

Media Literacy Monday – February 6th, 2006 “Tackling the Beer Barons”

Goal: An investigative, goal-oriented, lesson to stimulate critical thinking about the single most watched television show, the Super Bowl, and its most common ads--beer commercials--and their impact on youth.

Rationale: If students don't receive this information, children know less about one of the most powerful media--TV ads and sports broadcasting. Then, the alcohol companies can continue their powerful influence upon the socialization of our kids.

by **Bob McCannon: Vice President, Action Coalition for Media Education and**

This lesson is a project of the Action Coalition for Media Education (www.acmecoalition.org). It derives from the New Mexico Media Literacy Project's seven year "Targeting Children, Disrespecting Women, Ban Budweiser Campaign," also developed by Bob McCannon during his fourteen years as Executive Director. If you have questions, Bob can be reached at mccannon@flash.net. A small part of this content was also contributed by Peter DeBenedittis.

DURATION: (1 and 1/2 class periods):

20 minutes on the last class day before the showing of the Super Bowl, for most Friday, February 3rd, 2006.
One class period on the Monday after the Super Bowl.

Relevant SUBJECT Areas:

Social Studies/History
Language Arts/ English
Health
Communications

Critical thinking OUTCOMES: Students will better be able to:

Analyze beer advertisements.
Better understand targeting techniques used in beer ads.
Understand the effort the alcohol industry invests in beer ads.
Appreciate the importance of youth to beer companies.

Health OUTCOMES: Students will better be able to understand:

The biological consequences of beer drinking.
The addictive properties of beer drinking.
The social consequences of beer drinking.
Beer company attempts to divert attention from these effects.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Use of a copier; TV/VCR/DVD recorder to record Super Bowl; and TV or monitor to play back ads in class.
Downloaded copies of the lesson plans and handout.

PREPARATION: “Tackling the Beer Barons:” (Before the Super Bowl)

- Download and copy 2-3 “Log Sheets” for every student. Distribute them during the last class before the Super Bowl, most probably, Friday Feb. 3rd, 2006, since the game is Sunday, Feb 5th, 2006.
- On Friday, read and explain the log sheet instructions to the students.
- Explain that the students will only use the sheets, i.e., “**work**” for **one hour** of the Super Bowl. *During that hour and that hour ONLY, the students will LIST:*
 - Any ad or reference to any alcohol or beer company, such as “brought to you by xxx alcohol or beer (A or B) company – **ANY announcement or mention** of an A or B co.”
 - Any statistics or awards brought to the viewer by a beer company.
 - Any beer “blimps, balloons, robots” or other aerial shots.
 - Any shots of beer signs in the stadium that the cameras show.
 - Any shots of fans drinking (count them) or shots of fans with beer logos on their apparel.
 - **Very important:** Note any ads that
 - have actors that could be under twenty-one years old
 - have cartoon characters or
 - seem to have humor designed to appeal mostly to adolescents
 - or seem to be PSAs (public service announcements about the problems of drinking) promoting “responsible” drinking or “dangers” of drinking.
- Ask for student **volunteers** to tape the beer ads and PSAs. Split them up into hours, half hours, or quarter hours of the game. Emphasize that they could *also* bring the examples to class with examples from above cued up and ready to play. *Note that the prevention PSA is particularly important.*
- Teachers should also record the show and have several examples ready and bring them to class with some classic examples ready to play (cued up). Try to get the best Bud ads; there are usually 8-12 of them each game. *Also, remember, the Bud prevention PSA is particularly important!*
- Print & copy student handout #1 to use in class. To save paper, it is designed to be cut in half.
- Optional preparation: this will extend this segment’s class time, but is great education. Explain that in the past beer companies, especially have sought

to target kids from age two to twenty by using many cartoon characters, adolescent humor (like “fart” jokes), sexy models, youthful music, etc. If you have any old examples to show the kids, it would enhance their understanding. Examples can be found at www.nmmlp.org. Explain that beer companies have the problem that most kids decide whether to drink or not by ages 14-18. So A and B companies need to target younger kids to be effective. Ask the students if they know any “party animals” and when those kids started thinking like that.

AFTER THE SUPERBOWL: MEDIA LITERACY **MONDAY: “Tackling the Beer Barons”**

1. **Cost (10 Minutes):** Ask several students to review the results of their log and the totals from each category. Note the totals on the board. Are the students surprised at how often beer is advertised on this sports event? Multiply the total amount of time times \$2.5 million per minute. How much is that?

Ask the students to try and figure out how much money Budweiser spent *on just this one football game*. Take the cost of the ads time (\$2.5 million per ad); then, add in (guess at) the number of stadium signs and what they cost, announcements, \$1-2 Million to produce each ad and hundreds of public relations and advertising people to push the campaign associated with the ad campaign right down to signs in stores all over the country. You probably cannot overestimate!

2. **Targeting (10 Minutes):** Introduce the students to the concept of *targeting*. Different ads target different groups (age, ethnicity, wealth, profession, etc.). Which ads did the kids think were the most humorous, the most memorable? Research shows that the more people like an ad, the more likely they are to buy the product. Ask the kids if this is important to beer companies and why. Note that competition from other alcohol drinks is growing. Were there ads for other kinds of alcohol drinks other than beer? If the ads sell more beer, ad executives receive bonuses! How many other alcohol drinks advertised on the Super Bowl? What age groups do the students think the best ads targeted?
3. **Information (2 Minutes):** Point out that on a per-minute basis, these ads cost more to make than movies. The average national TV ad costs approximately one million dollars. That would be \$2 million/minute! And, the bulk of the money is spent to buy the **time** to play the ads. Thus, *every detail* in the ad is put there on purpose, and only after a great deal of thought by expensive experts.
4. **Deconstruction (10 Minutes):** Since ads are so carefully and expensively constructed, try to *deconstruct* or *analyze* a few.

Pick one of the kids’ favorite ads for detailed analysis. Show it several times.

Why did they like the ad? Consider music, humor, animation, animals, attractive people, attention getting scenes, celebrities, powerful symbols, cleverness and other techniques of persuasion.

Were most of the actors in the ad having fun? Why?

Often, the ads use humor. What kind of humor was used?

Budweiser often uses animations. Most recently a Bud animation appeared in June, 2004. What age group is being targeted by cartoons?

Another frequent technique of beer ads is to use jokes that put down (disrespect) women (since men buy most of the beer) or other types of people who are portrayed as being “dumb.” Why? (The fact that we “get” the joke is meant to make us feel good. The better we feel, the more beer they sell.) Are these kinds of humorous stories good for little kids to watch? Could they get wrong or misleading ideas about drinking, women or different groups?

Did the ad mention any of the negative consequences of drinking alcohol? Remind the students that the more students enjoy beer ads, the more likely students are to try beer drinking. Make a list of negative consequences of drinking.

Pick another of the most popular beer ads and repeat the analysis. Did the ad appeal less or more to some students in the class? Why?

5. Health consequences (10 Minutes): Point out that the ads usually don't mention **any of the health consequences of drinking**, such as:

- After drinking there is less activity in the brain – less thinking.
- Many researchers think that heavy drinking *damages* parts of the brain.
- There are about 60 ads in a Super Bowl. Bud usually buys about ten.
- That is about 25 MILLION DOLLARS just to buy the TIME!
- The Super Bowl is the most watched TV show on earth.
- About 15 million people under age 18 watched the last Super Bowl.
- About 7 million were age 12-17.
- About 7 million were under age 12.
- Out of 10 kids that start drinking before age 15, *four will become alcoholics*.
- Beer companies make \$5 BILLION per year from under age drinking.¹
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Why would Budweiser be willing to spend so much money on the Super Bowl?

- Ask students why they think that beer companies don't mention the health effects of drinking?
- Ask the students what group buys the most beer (alcoholics/heavy drinkers).

¹ Sources: TV industry promotional materials; SuperBowl ads.com; Leadership to keep children alcohol free; Center for Science in the Public Interest; *USA Today*.

- Could beer companies be interested in attracting their best customers (alcoholics/heavy drinkers) when they are young?
- Ask the students what other negative health consequences arise from drinking beer. (driving, sex and pregnancy/STDs, less money to spend on other things. Make a list of other things that most families need to spend money on.

6. What Beer companies call “prevention” (8 Minutes):

- Usually Budweiser runs a “prevention” ad during every Super Bowl. It usually encourages people to use “designated drivers” or asks parents to “talk to their kids about drinking.” This part of the lesson is about this type of ad. If there is no Bud “prevention” ad, go on to the next section.
- Play the prevention spot to the class.
- Use the following questions as a guide for the discussion.
- - Why did Bud only play one prevention ad out of so many others? Does Bud, therefore, really “value” prevention?
 - *Did the Bud “prevention” ad have the same kind of humor, cleverness, attractive people, music, attention getting devices and entertainment values of the other Bud ads? Why or why not?*
 - Do you think that encouraging parents to talk to kids about drinking will affect many teens’ decisions to drink or how much teens will drink? Could this be a sneaky way for the beer companies to influence younger kids or, possibly, transfer responsibility for teen drinking from the company and its advertising to the parents?
 - Since the PSA ad is usually bland and boring, and the other alcohol/Bud ads are so funny, sexy, etc., isn’t Bud just making the kids’ and parents’ jobs harder?
 - Did the ad say that the smartest, safest thing was to NOT drink? (It is.)
 - Did the ad mention the negative health consequences of drinking? If no, why not? If so, how few and why so few?
 - Did the ad encourage one person to not drink or to get someone else to drive a group, SO THAT MORE PEOPLE COULD GET SMASHED?? Do you think alcohol companies like the idea of designated drivers?
 - With \$5 Billion at stake, do you really think the beer companies want less underage drinking?
 - Car crashes are the number one killer of teens. Alcohol is involved in most of these. Do you really think beer companies care about kids’ lives? If they were, wouldn’t they run more prevention PSAs?
 - Could they produce more effective prevention PSAs? (like the ads they make to SELL beer)?

-- Do you think you could create a prevention ad that would be more effective at getting kids to not drink or drink more responsibly, and, especially, not drive after drinking?

-- How would you go about it? Think of some ideas, some music, some humor, some attractive people, some celebrities, some dialogue, some scenes. You could make a better prevention ad than Budweiser.

7. Grading: Students are graded on successfully filling out their log sheets and their participation in the class discussion.

8. Extension Activities:

Design posters illustrating the lesson and post them in hallways.

Make a video that “tells the untold story” about Super Bowl beer ads and Budweiser.

Talk about the truth. Try to get the video played on the local cable access channel.

Write letters: to the editor of your local papers, to the beer companies, to ABC Sports, to your local, state and national representatives. Talk about the unfairness of beer companies making drinking problems worse, targeting kids and putting down women.

9. More Resources:

New Mexico Media Literacy Project: Boycott Bud Campaign

<http://www.nmmlp.org>

Center on Alcohol Marketing to Youth

<http://camy.org/>

The Marin Institute

<http://marininstitute.org/>

Leadership to keep Children Alcohol Free

www.alcoholfreechildren.org/

Center for Science in the Public Interest: Alcohol Studies Project

<http://cspinet.org/booze/>