Reading Advertisements:
Taking A Closer Look (Critical Viewing)
by Media Literacy Educator, Frank Baker

Time Frame: 1 or 2 class periods

Grade Level: Grades 6 through 12

Overview: This activity is designed to help students look more deeply into advertising. Ads surround us and frequently, we do not stop to study them and ask questions about the techniques used to persuade us. This activity is designed to instill critical thinking and critical viewing in students. The activity utilizes Artopia - Critical Viewing: Cigarette Ads on http://www.Knowitall.org/ and full-page tobacco advertisements located in mainstream magazines. The following publications carry tobacco advertisements: Glamour, US News & World Report, Newsweek, TIME, Ebony, Family Circle, Cosmopolitan, Bow Hunter, Ladies Home Journal, Hunter, Outdoor Life, Popular Mechanics, Rolling Stone, and Sports Illustrated.

English Language Arts Standards
Communication Goal (C)
Grades 6-12
The student will recognize, demonstrate, and analyze the qualities of effective communication.
Communication: Viewing
Demonstrate the ability to evaluate the ways that the use of language, the medium, and the presentation contribute to the meaning and impact of a message

Health and Safety Standards
Content Area VI: Alcohol Tobacco & Other Drugs (ATOD)
By the end of grade 8, students should be able to
--analyze the effect of mass media, culture, gender age, and other factors on attitudes and behaviors related to ATOD use:
12th evaluate ATOD media messages and marketing techniques

Goal
This activity is designed to get students thinking about the purpose of advertising and the techniques of persuasion used specifically in print ads.

Objectives
Students will learn about the techniques of persuasion in print advertising.
Students will learn how to deconstruct a print ad.
Students will learn how to tobacco industry targets its audiences.
Students will learn about parody through the production of counter advertising.
Assessment
Students, working in groups will analyze a tobacco advertisement and create a counter advertisement. The following questions are designed to make sure they understand critical viewing and media literacy:

Questions:  Answers:
1. Who is the producer of the tobacco advertisement? 
2. What is the purpose of the tobacco advertisement? 
3. Which technique(s) of persuasion are used to make the advertisement believable? 
4. How is the advertisement constructed? 
5. What lifestyle appears to be communicated via the advertisement? 
6. What do you already know about tobacco and the dangers of smoking? (prior knowledge) What don’t you know? What would you like to know? 
7. Where can you go to find credible answers?

Instruction
Building Background:  For years, the tobacco industry has used many different media (radio, television, billboards, magazines, etc.) to reach its target audiences. Ever since the 1998 tobacco settlement, access to some of those media has been restricted (television, billboard). But that has not stopped the powerful industry from coming up with new and innovative ways of reaching its target audience, increasingly young people.

Students may be encouraged to research the 1998 US Tobacco Settlement; how much money the state of South Carolina received from that settlement; and how that money is or is not being used.

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Since many students (and teachers) have never been taught how to “read an ad,” emphasis is placed here on understanding the language of advertising.

Special attention is called to Frank Baker’s Tobacco Ad Web page, which lists a number of current event news articles relevant to the topic of tobacco advertising and efforts by the tobacco industry to expand its reach to young consumers.
http://medialit.med.sc.edu/smoking.htm
Teaching the Lesson:  Teachers should locate ads from magazines and select enough so that students work in teams of 4-6 students. Each team have one ad to study per group. The teacher should begin with a general discussion about the purpose of advertising and move into a more specific discussion about the common “techniques of persuasion.” Here are several URLs in which to
download handouts with common techniques. The first one could be used on an overhead projector to assist students.  
http://medialit.med.sc.edu/hooks.htm  
http://reta.nmsu.edu/traincd/media/tools.html  

Teachers can assist students by instructing each group to read not only the words in their tobacco ad, but also the image. Reading the image is not something teachers or students have significant experience with, so here are some suggestions. Ask students to notice what is happening in the pictures. For example, can they tell a story as a result of the images on the page. If the ad includes people, students might be asked to notice their clothes and their expressions. They might also think about the use of color and what if anything it might signify. Working in groups, they should be given about 5 minutes to talk about their ad. They should also reference the overhead (hooks) and try to identify at least one hook. At the end of five minutes, a representative from each group shares with the entire class.

Also helpful here is a new web site within the ARTOPIA web page:  http://cfmedia.scetv.org/artopia
Click on Media Arts; then Be A Media Critic. There you will see links to the Critical Viewing exercise, which again uses tobacco ads and key concepts in media literacy to help students understand advertising messages.

Extending the activity:
Counter advertising is nothing new: it parodies ads as a way of not only making fun of them, but also helping audiences see through the messages and techniques. The Canadian group ADBUSTERS is famous for taking the KOOL brand, changing the K to an F, and making the smoker out to be a FOOL for smoking. In the 1990’s the state of Florida funded the TRUTH campaign with counter ad messages on radio, TV and magazines as a way to help alter the behavior of young people to smoking. The TRUTH counter ads are often edgy, irreverent, and controversial—all designed to appeal to young people.

Extending the Activity 2
Ask students where, in their neighborhood, they might find tobacco ads. Some may say on television or billboards, but they would be wrong. Tobacco commercials ceased in 1971, and tobacco billboards came down with the 1998 federal tobacco settlement. (This activity is designed to get students to think about placement and audience.)

-For example, why would tobacco companies put their posters outside alcohol or convenience stores? Students can be assigned to document the exact location of tobacco signage (store name, address, proximity to major intersection or university) Working in teams, they report back to class on their findings.
Teachers may decide to create an interactive map of their community noting where tobacco ads are located.

-Tobacco’s relationship with music (ask students to investigate one or more brands sponsorship of music concerts) Why would tobacco want to be associated with music?

- Tobacco’s relationship with Hollywood motion pictures (ask students to explore the purpose of actors/actresses smoking in popular film) what purpose does tobacco play when a character smokes in a film? Does smoking add or detract from the betrayal? Who benefits in the product placement arrangements?

Teachers can introduce students to ads from various tobacco counter ad campaigns. Here is a website with many counter ad examples:

http://medialit.med.sc.edu/counteradexamples.htm

Again using counter ads as overheads, teachers can next ask students if they know what counter advertising is and what its purpose might be. After a brief discussion, the teacher should display several of the counter ads, asking students to think about how they work.

The teacher can then explain that each group will now create their own counter advertisement using the original ad they’ve been de-constructing. Teachers can distribute crayons or markers, scissors, glue stick and paper. (Students will need the most time to create their counter ad…probably 15-20 minutes at least). After each group has completed the creation of the counter ad, they should again be prepared to explain to the entire class how they altered their original ad.

After Teaching the lesson students will use the rubric in the above Assessment section.

Text Sets
The teacher may want to create a text set to use as a classroom resource that includes titles in a variety of genres and reflects the diversity of the students. Text sets should include titles that may be used as read-alouds, independent reading, research, or enrichment. Text sets are optional and may be collected and expanded based on student need and the focus of the module.

Books
The Cigarette Papers by Stanton A. Glantz, John Slade, Lisa A. Bero, Peter Hanauer, Deborah E. Barnes

Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising by Juliann Sivulka

Media Sharp: Analyzing Tobacco & Alcohol Messages (CDC produced curriculum) http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/mediashrp.htm
Videos
Pack of Lies: 
http://www.mediaed.org/videos/MediaAndHealth/PackofLies

Deadly Persuasion The Advertising of Tobacco & Alcohol: 
http://www.mediaed.org/videos/MediaAndHealth/DeadlyPersuasion

Making A Killing: 
http://www.infact.org/mak.html

The Teen Files: Smoking, Truth or Dare 

Smoking: The Truth Unfiltered (In The Mix Series) 
http://www.pbs.org/inthemix/shows/show_smoking.html

Web sites 
Frank Baker’s Website on Tobacco & Media Literacy: 
http://medialit.med.sc.edu/smoking.htm
News Articles 
http://medialit.med.sc.edu/smokingreading.htm