Toys: Activity Procedures

Activity Procedures:

- On the board or chart paper, I will write: “what is a ‘commercial’ and what is it designed to do.” Usually, I will show participants what a real SCRIPT looks like by dividing an 8 X 11 sheet of paper into two columns, one which says VIDEO and another which says AUDIO. While this might sound simple, my purpose is to explore these two production elements. I will ask participants to brainstorm what we mean by VIDEO. Typical answers might include: the picture on the screen, what we see. Then, I will do the same for AUDIO; answers include what we hear. Examples include: narration, music, sound effects.
- I want participants to know more about TV production. What I know about making television goes deeper than what they might know. For example, I might talk about ANGLES, PERSPECTIVE, FRAMING. With a video camera connected to a television, I can easily demonstrate how a small toy could be photographed to appear larger. I will ask if anybody knows what the phrase SPECIAL EFFECTS means. We will discuss this in relation to what they might already know and be familiar with (ie Star Trek; Star Wars;
The X Files, etc).

  There is an episode of the Reading Rainbow series (hosted by Levar Burton) which features a segment from “Star Trek” on how the special effect for the transporter is accomplished.

  When we discuss audio, I might talk about how it too can be manipulated to create sounds which are intended to be attract interest. For a glossary of techniques used in TV/video production, go here.

- I will also talk about attributes of commercials aimed at girls and those aimed at boys. What do we know? What can we guess? Several articles (see HANDOUTS/ARTICLES) provide some insight. We will review those specific attributes and write them on the chart. We might even talk about a toy commercial that we all can relate to: GI JOE; BARBIE, as examples.
  So, do producers of commercials have a FORMULA to follow when making their spots?

- Let's Go to the Videotape: Utilizing the HBO/CU videos "Buy Me That" and"Buy Me That Too!" I will play a few segments designed to get us to think about PRODUCTION and FORMULA. Using an overhead transparency, I will also ask my audience to look at the SCRIPT (see HANDOUTS) of the commercial we watch. We will note special words in the script and what they might mean. Be sure to see the list of CODE words at the bottom of each script. We might also brainstorm on where might we see
  these commercials: in other words, which TV shows aimed at kids might we find this specific toy.

  Five Toy Ad Tricks To Watch Out For– Consumer Report's Zillions Web Site

  Common Advertising Strategies- from Media Awareness Network

  Specific Media Tools for Analysis (pdf) : N Mexico ML Project

  Advertising Analysis -another good handout (4 pages)

- Additionally, we will identify which government agency, in the U.S., oversees television advertising aimed at youngsters, (the Federal Trade Commission) and what advice they have for parents. We will discuss what options young people have if they receive a toy that

does not meet their expectations.
Addresses of toy manufacturers, TV networks

Link to most major toy manufacturers

Other Ideas (suggested by teachers)
– Have students write reviews of toys and publish them in a school newsletter or website
– Brainstorm with students who they might write to, in order to complain about a toy that failed to live up to its commercial promises
(e.g. letter to the editor; toy manufacturer; cable or TV network)