



INSTITUTE FOR
HUMANE EDUCATION

ANALYZING ADVERTISING

Institute for Humane Education

PURPOSE

Students learn to be ad-savvy by exploring the pervasiveness of ads in their lives and by analyzing what ads are trying to sell...and trying to hide.

GRADES

5 and up

TIME

45-60 minutes

MATERIALS

- poster board with advertising slogans written on one side and enlarged first letters or logos from company names on the other, or the same using PowerPoint or similar;
- a variety of print ads, especially those aimed at your students' age group; alternatively you can use recorded samples of TV commercials or ads from the web

SUBJECT AREAS

Art, Language Arts, and Social Studies/History

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Common Core for grades 5-8: <http://bit.ly/13Uq4lc>

Common Core for grades 9-12: <http://bit.ly/18WELCp>

PREPARATION

1. Gather a variety of age-appropriate ads from print, TV, or the web -- enough that small groups of students can each have a small stack.
2. On poster board (or via PowerPoint or similar), write several familiar advertising slogans on one side/slide, with an important word missing (such as "Got ____?" (milk) or "Taste the ____." (rainbow). On the other side (or another slide), tape enlarged letters from products, such as the "M" from McDonald's, the "G" from the Gap, and the "C" from Crest, as well as company logos.



PROCEDURE

1. To illustrate the pervasiveness of advertising in your students' lives, "test" their advertising knowledge. Hold up the poster on which you've written the familiar advertising slogans. Ask your students to supply the missing word for each slogan.
2. Show your students the other side of the poster and have them shout out the product/company names just from seeing a single letter or logo.
3. Ask students to consider which ads have influenced them to want specific products and lead them in a brief discussion. Invite them to be very honest with themselves as they reflect upon advertising's impact on their desires. (They may consider radio, TV, web, or print advertising.)
4. Spread advertisements from popular and teen magazines over the floor of the classroom. Demonstrate how to analyze the messages embedded in them, using the following questions:

RELATED RESOURCES

Websites

Campaign for a Commercial-free Childhood
<http://bit.ly/SOHO9I>

Commercial Alert
<http://bit.ly/Q2LGPH>

Media Education Foundation
<http://mediaed.org/>

Media Literacy Project
<http://medialiteracyproject.org/>

Media Smarts
<http://bit.ly/QUzDrL>

Sociological Images
<http://bit.ly/RAocmL>

Films

The Merchants of Cool
<http://to.pbs.org/SOIqMp>

Books

Marketing Madness
 by Michael Jacobson & Laurie Ann Mazur (1995)

Consuming Kids
 by Susan Linn (2004)

Born to Buy
 by Juliet Schor (2004)

- a) What product or service is being advertised?
 - b) What deep need or desire is the ad promising to fulfill? (e.g., love, happiness, wealth, beauty, friendship, joy?)
 - c) Who is the intended audience? What might their response to the ad be?
 - d) Who is excluded by the ad? (i.e., what classes, races, body types, values, etc.)?
 - e) What suffering, exploitation, or destruction is hidden from view? (i.e., what suffering to people or animals does the production of the product or the generation of the service lead to and/or what destruction to the environment does the product or service cause?)
 - f) What product/service might do more good & less harm?
5. Organize groups of four or five students and distribute a small stack of ads to each group. Ask each group to analyze several ads, using the questions above.
 6. Have each group report on one of the ads to the class.
 7. Facilitate a discussion about how students perceive advertising in a different light now that they've done the exercise, and how their critical thinking skills might enable them to resist advertising messages.

ALTERNATIVES

8. This activity can also be conducted using recordings of television commercials. For elementary-age children, record the commercials during children's programming (e.g., Saturday morning cartoons). For teens, record the commercials during shows that appeal to their age group. Show the commercials during class and analyze them in the same ways as print ads. In addition, have students note the speed at which the images in the commercials change, and discuss the effects of this technique with them.
9. Have students bring in their favorite ads from home and analyze these instead. Refer to their own preferences in discussions of the ways that

advertising targets specific genders, races, age groups, and classes of people.

10. This activity can also be conducted using ads on the web. Use commercial websites of interest to the age group.