

## LESSON PLAN

### Kids, Alcohol and Advertising

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



**LEVEL:** Grades 4 to 8

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** MediaSmarts

**DURATION:** About one hour, plus time for the assessment activity

### Overview

In this lesson, students learn to recognize how the advertising genre is used to build brand loyalty for “parity products”—products like alcohol where there is little difference in taste or performance. Students learn to deconstruct the “Three Ps” of branding: Personality (the product’s “vibe”), Position (the target audience), and Promise (the fantasy sold to the consumer). The lesson culminates in an “Ad Satire” assessment where students create a parody ad that “unmasks the brand” by flipping a glamorized media promise into a realistic social or medical consequence.

### Learning Objectives

Key Concepts/Big Ideas: Students will understand...

- Media are constructions: Media works are built by makers who make deliberate choices to achieve a particular purpose.
- Media have commercial considerations: The alcohol industry uses image advertising to recruit youth as “replacement drinkers” and ensure long-term profit.
- Audiences negotiate meaning: Students have the power to engage in resistant readings by subverting an ad’s intended message through parody.

Framework topics: Students will learn...

- Consumer Awareness:
  - The definition of a parity product and why branding is more important for these items than for products with distinct merits
  - Specific tropes and practices of ads for parity products, including the technical definitions of Personality, Position, and Promise.
- Media Health: The contrast between the industry’s “fantasy” portrayals and the real-world consequences of alcohol use, such as social regret or health risks.

Key vocabulary: Genre, parity product, parody, satire

Core Competencies: Students will be able to...

- Understand: Critically evaluate and deconstruct advertisements by following a question sequence from factual observations to interpretive meaning.
- Use: Apply “Think-Aloud” strategies to identify how visual elements (such as color, symmetry, and mascot use) are used to inflect a message.
- Engage: Create an original parody ad that uses exaggeration to communicate a serious health or social message.

## Preparation and Materials

Prepare to project:

- the video [Reading Media: Genre](#)
- the overheads *Mr. Clean* and *Ad Parody*
- the slideshow [Alcohol Brands](#)

Prepare to distribute the handout *Alcohol Brand Identities*

Prepare to distribute the assignment sheet *Parody Ad Assignment*

Ensure that students have access to art/craft materials or to a graphics program.

Review the MediaSmarts article on [Tobacco, Alcohol and Cannabis Advertising](#)

## Procedure

Start by showing students the video [Reading Media: Genre](#).

Explain to students that one of the best purposes of the advertising genre is building brand loyalty. That’s especially important true for products for which there is little difference in taste or product performance. Products such as these are called “parity” products.

Ask students: Can you list a few types of parity products?

Prompting question: Imagine you were given a product with no packaging or branding. For which products could you still tell which brand it was, and for which would you not be able to tell?

Tell students that many kinds of alcohol are parity products: there's not much difference between the most popular brands.

Now explain that ads for parity products are a specific sub-genre with its own tropes and practices. Parity product ads distinguish their brand from others through what is called the Three Ps:

1. a distinct Personality for the product (What kind of person does it feel like?)
2. a Position in the marketplace (What kind of person is it aimed at? What sets it apart from similar products – is it something you use every day or for special occasions?)
3. and a Promise to consumers.

Project *Mr. Clean* and tell students you are going to “think aloud” your process of identifying the Three Ps for this brand:

- Personality: I see a big, strong guy in a spotless white T-shirt, holding a shoe. He is smiling, so part of the brand's personality is being friendly. I know he has been the Mr. Clean mascot for a long time, so that tells me that part of the brand's personality is being familiar, maybe a bit old-fashioned.
- Position: Choosing sneakers as the thing being cleaned suggests it's positioned as being for younger people who take their sneakers seriously, instead of older people who might buy the product to clean their house. The use of the Mr. Clean mascot reminds us that it's been around longer than other brands.
- Promise: The simplicity and symmetry of the ad, the pure white and blue colours, and the slogan all promise that the brand will work to clean anything that is dirty.

Now project the slideshow [Alcohol Ads](#) and distribute the handout *Alcohol Brand Identities*.

Show the first slide and go through the first row with the class.

Next, show the second slide and go through the first two cells of the second two (“Personality” and “Position” and ask students what they would put in the third (“Promise.”)

When students have made their suggestions, show the third slide and go through the first cell of the third and fourth rows and then ask students what they would put in the second and third cells.

When students have made their suggestions, show the fourth slide and then have them complete all four cells of the fourth row and share their answers.

Next, ask students:

- Do you notice any similarities in the “personalities” that have been created around these brands? (*Three of the four brands feature “cool” or “hip” as part of the personality profile.*)
- What kind of people do you think brands that promote themselves as “cool” are trying to reach? What makes you think this?
- What about the market position? Have these companies managed to develop distinct positions for their brands, or do they all say the same thing? What is your impression about each *brands* when you hear its slogan?
- Now let’s look at the promise of each *brands*. What type of people do you think each of these “promises” might attract? Is there any truth to these promises?

### ASSESSMENT TASK: AD SATIRE

Project the overhead *Ad Parody* and introduce the concept of a parody ad. Ask whether any students have ever heard of or seen a parody ad, and make sure they understand that a parody is something that makes fun of an existing work or a genre.

In this case, the ad is parodying alcohol ads as a genre, not a specific ad.

Tell students that a *satire* is something that uses humour to make a critical point. Explain that this ad was supposed to be funny, but to also make a serious point about alcohol, so it is a *satire* as well as a *parody*.

Explain that parodies usually are very close to the original, with just a few important things changed to be funny or to make their critical point. Because of that, a parody ad will follow the same *tropes* as real ads of that kind.

Ask students to identify the “3 Ps” of the Bacardi ad.

Prompting questions:

Personality:

- The main image is a big splash, what feeling does that give?
- What is the impact of the stark white text?
- The dominant colour is black. How does that feel?

Positioning:

- How do the elements we just talked about tell us about how this brand is different from other alcohol brands? Do many of them go for an aggressive, dangerous feeling?
- The slogan talks about sending texts. What does that tell us about the intended audience?
- How similar or different is this from the real alcohol ads we saw earlier?

Promise:

- What is this ad promising will happen if you use this product? What kind of person will you be?
- How similar or different is that from the promises made in the real alcohol ads?

If no students have mentioned it, point out that this is *almost* the same message as the Belvedere ad – it is making the same promise about alcohol (that it makes you feel less inhibited) but instead highlights how risky that could be.

Now tell students that they are now going to create their own parody ad for one of the advertisements that they examined in the *Alcohol Brand Identities* activity (it does not matter if multiple students choose the same ad.)

Distribute out the *Parody Ad Assignment* sheet and provide students with craft materials or access to a graphics program. If time permits, students can share their parody ads and their reasoning with the class.

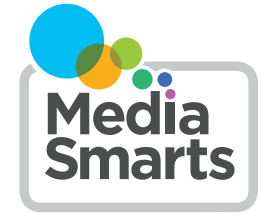
# KIDS, ALCOHOL AND ADVERTISING

Mr. Clean

.....



# KIDS, ALCOHOL AND ADVERTISING

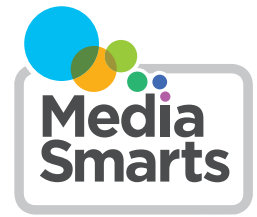


Ad Parody

.....



# KIDS, ALCOHOL AND ADVERTISING

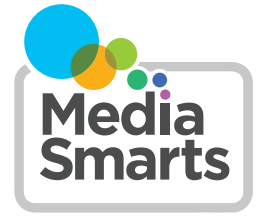


## Alcohol Brand Identities

.....

| BRAND       | PERSONALITY       | POSITION                           | PROMISE               |
|-------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Molson      | Outdoorsy         | Canadian                           | You'll feel patriotic |
| Heineken    | Exciting, vibrant | Adventurous, aimed at young people |                       |
| Belvedere   | Wild              | Different, aimed at young women    |                       |
| Miller Lite | Health-conscious  |                                    |                       |
| Corona      |                   |                                    |                       |
|             |                   |                                    |                       |

# KIDS, ALCOHOL AND ADVERTISING



## Parody Ad Assignment

.....

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**The Mission:** Your goal is to **unmask the brand!** You will take a real alcohol advertisement and create a **parody** that flips the alcohol industry's "promise" into a "reality." You will use the same visual style as the original but change the message to show the real consequences of drinking alcohol.

### STEP 1: PARODY PERSONALITY (THE 3PS)

*Think about how the original ad communicated the brand's personality, then think about how your parody should be similar or different:*

- **Personality:** What is the "vibe" of the brand? (e.g., Is it cool, outdoorsy, athletic, or high-class?)
- **Position:** Who is this ad trying to reach? (e.g., Is it aimed at sports fans, people at a party, or someone trying to look "grown-up"?). How is it different from similar brands?
- **Promise:** What "fantasy" is the ad selling? (e.g., If I drink this, I will be popular, powerful, or relaxed.)

### STEP 2: PLAN YOUR "FLIP"

*A parody looks like the original but uses **exaggeration** to tell a serious truth. Plan your changes here:*

1. **What will you keep the same?** (e.g., the same bright colors, the same font, or a similar background)
2. **What will you change?** (e.g., instead of people laughing on a beach, they are arguing or look sick)

### STEP 3: CREATE YOUR PARODY!

*Now it's time to make your own ad. Remember, the "Aha!" moment happens when people recognize the kind of ad you are parodying but are surprised by your new, honest message.*

### STEP 4: REFLECTION (EXPLAIN YOUR THINKING)

*Complete these sentence starters to justify your choices:*

- The main changes I made in my parody were ... because ...
- I want my audience to think or feel ... when they see this because ...

### Success Criteria

- ☐ I identified the **Personality, Position, and Promise** of my parody ad.
- ☐ My parody uses **exaggeration** to reinforce a real health or social message.
- ☐ My reflection explains how my thinking about **brand manipulation** has changed.