



LESSON PLAN

Level: Primary / Junior
About the Author: MediaSmarts
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



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

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

- Bring in a variety of food packages (full or empty—you can collect empty ones from recycling bins or have students bring them in)
 - Make sure to include at least one box of children's cereal
- Prepare to project or distribute the *What else do packages say?* handout
- Prepare to distribute the activity sheet *What does this box say?* (for younger students) or *What does your cereal box say?* (for older students)
- Bring paper bags of different sizes



Procedure

Before class, put a variety of food packages into paper bags. Take each food package out of the bag slowly and ask students to see how quickly they can guess what is in each bag.

- Which packages were they able to recognize when just a bit had been taken out of the bag?
- Which ones did they recognize when they were able to see half the package?
- Which ones did they not recognize at all?

Explain to students children that packaging is one of the kinds of advertising we see most often, but we often don't think of it as advertising.

Ask students: What do they do to get someone's attention? Now tell them to think of all of the products on a grocery store shelf competing to get their attention. What are some of the things *they* do to get kids' attention?

After students have discussed some possible things, take out a box of kids' cereal to show to students. (If possible, you can pass several boxes around so that kids can get a better look.) Ask them to name the things that are on the box that are trying to get kids' attention.

Make sure the following things get mentioned:

- Brand name and logo (different logos say different things about the product: "storybook" lettering gives an old-fashioned, comfortable feel, for example, while jagged letters feel exciting and "extreme")
- Characters (brand mascots like Tony the Tiger, characters from kids' media, or real people like athletes)
- Slogans (like Lucky Charms' "magically delicious")
- Claims (some cereals have claims about taste, or nutrition, or both)
- Colour (bright colours to attract attention)
- Prizes, contests and giveaways
- Activities on the back of the box
- Links to websites or apps that tie in to the product

Now ask students: What else is on the box?

- There is a list of ingredients, which often includes a list of possible allergens like eggs or milk
- Food packaging often has pictures of fruit or bread around it, usually with a note that says something like "part of a complete breakfast." (Ask: How many students who have cereal for breakfast usually have fruit or bread too? What does it say about cereal if it needs those things to be a complete breakfast?)
- The nutrition facts label. This show much there is of different nutrients (like sugar, fat, protein, iron, etc.) in a serving. (Point out that you often eat more than one serving at a sitting.)

Which parts of the package do you think the maker *wants* to show you? Which do they *have* to show you? Which is bigger? (By law, the nutrition information and ingredients list have to be a certain size relative to the package, be "prominently shown" and big enough to be readable.)



Now ask whether packaging can say things beside “Look at me” and “Buy me.” What are some other things a package can say?

Distribute or project the handout *What else do packages say?* (If you are distributing it as a handout, tell students not to turn it over yet.) Ask students what each element of the package is “saying”: the colours, the logo, the claims (you may need to explain to students that “organic” in this context mostly means no chemicals were used to kill insects or weeds when growing the ingredients) and images such as the rabbit and the cookie. What do the packages say about which cookies taste better? What do they say about which are more healthful?

Have students flip over the paper or project the next page of the handout. Explain to students that the nutrition panel shows you both how *much* of each nutrient is in something but also how much it counts towards the amount of that thing you should have in a day. Some of those are things you try to limit (like sugar or fat) while others are things you may not always get 100% of (like fibre or iron.) Explain that in nutrition panels, 5% or less means there is just a little of that thing; 15% or more means that it is a big part of how much you should have in a day.

Go through the nutrition panels and ask students if they can guess which one goes with which snack. (The only clue is the serving size — the one on the left is clearly for larger cookies because it only takes two cookies to make a 34 gram serving.) What nutrients are there a *lot* of? (Fat and sugar for both.) What nutrients are there a *little* of? (Vitamins, calcium, fibre for both.) What nutrients are in between? (The one on the left, the Decadent chocolate chip cookies, actually have 10% of your daily recommended iron.)

Point out to students how this shows packaging can be *misleading* — just like a package could make food look tasty but you don’t know if it really is until you try it, just because the package tells you something is healthy doesn’t mean it’s actually any more healthy.

Activity for younger students:

Have students collect at least ten food packages. Make sure they are a mix of snack foods and other packaged foods (dry pasta, canned beans, etc.) In pairs or groups, have them choose up to four of those packages that they would want to have with a meal. Next, have the groups or pairs share and discuss which packages they chose:

- What made them choose those packages?
- Did anybody choose something they have never eaten before? If so, what made you choose it?
- Were there packages more people chose than others? Ones nobody or almost nobody chose?
- What do the packages that lots of people chose have in common? What do the ones that not many chose have in common?

Now distribute the handout *What is this box saying?* and have students spot and colour in all of the elements on the cereal box that are designed to get kids’ attention.

Activity for older students:

Have students collect at least ten food packages. Make sure they are a mix of snack foods and other packaged foods (dry pasta, canned beans, etc.) Working together as a class, develop a scoring system to measure how much the packaging appeals to kids, based on the factors identified earlier in the lesson (colours, characters, etc.) Have them score each of the foods based on the package.



Next have students look at the nutrition information of those packages and assign a nutrition score to each one. Add points if protein, fibre, or any vitamins or minerals are above ten per cent of the total daily value; take points away if fat or sugar are above ten per cent of the total daily value.

Finally, compare the two scores. Is food with a high “kid appeal” score likely to have a higher or lower nutrition score than food with a low kid appeal score?

Now distribute the handout *What does your cereal box say?* Remind students of the earlier discussion about how packages get kids’ attention and have students draw and colour in as many elements as they can think of to get kids to notice their cereal box.

Extension activity: Packaging field trip

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.
- 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.

Extension: Wacky Media Songs

You may consider supplementing this lesson with the TVOntario Original Series *Wacky Media Songs*. These short videos explore a variety of digital media literacy topics. Here are a few suggested videos and discussion topics:

[We’ll Make Them Want It!](#) Packaging is the marketers’ last chance to convince us to buy their product. They have to grab our attention right away. Ava designs a package as she sings about the different packaging tricks marketers use to make kids say: “Wow! I want that!”

Before the video, ask: Have you ever seen something in a store that made you want to buy it (or ask for it)? What about it made you want it?

After the video, ask: Pause on this part of the video. Which box makes you want the cookies more? Why? (For example, bright colours, cartoon characters, fun logos and lettering.) Does it make any difference to how the cookies taste?



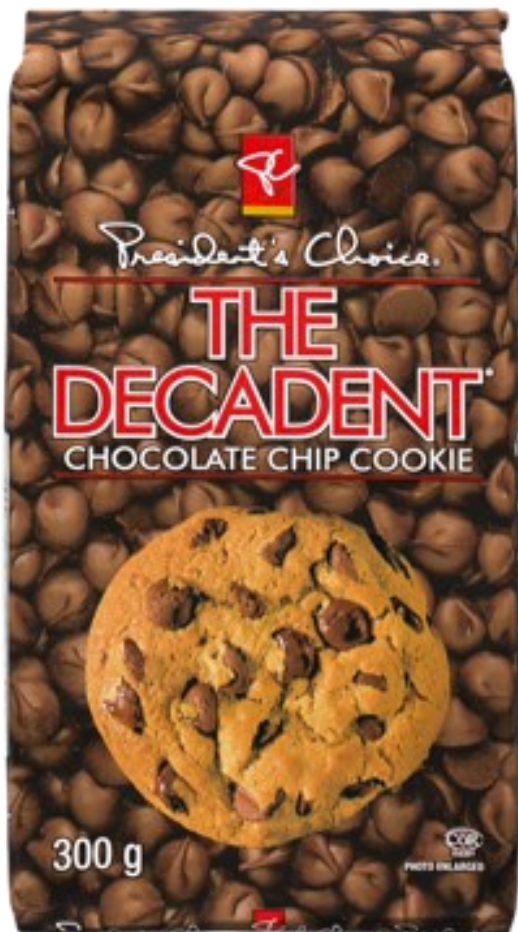
[Creating a Brand!](#) From packaging to creating a cool mascot, everything about a brand should give us good feelings. Ava creates her own brand of cereal. Plus, she plays a wacky, singing llama!

Before the video, ask: What does it mean when we talk about a “brand” in ads?

After the video, ask: Can you think of any ads that try to make you like the brand instead of telling you what’s good about the product? What are some ways that they do that?



What else can packages say?



Nutritional Information

Serving Size Per 2.0 cookie(s) 34 g	
Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 170 cal	
Fat 8 g	12%
Saturated Fat 5 g	26%
Trans Fat 0.1 g	
Cholesterol 15 mg	
Sodium 80 mg	3%
Potassium 0 mg	0%
Carbohydrate 23 g	8%
Sugars 13 g	
Dietary Fiber 1 g	4%
Protein 2 g	
Vitamin A	4%
Calcium	2%
Iron	10%

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size	6 cookies (30g)	
As Packaged		
Calories	150	
% Daily Value *		
Total Fat	8g	10%
Saturated Fat	3g	15%
Trans Fat	0g	
Cholesterol	0mg	0%
Sodium	100mg	4%
Potassium	0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate	19g	7%
Dietary Fiber	1g	5%
Total Sugars	9g	
Incl. Added Sugars	9g	18%
Protein	2g	
Vitamin D	0mcg	0%
Calcium	0mg	0%
Iron	0.6mg	4%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.



What is this box saying?

Colour in all the things on this box that make kids notice it.



What does your cereal box say?

Draw and colour as many things on the box as you can think of to get kids to notice and want to buy it.

