

Close Reading (Lesson Plan)

Close Reading of News Story, Advertisements, Websites (LESSON PLAN/ACTIVITY)

by Frank W. Baker

There are at least two places in the Common Core ELA document where advertisements fit nicely:

Speaking & Listening Standards (Grade 8)

“Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.”

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

“Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.”

Here is a lesson plan/activity for you to consider using with your students. It involves reading a news story, questioning it and then examining the ads discussed in the news story and evaluating them.

1. Students read the story [‘Liquid candy bars’ still junk food, even with added vitamins](#)
2. They answer or discuss in groups these questions:

Close Reading Questions/Considerations

- a. Who wrote it?
- b. Where was it published?
- c. Who is the audience, in other words, who is likely to be the target demographic the writer hopes to reach?
- d. What is the purpose of the news story?
- e. Is there one quote, or sentence, that stands out more than the rest? What is it?
- f. How would you summarize this news story [as a TWEET](#)?
- g. What did you learn, that you did not previously know?
- h. Who is quoted? Would you consider them to be authoritative/credible?
- i. Who is not quoted?
- j. Considering who is not quoted, would this news story be considered “balanced”?
- k. Name three other sources you might seek out in order to read/research more about this topic?

NOTE: take the ad analysis study further by downloading this **“Questions for Ad Analysis”** [handout](#)

Taking it even further: have students create a 30-second [TV script and storyboard](#) based only on the information in the print ad.

3. Since the news story calls into question the ads from these nutritional supplements, students will now evaluate each of the ads in print, taken from magazines.

[ENSURE Advertisement](#)

[BOOST Advertisement](#)

Magazine Ad Questions/Considerations

- a. Who created this ad?
- b. Identify the slogan. What does it mean?
- c. Who are the makers of ENSURE/BOOST? How do you know? Where do you find their names?
- d. Describe the images in the ad: what is going on?
- e. What is the argument in the ad? What does ENSURE/BOOST say it can/will do?
- f. Who is the intended audience? What are the clues?
- g. What is omitted? Where might you go to locate the missing information?
- h. In which magazine(s) might you have found this ad?

4. These products are also being seen on television. What follows are links to two commercials which students will analyze and discuss.

[ENSURE Commercial](#)

[BOOST Commercial](#)

Have your students consider these pre-viewing questions:

- a. who creates commercials and for what purposes?
- b. what techniques do the creators use to make a product appealing?
- c. how do they know who might be their “target audience”?
- d. which information might be missing from these ads?
- e. which television shows might the creators buy time within to show the ad?
- f. how much does it cost to make an ad; to position it inside a prime-time program?
- g. how are camerawork, lighting, music, editing used to tell the story?
- h. how do I feel after seeing a commercial? How does it appeal to my emotions?

One of the approaches to studying ads using the acronym: [AIDA](#) (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) Students can use [this worksheet](#) to study the commercials and answer the questions posed on it.

Additional: Have students re-write the script. What if ENSURE/BOOST told the truth about its product? What might that ad say/show?

5. Consumer Reports has produced [this AdWatch video](#) which dissects an earlier ENSURE ad which helps consumers challenge some of the product’s assertions. After watching this short segment, ask students to consider the way this product is advertised.

6. Nutrition Action Health Letter also evaluated the claims in these products. Have your students read it [here](#).

7. The Federal Trade Commission, back in 1997, reached a

settlement with Abbott Labs over ad claims. Read the settlement [here](#).

8. Another way products, like these, are promoted is via the “infommercial.” Ask students if they know how these differ from regular commercials. Here is a [link to an infommercial](#) for one of these products. Have students consider who speaks in support of the product and whether this type of message might be considered deceptive. (For example, might the doctors shown be paid by Abbott Labs, the maker of ENSURE?)

9. Website evaluation. Most students don’t question product websites. Here we’re asking them to go to either the [ENSURE](#) or [BOOST](#) website (or both) and to use a [website evaluation form](#) to look more closely at and answer questions about the content, credibility and the design of the page.