Analyzing the Ad

Overview: This lesson looks at what constitutes an advertisement in terms of the variety of genres and examines how advertisements are structured. It also examines the images and techniques that are employed to make products desirable and to make the advertisements appealing to the consumer. Students create their own print advertisement or role-play a commercial they have devised.

Aim: To invite students to explore the language of advertising and the strategies employed to sell products to consumers.

Objectives: At the end of this session, students will be able to do the following:

- Identify the different genres of advertising
- Deconstruct an advertisement in terms of image, sound, target audience, appeal of the product and so on
- Create a print advertisement or role-play a commercial
- Position themselves as consumers making purchasing decisions

Target group: Pre-GED and GED

Length: Two two-hour sessions

Materials and resources:

- Prerecorded video selections of commercials on a number of tapes
- VCR and monitor
- Sample print advertisements (the week before the class, invite students to bring these in)
- Related Web sites

Teacher’s notes:

The week before the class, ask students to assemble print advertisements from newspapers, journals and catalogs and to download advertisements from the Web. It would also be helpful for students to watch sample television commercials in preparation for the lesson.
These materials will be used to help introduce a key media literacy concept—that the media is carefully constructed with a clear commercial purpose—rather than to conduct an in-depth analysis of the production values of a specific commercial.

**Activities:**

1. Show students a short tape of five or six commercials, then as a group, brainstorm the general purpose of advertising.

   Ask students to think about the different genres of advertising. Construct a learning web on the board charting the different genres they identify.

   ![Learning Web Diagram]

   Are they or are they not advertisements?

   Invite students to discuss the components of an advertisement. They should draw on the commercials they just viewed and also on the environment around them. For example, are there advertisements in their classroom?

2. Distribute sample commercials. Ask students to work in groups to respond to at least six of the following questions. Then challenge each group to prepare a presentation about their commercial. The image should be displayed, projected or photocopied in color.

   - What is the product? What is being said about it? Is this the main message?
   - How is the advertisement structured? Is it through a logo, a symbol, a narrative or something else? Is there a slogan or catchphrase?
• Whom is it targeting? Identify the largest target audience. How does it appeal to the target audience?
• Think about the images. Which ones do you really like and what associations do they have?
• What is the ad telling you? Think about the different levels here. What is it saying explicitly and implicitly? Does it promise anything?
• Does it create a mood or an atmosphere? If so, what? And how?
• What kind of voice is used? What words are associated with the product? What is the music like? What does the music add?
• Is there exaggeration? Are there visual jokes? Are stereotypes used? If so, describe them.
• Would this advertisement be different in another country? Is it culturally specific? How?

3 After each presentation, invite students to position themselves as consumers of this product and to answer these questions.

  • What does the advertisement not tell you about the product?
  • Do you have enough information here to make an informed decision?
  • Where could you find out more?
  • Are you tempted to buy this product? Why or why not?

4 Have students break into small groups and ask each group to create a collage of images around a theme, for example, health, hair, fashion, sports, nutrition and so on.

Display the collages in the classroom, then discuss the images. Describe the typical male and female images depicted. Are there recurring male and female traits in the collages? Ask students to list these recurring physical traits in the images that illustrate the theme of their choice. Is there a perfect look? Are these images realistic? Do their friends and family members look like this? How do these images affect people?

Encourage students to take notes during the discussion and to write a summary paragraph reviewing the points raised.

Follow-up

Ask students to work in groups to design an advertisement for an imaginary product. They could also redesign an existing advertisement for a product.
As an alternative exercise, if students enjoy role-playing, invite the groups to act out a scenario to persuade consumers to buy a specific product. They could choose to sell their product without making any exaggerated claims and by basing their advertisement on their view of its qualities.

Invite the whole group to review the designs and acted-out scenes and to decide which product they might buy if they had the resources.