

## **FOOD ADVERTISING TRICKS**

### **Extension Activity**

These classroom activities correspond to the **Don't Buy It** game *Food Advertising Tricks* at <http://pbskids.org/dontbuyit/advertisingtricks/foodadtricks.html>.

What do cotton swabs, tweezers, glue, glycerin, oil and blowtorches have in common? They're all tools used by food stylists to make the food in print ads and TV commercials look appetizing.

### **Objectives**

- Recognize techniques used to make food look appealing on television and in advertising
- Understand that media messages and products are composed of a series of separate elements

### **Materials**

- Print ads for various food products that students are familiar with, such as snack foods, pizza, burgers, fries, etc.
- Paragon Light Photography studio Web site at <http://www.paragonlight.com/food.html>
- Ingredients 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 food advertisements and/or the images on the Paragon Light Photography Studio Web site. Have the students consider the following questions.

- How do the images of the food look so appealing?
- What is a food stylist? (A food stylist is someone who makes food look attractive in photographs. The aim is to make food look fresh and delicious)
- Why would a food company be interested in using a food stylist?

Different special effects are used to enhance the look of the food during 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. Tobacco smoke is used to make it look like steam is coming from food. Food may be sprayed with hairspray to keep it in place.

Companies employ food stylists to apply these techniques because they want the best possible looking photographs of their products. And, considering that food sits under hot lights for hours during a photo shoot, a food stylist is a necessity for making it all look appealing.

Put the following quote from a food stylist up on an overhead projector:

"I always say my job is to get the customer to buy the product just once - to make them feel like eating. If the food tastes revolting, then that's the manufacturer's problem. Anything is possible - if you have the time. If I was doing a commercial burger shoot, I would ask for around 400 buns and go through them all to find the perfect specimen."

– *The Guardian*, "Tricks of the trade," March 5, 2003

Continue to have students review 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.

Invite students to create their own snacks. Keeping in mind the techniques reviewed, have students create an artful arrangement to be photographed and/or videotaped. What arrangement will make other kids want to eat their snack? What other techniques could the students have applied to enhance the look of the food that they photograph?

### **Additional Resources and Activities**

For more background for the teacher, read the article "Tricks of the trade," *The Guardian*, March 5, 2003. <http://media.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4618270-103680,00.html>

Rent or purchase the video *Buy Me That*, a collection of short segments on the tricks and techniques used in food commercials. It includes a cola taste-test and a segment with a food stylist who "dresses" hamburgers for the camera. Clips from this can be shown to students as part of the lesson.

### **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.