Thinking Through a Child Consumer

Consumerism, one of the inherent features of North American capitalism, is the act of consuming and purchasing goods (Shapiro, 1973). America's consumerist tendencies are the lifeblood of its economy. The media, advertisements, magazines, and accessibility of endless products heavily contribute to our consumer-based culture. Marketing corporations and advertising companies rely on consumer appeal to sell their products, and "almost half of every dollar spent by consumers ultimately goes to cover marketing-related expenses" (Shapiro, 1973, p.174). In a capitalistic society, it is important to examine the role of the marketing company as well as the consumer.

Wightman (2006) shares:

"Discovering the multiple meanings or interpretations of instore products by analyzing how the integration of text, visual imagery, design, color, or scale truly shapes our actions as consumers, is central to understanding how aesthetics and design immediately impacts the consumer" (p.133).

Moynagh & Worsley (2001) discuss the stigma of consumers in our society as being self-indulgent individuals, pleasure-seeking, and "sheep-like in their mimicking of others" (p.293). Although this may be true of some consumers, the role of consumerism as a whole may vary. Moynagh & Worsley (2001) state that a person's consuming habits may signify a personal identity, make a statement about themselves in relation to others, or be a way of finding fulfillment. Duncum (2002) also agrees, "consumer goods and imagery are consistently used, simultaneously for their use value, exchange value, and symbolic value. People purchase goods and view images on the

basis of what they believe such goods and images say about themselves" (p.9). Consumerism is not necessarily a negative aspect of our culture as long as it is practiced in a responsible, and rational manner. In our society today, both adults and children are more influenced by the mass media, advertising, and consumerism than any other generation before. In order to better understand the role of consumerism and advertising in our own lives, one must take into account the impact it has had and continues to have on our children.

In recent years, the child consumer has proven to play a highly significant role in shaping consumer culture through their discretionary income and their power to influence parent purchases (Calvert, 2008). Although the products and toys available to youth have remained much the same, the buying power of children and adolescents has increased. Calvert (2008) addresses how youth shape family buying patterns. She states, "From vacation choices to car purchases to meal selections, they exert a tremendous power over the family pocketbook" (p.207). Consumerism in today's world is no longer just an adult matter. It is now thought of as a marketable concept geared towards children. Children are growing up in an age of consumption, where new technologies, media, and visual culture are at their disposal. One way marketers reach children is through stealth advertising, making the intent of their ad unknown. Winston Fletcher, an advertising executive was quoted in the media stating, "by the age of ten, children have seen 50,000 different commercials about half-a-dozen times each," many of which are done through stealth advertising (quoted from Moynagh & Worsley, 2001, p.294). Some television stations also blur the line of entertainment and advertisement, in which children consider them one and the same (Calvert, 2008). Before reaching eight years old, children have not developed the mature cognitive abilities to understand the persuasive intent of commercials. As a consequence, marketing companies have an easier time hooking children to their products.

In the discussion of the child as consumer, we must also discuss the relationship between consumerism, childhood, and nostalgia. Buckingham (2000) shares that the idea of childhood has been shaped by the fears, desires, and fantasies of adults.

He shares:

"Adults have always monopolized the power to define childhood. They have laid down the criteria by which children are to be compared and judged. They have defined the kinds of behavior which are appropriate or suitable for children at different ages" (p.12).

As early as the 1870s, toy manufacturers were creating toys that were preparing children's behaviors for adult roles. Erector sets for boys were designed to teach about engineering and science, while baby dolls and miniature kitchens were designed to teach little girls how to be good homemakers (Cross, 1997). Specific expectations for children's toys were set early on in American culture. Toys mimicking adult roles were designed to teach children how to be good consumers, and what products should interest them in the future. Even now, many parents persuade their children to play with their old toys because it ignites a nostalgic experience within themselves. It gives the parent and child an opportunity to share and explore similar values. Although adults may not have as much influence over the toys children play with now, perhaps the very concept of nostalgia and memory still evoke them enough to make these toy purchases. Today's children and their choice of plaything do not consider the parent's wishes and desires as much anymore. Cross (1997) states that for toy manufacturers, "the long-submerged tension between satisfying the parent, the child, and the need for profit has given way to a system in which the parent is an onlooker rather than an active participant" (p.10). In our world today, the child has gained much leverage in the consumer market. A large factor in this switch of power has been due to the bombardment of media

and popular visual imagery. Today, children are influenced by movies, television shows, video games, and other media, whose merchandise is everywhere. Cross (1997) explains, "because modern toys link fantasy to the liberation of children from adult culture, they divide the generations" (p.238). The concept of childhood and toy culture is forever changing. Parents still have the capabilities to teach their children values through toys, regardless of its place in toy history. Although some of these toys in postmodern society are promoting good values, many parents fear the influx of advertisements and overexposure to consumerism may be embedding materialistic values within children.

Children's relationship with the economy is in correlation to their transition from childhood to adulthood. Buckingham (2000) states, "contemporary childhoods- and adulthoods- are inextricably entwined with consumer culture" (p.166). As a society, we cannot run from consumerism in order to prevent possible corruption. Cross (1997) insists, "we need to find playthings that give children a connection to the past and a constructive, but also imaginative, view of the future, and to encourage manufacturers to produce them" (p.238). The toy industry has potential to produce more effective, stimulating toys that will make both parents and children satisfied, while bridging the gap between generations.

As an educator, it is important to address the issues of consumerism and how it affects the lives of students. Teaching about consumerism through toys and nostalgic experiences will allow students question their own consuming practices and hopefully permit them to think critically about the role consumerism and advertising will have in their own lives. By constructing a toy for the future generation, students will place themselves in the shoes of children yet to come. Students will share and experience their own feelings of nostalgia for toys they once loved, while also exploring the concept of child need versus child want. The feelings of

nostalgia should impact the students in a similar way as parents for their children's toys. Students will have the opportunity to explore the possible role of the consumer in the future, while creating a toy that is still both meaningful and relevant to the student's life. It is important for students to explore their own consumer, popular culture, and nostalgic thoughts because they are surrounded by these concepts every day (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999).

Students engage with lessons when there is a meaningful relationship between the curriculum and themselves. "Relevancy requires connections between the texts and the social experience of the reader that precedes it" (Fiske, 1989a, p. 186, quoted in Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999). Wightman (2006) believes, "for better appreciating the role of aesthetics in consumerism, the need for students to consider the entire experience of what an object appears to project is paramount" (p.127). By placing themselves in the role of manufacturer, students will form a better understanding of consumer expectations, aesthetic perceptions, and the impact a toy has on a child. This unit will give students the opportunity to explore consumerism through the eyes of the child, parent, and toy manufacturer, in hopes to build awareness, making them a smart consumer in the future.

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Curriculum Theme: Child Consumer

Teacher: Kara Saxon

Grade Level: 10-12 grade Art II class

State Fine Art Goals: Grade 9-12

- I. Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes Students will
- A. Communicate ideas through the effective use of media, techniques, and processes in

their artworks.

B. Apply media, techniques, and processes with skill, confidence, and sensitivity sufficient

to make their intentions observable in their artworks.

C. Demonstrate the skillful, safe, and responsible application of a variety of media, tools,

and equipment.

II. Using Knowledge of Structures and Functions

Students will

A. Identify and describe the interrelationships among the elements and principles of design

that communicate a variety of artistic perspectives and purposes.

- B. Create artworks that use appropriate structures and functions to solve specific visual arts
- C. Evaluate the effectiveness of artworks in terms of structure and function.
- III. Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas

Students will

- A. Make personal choices and formulate interpretations regarding symbols, subject matter, ideas, and expression in artworks.
- B. Use the appropriate art vocabulary and concepts to make and defend aesthetic judgments

about the validity of the source and content of their own artworks and significant

artworks of others.

IV. Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures

Students will

A. Describe how the subject matter, symbols, and ideas in various artworks are related to

history and culture.

- V. Reflecting upon and Assessing the Merits of Their Work and the Work of Others
- B. Make complex descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative judgments about their own

artworks and those of others.

- C. Formulate criteria for interpreting and evaluating their own artworks and those of others.
- VI. Making Connections between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines
- C. Identify specific visual and performing arts careers and describe the knowledge and skills

required for these careers.

General goals for the curriculum (describe in 2-5 sentences):

In this unit, students will discuss the role of consumerism in general and in their own lives. They will examine the consumer's experience, as well as the relationship between the parent, child, and marketing companies. Students will revisit their own childhood nostalgia by creating a toy for the next generation that bridges the present era to the future.

Lesson title (name each lesson to reflect a general unit theme)	Visual Exemplars (list specific images and artists, TV shows, and/or books that you plan to use for each lesson)	Motivation / dialogue (list basic issues and questions to be explored during classroom dialogue and any other motivational strategies that you plan to use for each lesson)	Media / process (list artistic processes that your students will engage in during each lesson)	Concepts and/or design principles to be learned during each lesson	Closure (list an assessment strategy that can be used at the end of each lesson)
Lesson (class period) 1 Identifying Consumerism	Images: Various food boxes (Poptarts, Ritz crackers, Oatmeal, etc) Andy Warhol, 100 cans, 1962 Robert Rauschenberg, Retroactive I, 1964 Helmut Smits Artist website: http://www.helmutsmits.nl/english/indexenglish.html	-Consumerism, Advertising -What is consumerism? -How are you a consumer? -What do you consume? -Do you think the way marketing companies advertise products effect your purchases? -Do you consciously pay attention to the ads? -What advertisements stand out in your mind? Why?	Consumer appeal: classmates will be placed into groups and given a product to analyze; they have to consider the target audience, visual experience, design layout, and its appeal to consumers A list of questions will be answered in each team and share with the class as part of the closure	Color Value Rhythm Repetition Consumerism Marketing Advertising	-Students will reflect on what consumerism means to them and answer a series of questions in which one member of each group will share with the class -Teacher observation
Lesson (class period) 2 Consumer Commercials	Oxyclean product commercial Old Navy Supermodelquins commercial Commercial Toy Advertisements: Barbie, Hot Wheels, Polly Pocket, Nerf	-Advertising in public places; advertising in the media -Who is the target audience in these commercials? -What television shows do you watch? -What kind of advertisements do you see when you watch television? -How do marketing companies try to sell you the product? Is it effective? -If children do not have the funds to purchase toys, why would companies bother advertising children's toys on these channels?	Journal about a recently seen toy commercial like the one in class: deconstruct the commercial in terms of who the audience is, how they make the toy appealing, scenery, music, and overall experience. Write one paragraph of interpretation of the toy itself	Movement, rhythm, repetition, shape Key terms: -Interaction with child/playing -Target audience	End of class journal entry: Describe a childhood favorite toy. Why was it your favorite? What age were you? Who purchased the toy? What games or type of play involved the toy?

Lesson (class period) 3 Childhood Nostalgia	Clip from the movie, The Santa Clause showing adults reminiscing childhood toys	-What is nostalgia? -Who is affected by nostalgia? -Why do parents buy toys for their children? -How do you feel when you see your past toys or a toy that reminds you of a past toy? -Were all toys special or just the ones you needed? Need versus Want	Create thumbnail sketches of favorite toys, keeping in mind the reason these toys were desirable. Create another set of thumbnail sketches updating the toys to today's world.	All the elements and principles of design could potentially be used for student's individual designs. Key terms: -Nostalgia -Memory -Types of connections with the toy (emotional, physical, etc)	Checklist of thumbnail sketches Sharing of desirable toys with whole class
Lesson (class period) 4 Toy Recreation and Invention	Teacher will bring in her own toys of childhood nostalgia and share brief memories with the class.	-Special toys -Why did you choose to sketch those particular toys yesterday? -What made them so special? -Creating a new or reinvented toy for the next generation: Need vs. Want -What components make a good toy? -What target audience would you choose if you were to create a toy yourself? -What message are you conveying with your product? -Is this a recreation of a past toy or something completely new? -What toy would tell the next generation about our present time now? -What is a toy for the next generation that they might need/want?		All the elements and principles of design can potentially be used by student as they create their thumbnail sketches. Key terms: -Next generation -future -present	Class show and tell of designs Reminder of things to think about for designs. Homework: students are to bring in one toy of their own childhood nostalgia for the next day.

Lesson (class period) 5 Student Nostalgia and the toys of the next generation	Students bring in their own toys from childhood or current toys in our world today. Each day until the end of the unit, a few students will speak about their toy in a show and tell manner. This strategy is used to help trigger creative thinking during the discussion and art making process of class	-What was your most effective thumbnail sketch of a toy? -What message does it have? -Is the toy's function clear to the consumer? How did you incorporate the next generation into your design? -Discussion of available materials for art making (wood, cardboard, plastic tubing, paint, glue, tin foil, modeling clay, etc)	-Finalize one sketch -Sketch final drawing from multiple angles -Decide on materials for building toy experiment with materials and practice construction	All the elements and principles of design can be potentially used in design. Key terms: -materials -Three-dimensional sculpture -toy function	Teacher observation, checklist of thumbnail sketch, individual discussion of design
Lesson (class period) 6 The toy's purpose	Students bring in their own toys from childhood or current toys in our world today (continued from day 5) While students begin to build their toy, images of the artists discussed earlier in the week, as well as toys of the past and present, will be scrolling on the Smartboard for inspiration	-Discuss the different ways of constructing a sculptural design -Consider the functionality of the toy -Consider the toy's dimensions -Craftsmanship -Durability -Connection to the next generation	Begin building design Some students will construct the toy into sections and attach when closer to finishing toy; some students will continue experimenting with materials	Key Terms and Principles of Design: -Movement -Structure -Balance -Dimensions -Craftsmanship	Teacher Observation and individual feedback discussion Verbal group review of key concepts: -Consumerism -Target audience -Nostalgia -Next generation
Lesson (class period) 7 Building the toy through the eyes of child	Students bring in their own toys from childhood or current toys in our world today (continued from day 5, 6) While students begin to build their toy, images of the artists discussed earlier in the week, as well as toys of the past and present, will be scrolling on the Smartboard for inspiration	-What is a sculpture in-the-round? -Sculptural toy versus functional toy -Is your design a new invention or a recreation of an old concept that the new generation can adapt? -Is this a toy a child needs or wants?	Continue building design while incorporating craftsmanship, and thinking about the concept and function of design	Key Terms and Principles of Design: -Movement -Structure -Balance -Dimensions -Craftsmanship -Sculpture in-the- round	Verbal group review of key concepts: -Structure -Viewing the toy at multiple perspectives
Lesson (class period) 8 Continuing the construction	Students bring in their own toys from childhood or current toys in our world today (continued from day 5,6,7) While students begin to build their toy, images of the artists discussed earlier in the week, as well as toys of the past and present, will be scrolling on the Smartboard for inspiration	-What are you discovering as you build? -Are you running into any issues with the design? -Do you have to adjust anything, and if so, does it still fall under your original intent?	Continue building toy design while considering the concept of the toy and the desired message to be conveyed. Consider aesthetic appeal, craftsmanship, and original thought process while constructing.	All the elements and principles of design can be potentially used in design. Key terms: -Aesthetics -Craftsmanship -Original ideas	Group reflection and discussion of student progress

Lesson		-As you are nearly			
(class		finished with your			
period) 9		toy construction,	Continue		
		has your concept	building while		
	Students bring in their own toys from childhood or	changed or stayed	keeping the	All the elements	
	current toys in our world today (continued from day	the same?	same terms,	and principles of	
Analyzing	5,6,7,8)	-Child need versus	ideas, and	design can be	
original toy		child want: which	thought	potentially used	Teacher
ideas to		category does your	processes	in design.	observation
current		toy fall under?	discussed		and group
construction	While students begin to build their toy, images of	-Same target group	earlier in the		reflection
	the artists discussed earlier in the week, as well	as in the	week. Students	Key terms:	
	as toys of the past and present, will be scrolling	beginning on the	are to begin	-Creative problem	
	on the Smartboard for inspiration	assignment?	wrapping up	solving	
		-How is your toy	their toy		
		different from	design		
		others on the			
		market?			
		-Would you want			
		the toy you have			
		created if you			
		were still part of			_
Lesson		your target			Group
(class		audience?			discussion
period) 10	Students bring in their own toys from childhood or	-What surprised			and critique
	current toys in our world today (continued from day	you about the	Project due		of toys
	5,6,7,8,9)	constructive			
		process?	-Students will	Key terms:	-Students
		-Did the toy come	only add		will also
Toy Building		out as expected?	finishing	-Craftsmanship	write a self
Reflection	While students begin to build their toy, images of	Better, worse?	touches	-Concept	evaluation
	the artists discussed earlier in the week, as well	Why?	concerning	-Creation	about their
	as toys of the past and present, will be scrolling	-What role will	craftsmanship		work through
	on the Smartboard for inspiration	your toy have with	issues today		a series of
		the next			questions
		generation? Will			posed by
		it help, teach, or			teacher
		provide			
		companionship for			
		the child?			
		LIIG CHIECU.			

Lesson #1: Identifying Consumerism

Teacher: Kara Saxon

Grade Level: 10-12 grade (Art II)

Length: 50 min.

FINE ART STANDARDS:

II. Using Knowledge of Structures and Functions

Students will

C. Evaluate the effectiveness of artworks in terms of structure and function.

III. Choosing and Evaluating a Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas

Students will

A. Make personal choices and formulate interpretations regarding symbols, subject

matter, ideas, and expression in artworks.

V. Reflecting upon and Assessing the Merits of Their Work and the Work of Others

Students will

A. Analyze the intention of the artist in a particular work and justify their interpretation of that intention.

Lesson Objectives:

ART HISTORY:

The students will discuss images of the artists Warhol, Rauschenberg, and Smits in terms of their impact on consumerism in today's world and how they can personally relate to popular culture images.

AESTHETICS:

The students will discuss consumerist products and their relationship to art. Students will talk about how certain advertising schemes attract them to products, or how the elements and principles incorporated within a product can be

seen as artistic, appealing, and even beautiful.

ART CRITICISM:

The students will examine food product packaging in class and record their thoughts about the aesthetic appeal, design layout, target audience, and overall approach to consumers. Students will analyze and deconstruct these packages to reveal marketing tactics and advertising plans used in the consumer market today.

Vocabulary/Definitions:

Consumerism- a modern movement for the protection of the consumer against useless, inferior, or dangerous products, misleading advertising, unfair pricing; the concept that an ever-expanding consumption of goods is advantageous to the economy.

Marketing- the act of buying or selling in a market; the total of activities involved in the transfer of goods from the producer or seller to the consumer or buyer, including advertising, shipping, storing, and selling.

Advertising- the act or practice of calling public attention to one's product, service, need, etc., esp. by paid announcements in newspapers and magazines, over radio or television, on billboards

Color- the quality of an object or substance with respect to light reflected by the object, usually determined visually by measurement of hue, saturation, and brightness of the reflected light; saturation or chroma; hue

Value- degree of lightness or darkness in a color

Rhythm and repetition- a patterned repetition of a motif, formal element

Teacher materials:

Various cardboard food boxes designed for children Smart board and PowerPoint to show images

Student materials:

Paper and pencils

PROCEDURES:

- Introduction/ Motivation
- 2. Explanation/Demonstration
- 3. Teacher/Student Materials
- 4. Clean Up
- 5. Closure/Assessment

1. Students will discuss consumerism in society and their own lives and the affect advertising and marketing strategies have on the products they purchase.

The students will view works by Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Helmut Smits as part of the introduction to the unit on consumerism and the child.

The students will compare the artists' style, technique, and approach of presenting consumerist issues into their artwork.

Students will analyze food products in terms of aesthetic, practical, and consumer appeal.

Students will record their personal responses to these products and discuss their answers with other classmates.

- 2. At the beginning of class, the teacher will start a discussion with the students about consumerism. She will ask the students a few questions to gauge their prior knowledge of consumerism before her explanation. She will ask the students:
- What is a consumer? Are you a consumer? What do you consume? Do you usually make the purchases in your family or does someone else purchase items for you? Is consuming important to our economy? What are the benefits of being a consumer? What are the risks or detriments of being a consumer?

After explaining consumerism in more depth, the teacher will pose questions to her students about advertising and marketing strategies. She will ask:

- Have you ever made a biased purchase simply based on the way

a product was packaged? How often do you make judgments about a product based on its package design? Do you think marketing companies take into account what consumers are attracted to on products? Do you think an artist designs those packages designs? What items do you buy just because it looks like a "good" product? Where do you see these items advertised? How is the advertising done? What stands out in the advertisement?

After discussing advertisements and different products, the teacher will show artworks by Warhol, Rauschenberg, and Smits to show how artists have embraced consumerism by including the concepts, ideas, and the products themselves in their artwork. Each artist includes consumerism into his artworks in a completely different way. The teacher will ask the students:

Why do you think these artists included popular culture and consumerism into their artwork?

In what ways did they include similar aspects of consumerism?

What is different about these artworks?

How did the artists use color with the consumer products?

Do you see any rhythm or repetition in their artwork?

If so, where and how was it used?

Do you see any changes in hue or value?

Does Smits's work remind you of any popular environmental trends?

After the teacher discusses the artists, she will evenly divide her students into small groups, in which they will

analyze a particular food product box using a questionnaire for the remainder of the class period. The Product Ouestionnaire will be as follows:

- Have you ever seen this product before? If so, where? How many times have you seen it?
- Describe the product in terms of box shape, color, value, image design, shapes, or anything else you find interesting.
- Before today, have you ever paid close attention to this particular product?
- What message, in your opinion, is the product sending the consumer? Is there more than one message?
- How visible is the company's label? On what products have you seen this label before?
- Are you attracted to this packaging? Why or why not?
- 3. The teacher will use artwork and website resources and distribute the cardboard food box materials. The students will only be using paper and pencils for this lesson.
- 4. Students will clean up area by bringing their recorded questionnaires to the teacher and placing the cardboard food boxes into the storage bag.
- 5. As the lesson assessment, the student questionnaires will be written, read aloud to the class and turned in to the teacher to be checked off.

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