

# (Rocky Hill HS)

Mary E. Aunce-Oberndorfer  
United States History

“Turn of the Century Advertising and Middle Class Values”

Essential Question: What can be learned about a historical period from advertisements?

Learner Background:

The years 1870 to 1900 were characterized by rapid technological and social changes. Two of the most important trends, urbanization and industrialization would not only change how most people lived, but also how they thought. As a result, people would begin to desire newly developed technologies and products. Advertisers, seeing their moment would begin to compete for Americans' disposable income. This lesson examines advertising techniques while at the same time exposes the students to the “hopes, values, and fears” of turn of the century middle class America.

Objectives: The students will be able to:

- understand how American industry overcame the traditional American ethic of thrift and generated a demand for newly created products.
- analyze different types of advertisements (persuasive, editorial, and informational) taken from 19<sup>th</sup> century magazines and newspapers.
- understand the techniques of persuasion used by advertisers.

Materials / Resources:

- copies of pages 1-8 of Daniel Pope's, "Making Sense of Advertisements," *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/ads/ads.pdf>, June 2003.
- copies of pages 58 -62, *Wheeler's Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence, Volume II, 5th Ed.*
- one copy of “Excerpts on the New Business of Advertising, 1898-1927”, pg. 97, *Wheeler's Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence, Volume II, 5th Ed.*
- one copy of each of the advertisements on pages 66-96, *Wheeler's Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence, Volume II, 5th Ed.*
- copies of “print advertisement analysis worksheet”;  
<http://www.glencoe.com/sec/science/webquest/content/pdfs/unit1worksheet.pdf>
- “Glossary of Commonly Used Advertising Techniques”;  
[http://www.mediaworkshop.org/bwc/johnston\\_gonzalez/ads/glossary.html](http://www.mediaworkshop.org/bwc/johnston_gonzalez/ads/glossary.html)
- a copy of a modern print advertisement.
- an overhead projector.

## Learning Activities: Day I

### Initiator:

- Explain to the students that they are about to embark upon an examination of advertising and how it can be used to learn about a society's values.
- Provide each student with a copy of pages 1-8 of Daniel Pope's, "Making Sense of Advertisements".
- Lead the class in a reading of the document.
- Ask the students the following questions based on the reading:
  - 1) According to the reading, how are advertisements a "true mirror of life?"
  - 2) What is "institutional advertising?"
  - 3) How does "institutional advertising" influence people's decisions?
  - 4) According to the article how has advertising evolved since the colonial period?
  - 5) When were advertising agencies born? What contributed to the birth of agencies?
  - 6) According to Pope, what questions should we ask ourselves when we look at an advertisement?
  - 7) What can historians learn from examining an advertisement? Comparing advertisements from different periods of time?
- Hand out to each student a copy of the "Glossary of Commonly Used Advertising Techniques".
- Have the students silently read through the list of various techniques.
- Use the overhead and screen to display a modern print advertisement.
- Explain to the students that they are going to look at a modern advertisement and work together to analyze it.
- Ask the students the following questions:
  - 1) To whom (which target audience) is the advertisement trying to sell the product?
  - 2) How would you describe the target audience (age, gender, culture, lifestyle)?
  - 3) Does this advertisement appeal to your emotions? If so, which emotion(s)?
  - 4) Do you detect any exaggeration or suspicious promises? If so, what is the "hidden message"?
  - 5) What is the intended use(s) of the product?
  - 6) Does the advertiser point out special features of the product?
  - 7) Are there any signs or symbols in the ad? If so, what are they trying to tell you?

- 8) What advertising techniques are being used to sell the product (see glossary of terms)?
- 9) How is the technique being employed?
- 10) Do you think this ad was successful?
- 11) What does it say about the society it is directed at?

#### Learning Activities: Day II

- Hand out to each student a copy of pages 58 -62 in *Wheeler's Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence*
- Inform the students that this reading will provide them with valuable background information pertaining to the industrialization and urbanization of America during the years 1870-1900.
- Lead a whole class reading of the document.
- Point out to the students the question that the author poses on page 62: *How could American industry overcome the traditional American ethic of thrift and create a demand for products that might not have existed a few years earlier?*
- Have the students spend a few minutes brainstorming methods that 19<sup>th</sup> century advertisers might have employed.
- Read aloud to the students "Excerpts on the New Business of Advertising, 1898-1927".
- Ask the students the following questions:
  - 1) How does the author define the art of advertising?
  - 2) According to the author, what is the purpose of advertising?
  - 3) According to the author, what are the elements of a "good advertisement"?
  - 4) How does the author describe men and women?
  - 5) How do men and women differ in their concerns?
  - 6) According to the author, how do advertisers capitalize on the differences between men and women?
  - 7) What does the author mean when he says, "people are like sheep"?
  - 8) Are these new concepts? Do you think this is the prevailing idea today? Why, or why not?

#### Learning Activities: Day III and IV

- Inform the students that they are now going to evaluate an advertisement from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Give each student an advertisement taken from pages 66-96, in *Wheeler's Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence, Volume II, 5th Ed.*

- Give each student a copy of the “print advertisement analysis worksheet”.
- Instruct the students to carefully complete the “print advertisement analysis worksheet”.
- Once everyone in the class has completed the worksheet, have the students take turns coming to the front of the classroom in order to show their classmates the advertisement they evaluated and give their interpretation of the document.

Closure: Upon completion of the mini-presentations, ask the students to orally respond to the following questions:

- 1) How did white, middle class Americans live during this period of time?
- 2) What did advertisements from the period reveal about middle class “values, hopes, and fears”?

Differentiated Assessment:

Depending upon the level of your class, students could be assessed through one the following:

- Have the students write an essay response to the following question: *How could American industry overcome the traditional American ethic of thrift and create a demand for products that might not have existed a few years earlier?*

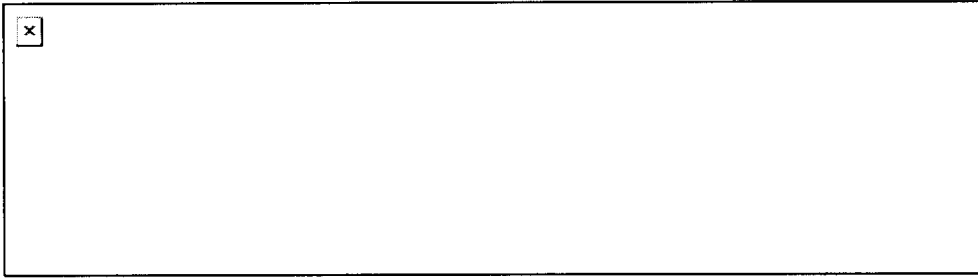
or

- Have the students design their own advertisement which reflects the values of the period.

or

- Have the students write an advisory brochure as to the dangers of 19<sup>th</sup> century or modern “advertising techniques”.

- Have the students respond to the following question in a persuasive essay: *Have advertisers actually created the standards and values of our society?*



## **Glossary of Commonly Used Techniques**

**Beauty Appeal:** Beauty attracts us; we are drawn to beautiful people, places, and things.

**Celebrity Endorsement:** Associates product use with a well-known person. By purchasing this product we are led to believe that we will attain characteristics similar to the celebrity.

**Compliment the Consumer:** Advertisers flatter the consumer who is willing to purchase their product. By purchasing the product the consumer is recognized by the advertisers for making a good decision with their selection.

**Escape:** Getting away from it all is very appealing; you can imagine adventures you cannot have; the idea of escape is pleasurable.

**Independence/Individuality:** Associates product with people who can think and act for themselves. Products are linked to individual decision making.

**Intelligence:** Associates product with smart people who can't be fooled.

**Lifestyle:** Associates product with a particular style of living/way of doing things.

**Nurture:** Every time you see an animal or a child, the appeal is to your paternal or maternal instincts. Associates products with taking care of someone.

**Peer Approval:** Associates product use with friendship/acceptance. Advertisers can also use this negatively, to make you worry that you'll lose friends if you don't use a certain product.

**Rebel:** Associates products with behaviors or lifestyles that oppose society's norms.

**Rhetorical Question:** This technique poses a question to the consumer that demands a response. A question is asked and the consumer is supposed to answer in such a way that affirms the product's goodness.

**Scientific/Statistical Claim:** Provides some sort of scientific proof or experiment, very specific numbers, or an impressive sounding mystery ingredient.

**Unfinished Comparison/Claim:** Use of phrases such as "Works better in poor driving conditions!" Works better than what?

## **Print Advertisement Analysis worksheet**

**You may print this worksheet out to complete the questions.**

What product, service, or point of view is being advertised?

Who is responsible for creating this advertisement? Why are they sending this message?

What is the purpose of this advertisement? (For example, is it intended to educate, entertain, or inform?)

What advertising techniques are used to attract a viewer's attention and to make the advertisement believable?

Who is the anticipated audience of the advertisement? Who is actually seeing the advertisement?

What does the advertisement say to the viewer? What lifestyles, values, opinions, and points of view are represented?

Who makes money or benefits from the advertisement?

What makes the advertisement biased in some manner? How is this bias demonstrated? What has been included or left out of the advertisement?

Why would the advertisement's creators or the product makers have the need to be biased in their advertisement?

How might some people understand this advertisement differently from others? Would all viewers agree on what was being advertised and the purpose of the ad?

Would someone be likely to believe this advertisement? Why or why not?

Do you agree with the advertisement? Why or why not?