

# A Media Educator Deconstructs Two Movie Ads by Frank W. Baker

Those who study and teach about advertising know that you must understand who your audience is (aka demographic) as well as how best to reach them (e.g. medium). Then it's important to get them (your audience) to read, or notice your ad, so understanding ad design is also a consideration.

The movie "Fences" is getting a lot of buzz so I've decided to take two different ads for the film and offer educators/students my analysis.

If your students don't know anything about the play or playwright August Wilson this might be a good time to have them research or investigate the story and its themes.

First: I have taken one ad from [The New York Times special Holiday Film Section](#), dated Sunday November 6, 2016. With that information alone educators could challenge students to determine who reads the Times. The second ad for the film is taken from the industry trade publication, Variety, dated November 1, 2016. Students could also go to the [Variety website](#) and investigate who is most likely to read it.

Second, students should know that this time of year (late fall) is traditionally when films, hoping to get noticed by film voters, tend to be released.

So "Fences," with its two huge, well-known actors, is one of those films.

[The New York Times ad](#) (click on the ad to open a larger version)



We might ask: what did you notice first? One thing that you will notice is that it is huge: it covers two full vertical pages (each section is 12 inches wide X 22 inches tall). The other thing you might notice is that the majority of the ad is in black-and-white, except that there is a hint of color in both the actor's names (on the left) and in the slogan (In Theatres Christmas Day) on the right.

Why would a movie, coming out Christmas Day, be advertised now, in early November? What is the movie studio hoping to do?

The left side of the ad lists only two actors' names at the top and images of them, in character, at the bottom. Their first names are in very large font. Why do you think that is?

Notice the expressions on their faces and what they're wearing. What might the smiles and the tilted heads mean? What is in the background on both sides? Is it a fence? The right side of the ad provides the name of the film (in large font) as well as other film poster type credits. So this ad in fact resembles the official poster for the film and has the requisite listings of those responsible for making the movie. It also carries the film's rating as well as the studio(s) responsible for releasing and/or distributing the film and even a URL where interested persons can go to learn more about the movie.

**The Variety ad** (click on the ad to open a larger version)



This two page color ad has a large headline running across the top of the page: For Your Consideration in All Categories. Most students will probably not understand this reference.

But understanding this phrase, and the categories listed below it, are central to understanding who (audience) this ad is trying to reach. “For Your Consideration” is a phrase used in promotional/marketing ads, during the Fall, to get Academy (Oscar) voters and other crafts members, to consider voting for this particular film. The categories listed (acting, screenplay, production design, editing, etc.) are those that Academy members, who are eligible, can consider when voting for this film. Listed under each category are the people whose name(s) will appear in the ballot when members vote, so they know who they are honoring.

The image in the ad appears to a “publicity still” from a scene in the film. It shows five total characters, two of whom many of us may already recognize from their previous work or from The New York Times ad above. The upper right hand corner displays the film’s title in large font with information below which says it is based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Wilson. The bottom right hand corner has information relevant to voting members: it directs them to a special website where they can find information about screening the film and other important information that might be helpful for voting purposes.

Considering the image: we might first look at and question the time period, as well as the setting. Considering the action portrayed here: there may be some type of conflict as Denzel Washington (with his hands in his pocket) appears to be in some type of serious discussion with the character dressed as a football player. Viola Davis, wearing the apron, and standing some distance from these two, may also be expressing some concern—with her hands in front and a concerned facial expression. Can we guess what the relationship might be between Washington/Davis? Two other characters (far left and far right) appear on the fringes of the ad and both appear to be listening, if not engaged. The man on the far right is holding what appears to be a martini glass, while the man on the left holds a hat.

### **Extension activities**

**MATH:** Have students research the cost of full page ads in both publications as well as the total number of readers each publication reaches.

Is the placement of this ad, at this cost, effective?

**ART:** Challenge students to use publicity stills from the film to re-create the ad. Some ads could be full page, others could be half page or 1/4 of a page.

This analysis might be considered by any educator who wishes to engage students in close-reading, visual literacy, popular culture, advertising, and more.

Resources:

Learn more about “For Your Consideration” ads [here](#).

Frank Baker’s [Advertising Resources](#)

Go to Frank’s [Media Literacy Clearinghouse](#) website

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