

## MEDIA LITERACY MONDAY

Thinking critically about **Superbowl Ads**—and their impact on teen health

### Relevant Subject Areas:

Health, Social Studies, Language Arts/English

### Class Time:

-20 minutes during class on the Friday before Super Bowl Sunday

-1 class period on the Monday or the next class following the Super Bowl.

### Classroom Outcomes:

Critical Thinking Outcomes—Students will be able to:

Analyze alcohol advertising.

Identify techniques used by alcohol advertisements to target them.

Understand how much time, effort and money is invested in alcohol advertising targeted at them.

Health Outcomes—Students will learn that:

Drinking alcohol damages their brain capacity.

The earlier they start drinking, the more likely they are to become an alcoholic.

Alcohol companies divert attention away from the damaging health consequences of drinking.

### Materials needed:

- access to a photocopier
- ability to play Superbowl commercials in class (a computer with internet access that is hooked up to an LCD projector and speakers is easiest. Taping commercials and bringing the tapes to class is also an option).

### A. BEFORE THE SUPER BOWL:

1. **Print out lesson and student handouts from CD-ROM.** Photocopy the log sheet and the hand before class. The log sheet will be distributed in the class before the Superbowl. The handout is used in the class after it.

2. Read over log sheet instructions. Be prepared to explain the log sheet to students.

3. Ask students to select one specific hour of the Super Bowl, and keep track of anything alcohol related during that hour on their log sheet. They will need to note: every beer commercial, "Brought to you by" statements that include a beer company, special in-game reports or statistics sponsored by a beer company, pictures or mentions of beer blimps, or anything else alcohol related that is said or shown during that hour.

4. **Figure out a plan for showing beer ads from the Superbowl in class.** The easiest way to do this is by logging into a web site that posts the ads immediately after the Superbowl, and then projecting the ads to the classroom. If you have the technology to do this, spend a little time finding the web site you want to use before class and practice playing a few ads. If you don't have an internet connection in class, you'll have to tape Superbowl beer commercials and bring them to class. It is important to have several commercials **cued up** and ready to be played. Here are some suggestions for achieving this:

a) To make it easy to cue up the commercials yourself, purchase 5-10 video tapes. Put in the first tape and begin recording-the first commercial that airs is usually a Budweiser spot. As soon as it is over, put in a new tape and start recording. When the next Budweiser spot gets recorded, repeat this process. This way, the tapes will have a Bud commercial just before each place where you've stopped the tape, making it easy to rewind for a few seconds to cue up the spots quickly. Remember to tape the 'prevention spot' Budweiser sometimes runs towards the end of the game. If you have a limited number of tapes, collect 2 or 3 good ads and the prevention spot.

b) Collaborate with school colleagues, or ask for student volunteers (no more than 6), and agree that each of you will tape the game. Have 2 students assigned to tape the 'alcohol prevention spot' if one is aired towards the end of the game. Then have the tape cued to the Budweiser spots (there are usually 8-10 during the game). Assign someone to have their tape cued to the first spot (which is usually their funniest), someone cued to the 2nd spot, etc.

c) Have 4 or so students tape the first half of the game and ask them to cue up their tapes to **their favorite commercial**. This should give you a variety of spots to analyze, and ensure that the spots are the ones your students enjoy the most.

## B. AFTER THE SUPER BOWL IN-CLASS LESSON:

1) **Review the log results** (10 minutes). Ask several students to briefly report their

findings, and the totals of each category from their log.

Ask students if they ever before thought about how often alcohol is shown during sports broadcasts.

Mention that the average 30-second spot during the Superbowl sells for between \$2.3 and \$2.7 million.

Point out that Budweiser pays up to 10 times that much for running 10 commercials—Plus an additional \$2-4 million to "make" each of the commercials they saw—Plus the money they spent for their Blimp (if there is one), all the stadium signs, AND paying all the people who had to figure out where to put those signs so that they'd be seen by the TV cameras.

2) **Targeting** (10 minutes). Introduce students to the concept of 'Targeting'.

Background: Targeting is a term used by advertisers that refers to the specific audience for whom an ad or commercial message is made. Certain messages are directed at certain groups of people—and a target market would be the group of people advertisers think are most likely to buy their products. For example, expensive luxury cars are sold to rich people, young men and women are the target markets for sports car ads, and mothers are one of the major target markets for mini-van commercials.

Tell students that the more teenagers like beer ads, or find them funny, the more likely they are to drink beer.

**Discuss the concept of targeting**, and ask students if they think that their age group was the target audience of the beer commercials in the Super Bowl. Also ask them if they think these commercials would encourage other students their age to drink?

Remind students that about 15% of the total audience watching the Superbowl is below age 18. (If you get a chance to look up the viewer ratings before class, do so. Tell students that 15% of that number is how many kids watched. Point out that half of the total number of kids is less than 11 years old.)

3) **Analyzing Commercials** (10 minutes). In a shorter class (45-50 minutes), show and discuss 2 commercials, taking no more than 10 minutes to do so. Longer classes can analyze a third commercial. (**NOTE:** If a drinking prevention commercial is broadcast, is

discussed later in this lesson.)

Ask students to name beer commercials they remember. Ask them to choose which ones they liked. Show one of these then discuss it. Point out that alcohol companies spend \$2-4 million to produce ONE commercial they run nationally. Make the point that "everything" in the commercial is put there on purpose, and that a lot of money was spent to get the commercial just right. Ask students why they liked the ad.

Consider asking:

- Was it funny? Why?
- Did it have cute animals in it?
- Did you like the music?
- Did the commercial mention any consequences that might happen to people who drink alcohol?

Remind the students that there's strong research showing that the more teens like beer commercials, the more they drink. Being funny, having cool music, and cute animals are some things kids say they like in beer commercials.

--Repeat this discussion with 1 or 2 beer commercials--

**4) Health Consequences** (10 minutes). Remind students that the commercials they've seen so far don't mention any of the health consequences of teen drinking. Refer them to the handout.

Share the findings that 4 out of 10 teenagers who get drunk by age 15 go on to become alcoholics later in life. Reinforce the idea that even though alcohol commercials make drinking seem fun, or sexy, or 'adult', these are the facts; the long-term consequence of teen drinking is that 40% become alcoholics.

To make this statistic real, suggest that the students start counting the teens they see drinking-and when they get to ten, they can ask themselves which four of these ten will become alcoholics later in life? Make sure they include themselves if they have already begun drinking.

The short-term consequences of teen drinking are also devastating. Have students refer to the MRI brain images on their handout. An MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) is commonly used to reveal where athletes' bodies are injured. They can also be used to show where alcohol does damage, particularly to a teenager's brain. Researchers studied the brains of two groups of teenagers: one group that never

drank alcohol and another group that had gotten drunk. The researchers had teenagers read a list of words out loud, which required them to : use parts of their brains that see and process visual information; the areas needed to understand language; and the motor skills to speak out loud. The darkened areas are the part of the brains that were working. You can see from the picture that the teen who never drank any alcohol used large parts of her brain, and the teen that drank had very few areas of her brain working.

On average, teens had gotten drunk lost 10% of their brain's function-compared to teens who don't drink. Scientists don't know how much teens have to drink before they suffer brain loss, since it would be unethical to repeatedly get kids drunk and then run brain scans. But from looking at kids who had already gotten drunk, they were able to determine that the average brain loss is 10%.

Remind students that 10% is the difference between an A or B on a test. Ten percent is also the difference between passing or failing if you're at the bottom of the grade curve.

Ask students: Do you think drinking is worth being 10% less?

Point out that the commercials discussed so far do not mention any of these serious health consequences. And according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, beer companies earn \$5 billion a year from underage drinking.

Ask Students: Do you think the reason beer companies don't tell teens about how much drinking hurts them is that they make so much money selling the beer to teens?

##### **5) What beer companies call 'prevention' (10 minutes).**

NOTE: Budweiser usually runs 8-10 commercials during the Super Bowl. Often, one of them, usually one of the last, is an attempt at prevention. It usually encourages using designated drivers, or asks parents to talk to their kids about drinking. Sometimes it tries to brag about prevention programs that Budweiser supports, such as "We Card." This section will focus on the prevention spot. If no prevention spot is aired, skip this part of the lesson.

Play the prevention commercial that ran during the Super Bowl.

Discuss it with students using the following questions as a guide:

Given how much we've seen how these commercials appeal to teens, and the damaging effects of teen drinking, why do you think that only one spot out of all the beer ads (usually 8-10) was about prevention?

a) If the spot addressed drunk driving ask the following questions:

- Did the commercial tell people not to drink? Or did it tell people to drink a lot but make sure they get somebody else to drive while they do it?
- Do you think this is an effective way to help stop drunk driving?
- Would it be more effective to encourage everyone to drink less when they party, so that they won't be so drunk that they can't drive?
- Alcohol companies never suggest that people drink less so they can drive more safely. Do you think they don't care if people get killed by drunk drivers? Do you think they care more about making money?
- Drunk Driving Car crashes are the number one killer of teens. Do you think that alcohol companies care how many teens are killed by drunk driving, or is making money more important to them?
- If they did care about teens getting killed from drinking, would they still advertise the same way during Super Bowl?

b) If the ad encourages parents to talk to their children about drinking, ask these questions:

- Did the commercial tell teens not to drink?
- Did it mention any of the health consequences of teen drinking?
- Why was the spot directed at your parents? Some people think this is a really sneaky way for alcohol companies to shift the blame for teen drinking to your parents, instead of their advertising. What do you think?
- Do you think any of the other beer commercials that ran during the Super Bowl had messages that would help your parents convince you not to drink? Or do the other commercials make your parents' job harder because they make drinking seem fun or sexy?
- Beer companies make \$5 billion a year from underage drinking. Do you think these companies could come up with a better prevention commercial?
- What would these better prevention ads look like?

c) If the spot brags about Budweiser Prevention Programs, ask these questions:

- Beer companies make \$5 billion a year from underage drinking. Do you think these companies want to have prevention programs that work?
- If Budweiser really wanted to keep teens from drinking, why did they run almost ten times

as many spots in the Super Bowl telling you to drink than spots about prevention?

-If Budweiser really wanted teens to not drink, why is it so many of you told me earlier in class that you liked their ads so much?

-This commercial was made to brag about programs to keep teens from drinking. If Budweiser's prevention programs really worked, why do so many teens drink?

-Budweiser makes so much money that it could easily afford to put an effective prevention program into place, but it hasn't. What do you think is the real reason Budweiser runs spots bragging about its ineffective prevention programs?

### **Grading:**

Students are graded for turning in their thoughtfully completed log sheets, and for their participation in classroom discussion.

### **Civic Activism-Extension Activities:**

Students can

\* **Design posters** illustrating what they learned from this project, and post them in the hallways around school.

\* **Design their own short video PSA's** (public service announcements) that educate others about this issue and air them on your local access TV station.

\* **Write letters to alcohol companies** asking them to refrain from targeting young people in their alcohol advertisements-and telling them they know about the health consequences of drinking and will pass on the information to their friends.

\* **Write letters to the heads of large media companies** telling them it is irresponsible for them to run alcohol ads aimed at underage people. Have students tell the media companies about their media literacy project and tell them they know about the health consequences of drinking and will pass on the information to their friends and family.

### **More Media Literacy links and resources on-line:**

Center on Alcohol Marketing to Youth <http://camy.org>

Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free [www.alcoholfreechildren.org](http://www.alcoholfreechildren.org)

Center for Science in the Public Interest <http://cspinet.org/booze>

The Marin Institute <http://marininstitute.org>