

# Advertising, consumerism, and the adolescent market

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The eighth grade language arts curriculum in the ISD 196 includes a required unit on advertising as well as television, film, radio, and newspaper. In fact, with the exception of two additional focus areas centered on public speaking – demonstration and persuasion – the entire year’s studies center on media literacy in eighth grade communication classes in all four of the district’s middle schools. These units have been analyzed and adapted to align with state language arts standards for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. In the past, district language arts staff invested a great deal of professional time and energy to ensure that this curriculum supported the learning requirements defined by the Profile of Learning, as well. I knew that the classroom activities, objectives, and goals for student learning would support state and district expectations for what students should know and be able to do to demonstrate their proficiency in literacy learning and development, and in teaching this unit, I found this to be true. However, what was not entirely apparent was an equally clear guide for making visible to students the explicit expectations for their understanding of the content explored through this unit – specifically the knowledge and understanding about advertising that students should be taking away with them at the conclusion of this unit of study.

In reading through the advertising materials, the questions that have surfaced repeatedly include: What are the essential understandings concerning advertising that I want students to take away with them as tools for continued and life-long learning?

- To be more aware of the prevalence of advertising throughout our lives and it’s potential influence of our decision-making in many areas of our daily experience.
- To have the tools to more critically think and talk about advertising as such targets teenagers as a market.
- To appreciate and understand the complex nature of advertising and marketing to teenagers.
- To understand advertising’s potential for shaping our culture(s) and how we respond to particular aspects of our lives.
- To understand the value of raising one’s level of awareness about advertising in our society and world. What aspects of this unit will be applicable to their life experiences and how can I make these areas the overarching themes for learning and revisit these elements throughout our classroom studies?
- Continually revisit the essential understandings and interface these themes into readings, class discussion, journal writing, projects, and other assignments and course expectations. How would I reconstruct this unit of study so that students could contribute to establishing the most important guiding questions for exploring advertising at the onset of this unit?
- Invite students to share their ideas and contribute to the direction of the course whenever possible. In what ways could I make clear connections to other subject areas in my same grade level and invite teachers in these other areas to collaborate with us as we explore Advertising?
- Find ways to connect this learning to other content areas and coordinate this with other House teachers whenever possible.

So, I came to understand the focus and purpose of my project for this course: I would redesign or reframe the advertising unit so that learning centered around the development, emphasis, and reinforcement of several key learning goals (essential understandings [about advertising]). The assessments (informal and formal) I planned to develop would provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their learning in these key learning areas and their ability to connect their understanding of advertising to their individual, family, and community experience on a daily basis (an emphasis on performance-based assessments). These would also incorporate different approaches to learning so students could interact and explore the subject matter in a variety of ways. Concurrently, once students have some basic information about advertising, I would invite them into conversation to identify and establish some particular areas of interest to examine during the course of our inquiry. These would become featured topics throughout the unit in addition to pre-established course goals and expectations.

Here is a day-by-day guide to the existing advertising unit

### **Day 1 – 7: Introduction to advertising.**

Students learn about the prevalence of advertising in their lives. Students examine and discuss articles and statistics. Pretest on student knowledge of basic statistics and facts about advertising and discussion of responses and questions. Advertising terminology – read through some basic terms and provides examples. Students receive handout, take notes, and ask questions. Students receive a handout on advertising appeals and a worksheet that examines different ways that are used to encourage people to purchase a product (see resources for listing of motive appeals). The worksheet is reviewed in class and student questions are answered. The worksheet is reviewed in class and student questions are answered.

Magazine Ad analysis Worksheet activity – see [tappedin.org](http://tappedin.org) document posting. Students page through a magazine of their choice. They note all ads in the magazine and what motive appeal(s) are being used to see the product or service. The goal of this is for students to understand that most magazines are predominantly advertising. This is meant to impact their thinking about the role that ads play in their lives. Advertising uses of color and emotional appeals. Students receive a worksheet that identifies the different purposes that specific colors serve in communicating emotions, status, and moods. We talk about the worksheet in class and discuss examples from the magazine they used for their ad analysis worksheet. This provides students with an understanding of the ways that color impacts how they may view or respond to an ad.

Students apply understanding of the elements of advertising to construct a Homework Hotline advertising poster – see [tappedin.org](http://tappedin.org) document posting. This activity will serve as practice in applying the techniques and concepts they've learned about advertising thus far. The Homework Hotline ad will also be a form of assessment to determine what students understand and where additional review may be necessary before transitioning into the more complex unit project that follows this learning activity. Students work with a partner to create an ad for the student Homework Hotline at school. These ads will be presented to the rest of the class. Students are assessed on their ability to apply information about how to use language, color, motive appeal(s), slogans, logos, icons, and establishing a company signature cut to promote this service. See [tappedin.org](http://tappedin.org) advertising vocabulary (documents) and emotional appeals (links) postings.

### **Days 8 - 20**

Students begin working on large advertising project. The goal is for students to demonstrate their understanding of advertising and an ability to use advertising techniques and strategies to create and market a new cereal to a specific group of people (i.e. young children, the elderly, etc.). Each group of five students must complete the following elements of an advertising promotional campaign:

- Conceptualize a company and product.
- Design and develop a company signature cut, logo, icon, and slogan.
- Create a cereal box that also serves as a promotional tool for the product.
- Create and perform a 30-second television commercial (prefer this on video but may be presented live if technology is not available). Students are required to write a script and create a storyboard for this part of the project.
- Create and perform a 30-second radio commercial. Students are required to write a script and record this advertisement on a cassette tape for their presentation.
- Create and display a poster or billboard ad for the cereal product.
- Create and display a magazine ad for the cereal product.

Students spend 2 weeks working in their groups to create and develop their cereal product and marketing campaign. Each group divides out the work for their unit so that each person is responsible for one kind of ad with 2 people assuming responsibility for the television commercial and all group members contributing to creating the cereal box for the formal “pitch” of their ad campaign. Students present their product and advertising campaign to the rest of the class. Rubrics for each component of the advertisement are used to assess student work and learning.

## **Advertising Unit Revision for CI 5472 – Teaching Film, Television, and Media Studies**

### ***Days 1 – 7***

Large group discussion to establish what students know about advertising along with their attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives. Rephrase the essential understanding questions and create a pre-assessment of their views and understanding of advertising and themselves as a target market for corporations. Students will do this again at the conclusion of the unit to assess any changes or development in their understanding of the topic following their month of study. Find out what they are curious about in regard to advertising. Generally, the subject of brands comes up and this is a good launch point for student learning as most students are confident they can identify brands and the relationship of brands to their sense of identity and lives. Use resources explore different views on ad making: creativity, complexity, marketing, as well as perspectives that are critical of the ad industry.

Read excerpts from several articles (see resources) and view portions of one or more videos that identify and illustrate the breadth and depth of teen exposure to and subsequent influence of advertising on our lives. This could be sections of the videos, Advertising and the end of the world; Merchants of Cool; or Sell and Spin (see resources listed at the end of this unit). Use some of the concepts and ideas we’ve viewed, read, and discussed to inform the construction of 4 – 5 questions for a parent/guardian interview process on advertising.

Students will team with 2 other students and brainstorm ideas for interview questions (writing these down). Then, as a class, we will come together and identify 10 questions for conducting an interview. Students may choose 4 – 5 of these questions for their interview with a parent/significant adult. Interview and tape responses of their parents or family member who is a main wage earner about advertising and their views/perspectives on the subject. Brands could be a main focus for this interview process. In class, create a Venn diagram as an organizational tool for considering the differences and similarities in your

parent and your own view of advertising and the marketing of brands to adolescents/general public. Students spend time in small group and whole class discussion about their Venn diagram and how they interpret this data in terms of their own and their family views on advertising. In what ways are teenagers' views about advertising similar and different from their parents?

Transition the discussion onto the subject of brands that are of particular interest to them and their peers.

Respond in writing to these questions:

What are several of your favorite brands? What do you know about the brand, the company, when you started buying that brand and why? What kinds of ads are used to expose the public to this brand?

Ad analysis revision: Have students look for ads about one or more of their favorite brands. In their day-to-day experience, where and in what ways are they exposed to this brand's advertising? Magazines, television, radio, film, Internet, etc.; (Do this over the course of several days and expect students to have a minimum of 4-5 examples). Choose an advertisement for the brand you're researching in the previous activity. Look at the ways the ad uses the following elements of advertising: Color Language Motive appeals Emotional appeal Where and when these ads are placed for viewing

Talk about Motive appeals, emotional appeals, use of color and determining the venue for delivering an ad to the target market or general public.

### ***Days 8 - 10***

Bring in Marc Grossfield, President of Johnson-Grossfield Marketing Firm in Minneapolis. He will talk about marketing and how his firm creates and develops a marketing campaign for a corporation (i.e. Subway). Following the presentation, students come up with 2-3 follow-up questions for Mr. Grossfield asking for his recommendations for marketing a product to teens. How would he go about gathering information to find out if there is a market for a particular product? What about to a particular target audience? Students form groups of 4 – 5. They use the information gathered in self-reflection about products and ads that appeal to them and the information from Mr. Grossfield's presentation to begin thinking about a new cereal that they could create and market to teenagers at their school. Students read, write and discuss the article, is the cereal bowl half full or half empty? From the Star Tribune, August 16, 1998 and the article, More fun than a box of cereal in June – also in the Star Tribune, December 28, 2000. These articles chronicle the advertising campaign for General Mills' cereal products and also examine promotional strategies for these items (see articles posted in documents in [tappedin.org](http://tappedin.org)).

### ***Days 11 - 13***

Students develop surveys that ask questions of teenagers about what they look for and like about breakfast foods and in particular, cereal products. This will be done in collaboration with other subject areas. For example:

Family and Consumer Science - students will examine consumerism in her class. Students will take each other's surveys anonymously in this class and then each group will receive back their surveys for analysis and interpretation.

Math - students will analyze and interpret the data they obtain in their surveys so that groups can draw conclusions about what product characteristics would be the best for marketing their product to teenagers.

Global studies - students explore the role that propaganda plays in shaping people's thoughts, views, and ideas. Students are asked to consider any connections or similarities between propaganda and advertising. What are the differences, too? (See Institute for propaganda analysis web site posted in [tappedin.org](http://tappedin.org) under links).

Students will use the data they've obtained, analyzed, and interpreted from their marketing analysis surveys and revise and/or strengthen their plan for marketing their cereal to teenagers. Days 14 – 24  
Large advertising project: The purpose of this learning experience is to provide students with an opportunity to apply their understanding of advertising to create a product and market it to teens at their school. They will use information obtained through readings, videos, advertising techniques and strategies, marketing practices, etc. to develop a cereal product that teenagers will want to eat for breakfast! Students use the data from their marketing surveys and spend 2 weeks working in their groups to create and develop their cereal product and marketing campaign. Each group is responsible for a 30-second television commercial and a 30-second radio ad. All group members contribute to writing the script, making a storyboard, and performing/filming the video. If video equipment is not available, groups perform their TV commercial live for the class as a part of their advertising presentation. The group must also choose to create either a billboard ad or a magazine/newspaper ad for their product, too. The group must also choose to create either a billboard ad or a magazine/newspaper ad for their product, too. All group members contribute to creating the cereal box for the formal "pitch" of their ad campaign. Student learning is assessed in several ways throughout the unit:

Teacher observation Peer assessment Self-assessment Presentation rubric for each of the components of the advertising campaign.

Following the completion of these advertising campaigns, we will generally discuss what they've learned about advertising as such relates to their lives on a daily basis. Students will have an opportunity to respond to the questions that serve as our unit "essential understandings" once again to see if their responses and perspectives have further developed or changed through their experience with the unit. This will also provide a way to bring closure to this unit of learning, however aspects of the advertising unit will re-surface again and again as we continue to explore media studies in the eighth grade communications classroom.

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