the impact of the ingredients in their personal care products, but the impact of the production, transportation, consumption and disposal of the product's packaging.

4. Have students research the practices of the corporation that makes their products, using resources such as Responsible Shopper: <http://www.greenamericatoday.org/programs/responsibleshopper/>. Is the corporation known for using socially responsible practices, or is it known for certain types of harmful or destructive policies and practices?

Activity by Katherine Croom, Susanna Barkataki, Gail Morales and Deb Teachout (IHE Students)