

Toy Ads: Lesson Plan

TV Toy Commercials: How They Influence Kids (revised)

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Target grade levels: 3rd-6th

Background

Toy advertising remains one of the most persuasive messages most young people are exposed to. The toy business is a multi-billion dollar industry and both parents and young people are the targets, especially around the holiday time of year. Teachers have the opportunity to record toy commercials from television, or capture them from video-generated sites (such as YouTube), to use with their students. The lesson plan below will provide teachers with the background needed to get started.

Standards

National

NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts

Standard 6

Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), **media techniques**, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

South Carolina

Guiding principle #8 from the 2008 ELA Standards encourages teachers to consider teaching with and about the media: "The skills of critical inquiry—the ability to question and analyze a message, whether it be textual, visual, auditory, or a combination of these—are a crucial element in literacy instruction. The production of visual media is also a crucial element enabling students to acquire and demonstrate an understanding of **advertising**, aesthetic techniques, audience, bias, propaganda, and intellectual purpose. Integrating into

the ELA curriculum the vocabulary and skills associated with media presentations helps students develop lifelong habits of critical thinking.”

One of most effective ways of approaching nonprint sources is by having students ask questions. It starts at the earliest of ages: “Kindergarten students generate *how* and *why* questions about topics of interest. They understand how to use print and nonprint sources of information. They classify information by constructing categories.” This is the start of critical thinking and critical viewing, both of which are part of what is now known as “media literacy.”

Excerpt from Nonprint Sources of Information: Support Document

Moving images, such as televised/streamed commercials, offer rich material for young people to study. They contain “techniques of persuasion/propaganda” which are also found in everyday life, not just advertising. Every day, we are exposed to literally thousands of messages, many of which are advertising and marketing. From toy ads to political candidate messages, to car and food ads: all are easily accessible via television and the web. These ads can be analyzed (read) and created (produced) by students. Like print advertisements, commercials offer teachers a chance to help young people better understand “media literacy” as well as the “techniques of persuasion/propaganda” and the “language of television ads.” If you have the equipment and know how, students can also be encouraged to create actual commercials. If you don’t have electronic equipment, students can still create their own scripts and storyboards.

Indicators Relating To Toy Commercials

Understanding & Using Informational Texts (nonprint)

3-2.1 Summarize evidence that supports the central idea of a given informational text.

3-2.2 Analyze informational texts to draw conclusions and make inferences.

3-2.3 Distinguish between facts and opinions in informational texts.

3-2.8 Analyze informational texts to identify cause and effect relationships.

Producing Written Information in A Variety of Forms

6-5.4 Create persuasive writings (for example, print advertisements and commercial scripts) that develop a central idea with supporting evidence and use language appropriate for the specific audience.

Lesson Plan Background

The teacher will introduce the common “techniques of persuasion”; use the toy advertising analysis worksheet as well as the “Buy Me That” video and critical thinking questions to help students understand the elements of production in commercials.

Handouts:

[Common toy ad strategies](#)

[Script of Typhoon 2 toy](#)

[Toy Ad Analysis Worksheet](#)

[5 Toy Ad Tricks To Watch For](#)

[Questions to ask about toys & ads](#)

Some questions you might pose with your students to get them started:

- how are commercials made?
- who makes them?
- where are they seen?
- what do the people who make toy commercials hope you (the audience) will do?
- do commercials always tell you everything you need to know; or do they leave something out?

Introduce your students to some of the tricks used in many toy ads. Download [Five Toy Ad Tricks To Watch Out For](#) as originally published in Consumer Reports’ Zillions magazine.

You may wish to provide students with copies of these pages. Spend some time reading and reviewing each of the tricks. Students may be anxious to share with you some of their own experiences which relate to each trick.

Print out the Toy Ad Analysis Worksheet and distribute it to each of the students.

After you've introduced them to the "Buy Me That" video and the techniques of persuasion, use the worksheet with other toy ads that you might record from television or the web.

Vocabulary Words

advertising

audio

commercial

deceptive

deconstruction

influence

script

techniques of persuasion

video

Buy Me That: Kids and Advertising

In 1990, HBO, in a collaboration with Consumer Reports Television, aired the first of three half-hour specials about children and advertising. The programs pulled back the curtain on many of the techniques and tricks used in TV commercials. Since the programs were clearly teaching "media literacy" the programs became popular with teachers and media educators alike. Alas, the videos are no longer available, although some libraries may still have them on the shelves. Now, here, for the first time, it is available. I have created some critical thinking questions and links to video clips so that you can teach "techniques of persuasion" and more.

Frank Baker, media educator

(Note: use of this video constitutes what the author understands to be "fair use" and "transformative use" since it

is being used in an educational/critical thinking/media literacy teaching environment as opposed to a program broadcast on TV for general audience consumption.)

Questions to consider before watching the “Buy Me That” segment:

1. What is the purpose of advertising on TV?
2. On which cable/satellite networks might you find toy commercials?
3. Who is the audience for toy ads?
4. What is the toy manufacturer hoping to accomplish by airing these spots?
5. What do you find appealing in most toy commercials?
6. Are boys/girls/both featured in most toy commercials?
7. What are the common “techniques of persuasion”?
8. Define the word deceptive. Do commercials always tell the truth?

From “Buy Me That Too: Kids’ Survival Guide to TV Advertising” (1992)

“...helps children weave through the maze of television advertising by showing tricks advertisers use to fool viewers, revealing facts that ads don’t provide, and by arming children with concrete tips for surviving the TV advertising blitz.”

To begin: you might ask your students if they know how commercials are made (constructed). They should become familiar with the process of advertising which involves identifying the audience you want to reach; creating the message that will appeal to this audience; and positioning or placement of the message where the target audience is likely to best see it.

Before playing the video, some background. “Buy Me That” is hosted by comedian Jim Fyfe. In the introduction he asks the questions “ can you really trust those commercials; is everything you see, really what you get?” At this point you may wish to PA– USE the video and initiate a discussion around

those questions.

Script of the Commercial: download the actual script here:

<http://www.frankwbaker.com/typhoonscript.htm>

(with embedded images from the ad); create an overhead or handout for your students, so that they can begin to understand that commercials must first be written before they are photographed and edited. You may wish to play the first video segment while the script is projected.

Jim is going to introduce the audience to the toy “TYPHOON 2” and students will see a portion of the actual commercial. **PLAY THE VIDEO BUT BE PREPARED TO STOP IT EXACTLY ONE MINUTE IN.** At approximately 1 minute (when Jim says “see how the Typhoon 2 zooms around that rocky maze” **STOP** the video). You might start a discussion here with questions like: how many of you would like to own this toy? and why?: is this toy aimed at boys or girls, or both? How do you know?

Copy & paste the URL below to play the video

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Hdm69hp0-E>

(ask your school librarian or tech coordinator for assistance in saving this video)



Before playing the remaining part of the video (about 6 minutes) explain that the producers of “Buy Me That” have given the actual “Typhoon 2” toy to some children to take outside and test. In other words, does this toy perform in the real world, the way the commercial implied it did? **PLAY THE**

REMAINING PART OF THE VIDEO. Notice during which portion of the video your students might begin to laugh. Also, be sure to have them notice the young man who reacts after the toy fails the water glide test. He says “cause the commercial made it look so good, that you really want to buy it, but it’s not good.”

Questions to consider after watching the “Buy Me That” segment:

1. How has your thinking about toy commercials changed since you’ve seen the entire video? Do you always believe what you see?
2. In the commercial did Typhoon 2 really glide on water—or did the producers make it appear to glide on water?
3. If you were going to re-create the “glide on water” scene, how would you do it? Where would you put your camera?
4. Did you ever receive a toy that failed to live up to expectation? If so, describe what happened?
5. To whom would you write, in order to complain about a toy that failed to deliver promises made in a commercial? (students should consider not only WHO made the toy, but also WHO broadcast the ad)
6. Do TV networks have any obligation to ensure that advertising is truthful?
7. Which US Government agency is responsible for ensuring toy ads are not deceptive?

Extension Activities

Scriptwriting

Teachers can introduce writing by helping students to understand that all commercials started out as a written script. The script is used by all of the people involved in the making of (the production of) the commercial. If you divide an 8 X 11 sheet of paper into two columns, and label one AUDIO and the other VIDEO, then you have the start of a simple, 30-second commercial script.

For more information about script-writing in the classroom, go

to this page

http://www.frankwbaker.com/scriptwriting_in_the_classroom.htm

Storyboarding

Another major part of the process of making commercials, after writing the script, is creating the “storyboard.” Storyboards are visual representations of what the scene might look like, prior to actually filming. The director (among many others) uses the script and the storyboard to help him decide how to shoot the commercial. It might be helpful to show students what an actual commercial storyboard looks like. Here is one:

<https://www.middleweb.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/toy-ad-storyboard.png>

You might want to assure your students that their storyboards don’t have to be in color or look like great artwork: they can be stick figures.

Background on storyboards:

<http://www.wildsound-filmmaking-feedback-events.com/storyboards.html>

[Who Pays for My Favorite TV Program?](#) (Lesson Plan)

Additional Resources

Buy Me That: How TV Toy Commercials Influence Kids

<http://www.frankwbaker.com/toys.htm>

Author: Frank Baker Email: fbaker1346@aol.com

Original URL can now be found:

<https://www.frankwbaker.com/mlc/sc-sde-toy-ad-lesson-plan/>

Note: The “Buy Me That” video series referenced here is no longer available for purchase.

But I suggest you check with a local library to determine if it is available for checkout.

Time: One or two class periods

Original: yes

Title: Buy Me That! How TV Toy Commercials Hook Kids

Abstract: Elementary students use VIEWING skills to understand the constructed nature of television commercial

advertising.

Grade: 3-5

Subject: ELA

Objective:

1. students will learn that television toy commercials use techniques which make products look/sound better than they may actually be

2. students will understand the “constructed” concept of media

3. students will think differently about advertising claims after being exposed to critical viewing analysis techniques

Standard Correlation

3-C3.1, 4-C3.1, 5-C3.1 Demonstrate the ability to make predictions about the content of what he or she view

3-C3.2 Demonstrate the ability to recognize details, setting, characters, and cause and effect in material from nonprint sources;

4-C3.2, 5-C3.2 begin analyzing details, character, setting, sequence and cause and effect in such material

3-C3-3, 4-C3-3, 5C3-3 Demonstrate the ability to summarize information that he or she receives from nonprint sources

3-C3.5, 4-C3.5, 5-C3.5 Demonstrate the ability to make connections between nonprint sources and his or her prior knowledge, other sources, and the world

4-C3.7, 5-C3.7 Begin/continue evaluating the ways that different nonprint sources influence and inform

Focus Question: How do the producers of television toy commercials make their products look so appealing to the target audiences?

Summative Assessment Students will use a rubric to help them analyze different parts and various techniques used in

commercials. (see below)

Resources/Materials

Teachers should plan to prerecord any number of channels (Disney, Cartoon, Nickelodeon, Saturday morning) in order to have at least one toy commercial for each gender. (Fair-use guidelines of the federal Copyright law allow teachers to record these and use them for instruction.)

Check out the video *TV Planet, Discover the Secrets of Television* ([Wayback Machine \(archive.org\)](http://www.archive.org))

from your school library media specialist. It includes a segment on commercials which is appropriate for viewing.

Teachers should also log onto the “Buy Me That” website developed by the author: <http://www.frankwbaker.com/toys.htm>

At this site, teachers can download these handouts: *Questions To Ask About TV Toy Advertising; Attributes of commercials aimed at boys/girls; Common Advertising Strategies*. Additionally, there are some articles from mainstream news sources about toy advertising that you may wish to refer to, or print out for your students to read.

Vocabulary Words: (these could be used as a handout)

Angle- the place, position, or direction from which an object is presented to view

Audio- everything that is heard (includes: narration, music, sound effects)

Commercial- a paid advertisement on television

Constructed- parts are put together to create a whole, in this case, a commercial

Editing- the process of taking scenes, shot out of order, and putting them together in order

Framing- how a photographer/videographer sees a shot using the camera's viewfinder

Formula- a series of steps followed in sequence

Narration- in commercials, the voice that is dominant which voices-over the action

Perspective- a particular view from a particular position

Script- a written description of what's to be heard, seen and/or shown

Special Effects- one of a number of visual techniques, usually created/produced in editing

Spot- another name for a commercial

Target Audience- those to which a commercial is designed to appeal to specifically

Video – everything that is seen (what the camera records; any visuals added in editing)

Student Rubric For Analyzing Television Toy Commercials

What is the product (toy) being advertised?	Name of product:
What do you know, if anything, about this toy?	
Is this toy being advertised to boys, girls, or both?	Boys Girls Both
What clues in the commercial lead you to the answer above? Be specific.	
Who is the narrator, a male or female?	Male Female
Who is shown playing with the toy?	Boys Girls Both None
Is the toy shown in a real life setting? (for example, outside)	
Describe the expressions on the faces of the children playing with toy?	
Are special "tricks" used, like slow motion?	

Is the price of the toy mentioned? Why not?	
Where can you go to get more information about this toy?	

Lesson Plan Script:

1. Teacher Does:

On the board or overhead, the teacher starts by writing: "what is a 'commercial?" and "what are commercials designed to do?" A general discussion can bring out the role of advertising on television and how these SPOTS are designed to get us to feel good about a product. The teacher might explore where (which TV networks) students might find toy commercials. An excellent videotape called *TV Planet: Discover The Secrets Of Television* is available from the SC State Department of Education Office of Instructional TV. One of the segments on this video is about commercials. Ask your media specialist or Distance Education Learning Center (DELC) to assist you in acquiring this video. For additional info, visit the TV Planet website: [Wayback Machine \(archive.org\)](http://www.archive.org/web/20060501000000/www.tvplanet.org/) In addition, an original lesson, corresponding to this segment, has been developed by SC educator Doug Smith, as part of his participation in the National Teacher Training Institute. You can find his lesson plan here: [ETV NTTI Lesson :: Who Pays for My Favorite Television Program? \(Grade 8\) \(archive.org\)](http://www.archive.org/web/20060501000000/www.etv.org/lesson/lesson.htm)

2. Students should understand the concept of TARGET AUDIENCE: the maker of this toy has purchased the time for this commercial on this channel in order to reach you: the person most likely to be interested in the toy and who might buy it by convincing mom or dad to "buy me that." Teachers can show students what a real 30 second (half minute) SCRIPT looks like by dividing an 8 X 11

sheet of paper into two columns: one labeled VIDEO at the top of one column and AUDIO at the top of the other column. (Examples of actual toy scripts can be found on the "Buy Me That" web site) While this might sound simple, the purpose is to explore these two production elements. The teacher should ask students to brainstorm what is meant by VIDEO. Typical answers might include: the picture on the screen, what we see, what the camera records, colors used, etc. Then do the same for AUDIO; answers include: what we hear. Examples include: NARRATION, MUSIC, SOUND EFFECTS. A teacher can tell students that commercials are CONSTRUCTED, much like a house is, when it is being built. The producer of the commercial decides what words and images will be used and constructs the script and the commercial to utilize the best techniques.

The producer also decides what shots to include and which shots to leave out.

3. Students need to know more about how a commercial is photographed and produced. For example, a teacher might talk about ANGLES, PERSPECTIVE, FRAMING. With a video camera connected to a television, he/she can easily demonstrate how a small toy could be photographed to appear larger. Ask students if they know what the phrase SPECIAL EFFECTS means. He/she can discuss this in relation to what students might already know and be familiar with (i.e. *Lord of the Rings*; *Harry Potter*, etc). When we discuss audio, a teacher might talk about how it too can be manipulated to create sounds which are intended to attract interest.
4. Teachers can also talk about attributes of commercials aimed at girls and those aimed at boys. What do we know? What can we guess? Several articles (see HANDOUT #4 at <http://www.frankwbaker.com/toys.htm>) provide some insight. Review those specific attributes and write them on the board or overhead. The teacher might even talk about a toy commercial that all can relate to: GI JOE;

BARBIE, as examples.

5. FORMULA: Students can understand formula if the teacher compares this idea to that of a recipe. Everyone knows that you use a recipe to make cookies, for example. The recipe would include not only the list of ingredients, but also the procedures to follow in order to make the cookies. The producers of TV commercials also use a recipe, called a formula. The formula can be discussed by using HANDOUT [“Five Toy Ad Tricks To Watch Out For”](#) and “Common Advertising Strategies,” both posted at <http://www.frankwbaker.com/toys.htm>

6. At this stage, the teacher should have pre-selected at least one toy commercial from those he/she has recorded from television. The teacher sets up the playback of the commercial by talking about:

- formula, gender, video, audio, editing, special effects.

In general, the teacher wants to make students more comfortable with the process and procedures for making and producing a commercial.

7. The teacher should distribute the RUBRIC page to each student and review each of the questions on it.
8. Teacher plays the commercial. Students complete the rubric upon watching the commercial. It may be helpful to show the commercial more than once, as 30 second commercials go by quickly, and with repeated viewings, more details can be picked up.

Interactivity is encouraged at this stage.

9. Sometimes a toy does not perform as advertised. (This is highlighted well in a video called “Buy Me That Too” available from local libraries.) Your students may have experiences to share, in which a toy they received for a birthday or holiday failed to perform as advertised. You should encourage your students to share, or write about that experience.
10. Keeping in mind: what can students do when a toy they own fails to perform: ask students who they might

consider writing a letter to, to complain about a toy's performance or a deceptive advertisement.

At this point, you might make a list. For example, a letter could be written to: the TV network that aired the ad; the toy manufacturer; a magazine read by kids; the local newspaper; the Federal Trade Commission; the local Better Business Bureau.

Student Does:

Students listen while the teacher introduces the concepts of: television advertising; target audience; and specific production techniques. The student may receive a list of vocabulary words in which to define during this lesson. Students may be seated in groups and may be asked to review/complete the rubric designed for this lesson. Students may view one or more pre-recorded video commercials, using the rubric to answer questions. They may be asked to participate in a discussion about the specific techniques used by the producer of commercial. Critical viewing skills are emphasized. Following the activity, students may be asked to be involved in one of a number of writing activities. An extension activity involves additional writing: transferring knowledge from a "printed ad" to a blank script form for a commercial.

Extension Activity #1 Time Needed: 1 or 2 class periods

From magazines aimed at this age group, cut out full page ads for toys. With students seated in groups of 4-5 at tables, assign each group one ad. They are instructed to convert their print ad into a TV toy commercial, using the 8 X 11 script format described in step #1 above. Each table receives one 30 second blank script form.

After having watched several commercials, students will understand the concepts of writing both the audio and the video columns.

Working in groups, they might need an entire class period to

write their new commercial. Upon completion, a representative from each table stands up, shares with the class what their print ad said, and then proceeds to read their group's script, explaining audio and video techniques used.

If video cameras and editing capability are available, students may actually plan and shoot a commercial.

Extension Activity #2 Time Needed: 1 or 2 class periods

Locate a blank STORYBOARD form on the web. A storyboard involves drawing out each scene to be shot in a commercial. In addition to drawing in the frame on the storyboard, students must also describe below the drawing what action is to take place and what is said while that action is occurring. Students can be given blank storyboard forms and assigned to write an original commercial. Examples of original storyboards can also be found on the web and used as examples.

Resources/Materials List:

1. Teachers will need to have recorded toy commercials from television.
2. Obtain the video *TV Planet: Discover the Secrets of Television*
3. Teachers should carefully review the web site: TV Toy Commercials: How They Influence Kids.
<https://www.frankwbaker.com/mlc/toys/> Included on this website are various one page handouts that are easily downloaded and used in this activity.
4. Vocabulary- teachers should review the list of recommended vocabulary words
5. Rubric. Teachers should distribute copies of the Rubric to each student or group of students.
6. Magazines: the extension activity requires the teacher to have a number of print advertisements from magazines
7. See the article "I Want That!" ([Toy Advertising](#)) from the Dec. 2006 issue of Cable In The Classroom magazine