



LESSON PLAN

Level: Primary / Junior

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Duration: 40 minutes

Parts of this lesson have been adapted with permission from the Media Literacy Guide, Saskatoon Board of Education, © 1994, and from A Practical Guide for Parents: Advertising, Nutrition and Kids, a guide created by [The Children's Advertising Review Unit \(CARU\)](#) and the International Food Information Council (IFIC)

Packaging Tricks

Overview

This lesson introduces students to the ways in which packaging is designed to attract kids. The class begins with a discussion about packaging and how the design, promotions and product placement all contribute to make a product attractive to consumers. In a series of individual and group activities, students compare similar food products based on packaging and on taste; assess the nutritional value of the foods and beverages they enjoy; and participate in a field trip to a local grocery store to see how packaging and placement affect consumer choices.

Learning Outcomes

Students demonstrate:

- awareness of the techniques used by advertisers to sell food products.
- beginning awareness of how they are affected by these techniques.
- an understanding that products may be similar, despite differences in packaging.
- an understanding of nutritional labelling on packages.

Preparation and Materials

- Have students each bring in empty food packages.
- Create "mystery products" by covering the brand names on several well-known food packages.
- Bring in a few sets of similar products, some name-brands, and one that is either a "store" brand product or from the "bulk foods" department.



The Lesson

Guided Discussion: Packaging

Explain to the children that advertisements are just one way to get a customer's attention. Another way is the packaging.

- A good strategy in helping children understand the importance of packaging is to have them imagine (or act out) a grocery store shelf with each product vying for the customer's attention.
- Have them imagine what they might do to make the customer choose them, and not the "product" next to them. Manufacturers might feature cartoon characters or famous people on the front of the package.
- Or they might include attention-grabbing graphics and colours, recipes for sweet goodies, or 'gimmicks' such as premiums ('free gifts' inside the box), sweepstakes (contests to win great prizes) and kids clubs (connected to the product).
- Ask students to consider the amount, or size, of the product in relationship to the package size: have they ever noticed the small amount of potato chips in those nice big bags?
- You might also ask them to consider placement of the product in the grocery store itself. Who might products on the lower shelves be aimed at?

Activities

1. In order to help students understand the importance of packaging, explain how manufacturers want customers to be able to recognize their product when they see it on the grocery shelf. Using popular products that the kids will recognize (for example, an Oreo cookie package or a Kellogg's Corn Flakes box) cover the product name and ask the children to identify what it is. Or, you could show them a small portion of the package and see if they can identify it. Would the manufacturers be pleased that people recognize their products?
2. Let students examine a series of packages. Ask how they are similar and how they differ. What do they find attractive about each product? As they examine the packages, you might want to discuss the following:
 - How is the product depicted? (For example, is it shown with a celebrity? Is it scattered among different characters? If there are kids on the package, what do they look like? How are they dressed? What are they doing? Is a picture of the actual product a small or large part of the package? What is the relative size of the product? Is it larger on the package?)
 - How does the food product appear to look on the outside? How does it really look inside?
 - Is the inside what you expected?
 - If this was something that you had never tasted before, would the packaging make you want to try it?



3. Show students two similar products (e.g., animal crackers and arrowroot biscuits, or different pastas such as Zoodles, Alphagetti, Smurfagetti). Have the children discuss which package they prefer and why they prefer it. Open the packages and let the children look at the product itself. Is it easy to tell them apart? Does one product taste better than another, or do they taste the same? When looking at similar products like canned pastas, encourage your students to think about the different marketing strategies used on the packages and judge which package is the better buy.

Extension 1: Individual assignment, all levels.

Have students draw a picture of what kind of package they would create for their favorite food.

Extension 2: Group or individual assignment, junior level.

1. Have class collect empty cereal boxes, with price tags, if possible.
2. After giving some background information on nutrients, ask students to examine the nutritional level of various brands, especially their favourites.
3. Ask them, individually or as a class, to answer the following questions:
 - Why do you like this cereal?
 - Do you think it's nutritious?
 - How does it compare nutritionally with other cereals?
 - How does it compare economically with a more nutritious cereal?
 - How did you find out about this cereal?
 - Were you influenced to buy it by advertising on TV or by its package?
 - How did the advertisements make you want to buy this cereal?

Have students create their own exciting packaging for an imaginary new cereal, including a nutritional guide and a price.

Extension 3: Class Activity

Ask students to bring a juice box or label from a juice container to class.

- Ask them how pure they think their juice is by just looking at the label. (*For example, the packaging may feature pictures of fruit, the words apple or orange and 'made with pure juice.'*)
- Ask the students to look at the ingredients. (*Explain that the ingredients are listed in order of amount, with the first item listed being the main ingredient.*)
- Ask students for the first two main ingredients. What are they?
- How many had pure juice as one of the main ingredients?
- How many had water and sugar and/or glucose-fructose (more sugar!) as the two main ingredients?
- What other ingredients are in their juices?



As a class, create a graph of the ingredients found in their juice boxes and rate the purity of the brands of juice that are featured.

Extension 4: Class Activity

Take students to a local grocery store and conduct a "packaging and placement" field trip. As students explore the aisles, have them note:

- How food is arranged in the store from a location perspective (i.e. milk products are at the back of the store so that you have to travel through the aisles to reach this frequently bought item). Have kids create maps of the store based on general food areas and talk about the reasoning behind where food is placed when they return to class.
- If possible, arrange a presentation from the store manager on how foods are selected for the store.
- Look at how foods are placed on shelves - do a "kids' eye view" survey and then look at the products on the higher shelves. Are there any patterns?
- How do colour, lighting, presentation makes foods appealing to consumers?
- Are there any in-store ads or displays promoting specific products? What are they? Would they make students want to buy the product? Why?
- Pay special attention to "kid friendly foods," for example, stop in the cereal aisle and vote for the package that students consider to be most appealing.
- Bring a "packaging techniques" checklist, and see what the most common strategies are.
- Go to the juice aisle and compare the placement of real juices to fruit-drinks. Is it clear which is which?
- How prominent are generic products? Are they as appealing as the brand-name items?

