

Unit Guide

Analyzing Commercials: Recognizing Methods of Persuasion and Becoming a Critical Consumer

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This five to eight day, 90 minute block-scheduled curriculum unit focuses on rhetorical appeals—ethos, logos, mythos, and pathos—in television commercials, while also exposing 12th grade students to logical fallacies and language in advertisements. Students will evaluate the effectiveness of rhetoric, fallacies, and the language of advertisements by becoming critical consumers, asking themselves, “Do these techniques persuade or dissuade me as a potential consumer of this product?” Going beyond shallow qualitative descriptions, students will become familiar with examples in various teacher-chosen commercials as well as commercials chosen by themselves and their classmates. The goal is to change students from passive consumers who either accept the messages they receive from commercials at face value or fail to actively analyze the messages they receive to critical consumers who actively evaluate the techniques in persuasive advertising and make more educated, intelligent decisions about their interest in products. The unit culminates with a group project during which students will create advertisements that utilize rhetorical appeals and the language of advertisements yet avoid logical fallacies. Audience members will evaluate their classmates’ presentations to continue to identify and evaluate the conventions of commercials.