

ADVERTISING'S HIDDEN MESSAGES





Advertising's Hidden Messages

Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze advertising techniques used to sell products.
- Develop an advertising campaign using advertising techniques.

Time Needed

Two 50-minute class periods

Getting Ready

Read:

- Teacher Background Information

Make:

- *Advertising Techniques* transparency

Duplicate:

- *Advertising Techniques*
- *Advertising Campaign*
- Newspaper/magazine advertisements (See **Activity Steps**, #2)

Curriculum Links

- Business
- Consumer Education
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Language Arts

OVERVIEW OF LESSON—Advertising is one of the most powerful forces shaping our ideas, culture, and behavior today. To help students become smart shoppers, this lesson teaches students to critically examine advertisements and identify the underlying messages they convey. Students are given the opportunity to express their creativity by developing their own advertising campaign.

Activity Steps

1. Briefly discuss advertising's influence on our lives. See **Teacher Background Information** for suggestions.
2. Discuss *Advertising Techniques* using the transparency and handout. Ask students to describe examples of advertisements they have seen that use the techniques. Cut advertisements out of newspapers/magazines that illustrate the following:

Status—Using the product will make you successful (e.g., most car advertisements).

Peer approval, being popular—Using the product will make you popular (e.g., beer or cigarette advertisements showing groups of people having a good time together).

Celebrity endorsement—Using the product will make you resemble the celebrity in the advertisement.

Physical attraction—Using the product will make you more attractive (e.g., many fitness center, perfume, and cigarette advertisements).

Testimonial—Ordinary people like the product; so you should, too (e.g., many cleaning product and toothpaste advertisements).

Have students identify the advertising techniques used in the sample advertisements you have clipped.

Note that advertisements usually show just one side of the story. Advertisements typically downplay the negative side of a product's cost, taste, bad health effects, etc. Ask students to identify the negative side of the advertisements you've presented.



3. During the second class period, divide students into small groups/advertising teams. Ask teams to pick a healthy food or a physical activity to promote through an advertising campaign. (For background information on healthy eating and physical activity, see Lessons 1 and 2.) Have students use one or more of the *Advertising Techniques*. Distribute *Advertising Campaign*. Encourage students to be creative.

Extensions

- **Optional Activity:** Invite a representative of a local advertising agency to class to discuss the techniques he/she has used to increase sales of a client's products.
- **Optional School Outreach Activity:** Assign students to work with school nutrition staff to develop new and creative ways to promote school lunches or healthy food choices like fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Optional School Outreach Activity:** Ask students to clip newspaper and magazine advertisements and create a display, bulletin board or a video that identifies the "hidden" messages. Ask students to write a report about what they learned from this activity.
- **Optional Homework:** Ask students to describe the types of billboards, signs or posters they see in their community. Ask students to report on the products being advertised. What techniques are used? Are they trying to get teens to buy the products? Do students believe they or other teens have been influenced by those advertisements?

Teacher Background Information

The average American absorbs hundreds of advertising messages each day that convey what's "in," what's "out," who's "beautiful," and what constitutes the "good life." Today, students are exposed to marketing and advertising practices at schools through school television and public announcement systems, in sponsored curriculum, and on school equipment and facilities, including vending machines. Advertising has become one of the single most pervasive influences on society and culture, yet people rarely think about its impact on their lives. Consider the following:

- According to the Institute of Medicine, food and beverage advertisers collectively spend \$10 billion to \$12 billion a year to reach children and youth.
- Many advertisements target youths because they have tremendous spending power. Children and teenagers influence more than \$150 billion a year in family spending with about \$7 billion coming from weekly allowances, according to *Marketing To and Through Kids* (McGraw-Hill Inc.).

Teens are especially susceptible to advertising's seductive appeal because they want to be accepted. Unfortunately, some—not all—advertisers deliberately mislead. The Center for Science in the Public Interest points to one example: A popular toaster-ready bar is advertised as "Delicious whole grain, no preservatives...[with a] real fruit filling." Yet the "whole grain" is more ordinary white flour than whole-grain oats, and the "real fruit" filling is mainly sugar. This supposedly nutritious, healthy food is not what the advertisement claims it is.

Students need to critically examine advertising messages to ensure they are not misled into purchasing something that cannot meet the said or unsaid claims of the advertisement.

Advertising Techniques

Status:

Using the product will make you successful.

Peer approval:

Using the product will make you popular.

Celebrity endorsement:

Using the product will make you resemble the celebrity in the advertisement.

Physical attraction:

Using the product will make you more attractive.

Testimonial:

Ordinary people like the product; so you should, too.



Advertising Campaign



- 1.** Name a healthy food or physical activity that you want to advertise.
- 2.** What are the positive features about the food or physical activity?
- 3.** What are the negative features about the food or physical activity?
- 4.** Who do you want to listen to your message (teens, adults, younger children, etc.)?
- 5.** What advertising techniques will you use? Remember: you want to promote the positive aspects and downplay the negative.
- 6.** On the back of this piece of paper, or on a poster, or through a skit or video, create your message. Use the *Advertising Techniques* outlined in class. Your advertisement can be a sample TV or radio commercial or magazine or newspaper advertisement. Be creative!