



INSTITUTE FOR
HUMANE EDUCATION

IN YOUR FACE: RECLAIMING BILLBOARDS

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PURPOSE

Billboards are omnipresent in most communities and on many roadways. These in-our-face ads can have a powerful influence on us. Students explore issues surrounding billboards and the values billboard ads promote and design new billboards that help reclaim their visual space and restore value in their communities and culture.

GRADES

9 and up

TIME

Varies - at least 2 class periods

MATERIALS

- videos and excerpts of films related to advertising and marketing
- information, excerpts and examples related to billboard advertising, including from books like *Consuming Kids* and *Marketing Madness*
- photos of billboards advertising alcohol, tobacco, food, clothing, etc.
- white board and markers; paper and writing utensils; art and collage supplies (use recycled materials as available)

SUBJECT AREAS

Art, Language Arts, Media Literacy, Psychology and Social Studies/History

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Forthcoming

PERTINENT INFORMATION

You may wish to lead into this activity by showing videos or excerpts of videos related to advertising and marketing (especially targeted to youth) or by using the experience of the learners to guide the process.

It would be particularly powerful to use photos of billboards from the area surrounding the school and students' neighborhoods. If time and circumstances allow, you could loan kids cameras and go as a group to gather these images.



PROCEDURE

1. Talk briefly about issues surrounding the nature of billboard advertising: location issues, cost, visibility, prevalence, regulatory laws, municipal efforts to ban billboard advertising, municipal efforts to promote billboard advertising, leasing public space, inequitable exposure, etc. Also share facts, statistics and other information about the influence of billboards. You may wish to ask the group for their thoughts and experiences with billboard advertising, its efficacy, appeal, etc.
2. Share examples of billboard ads and record a summary of the groups' responses to these questions in a big column on the whiteboard:
 - What is the message in this billboard promoting?
 - What is the benefit of this product for humans, the environment, and nonhuman animals?
 - Beyond the cost of the advertised product, what external costs exist to humans, nonhuman animals, or the environment?
 - How does this billboard message make you feel?

RELATED RESOURCES

Films

Affluenza

<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza>

Behind the Screens

<http://bit.ly/He87DM>

Captive Audience

<http://bit.ly/1isiYFR>

Consuming Kids

<http://bit.ly/16IoWCF>

The Cost of Cool

<http://bit.ly/16JJ7e5>

Killing Us Softly 4

<http://bit.ly/1dKqBtN>

3. Ask each participant to recall five significant influences in their lives: e.g., important people, encounters with another species or nature, an experience, a message, something someone once said. Have participants record these five examples and, if they're comfortable, share them with the group.
4. Have students write down the values that these influences represent, e.g., family, friendships, religion/spirituality, unconditional love, encouragement, support, inspiration, trust, kindness, generosity. Have students share these values and write them down in a second column, next to the first from item #2 (You may want to place marks next to repeating values to show it as a shared value.). After everyone has had an opportunity to share, there should be an accumulated list of values important to the students.
5. Return to the first part of the exercise. Show each billboard example and ask participants to share with the group which of the values from the second list are present in the message on the billboard. Record their responses in a third column. Most likely, this third list will end up being rather sparse. Discuss the results and conclusions with the class.

Alternative: Have participants list the values that are reflected by the billboard examples and have them compare that values list with the list from column two.

6. Have students imagine that they are now creative directors at an advertising agency and their clients are their former selves: enlightened young people. Now in an effort to reclaim their visual space and restore value in their communities and culture, these young people are seeking the expertise of the advertising industry to create billboard messages that reflect their rediscovered values and care for people, animals, and the earth. Have each participant design a billboard, complete with relevant visual images and words, that delivers a message that is aligned with the collective values of the group.

Alternative: Participants may prefer to create a billboard design in small groups.

7. Have volunteer participants share their designs with the group. You may choose to display the designs in a larger venue, such as throughout the school or by creating a traveling exhibit for the community.

EXTENSIONS

1. Procure a donation of outdoor space in your neighborhood or elsewhere in the larger community to display either one image (chosen by majority) from the collection or to create a message as a group that represents the collective group values. Seeking sign printing donations may provide an opportunity for students to further promote their project.
2. Have the billboard message and design converted to a banner, which could be displayed on school grounds or somewhere in the community.
3. Have participants begin a letter writing campaign to city officials advocating for more responsible billboard use and suggesting their messages as alternatives to signage that encourages consumption and other less desirable values.