

# Don't Buy It

## GET MEDIA SMART!

## Teacher's Guide

Children spend the majority of their days consuming mass media. On average, children spend four-and-a-half hours a day using television, video games, and computers.<sup>1</sup> Yet children are not provided with the tools needed to evaluate and analyze the media messages they see.

Teachers have the ability to engage students in media literacy — the ability “to access, evaluate, analyze and produce both electronic and print media”<sup>2</sup> — by dissecting pop culture and advertisements. Media literacy education can help students build critical thinking and analytic skills, become more discriminating in the use of mass media, distinguish between reality and fantasy, and consider whether media values are their values.

The following activities are intended for children ages 9–11, and are designed to touch on the six levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In addition, each lesson is aligned with the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) Standards.<sup>3</sup> The introductory lesson, “What Makes an Advertisement... An Advertisement?”, introduces students to the media literacy concepts covered in more detail in the other lessons.

### Lesson Index

- What Makes an Advertisement... An Advertisement?
- Art: Design Your Own Cereal Box
- Health: “Part of this Complete Breakfast...”
- Math: Graphing Data — Nutritional Comparisons
- Math: Using Statistics to Sell Cat Food
- Media Awareness
  - Food Makeover
  - Challenging TV Violence
  - What Do You Consume?

### Viewing Tip

Television is a compelling medium. When showing program or commercial clips to students, keep the segments very short — one or two minutes — so students stay with the task at hand. Tell students that they will be seeing only short clips, and play with the media to keep attention from wandering. To concentrate on images, turn off the sound. To concentrate on sound, put a towel over the screen. Use the “pause” button on the remote and the “closed-captioning” function.

If students protest that they aren’t getting to see “everything,” remind them that the people who create TV have designed programs so that viewers feel compelled to watch everything. Who’s in control? The students or the people who are making the programs?

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### Resources

The National Institute on Media and the Family<sup>4</sup> is a national resource for teachers, parents, community leaders and other caring adults who are interested in the influence of electronic media on early childhood education, child development, academic performance, culture and violence.

For streaming video of advertising for Phillip Morris/Nabisco products (Oreo, Chips Ahoy, Snackwell, Cheese-Nips, Triscuit, etc.), see <http://www.nabiscoworld.com/> This Web site is a lesson in media education all by itself. It is very kid-friendly with lots of zippy graphics and animation.

KidScore<sup>5</sup> a content-based rating system that evaluates video and computer games, movies, and television from a family-friendly perspective.

### What Makes an Advertisement... An Advertisement?

#### Overview and Objectives

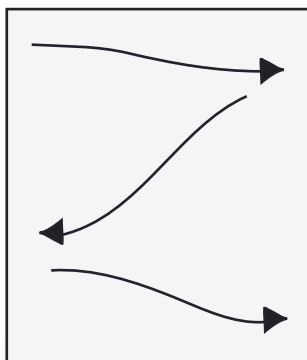
This lesson introduces students to the elements of advertising. How do you distinguish between a print ad and a photograph accompanying a magazine article? Is the logo on your clothing an advertisement? How do advertisers make sure that you glance at their ad? How is an ad created? Objectives: students will analyze the format and structure of advertisements and will be able to differentiate between information and selling.

#### Materials

- ☐ • magazine and newspaper ads
- ☐ ☐ • magazine and newspaper articles
- ☐ ☐ ☐ • art supplies (markers, glue, paper)

#### Procedure

**The “Z” Form:** select any of the ads to demonstrate how eyes track over an ad. If you learned to read left-to-right (English, Spanish, French, etc.), your eyes will scan over the page from left-to-right in a “Z” form.



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Marketing firms use this information to place ad elements where they will catch your eyes. There will be an element to lead your eyes in, something catchy in the middle, and the logo or message will frequently appear in the lower-middle area to the right.

**Light Works:** Human eyes tend to look towards a lighter color. Where are the lighter colors? Or is light color used to draw the eye to the product? Turn the ad upside down. Where do your eyes go to?

The same elements are used to place elements in newspaper or magazine stories and other non-ad print applications. Right-side placement is considered superior and right-page advertising frequently costs more than left-page advertising. In an article, the more compelling photos tend to appear on the right pages. Pass out ads and/or articles and ask students to find how the “Z” form is utilized. Note: the “Z” form appears over two-page spreads for many articles.

**Ad or Article?:** Pass out a variety of print materials to students. Include advertisements in which the words have been covered, as well as photographs from magazine articles. Discuss the images using the following questions as guidelines:

- ☐ • Is this image an ad (i.e., selling something) or a photograph?
- ☐ • Are logos on clothing advertising? Why or why not?
- ☐ • What appeals or does not appeal to you in these images?
- ☐ • What are the differences between ads and non-ads?
- ☐ • What is information and what is selling? Is it hard to tell the difference?

**Create an ad.** Instead of an ad encouraging the purchase of products, ask students to create an ad — or an entire ad campaign — that encourages kids to participate in sports, volunteer in the community or go a day wearing clothes that are free of logos.

### Alignments

#### • McREL Media Standards

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media. Level 2: (Grades 3–5) —

BENCHMARK: understands that media messages and products are composed of a series of separate elements (e.g., shots in movies, sections of a newspaper). BENCHMARK VOCABULARY: media message, product, separate elements, camera shot, movie, newspaper section.

#### • McREL Writing Standards

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process. Level 2 (Grade 3–5) —

1. Prewriting: Uses a variety of prewriting strategies (i.e., makes outlines, uses published pieces as writing models, constructs ☐ ☐ ☐ critical standards, brainstorm, builds background knowledge) 2. Drafting and Revising: Uses a variety of strategies to draft and ☐ ☐ ☐ revise written work

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### Design Your Own Cereal Box

#### Overview and Objectives

The techniques used in selling children's cereal include some of the most obvious packaging and promotional plays used in marketing. Objective: students learn how and why marketing messages work.

#### Materials

For each group of two or three students:

- a large cereal box  
(or create a box — see the Extension Activities)
- white craft paper
- markers, pens, stickers and other art supplies
- old magazines and newspapers

#### Of Interest

Many cereal boxes are made from recycled materials. How can you tell? Check the inside of the box. If it's gray, the paper is probably recycled.<sup>6</sup> Is this information that could be used to sell cereal?

#### Procedure

Each group will design a cereal box using art supplies, collage techniques or any combination thereof.

Ask students to:

- Determine what age group their cereal will appeal to (and ☐ why it will appeal to that age group)
- Decide how they will "sell" their cereal to the target audience (free prizes?) ☐
- Determine a price for their cereal.
- Note the government requirement for posting a list of ingredients and their nutritional values ☐
- Create a list of ingredients with nutritional values for their cereal ☐

#### Extensions

- Create the cereal box using origami techniques.<sup>7</sup>
- Create an ad campaign for the cereals. Consider using print and/or video.
- Use the nutritional information to create a graph comparing the cereals' contents.
  - How could a marketing firm manipulate these figures? See the lessons in the Math section.
- Try the Packaging Tricks<sup>8</sup> lesson. How is packaging designed to attract kids?

#### Alignments

##### • McREL Art Standards

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques and processes related to the visual arts. Level 3 (Grades 5-8) — BENCHMARK: Understands what makes different art media, techniques and processes effective (or ineffective) in communicating various ideas. BENCHMARK VOCABULARY: art medium, art technique, art process, communication, camera, easel, kiln, knife, lathe, press.

##### • McREL Media Standards

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media. Level 2 (Grades 3-5) — BENCHMARK: understands that media messages and products are composed of a series of separate elements (i.e., shots in movies, sections of a newspaper). BENCHMARK VOCABULARY: media message, product, separate elements, camera shot, movie, newspaper section.

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### • McREL Thinking and Reasoning Standards

Standard 3: Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences. Level 3 (Grade 6-8) — Compares consumer products on the basis of features, performance, durability and cost, and considers personal tradeoffs. BENCHMARK

VOCABULARY: consumer, product, feature, performance, durability, cost, tradeoff.

### Health

#### "Part of This Complete Breakfast", Nutrition and Truth-In-Advertising

##### Overview and Objectives

Students will discuss the methods used to sell them breakfast cereal and the accuracy of facts in food commercials.

What is the real nutritional content of snack foods? In the extension activity, students will have a chance to compare national nutritional standards of food products that are marketed to their age group.

Objectives: increase the awareness of the techniques used by advertisers to sell food products, and increase awareness of how students are affected by these techniques.

##### Materials

- Cereal ads from magazines and/or ad copy for Life Cereal<sup>9</sup>
- Copies of breakfast cereal commercials that target kids

##### Procedure

Ask students to examine the print ads carefully. View TV commercials two or three times, with and without sound, or with sound and no image (put a towel over the TV screen).

Ask students:

- Which words and images appeal to kids? To adults?
- Do you think the words and images used in the ad(s) are completely truthful? Why or why not?
- Is the truth being stretched? Why or why not?
- Why do you think you would like or dislike this cereal?
- Do you think it's nutritious?
- Have you seen other ads for this cereal? Where? And in the case of TV advertising, when?
- Why do you think you saw the ads where and when you saw them?
- Did the advertisements make you want to buy this cereal? ☐

After discussing the ads, ask students to do any or all of the following:

- Redesign the ad to appeal to adults.
- Redesign the ad to appeal to very young children.

Make copies of print ads for students to work with. If redesigning a TV commercial, ask students to show what would happen in "Scene 1", "Scene 2" and so forth.

##### Extensions

- Try the Junk Food Jungle<sup>10</sup> lesson: familiarize students with the nutritional value of foods advertised on television and in magazines.
- See the Math section for more extensions.

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### Alignments

- McREL Media Standards

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media. Level 2 (Grades 3–5) —

BENCHMARK: understands that media messages and products are composed of a series of separate elements (e.g., shots in movies, sections of a newspaper). BENCHMARK VOCABULARY: media message, product, separate elements, camera shot, movie, newspaper section.

- McREL Thinking and Reasoning Standards

Standard 3: Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences. Level 3 (Grade 6–8) — Compares consumer products on the basis of features, performance, durability and cost, and considers personal tradeoffs. BENCHMARK

VOCABULARY: consumer, product, feature, performance, durability, cost, tradeoff.

### Math

#### Graphing Data for Nutritional Comparisons

<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/Curriculum/computer.skills/lssnplns/database/grad6332.htm>

#### Using Statistics to Sell Cat Food

<http://science.ntu.ac.uk/rsscse/pose/level3/book2/sectiona.htm>

### Media Awareness

#### Food Makeover

##### Overview and Objectives

What do cotton swabs, tweezers, glue, glycerin, oil and a blowtorch have in common? They're all materials used by food stylists to make the food in print ads and TV commercials look appetizing. Objectives: to help students become aware of the work "behind the scenes" to make food products look appetizing.

##### Materials

- Ads for various food products that students are familiar with such as snack foods, pizza, burgers, fries, etc.
- A copy of the Paragon Light Photography studio Web site.
- Makings for easy, nutritious snack foods like carrots with dressing or peanut butter with crackers.
- A camera — Polaroid, digital, disposable and/or a video camera, if available.

##### Procedure

Review the comments on the Paragon Light Photography Studio<sup>11</sup> web site. Examples:

- "It looks so good in the photograph, why doesn't it look like that when I make it?"
- "Oh, you know all that food is fake. They use wax and plastic to keep the lights from ruining the real stuff."
- "I heard it takes a whole day to take one shot! They even glue every sesame seed in just the right place!"

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All the above statements are true; this and more happens during food photography. Glycerin or oil is used to put shine on fruits, vegetables, lobsters and crabs. Hamburgers are propped up with toothpicks and cardboard. Plastic ice cubes are used in place of the real thing. Meat is “cooked” with a blowtorch. Continue to read through the Web copy to see what the photographers have to say about the art of food photography.

Pass out the food advertisements. Ask students:

- Have you ever eaten the product?
- Does it look the same when you buy it as it looks in the ad?  
(For instance: Are the burgers as big? Are the fries as golden? Is there as much pepperoni on the pizza?)
- Ask students to share ideas on how they think a food stylist made the food look more appetizing.

Pass out the snack materials. Before students can eat the snacks, they must create an artful arrangement to be photographed and/or videotaped. What arrangement will make other kids want to eat their snack?

### Alignments

- McREL Media Standards

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media. Level 2 (Grades 3-5) —

BENCHMARK: understands that media messages and products are composed of a series of separate elements (i.e., shots in movies, sections of a newspaper). BENCHMARK VOCABULARY: media message, product, separate elements, camera shot, movie, newspaper section.

### Challenging TV Violence

#### Overview and Objectives

Are the TV shows and cartoons targeting students too violent? Students will view programs and determine if the images they see are violent. Objectives: students will develop an awareness of the amount and different types of violence and an understanding of their own reactions to various types of violence.

#### Materials

- tape clips of popular TV shows and cartoons targeting students

#### Procedure

What is Violence? Before viewing clips, ask students what “violence” means to them. Guns? Fights? Threats? Do the adults in their lives determine what they can and cannot watch on TV? What do they think is appropriate for them to watch?

View short clips of popular children’s TV shows and cartoons. Ask students to record the number of violent acts that occur in a segment. After discussing the scenes that the students found violent, ask what the students think their personal reactions would be if they saw a single violent act over and over.



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TV violence: reality vs. fantasy. What would happen if the violence portrayed in cartoons happened in the real world? Discuss this with the classroom, creating an understanding of violence and its effect (or lack of effect) on children.

### Alignments

- McREL Media Standards

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media. Level 2 (Grades 3–5) —

BENCHMARK: understands that media messages and products are composed of a series of separate elements (i.e., shots in movies, sections of a newspaper). BENCHMARK VOCABULARY: media message, product, separate elements, camera shot, movie, newspaper section.

- McREL Media Standards

Viewing Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media Level 2 (Grade 3–5) 7. Understands basic elements of advertising in visual media (i.e., sales approaches and techniques aimed at children, appealing elements used in memorable commercials, possible reasons for the choice of specific visual images). BENCHMARK VOCABULARY: advertising, visual media, sales approach, technique, children, appeal, element, commercial, visual image.

### What Do You Consume?

#### Overview and Objectives

How much time do students spend watching TV, surfing the Web or playing video games? What products do students consume? Is the advertising targeting students also influencing them? Objective: to help students become more aware of their own viewing, buying and spending influences.

#### Procedure

Ask students to evaluate their current TV and/or Internet viewing habits and video game time by keeping a journal or a log. Have they bought products (or asked others to buy products for them) advertised on the TV or Internet? (Send a letter home to explaining the activity.) Ask students to keep their “media log” for one week.

Compare and contrast media consumption and discuss in class. What do students feel are their greatest influences in making purchases? Ask students to make up their own “media rules” to cut down on television, video-game and Internet time.

### Alignments

- McREL Media Standards

Viewing Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media. Level 2 (Grade 3–5) 7. Understands basic elements of advertising in visual media (i.e., sales approaches and techniques aimed at children, appealing elements used in memorable commercials, possible reasons for the choice of specific visual images). BENCHMARK VOCABULARY: advertising, visual media, sales approach, technique, children, appeal, element, commercial, visual image.



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### Additional Resources

#### Media Literacy Clearinghouse

<http://www.med.sc.edu/medialit>

This Web site is designed for teachers of grades K-12 who want to learn more about media literacy and integrate it into classroom instruction.

#### Media Awareness Network

<http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/>

A Canadian Web site that promotes and supports media education. The educator's section includes teaching units, student handouts, reports and background materials.

#### Affluenza Teacher's Guide

<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza/treat/tguide/tguide.html>

For grades 5–12, this guide exposes students to the problem of overconsumption and its effects on society and the environment. It supports the one-hour PBS program of the same name. The program takes a hard, sometimes humorous look at the American passion for shopping.

### Endnotes

1. <http://www.mediaandthefamily.org/>
2. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
3. <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>
4. Ibid.
5. <http://www.mediaandthefamily.org./kidscore/index.shtml>
6. [http://www.goodhumans.com/Guidelines/Household/Check\\_paper\\_boxes\\_cereal\\_etc\\_to\\_ensure\\_they\\_are\\_recycled\\_](http://www.goodhumans.com/Guidelines/Household/Check_paper_boxes_cereal_etc_to_ensure_they_are_recycled_)
7. [http://www.wackykids.org/origami\\_box.htm](http://www.wackykids.org/origami_box.htm)
8. <http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/class/teamedia/food3.htm>
9. <http://www.lifecereal.com/about/indexproducts.html>
10. <http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/class/teamedia/food5.htm>
11. <http://www.paragonlight.com/tipstylist.html>