



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 8-12
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Duration:	30 minutes

Marketing to Teens: Talking Back

Overview

This lesson helps teens become active consumers by encouraging them to 'talk back' to advertisers when they have concerns.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

- an understanding of the importance of being active consumers through 'talking back' to advertisers and voicing their concerns and comments
- an appreciation of the power consumers have to influence advertisers

Preparation and Materials

- photocopies of the student handout *How and When to Talk Back*

Procedure

We don't have to sit back and accept all of the messages the media (especially advertising) feeds us. We can "talk back" and voice our opinions. Ask students:

- do you think that talking back to advertisers can make a difference?
- can anyone think of examples where consumer activism lead to changes in company policy or advertising? (*In 2011 Abercrombie & Fitch stopped selling a padded bra aimed at 8- to 12-year-olds; Camel cigarettes stopped using the 'Joe Camel' character in advertisements due to consumer complaints that it targeted kids; JC Penny chose to stop selling children's T-shirts featuring Budweiser's "Whassup!" slogan when parents began an email campaign.*)



Activity

As a group, brainstorm all the ways your students can "talk back" to the media, to advertisers and to corporations. Tell students to consider ideas for action that are both local and global in scope. Some ideas might include the following:

- To raise awareness about consumerism, organize a school-wide "Buy Nothing Day" campaign. (See the lesson *Buy Nothing Day* (<http://mediasmarts.ca/lessonplan/buy-nothing-day>) for more information.)
- The email grassroots campaign should be expanded to include social media campaigns (see below)
- Use email or create a website to begin a grassroots campaign to raise awareness and encourage action on a particular issue. (*Because of sensitivities about spam, students should plan email campaigns very carefully. Correspondence should be phrased in a logical, unemotional manner and should be based on factual evidence. Organizations and individuals chosen to forward the message to should also be carefully selected.*)
- Put some spoof ads up in the hallways (with permission)
- Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper
- Call a TV station, radio station, or newspaper. Tell them you have a story idea (a product boycott, a group of friends with an opinion about something)
- Write a letter to a TV station, radio station, newspaper or magazine that has aired an advertisement that you have an opinion about

Distribute *How and When to Talk Back* handout to students:

- Review and discuss together

Using the Talk Back handout as reference, have students write a sample letter to a company (it can be a real or imagined scenario). Students who opt to create an email campaign should include a 'plan of action' outlining which groups or individuals their correspondence would be sent to and why they have been chosen.

Evaluation

- Student letters

Extension Activity

For students who have chosen real issues, have them mail their letters and report back to class on the company's response to their correspondence.

This lesson has been adapted from *Seeing Beyond the Glam*, a peer education workshop from the *Expecting Respect Peer Education Program*. The original workshop is designed for secondary students who want to conduct workshops with other students about advertising and its impact on teenagers. *Adapted with permission*. For more information about the *Expecting Respect Peer Education Program* or to obtain a copy of *Seeing Beyond the Glam*, email sthompson@mcd.gov.ab.ca



How and When to Talk Back

If you don't like the way people are portrayed on a TV show or in an ad, don't just complain to your friends.

Tell the people who have the power to do something about it -- producers, networks, companies that make or the ads, or companies that make the product being advertised.

If you think young people aren't quoted enough or their stories aren't being told in the mass media, get your story to the gatekeepers.

If you think anything you see on TV or in a magazine has gone too far, TALK BACK!!!

HOW?

You can write a letter to:

- Correct an error made in a story
- Add facts that were left out
- Disagree with a writer' or an advertising message point of view
- Compliment a writer or advertiser
- Inform a company you won't be buying their product
- Suggest solutions, such as ways in which an ad could be improved to reduce stereotyping

One way is to write a letter to the editor of a magazine or newspaper, or to the advertising department of a TV station.

Corporations take consumer opinions seriously. If you write to a company about something that bothered you about their advertising, tell them you will not be buying their product until they change their message.

If the company or product has a Facebook page or a Twitter or Instagram account, post your complaint (in a less formal form than a letter, but still professional, articulate and polite) there and get your friends to do the same. If a link to or embedded video of the ad is on their FB or a photo of it is on Instagram, comment on it directly.

A Few Hints for Comments on Corporate FB pages or Twitter or Instagram accounts:

- Keep it brief and to the point
- Don't go on the attack: instead, write as if you are just trying to bring an issue to their attention
- Don't use slang or profanity
- Include a link to a Facebook page or blog for more information
- If a company addresses the issue or already presents fair portrayals of different groups, acknowledge it
- Remember, you are talking to the company and everyone else who visits the site. It's a specific rebuttal and a public appeal.



If the corporation doesn't respond, you can send a complaint to Advertising Standards Canada (<http://www.adstandards.com/en/ConsumerComplaints/howToSubmitAComplaint.aspx>) for ads in print publications or to the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (<http://www.crtc.gc.ca/RapidsCCM/Register.asp?lang=E>) or the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (<http://www.cbcs.ca/english/complaint/>) for ads on television.

You can also start your own movement on social media! Write a blog entry, make a Facebook page, start a Twitter hashtag or post a video that gets your message across.

A few hints for letters:

- 3-4 paragraphs
- keep the tone of it cool and calm
- one main idea in the letter
- one point per sentence
- no profanity
- send to the Letters Editor if it's going to a newspaper
- you can send it by mail, fax, or email
- include your name, address and phone number, and name of a group if you are writing on behalf of others (anonymous letters aren't usually published)



Buy Nothing Day

Activities for the classroom and the home

International Buy Nothing Day always falls on the day after the American Thanksgiving, traditionally the first day of Christmas shopping! People are encouraged to not make any purchases throughout the entire day. The idea is to increase participants' awareness of their spending habits and to think about mass consumerism and its effect on the cultural and natural environment of the world.

Here are some questions to explore with your kids and students:

- Do you think that we buy more things than we really need each day? Make a list of things which your family would normally spend money on each day. I.e. food, gas, bus fare, clothing etc.
- Do think your family could go for a whole day without spending any money?
- Discuss the relevance of discouraging consumerism when we live in a capitalist country. Would it be more appropriate to celebrate Buy Nothing Day by encouraging citizens to buy from local businesses rather than from stores owned by large multinational corporations?
- Look at your spending habits over the course of a month and see where most of your money goes. Do you attempt to budget your money?
- Talk about how our culture has changed from one where people had to grow their food, build their own homes and make their own clothing to one where we pay money for all those things. What things would the early pioneers have had to buy which they couldn't supply themselves. i.e. flour, cloth for clothing, china, pots and pans etc.?
- Why do we, as a culture, feel compelled to buy things we don't need for survival?
- Do you think commercials and advertisements makes us feel we need things when we really don't?
- Can you think of reasons why buying things could be necessary for our society? Does it help the economy? Does it hurt the environment?

Activities:

- Visit a pioneer village or a museum. Discuss how we have moved from being a rural population to an urban one and what repercussions this change has had on society and the environment.
- Have your kids make something from scratch -- something they would normally buy, i.e. a loaf of bread, Christmas presents, etc.
- Have your kids to write a story or play around the theme of consumerism and youth.
- Create a "Buy Nothing Day" celebration at your school -- hold a poster contest or a competition to see which class can come up with the best idea for promoting non-consumerism in your community.

