

## **All About Persuasion**

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### **Introduction**

Media literacy! When you hear these two words spoken, what comes to mind? For me, it was various types of technology and social networks. It wasn't until I participated in the media literacy seminar that I realized I had such a narrow way of thinking when it came to all the various forms of literacy in the media.

### **Rationale**

When it came time to write this curriculum unit, I thought intensely about what version of media literacy I would want my students to explore. I felt all aspects taught in the seminar were equally important and would be exceptional for the students. But the need to align the curriculum unit with the Delaware State Standards has made me choose to focus the unit on the art of persuasion through commercials and advertisements. The unit will discuss the history of commercials, investigating how they have changed their persuasive techniques through the years, examining different types of persuasion, considering how different groups are targeted, and teaching the students themselves more effective ways to persuade.

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, to persuade is “to move by argument, entreaty, or expostulation to a belief, position, or course of action.”<sup>1</sup> All of us are aware of persuasion and know how companies create advertisements for profit using various techniques. We see persuasion in commercials, paper advertisements, pop-up ads on the internet and billboard ads. How many of us have thought of the work that goes into these advertisements and exactly how a company decides which ads to use to target consumers? When I think of the assortment of advertisements my students are exposed to on a daily basis, I wonder how many of them realize that the commercials they are viewing or the pop-up ads they are seeing are targeted specifically for them based on demographics and the monitoring of their daily habits. My intention in creating this unit is for the students to gain an understanding of persuasion, trace how it has evolved over time and identify and incorporate the techniques of advertising into their writing in order

to craft more persuasive essays and create commercials that will target classmates based on specific needs.

Many students inevitably question why they need to learn a particular topic. It is always important to give some background history of a subject to assure the students that what they are learning is significant. Students need to understand that persuasion is the essence of all advertising. Businesses need to use persuasion to encourage consumers to buy their product. It is important for the students to understand persuasion not only so that they are aware of how companies target them but so that they can master various techniques that will help the few of them who will choose a career in advertisement the many who need to become better consumers when purchasing an item.

In creating this unit, I had to remember the needs of my students. I teach sixth grade at George Read Middle School in New Castle, Delaware. George Read houses approximately 715 students, of whom 66.1% are from low-income families. Each student participates in rigorous programs that teach higher order thinking strategies to prepare them for high school and society beyond. I have 120 English Language Arts students whose competences range from the third-grade to the eleventh-grade reading level. English as a second language (ESL) learners are also in my classes. The class sizes range from twenty-three to thirty-one students.

### **History of Persuasion**

Currently, many of my students' knowledge of advertising is limited to what they see today. They have no concept of how persuasive advertising existed in the past or how it has evolved over time. Giving them a brief background of the history of advertising will equip them with the knowledge of what is needed to produce a well-developed paper and advertisement.

Advertisements have been around since the eighteenth century. Many focused only on material goods and the purchase and capture of slaves. These advertisements lacked color and pictures and were rarely of a noticeable size. In a newspaper, unlike today, advertisements were only a single column, and in magazines they were usually found on the back page.<sup>2</sup>

During the late nineteenth century, the most common advertisement that consumers viewed were for medications. These ads made "large, often outrageous promises, colorful and dramatic."<sup>3</sup> Eventually, new techniques began to take shape because of transformations in the corporate world. Advertisements started to emerge based on

demographics. Suburban areas produced advertisements focused on their large department stores, and rural areas debuted mail order catalogs. “By one commonly used measure, total advertising volume in the United States grew from about \$200 million in 1880 to nearly \$3 billion in 1920.”<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of an advertisement is not only to sell the consumer a product, but often to persuade consumers to change brands. In either case, the main goal of advertising is to strengthen sales.

### **Types of Persuasion**

Having the ability to beg and plead in order to get what you want is a natural habit in children. But knowing the various types of persuasion that are used to persuade is important for my students to learn. Not only do they need this knowledge for their studies, but it will also be beneficial to them in the future when they purchase an item.

Persuasion can be either positive or negative. Becoming knowledgeable about its various forms can help a person to make educated decisions when buying a product or listening to a politician. This is especially important for the younger audience, who need to know that not all items being marketed are necessarily beneficial to them.

This section of the unit will describe several forms of persuasion. In order to teach persuasion, it is essential to understand the different types of persuasion and why they are used. Ethos, pathos, and logos are common forms used in most styles of advertisement along with techniques that have been dubbed bandwagon, plain folks, name calling, testimonials, and product comparison. Once I have given the students an overview of each type, I will ask them to select one to use in writing their persuasive paper and creating their commercials.

#### **Ethos, Pathos, and Logos**

Ethos, pathos, and logos are the three main forms to the art of rhetoric. According to Aristotle, rhetoric is “the ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion.”<sup>5</sup> Ethos appeals to the credibility of the author. When you hear the word “ethos,” think of the word “ethic.” Ethos is used as a persuasive technique because people are more likely to trust someone who is honorable. Pathos targets one’s emotions. Advertisements often use this method because it is easier to appeal to people when you are provoking their emotions. Logos is the logical aspect of persuasion. “Everyday arguments rely heavily on ethos and pathos, but academic arguments rely more on logos.”<sup>6</sup> Each form of rhetoric has specific characteristics in the art of persuasion. Ethos

uses specific language and vocabulary for targeted audiences while paying close attention to grammar. Pathos tends to incorporate colorful, tangible language that is full of emotion and connotative meanings. Logos contains statistics and data that can be proven.<sup>7</sup>

### Bandwagon

“The word bandwagon was coined in the USA in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, simply as the name for the wagon that carried a circus band.”<sup>8</sup>The bandwagon effect is a form of propaganda that tries to convince the audience to buy or participate in what is being advertised because everyone else is doing so. This is the most common form of persuasive technique that is used today. An example of bandwagon in printed text is the McDonald’s yellow arch sign that advertises how many billions of hamburgers have been sold. This is a way of persuading people to stop in and buy products because billions of other people in the world have already done so.

### Testimonial and Product Comparison

Many commercials and printed advertisements feature testimonials or statements from people supporting the product. They persuade consumers to purchase the product by saying or implying that they are using the product and that it works. A popular television commercial that is an example of testimonial is for Crest toothpaste. This commercial, states that four out of five dentists recommend this brand. It not only seeks to convince consumers that dentists are standing by the product, but it also contains characteristics of ethos and logos by using both statistics and dentists, who are trusted by many people, to enhance its sales.<sup>9</sup>

### Plain Folks

Another marketing technique is casting actors with ordinary clothes, ordinary speech and day-to-day actions to create an illusion to the consumer. This makes the consumer believe that the performer is just an ordinary person using this product. Although using well-known celebrity figures also works as a persuasive technique, more people can relate to “plain folks.”<sup>10</sup>

### Name Calling

This tactic is used to denounce the reputation of other products. Negative concepts often lodge themselves securely in readers’ or viewers’ memories. To pass insults when comparing products causes the consumer to purchase the product in greater standing.

Comcast and Verizon commercials frequently use name calling during their advertisements.

### **Online Persuasive Techniques**

Much research has gone into online persuasion. Many consumers want to feel that they are getting the “best deal out there” and that others are also purchasing the same product. To create this sensation, marketers have incorporated various techniques. First, they have incorporated sections on their web pages to increase “social proof.”<sup>11</sup> This portion displays “most popular items, customers who have bought this also bought, top sellers and testimonials.”<sup>12</sup> Another segment includes an area for consumers who have already purchased this product to comment on its effectiveness. Many times when searching for items online, consumers are more likely to make a purchase if they feel there is a shortage. It’s the old adage, “you want what you can’t have.” Online ads often incorporate pictures and videos, persuading consumers to buy more and showing authority by using experts and easing the consumers’ fears by including a frequently asked questions section.<sup>13</sup>

### **Targeted Groups**

Research has identified four different types of audiences: hostile, critical, uninformed, and sympathetic. Different strategies must be used to target each group. The hostile audience lacks trust, so trust must be established. Then advertising may want to challenge them, using suitable resources and evidence and including humor. Strategies used to target the critical audience include studies without embellishments or fallacies. The uninformed audience needs rational arguments with basic facts while the sympathetic audience needs to build a bond that will trigger positive emotions.<sup>14</sup>

“As James Webb Younger, one of the last century’s advertising greats, once said, ‘Every type of advertiser has the same problem: to be believed.’”<sup>15</sup> Some ways consumers are targeted are through commercials, radio advertisements, internet pop-ups, and displays set up in stores to entice purchases. Although persuasion has existed for hundreds of years and many companies have been marketing their product for generations, companies must continue to revamp their marketing techniques for different age and ethnic groups.

Knowing the audience is imperative. When consumers make a purchase, they are interested in what benefits the product confers. This is why many companies offer warranties. Promotion is another key factor in targeting specific groups. In order to sell a

product, a company needs to determine what promotion method it will use, whether it is advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, or publicity.<sup>16</sup>

One of the most difficult demographics to reach through advertisement is young adults who often record television programs and skip over the commercials. “U.S. youth audiences include 32 million teens, the largest-ever generation of this subset representing \$150 billion in annual sales.”<sup>17</sup> One way to target this age group is through advertisements in movie theaters. Another successful technique for cornering younger audiences is implanting a product within a television show. Three months after Reese’s Pieces was placed in the movie “*E.T.*” in 1982, sales made a tremendous jump.<sup>18</sup> Another way to target teens is through the internet. Because the internet is unregulated and parents don’t always monitor their children, modern technology makes collecting data for marketing research effortless.<sup>19</sup>

Did you ever wonder why you choose to browse and purchase items in some stores while you walk in and then right back out of others? The layout and color choices of every store create an atmosphere that is designed to be inviting and enticing to consumers. Researchers have spent much effort in deciding what colors attract purchases. It appears that warm reds and oranges draw in impulse buyers, while cooler colors like blues and greens affect budget shoppers and traditionalists.<sup>20</sup>

### **Teaching Students How to Persuade**

As we all know, children are born with the gift of persuasion. They instinctively know how to persuade their parents or friends by using various tactics to get what they want. While they know the basics of persuasion, they do not realize it is essential to advance a valid argument, use credible sources to support their arguments, and state a claim. They also need to understand that when persuading other people, they need to recognize their audience and understand what appeals to them.

When choosing a persuasive topic, the writer must determine what facts are needed to target an audience, explain pertinent principles, prioritize the facts, and communicate all information effectively.<sup>21</sup> The strategies used for writing a persuasive essay are to state a claim, preferably use well-known names, appeal to the emotional, logical, and ethical needs of the audience and use reliable and credible research. It is important for students to realize that they need to stand firm in their claim. If they vacillate, no one will believe what they are saying.

Advertising makes a great way to teach persuasion because students are continuously immersed in commercials, pop-ups, and advertisements. They come from varying educational levels and social-economic backgrounds, but they all commonly see or hear advertising. For example, students reading on a third grade level can understand television or internet advertisements. Even students who do not have computers, may have a television or radio or see billboards. Advertisements are invaluable in showing how persuasion works. Through the use of topics that are important to the students, there will be a higher level of engagement, more opinions and opposing arguments along with supporting evidence.

### **Strategies**

Determining which advertisements to focus on, whether print ads or audio visual, is the easy part of planning this curriculum. The most challenging component is establishing how I will teach all the skills needed to reach each student. Since some of my students are struggling readers, the strategies must accommodate their style of learning along with being on grade level for them. Another important factor in deciding which strategies to use is seeking a high level of engagement while incorporating higher order thinking skills. The strategies I have chosen to teach persuasion will assist in teaching all that I have discussed previously.

### Visualization

If children can visualize the goal of an advertisement, they will have a better chance of understanding what is happening or what the speaker is saying. Visualization gives the advertisement a sense of reality and helps to create a clear, vivid picture in the students' minds by utilizing the five senses. Visualization is an effective strategy because it not only gives the students an opportunity to observe the persuasive techniques used by a company, but it can also be used as an assessment tool in exercises that require students to state the product, determine persuasive strategies used, and decide who is the intended audience. Students can also work strategically in pairs to discuss how the advertisement could be improved through graphic aids, sharper wording, or more eye-catching fonts and colors. My students are thoroughly engaged whenever they are able to use their artistic abilities.

One way I will incorporate visualization into my lesson is to show the students pictures of different advertisements. For example, I will project an image of an Old Navy

ad selling sweaters and hooded sweatshirts. After allowing the students to study the picture, I will ask them questions: What is being sold in this advertisement? Who do you believe is the intended audience? How can you tell? What persuasive techniques are used in this advertisement? Is there anything you would change in this advertisement to help it be more effective?

## Media

Children live in a world of technology. Incorporating technology into a lesson not only creates an engaging activity, but assists the students in making connections by using a medium they are comfortable with. Media can be used in a variety of ways, from YouTube clips to songs, to access prior knowledge. Smart boards are a new way of creating entertaining, engaging and higher order thinking activities for students. A Smart board is an interactive whiteboard that aids students' learning. When I use the Smart board for comparison between advertisements, students can underline or circle the differences among the advertisements and see the differences between historical advertisements and modern forms while completing other creative activities.

## Learning Centers

Learning centers provide an opportunity for students to work independently and self-monitor their comprehension and knowledge. The centers are organized in ways to that take into account what the students have learned and create activities for them to enhance what they know already. Centers should be utilized when students finish their work early or when the teacher is working with a small group. On those occasions the rest of the students can work in centers.

## Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are an exceptionally effective way for students to organize their thoughts. "There are three compelling reasons why you should use graphic organizers. First, students are considerably more likely to understand and remember the content subject you are teaching. Second, because the semantic information processing demands are reduced, you can often address the content at more sophisticated or complex levels. Third, students are more likely to become strategic learners. Reading and writing skills, communication skills, and analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills are all subject to improve when students learn to recognize these patterns of thinking, construct, and use



graphic organizers.”<sup>22</sup> Graphic organizers offer a great visual representation for students to organize their thoughts. For an example of a graphic organizer, refer to appendix B.

### **Classroom Activities**

The activities created below will be implemented after I have taught the students the various persuasive techniques, the ways companies target their audiences, and key essentials to writing a persuasive paper. I currently teach fifty minute class periods. All of these lessons will take approximately two to three days, with the exception of the persuasive paper, which may take a week or more.

#### Activity One

Many of my students are not aware of how persuasion has changed through the years. Most believe the way products are advertised on television or in print advertisements have always used the same techniques. The purpose of reviewing the history of persuasion with the students through this activity is to give them a broader understanding of how advertising has progressed. In understanding how the progression has happened in advertisement, the students will be able to make more informed decisions in future lessons within this unit.

#### *Lesson Essential Question*

How have the persuasive techniques in advertising changed over the years?

#### *Warm-Up*

I will begin the lesson by projecting on the smart board a nineteenth century Coca-Cola print ad which I found online at <http://talkingdrugs.org/19th-century-coca-cola-advertisement>. The goal of this advertisement is to persuade audiences to drink this beverage because along with being delicious it also “cures all nervous affections.”<sup>23</sup> There are no graphic aids and everything is in black and white except for the phrase “contains the valuable Tonic and Nerve Stimulant properties of the Coca Plant,”<sup>24</sup> which is highlighted in yellow. In their notebooks, the students will be asked to answer the following questions:

What product is being sold?

Who is the intended audience?

What persuasive techniques do you recognize?

How would you apply what you have learned in this unit to enhance the advertisement?

What conclusions can you draw regarding the way people thought about soda in the nineteenth century?

What is your opinion of the effectiveness of this advertisement?

Once the students have finished responding to these questions, we will discuss their answers as a class.

### *Instruction*

The students will next compare and contrast the nineteenth century Coca Cola advertisement to a 1951 Coca Cola ad and a twenty-first-century advertisement. The nineteenth-century ad is the same used in the warm-up. The 1951 advertisement features a young girl smiling while holding a glass of Coca Cola. The words printed on the advertisement are, “Want something good? Of course you do. You’ll love the delicious taste and wholesome refreshment of ice-cold Coca-Cola.”<sup>25</sup> The final advertisement contains an image of a man sitting on the beach in a lounge chair reaching for his Coca-Cola. To his surprise, the coke is missing, and unbeknownst to him, a penguin is hiding behind his chair drinking the soda.

Through viewing three different advertisements from three different eras the students will gain a sense of progression in advertising. These three print advertisements show a pattern of change over the years. The advertisements from the nineteenth-century are all written out with no color. It directly states the value of the product. The 1957 advertisement depicts “the girl next door” image. It is filled with color and through the use of the caption, “something good,” it portrays a wholesome value and uses the technique of plain folk. The final advertisement implies the value without directly stating it. It depicts a more relaxing atmosphere and through the illustration shows that Coca Cola is so good that a penguin is willing to risk warmer temperatures to have a taste. The students will work with a partner to answer questions about the three advertisements using a three column chart. In order for me to measure the students’ comprehension of the persuasive techniques, I have chosen to use the same questions that were presented in the warm-up.

### *Assessment*

The students will be informally assessed through classroom discussion and viewing their charts. Once everyone has finished working collaboratively with their partners, I will randomly call on students to discuss their answers with the class. While the students are sharing their answers, I will place a blank graphic organizer on the ELMO and record their answers to create a class chart.

## Activity Two

### *Lesson-Essential Questions*

How do marketers target audiences during advertisements?

### *Warm-Up*

I will present the students with the question: What type of advertisements do you see on a daily basis? As the students answered the question, I will record their responses on the Smart Board. Next, I will ask the students: Where do you usually see these advertisements? Again, I will record their answers on the board. Once we were finished our discussion, I will lead into a Power Point presentation on how companies target audiences to buy their products.

### *Instruction*

The students will be divided into groups of four. Each group will be assigned a range of ages: five through nine, ten through fourteen, and so on. On the Smart Board, I will display the words “iPad.” Although this device is suitable for all ages, not every advertisement would be created the same to target each age. It will be the responsibility of each group to utilize the various techniques of persuasion in an advertisement that will target their assigned age group. Following the creations of the advertisements, the groups will present it to the class. As an exit ticket, students will need to record which group had the most effective presentation for their age group, what techniques they used to target that age group and what changes they could make to improve the advertisements.

### *Assessment*

The students will be given a handout requiring them to view a thirty minute show of their choice that evening. On the handout they will record the product being sold in each

commercial, note which persuasive techniques were utilized, and indicate who they believe was the target audience. Upon returning to school the next day, the students will share their findings with the class. I will compile all the answers in a chart so the students can have a visual of the results. Each individual chart will be collected and graded based on a rubric. The aim of this assessment is to show the students how marketers target audiences based on demographics and viewing preferences.

### Activity Three

#### *Lesson-Essential Question*

What are the essential parts that need to be included to write an effective persuasive paper? What is the correct format to use when writing a persuasive paper?

#### *Warm-Up*

The students will be asked the question, “What are some issues or problems that truly matter to you?”<sup>26</sup> They will then be directed to brainstorm a list of five topics they are passionate about; such as, child abuse, animal cruelty, smoking, alcohol, etc. Once they have generated their lists, they will then narrow the list down to the one topic they wish to research for their paper.

#### *Instruction*

After the topics have been chosen, the students will begin research. They will be allowed three days in the library to find out all the facts, problems, and possible solutions for their topic. It is important to make sure the students understand that this paper must have an attainable goal. For example, if they choose animal cruelty, their goal should not be to stop animal cruelty. However, if they can persuade people not to own animals if they don't have the time and patience to raise them, that is more practical. Another factor the students need to be aware of when researching their paper is the reliability of sources. They need to be conscientious of the websites they are using. On the fourth day, we will meet in the classroom to begin the writing process.

The first step in the writing process is for the students to organize their research and ideas. They will be given a graphic organizer (see Appendix C) to assist them in structuring their reasons and support. We will work on the graphic organizer step-by-step

as a class to make sure each paper is formatted the same way. The first part that must be completed on the graphic organizer is an opinion statement and a description of the target audience. This is where the students convey their topic while stating their position. Next, using the information they found in their research, they are to develop reasons to support their opinion. Evidence, such as facts and examples, from the research they conducted is to be included into this section of the graphic organizer. Third, the students need to answer any opposing arguments that will give the reader a deeper understanding of how the student feels about their topic. Finally, each student needs to develop a call to action for their paper. This is where the students let the reader know what they want to see happen.

Using the information from the graphic organizer, the students will begin writing their paper. They will transfer all the information from the graphic organizer into well-developed paragraphs. Each paper should consist of at least five paragraphs with the introduction paragraph containing an attention grabbing opening and the opinion statement. The body paragraphs will explain each reason and give supporting evidence. The concluding paragraph will state the call to action.

### *Assessment*

To assess this persuasive paper, I will use a four-point rubric. The categories for the rubric will be: opinions statement, target audience, reasons for claim, supporting claims, call to action, restate claim. I will also include conventions, organization, voice and tone, word choice and sentence fluency.

### *Culminating Activity*

The students will design a product based on their research or choose a product that already exists. Once the product has been created, they will then develop an advertisement to sell their product. They have the freedom to choose what type of advertisement they want to use, whether it be a videotaped commercial, print ad, or Power Point. They will have one week to design and develop their product and advertisement before presenting it to the class. After presentations, the students will then be given five one dollar bills. Each student will “buy” the product they believe has the most convincing advertisement. Whichever student has the most money in their container will win a prize that will be up to the teacher’s discretion.

As an extension to the activity, I will choose the most and least persuasive project for the students to evaluate. They will analyze the advertisements and discuss what went well and what could be improved upon.

## Appendix A

Delaware State Standards

GRADE 6-Craft and Structure Informational Reading Standard 7

- Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

GRADE 6- Text Types and Purposes Writing Standard 1 Grade 6: Write arguments to support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

- Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.
- Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.
- Establish and maintain a formal style.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.

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## Appendix C

Persuasive Essay Graphic Organizer

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Introduction Paragraph

Opinion Statement:

Target Audience:

### First Body Paragraph

Reason:
Supporting Evidence:

### Second Body Paragraph

Reason:
Supporting Evidence:

### Third Body Paragraph

Reason:
Supporting Evidence:



### Conclusion Paragraph

Call to Action:

Restate Reasons:

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## Notes

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15456870701647656?journalCode=hajc0#preview> (accessed November 8, 2011)

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Curriculum Unit  
Title

All About Persuasion

Author

Lori Wiley

**KEY LEARNING, ENDURING UNDERSTANDING, ETC.**

Good readers evaluate and question forms and uses of persuasion through advertisements.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) for the UNIT**

How is persuasion used to target audiences?

**CONCEPT A**

History

**CONCEPT B**

Target Audience

**CONCEPT C**

Writing

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS A**

How have the persuasive techniques in advertising changed over the years?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS B**

How do marketers target audiences during advertisements?

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS C**

What are the essential parts that need to be included to write an effective persuasive paper?

**VOCABULARY A**

Persuasion, advertisements, consumer, bandwagon, plain folks, name calling, testimonials, product comparison

**VOCABULARY A**

Audience, hostile, critical, uninformed, sympathetic, demographics

**VOCABULARY A**

Appeal, emotional, logical, ethical, credible, reliable

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/MATERIAL/TEXT/FILM/RESOURCES**

Coca-Cola advertisements

Persuasive Essay Graphic Organizer