

Feed and Teenage Consumerism

BECCA DALRYMPLE / JUNE 23, 2003

Feed by M.T. Anderson – an overview of the lesson:

“Moon” (part 1 in book) - recognizing personal consumer habits and defining consumer norms within peer groups

“Eden” (part 2 in book) – a look at media

“Utopia” (part 3 in book) – credit cards and teens as targets

“Slumberland” (part 4 in book) – predicting the future – could “feeds” become a reality?

“Moon” writing prompts/discussion questions:

“We went to the moon to have fun, but the moon turned out to completely suck.”

How does this sentence set up the novel? What do you notice about the language Anderson uses? What is his purpose for doing so? How is it effective?

Choose a passage from part 1 that sticks out as important or interesting. What kind of person is Titus? Describe characteristics of him and his friends. What kind of a person is Violet? What is it like on the moon? Why is it a popular destination for young people? What do you know about the function of the “feeds?” – “going fugue” (p.7), “the feed suggested ‘supple’” (p.11), advertisements at the end of chapters, etc.

“When I looked around, I wanted so much, that all of the prices were coming into my brain, and it was bam bam bam, like fugue-joy” (p.21).

Activities for identifying teen consumer norms and habits:

Free-write: What do I spend my money on? Why do I spend it this way?

Free-write: Who/what influences how I spend my money?

Teen magazine activity: the link between consumerism and happiness: look through popular teen magazines and define teen consumer norms according to these magazines. How are these norms similar or different from your peer group’s? (students could produce posters/collages depicting teen consumerism portrayed in magazines)

Shopping bag activity: collect shopping bags from popular stores and critique them. Discuss shopping bags as a marketing strategy. What bags do you like? Do you like them for the name brand, for the design, or for what they represent? Compare plain brown bags to name brand bags? Why do different stores use different types of bags?

“We enter a time of calamity” (p.30)

Shopping Mall Field Trip/Activity

Take students to a shopping mall, such as Southdale or the Mall of America. Have students choose 3 of their favorite stores to shop. How do these stores market their products to teens? Why is it appealing for teens to shop there? Students could interview store employees about their teen patronage. Have students notice their senses when at the mall. How did you feel when you found out we were going on a field trip to the mall? How did you feel when you walked into the mall? How do you feel after one hour in the mall? After two hours or more? Be specific – is it stressful, rejuvenating, exciting, boring? Are you anxious, calm, etc.? What is it about the mall that makes you feel this way? Did you buy something while at the mall? Why? Did you feel like you had to?

“Eden” writing prompts/discussion questions

Fill out the “Know” and “Want to Know” sections of a KWL for corporate ownership of U.S. media. Fill out the “Learned” section after this lesson. “Missing the Feed” (p.39). What does this chapter say about corporations? Choose a passage or two from “Eden” and describe why it stands out to you as significant. What are the main themes of “Eden?” How are they relevant today? Why is it titled “Eden?” What do we learn about Titus and Violet? What questions are raised in “Eden?”

Media Conglomeration: investigating corporate ownership What corporations own a majority of the media in the U.S.? Read the articles “What Liberal Media?” (by Eric Alterman, *The Nation*) and “Myth of the Liberal Media” (by Eric Alterman, *The Nation* and published in *Utne* Jul/Aug 2003).

Research the corporate ownership of the media and present your findings to the class. Examples could include, but are not limited to ClearChannel, Fox News, Disney/ABC, AOL/Time Warner, Rupert Murdoch, etc. Hand out alternative publications such as *Utne* and *Mother Jones* magazines. Critique these publications as a class. Have students bring in other types of “alternative” media sources to critique.

“Utopia” writing prompts/discussion questions

How does having the “feed” affect Titus’ personality and intelligence? What passages demonstrate this? Respond to the following passage:

“They’re also waiting to make you want things. Everything we’ve grown up with...it’s all streamlining our personalities so we’re easier to sell to...they do these demographic studies that divide everyone up into a few personality types, and then you get ads based on what you’re supposedly like. They try to figure out who you are, and to make you conform to one of their types for easy marketing” (p.80-81).

Relate this to marketing tactics in today’s society. What is your “type?” What ads would you get if you had a “feed?” How often would you “chat” if you had the “feed?” How would “chatting” affect modern-day communication?

“This is my project.”

Explain Violet’s “project” (p.81+) What does her willingness to do this say about her personality? Do you know anyone like her? How are they like her? What does Titus’ response to her “project” say about him?

“Now that School™ is run by the corporations, it’s pretty brag, because it teaches us how the world can be used, like mainly how to use our feeds” (p.90).

In what ways does school and/or society teach us how to use the world? Why is consumer culture so strong? Why is it beneficial for companies to teach people how to consume? How is it dangerous? Respond to Titus’ reaction to his parents buying him an upcar (p.96-97).

Credit Card Marketing “Flunking Credit 101” <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/business/DailyNews/collegecards000215.html> Visit this website and read the article. Discuss the article, especially the mentioning of Mitzi Pool, a college freshman who, in 1997, committed suicide because she was “emotionally distraught after losing the part-time job she was dependent upon to pay off her three maxed-out credit cards.” Notice that next to this article is an ad for Mastercard. College freshmen are targeted on campus for credit cards. Recruiters offer free gifts to lure new applicants. How can you be a responsible credit card user? Is it possible? Visit <http://www.truthaboutcredit.com/roadmap.html>

“Slumberland” writing prompts/discussion questions

Who/what is responsible for Violet’s death? Could it have been prevented? How? Respond to Titus’ way of dealing with Violet’s death. If you had to rewrite Part 4, what would you change? In what ways is the title, “Slumberland,” significant? Choose a passage that is especially important to this section of the book. Why did you choose it? Why can’t Violet ever live without the “Feed?” Are there “feeds” in our future?

Culminating Activities: M.T. Anderson dedicates his book “to all those who resist the feed.” What does he mean? Imagine that the world is really like it is in the novel. What would be positive about it and what would be negative? Break up the class into two groups for a debate – one side argues pro- “feed” and the other side argues anti- “feed.” Take a trip back to the mall (individually or as a class field trip) and notice how your perspective has changed after reading *Feed* and learning about consumer culture.

“Everything must go.”

Culminating Project Ideas:

Write a paper in which you compare *Feed* with the book *1984*.

Write an original creative paper in which you portray a possible futuristic society that could be similar or different to the society in *Feed*.

Take a survey of your peers’ consumer habits and create a “handbook” for intelligent, responsible teenage consumerism.

Write a book review of *Feed* focusing on its effectiveness in creating awareness of consumerism.

Take Action! Choose a topic that is especially important to you (such as ClearChannel’s control of media) and investigate ways that you can make a difference and have a voice. Present your idea to the class and take action together!