Lesson: What Are Super Bowl Ads Really Selling and Who Are They Selling to?



Super Bowl 50 will soon be upon us. While baseball may be America’s pastime, football is king when it comes to media exposure and merchandising. Every year, the Super Bowl is the most watched event on American television. In fact, in 2014, [Super Bowl 48 became the most watched event in television history](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/super-bowl-2014-ratings-set-new-record/). In the advertising world, this begets big opportunities for corporations to make their products visible to an enormous audience. The exposure generated by a Super Bowl commercial leaves many companies willing to [pay astronomical amounts](http://www.businessinsider.com/super-bowl-50-ad-rates-reach-a-record-5-million-on-cbs-2015-8) for 30 seconds on the national stage.

With so much money to pay, so little time, and so much to say in mere seconds, it’s truly a scramble for advertisers to get their two cents in during these commercials. The values companies hold and their marketing goals they wish achieve through highly targeted markets are not always examined, but an exploration of Super Bowl advertisements will likely be illuminating for your students. Combining teaching about advertising and persuasive communications with entertainment is a great way to generate interest in the classroom.

It’s never too early for students to learn about ethical issues and the Super Bowl presents a golden chance for you to open a meaningful dialog on this subject. By helping your students watch advertisements with a more discerning eye, they can be armed with the knowledge to defend themselves against negative messages presented in advertisements and to appreciate the positive ones. While it may be tempting to cast your own views into a lesson based on truth and ethics in advertising, it is important as a teacher to remain a neutral facilitator. Critical thinking skills, independent thought, abstract reasoning, and debating skills can all be explored and refined through these lessons.

If you want your students to learn about how advertisers [target potential consumers](http://www.united-mail.com/target-audience-and-super-bowl-ads/#sthash.ecpROlRl.dpbs) and [values promoted in commercials](http://theweek.com/articles/537207/patronizing-phony-morality-super-bowl-ad-makers), basing a lesson plan around Super Bowl commercials is ideal. (Note: These lesson ideas are the most appropriate for grade 9 and up.)

**Essential Questions**

1. Do advertisers' end goals ever justify the means?
2. Why do advertisers appoint one set of people as an aspiration group and another as a group to avoid and view scornfully? What tactics do advertisers employ to set up these competing groups and what are the ethical issues surrounding these practices?
3. What makes a message placed in an ad "positive" and why might a company choose such a message while their peers would not?
4. How can we examine the balance between flash (and viewer count/ratings) and substance in a Super Bowl commercial? Should companies and advertising agencies choose attention-grabbing text and visuals over valuable product messages in order to get people to watch and comment on their commercials?

For information read: <http://www.superbowlcommercials2016.org/blog/all-the-2016-super-bowl-commercials/>