

## **Don't Say, "What's Wrong With Me," Say, "What's Wrong With This Ad?"**

### **Overview:**

Today's youth are inundated with advertisements. It is estimated that young girls see 250,000 advertisements directed at their physical appearance every year. Many of these advertisements contain mixed messages. On one hand, they are exposed to a large number of advertisements for junk and fast food. On the other hand, many ads sell the idea of thinness as beauty. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the average U.S. woman is 5' 3.7 tall and weighs 152 pounds. The average size of a model is 5'10" and 110 pounds. It is little wonder that almost two-thirds of girls describe themselves as being unhappy with their bodies. In this TeachersCount lesson, students will examine the role that media and advertising plays in the development of teens' body image. They will analyze advertisements and create a media message on body acceptance. They will also create a poster or informational brochure to promote healthy body image. The overall goal of the lesson plan is to enhance students' literacy development by providing engaging learning materials designed to promote creativity and critical thinking skills.

### **Grade Level:**

7-12

### **Subjects:**

Language Arts, English, Media Literacy

### **Learning Objectives:**

Students will do the following:

- learn how media influences body perception.
- create a media message on body acceptance.
- examine their own feelings about their bodies.

## **Learning Activities**

## Building Background

### Activity One: Media's Effect on Body Image

*The purpose of this activity is to develop an understanding of how the media can impact people's body image.*

#### 1. Share the following facts with your students:

- In a survey of girls 9 and 10 years old, 40% have tried to lose weight, according to an ongoing study funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (*USA Today*, 1996).
- A 1996 study found that the amount of time an adolescent watches soaps, movies and music videos is associated with their degree of body dissatisfaction and desire to be thin (Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996).
- One author reports that at age thirteen, 53% of American girls are "unhappy with their bodies." This grows to 78% by the time girls reach seventeen (Brumberg, 1997).
- In a study among undergraduates, media consumption was positively associated with a striving for thinness among men, and with body dissatisfaction among women (Harrison & Cantor, 1997).
- Teenage girls who viewed commercials depicting women who modeled the unrealistically thin-ideal type of beauty felt less confident, more angry and more dissatisfied with their weight and appearance than those who hadn't viewed the commercials. (Hargreaves, 2002).
- In a study on fifth graders, 10-year-old girls and boys told researchers they were dissatisfied with their own bodies after watching a music video by Britney Spears or a clip from the TV show "Friends" (Mundell, 2002).
- In another recent study on media's impact on adolescent body dissatisfaction, two researchers found the following:
  1. Teens who watched soaps and TV shows that emphasized the ideal body type reported a higher sense of body dissatisfaction. This was also true for girls who watched music videos.
  2. Reading magazines for teen girls or women also correlated with body dissatisfaction for girls.
  3. Identification with television stars (for girls and boys), and models (girls) or athletes (boys), positively correlated with body dissatisfaction (Hofschire & Greenberg, 2002).

#### 2. Involve students in a discussion about their personal observations

regarding media and body image. The questions below may be used to aid the discussion:

- What fact did you find the most surprising?
- Who sets these standards in our society?
- Who benefits from them and who suffers?
- What can be done about it?
- Do you feel any pressure to be beautiful based on the media's standards of beauty? How does our body image relate to our self-esteem?
- Is it realistic to have one ideal body image for all body types?
- How do some businesses use the ideal body image to promote their products?

These facts were taken from the Media Wise website.

[http://www.mediafamily.org/facts/facts\\_mediaeffect.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/facts/facts_mediaeffect.shtml)

## Steps for Learning

### Activity One: Negative and Positive Advertising

*The purpose of this activity is for students to analyze advertisements and determine if they think the ad has a negative or positive impact on body image.*

1. Cut out offensive and positive ads from magazines as they relate to body image. You may also choose to print ads from the websites listed below. **Teacher Note:** Some of the ads are very offensive. Please choose ads that are appropriate for your students.

Offensive Ads

<http://loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org/offensiveads.html>

<http://about-face.org/goo/newten/5/> (Click on the numbers above the ad to view additional advertisements.)

Positive Ads

<http://loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org/positiveads.html>

<http://about-face.org/gow/newten/4/> (Click on the numbers above the ad to view additional advertisements.)

2. Display the advertisements and ask students to select one advertisement from each category and respond in writing to the following:

- Describe how the ad was designed to sell, persuade, manipulate, or create a feeling.

- How do you feel about the ad?
- Who is the market audience?
- What is the ad really trying to sell?
- Does the ad make you want to buy the product? Explain.

3. Provide time for students to share their ads with the class.

4. Ask students to choose one offensive or negative advertisement and write a letter to the company's marketing director to let her/him know how the ad made them feel. Tell students to make sure that they include the ad with the letter.

### **Activity Two: Keep a Media Awareness Journal and Create a Media Message on Body Acceptance**

*The purpose of this activity is for students to extend their awareness of the impact of media on body image and create a media message on body acceptance.*

1. Provide students with a journal. Tell students that over the next week they will gather information about body image. Tell students to record conversations that they overhear in the bus, school, home, mall, sports events or anyplace where they go over the next few weeks. Ask them to record things that their friends, family and classmates say that relate to body image. Tell them to include what they see or hear in magazines, movies, books, songs, music videos, advertisements, television etc. Explain that they can collect advertisements or photographs from magazines and paste them into the journal. Finally, tell them to record their own thoughts and feelings about body image in the journal.

2. Provide time during the week for students to share selected journal entries with the class.

3. Divide the class into small groups. Explain to students that they are to use the information that they collected this week to create a media message or advertising slogan on body acceptance.

### **Extension Activities**

Activity One: Developing a Healthy Body Image

*The purpose of this activity is to increase students' awareness of body image and to share the information with the school or local community.*

Share Dr. Rita Freeman's suggestions for "Developing a Healthy Body Image" with your students:

- Listen to your body. Eat when you are hungry.
- Be realistic about the size you are likely to be based on your genetic and environmental history.
- Exercise regularly in an enjoyable way, regardless of size.
- Expect normal weekly and monthly changes in weight and shape
- Work towards self-acceptance and self-forgiveness. Be gentle with yourself.
- Ask for support and encouragement from friends and family when life is stressful.
- Decide how you wish to spend your energy -- pursuing the "perfect body image" or enjoying family, friends, school and, most importantly, life.

[http://www.psychotherapist.org/Index\\_archives\\_bodyimage.htm](http://www.psychotherapist.org/Index_archives_bodyimage.htm)

2. Have students create a poster or an informational brochure that incorporates Dr. Freeman's suggestions. Ask students to hang the posters around the school and community. Brochures may also be placed in areas around the school and community.

### **Teacher Information**

Visit the following sites to learn more about youth and body image.

The Body Positive

<http://www.thebodypositive.org/>

*The Body Positive* teaches young people to creatively transform the conditions in their lives that shape their relationships to food and movement.

Body Positive

<http://www.bodypositive.com/>

The Body Positive website looks at ways people can feel good in the bodies they have. The website contains monthly articles, forums, body image exercises, activism ideas and much more.

## National Education Standards

[www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

### WRITING

#### Standard 1:

Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=7&StandardID=1>

#### Level III (Grade 6-8)

#### Standard 4:

Gathers and uses information for research purposes

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=7&StandardID=4>

#### Level III (Grade 6-8)

1. Gathers data for research topics from interviews (e.g., prepares and asks relevant questions, makes notes of responses, compiles responses)

6. Organizes information and ideas from multiple sources in systematic ways (e.g., time lines, outlines, notes, graphic representations)

#### Level IV (Grades 9-12)

2. Uses a variety of print and electronic sources to gather information for research topics (e.g., news sources such as magazines, radio, television, newspapers; government publications; microfiche; telephone information services; databases; field studies; speeches; technical documents; periodicals; Internet)

6. Uses strategies to adapt writing for different purposes (e.g., to explain, inform, analyze, entertain, reflect, persuade)

### THINKING AND REASONING

Standard 5

[Applies basic trouble-shooting and problem-solving techniques](#)

Level IV Grade: 9-12

1. Applies trouble-shooting strategies to complex real-world situations
2. Understands that trouble-shooting almost anything may require many-step branching logic
10. Evaluates the feasibility of various solutions to problems; recommends and defends a solution

Level III [Grade: 6-8]

1. Generates alternative courses of action and compares the possible consequences of each alternative.
2. Selects the most appropriate strategy or alternative for solving a problem.
10. Evaluates the feasibility of various solutions to problems; recommends and defends a solution.

WORKING WITH OTHERS

Standard 1:

Contributes to the overall effort of a group

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/Benchmark.asp?SubjectID=22&StandardID=1>

Level IV (Grade K-12)