



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 5 to 7
About the Author:	MediaSmarts
Duration:	45 minutes, plus time for the assessment task

Looks Good Enough to Eat



This lesson is part of *ACCESS, USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>

Overview

This lesson looks at food photography and the different techniques used by food stylists to make foods look appealing in advertisements. The lesson begins with a discussion about the challenges involved in food photography and how traditional elements of photography may be combined with "food tricks" to achieve the desired effects. After reviewing some food photography "tricks of the trade," students find their own food advertisements, identifying how they have been made to look unrealistic and then reshoot the advertisement on their own with real food without the tricks, comparing the differences.

Learning Outcomes

Students demonstrate:

- an awareness of the different techniques or "tricks of the trade" used to enhance the appearance of foods in ads.
- an awareness of the format and structure of food ads.
- an understanding of their own reactions, as consumers, to these advertisements.

Preparation and Materials

- Equipment needed:
 - computers or portable devices with internet access,
 - a data projector or digital whiteboard
 - cameras (film or digital—phone cameras are fine)
- Prepare to project or distribute the slideshow *Ad or Reality?*
- Prepare to distribute the handout *Food for Thought: How Do Food Photographers Do It?*
- Prepare to distribute the assignment sheet *Keep it Real: My Food Advertisement*



The Lesson

Guided Discussion

Start by projecting or distributing *Ad or Reality?* and asking students to guess, in each case, which photo is from an ad and which is a photo of food that was actually served in a restaurant. In each case, it will probably not be hard for students to guess.

Now ask:

- Why do students think food in ads looks so different from how it looks when you eat it?
- Do they sometimes get hungry when you see ads for food or restaurants? If so, do they think the same thing would happen if the food in ads looked the same as it does on the plate?

Explain to students that just like there are professional photographers who take pictures of fashion models, the food they see in ads was arranged by professional *food stylists* and photographed by *food photographers*.

- What do they think is a food photographer's goal when photographing food for an advertisement? (They want to make the food look as delicious as possible - their goal is to make you hungry just looking at their ad.)
- What challenges might a photographer face when photographing food? (Things melt, wilt, get soggy, dry-up under lights, or just don't photograph well.)
- What foods do students think would be easy to photograph? What foods have natural "star power" and wouldn't need much to make them look good on film?
- What foods would be more difficult? What might melt, droop or just look bad under the lights?
- Can students think of any ways that food photographers might make food look better when they film it?

Class Activity

Now distribute the handout *Food for Thought: How Do Food Photographers Do It?*. **Tell students not to turn the page over yet.**

Read through the first two paragraphs, then have students write down a guess about how each of the different items in the list might be used by food photographers. Have students share some of their guesses.

Next, have students turn over the page and go through the list.

(It's important for students to understand that not all food stylists use food substitutes in their photography, and where food substitutes are used, it's not necessarily because they want to deceive consumers. It's just that it's often easier and more practical to use food substitutes, which can be controlled and look better on film, than to use real food. Many food stylists who use real food still have to have a few tricks up their sleeves. For example, a food stylist who needs ice-cream for a photo shoot might use dry ice to freeze the ice cream rock hard, so that it can be handled and arranged as desired.)

Ask students:

- Do you think it's fair for advertisers to use these tricks to make food in ads look better?



- Do you think there's a difference between using tricks that make it *possible* to take pictures of food (such as using frozen ice cream so it doesn't melt) and using tricks that make food look *better* (such as using motor oil to keep "syrup" from soaking into pancakes)?
- Truth-in-advertising laws mean that the food an ad is selling can't be fake, but photographers can use tricks to *simulate* real things like steam, syrup, and so on. Do you think that should be allowed? Why or why not?
- Do you think that influencers or other people who post pictures of food on social media use some of the same tricks? Why or why not? If so, which ones might they use?

Assessment Activity

Distribute the handout, *Keep It Real: My Food Advertisement* and divide the class into small groups .

Go over the handout as a class, making sure to emphasize that students will be finding their own ad (print or media) either through the links on the handout or of their own accord in order to reshoot a food ad with real food to make it realistic. (Encourage students to find ads for food products they are likely to find already in their own kitchens; if you think cost is likely to be a barrier for students, you can turn this into a whole-class activity and provide a single example of food to be photographed.)

Once they have found an ad, have each group complete the analysis of how it was made on the assignment sheet.

Next, have each group do their own version of the same ad. Encourage them to try to make the food as tasty-looking as possible *without* using any food photography tricks other than lighting, "plating" and camera angles.

Finally, have students complete the "What I did differently" section in order to reflect on the differences between food photography used in marketing and realistic food in everyday life.

When students have completed their shoots, create a "food gallery" with the finished product.



Food for Thought: How Do Food Photographers Do It?

There's just one rule in food photography: the food you are *selling* has to be real. But food photographers use a lot of “tricks of the trade” in order to make the food they are promoting seem a lot better than it is. This is because in real life, when photographing food, there are a lot of elements to pay attention to. They include: will the food melt? How can it be kept hot? Or cold? Do I have to fill a bowl full of cereal? Will milk make it soggy?

These are all questions food photographers must ask themselves and answer in order to get the best shot for the company using the advertisement. If they were to take a picture of the food looking how it does in real life, customers might not buy it — not because it doesn't taste good, but because it doesn't look good in the ad.

How do you think food photographers might use these different items to make food look better in ads?

Motor oil:

Makeup sponges:

White glue:

Dish soap:

Corn syrup:

Super Glue:

Brown shoe polish:

Shaving cream:

Hairspray:

Cotton balls:



Food for Thought: How do Food Photographers do it?

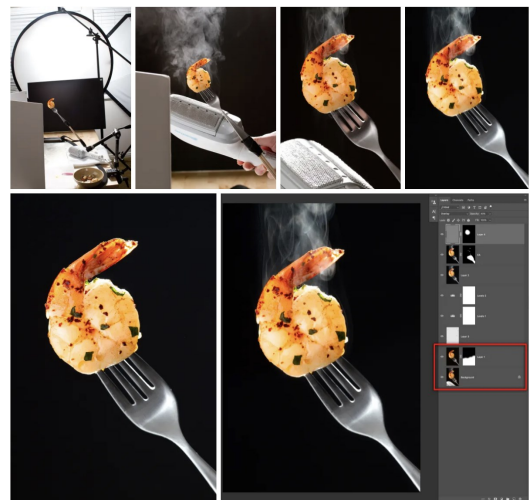
1. Motor oil is used as a syrup substitute that doesn't soak into pancakes or waffles.
2. Toothpicks hold ingredients in place
3. Makeup sponges can add height to a burger, making it look taller and less squished.
4. White glue looks like milk but doesn't make cereal soggy.
5. Dish soap creates longer lasting foam in fizzy drinks.
6. Corn syrup and food colouring can combine to make ice cream that doesn't melt.
7. Super Glue repairs tears in bird skin (i.e. chickens, turkey, etc.)
8. Brown shoe polish is used to photograph raw birds, like turkey, without actually cooking them.
9. Shaving cream is a whip cream that doesn't melt.
10. Hairspray can make a dried out piece of cake look moist.
11. Cotton balls are soaked with water and then microwaved to make food look steaming hot.



This photo shows food stylists using a heater to get mozzarella cheese exactly the right shade of brown.

This photo shows the process of adding fake steam to a piece of shrimp to make it look like it just came out of the oven.

In reality, this shrimp would be undercooked and cold if you were to eat it right off of that fork.



Keep It Real: My Food Advertisement

For this assignment, you will find a food ad (online, on TV, in a magazine, on a billboard, etc.) and get a copy of it.

Next, your group will do your own version of the same ad. You will try to make the food as tasty-looking as possible *without* using any food photography tricks other than lighting, “plating” and camera angles.

The food in the advertisement my group found:

(Attach a copy or photo of the ad. If you need to get a screenshot of an online ad, visit www.take-a-screenshot.org for instructions on how to get screenshots on different devices.)

The company selling the food:

Food photography tricks that you think might have been used:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

“Plating” of the food (How is it displayed? Is anything on top or below it? Are there any sauces or other foods on it?):

Lighting used (Angles, source of light, brightness level):

Camera angle used (From above, from below, from a specific side) :

Keep It Real: My Food Advertisement

What my group did differently:

Food Photography trick	What we did differently	The effect on the advertisement
<i>Example: used motor oil as maple syrup</i>	<i>Used real maple syrup</i>	<i>Made it a darker colour, and it was runnier, which meant it soaked into the pancakes.</i>

Assessment Rubric

	<i>Learning Expectations</i>	<i>Achievement</i>
Use	<p><i>Media Health</i></p> <p>Use media tools in a way that promotes positive physical and mental health</p> <p><i>Making and Remixing</i></p> <p>Effectively use elements of medium and genre in their own media works</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
Understand	<p><i>Media Representation</i></p> <p>Understand that media content can be fake or misleading</p> <p><i>Consumer Awareness</i></p> <p>Understand that most media products are made for commercial reasons and under commercial pressures</p> <p>Analyze the impact of commercial purposes and pressures on the meaning and influence of a media work</p> <p>Understand the norms and practices of key media industries such as news, film, advertising, search engines and social networks</p> <p><i>Media Health</i></p> <p>Understand how media can have an influence on choices that affect our health, such as food</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
Engage	<p><i>Media Representation</i></p> <p>Compare media representations of reality to one's own experience</p> <p><i>Consumer Awareness</i></p> <p>Ask critical questions about how commercial considerations influenced the creation of a media work</p> <p><i>Making and Remixing</i></p> <p>Explore alternative readings of a media work</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>

Ad or Reality?



Ad or Reality?



Ad or Reality?



Ad or Reality?

