

What's In the Shopping Bag?

Extension Activity

These classroom activities correspond to the **Don't Buy It** game, *What's in the Shopping Bag?* at

http://pbskids.org/dontbuyit/buyingsmart/shoppingbag_1.html.

Why do we buy the things we do? Are we influenced by the product's packaging or advertising? What is the impact of advertising on our lives and consumer habits?

Objectives

- Recognize techniques used by advertisers to sell toys and snack foods.
- Increase awareness of consumer habits and media influences.
- Differentiate between information and selling.

Materials

- Packaging for snack food and/or toy products
- Paper, scissors, glue, colored pens or crayons
- Record a corresponding television commercial for the product package (for additional activity)

Procedure

Have students examine the product packages. And ask them to analyze the messages on the package and techniques used to attract their attention.

Discuss the following:

- What item(s) are pictured on the package?
- What item(s) are actually in the package?
- What item(s) (if any) are pictured on the package that aren't in the box? Are there extra food items? Extra toys?
- How does the size of the package compare to the size of what is inside the package? What message does the size of the package send?
- Who is this item targeted to? What evidence from the package lets you know who the target audience is (e.g. color, font, cartoon characters or gender of people shown using the product)?
- What words and images are used to attract your attention?
- Do you think you would like or dislike this product? Why or why not?
- If it is a food product, do you think it's nutritious? Why or why not? How would you find out for sure whether it is or isn't nutritious?

After the class discussion, have students engage in one of the two following activities.

Truth in package design: If students have discovered a product with misleading information on it, have them redesign the package with complete and truthful information about the product. Compare and contrast the original package with the students' designs.

Target Audience: After determining the target audience for a particular product, have students redesign the product packaging aimed at a different target audience (i.e. kids versus adults). Have them compare and contrast the original box and new design. What elements did the students keep? What elements are different?

Additional Activity

Have students write letters to the product manufacturer explaining the problems they identified with the original package. Have them research the mailing address of the manufacturer online, and then mail their letters with the students' own "new and improved" package design.

Additional Activity

After students have had an opportunity to review and evaluate the package and its contents, have students watch the television commercial that advertises the product. While viewing the commercial, have students consider the following:

- Based on the commercial, what expectations of the product would a consumer have?
- What facts about the product were present in the commercial? What facts were omitted?
- Does the product appear bigger or of better quality on the package than it is in real life? (see Food Advertising Tricks, <http://pbskids.org/dontbuyit/advertisingtricks/foodadtricks.html>)?
- What "weasel words" are present in the commercial? Weasel words imply a promise by using words like "usually" and "chances are."
- Did they make the product seem better by portraying a certain lifestyle in association with the product?

Additional Resources

Consumer Reports for Kids Online: Five Toy-Ad Tricks to Watch Out For
<http://www.zillions.org/Features/Toyadtricks/toyad003.html>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration Food Labeling
<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/label.html>

Alignments

— McREL Media Standards

Viewing Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media. Level 2 (Grade 3–5)

BENCHMARK: Understands basic elements of advertising in visual media (e.g., sales approaches and techniques aimed at children, appealing elements used in memorable commercials, possible reasons for the choice of specific visual images).

-McREL Media Standards

Listening and Speaking Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes. Level 2 (Grade 3 – 5)

BENCHMARK: Listens to and understands persuasive messages (e.g., television commercials, commands and requests, pressure from peers).

— 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.