

MEDIA EDUCATION
FOUNDATION
STUDY GUIDE



Challenging media

CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

ADVERTISING INVADES THE CLASSROOM

CONTENTS

CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

ADVERTISING INVADES THE CLASSROOM

NOTE TO TEACHERS	pg. 02
THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT	03
OVERVIEW	04
INTRODUCTION	
Key Points.....	05
Discussion Questions.....	05
Assignments.....	06
THE SHADOW CURRICULUM: Sponsored Educational Material	
Key Points.....	07
Discussion Questions.....	07
Assignments.....	08
CHANNEL ONE: Commercials in the Classroom	
Key Points.....	10
Discussion Questions.....	10
Assignments.....	11
SCHOOLS IN NEED: The Politics of Funding	
Key Points.....	13
Discussion Questions.....	13
Assignments.....	14
SWEET DEALS: Exclusive Soda Contracts	
Key Points.....	15
Discussion Questions.....	15
Assignments.....	16
RESISTING COMMERCIALISM: Legislative Action	
Key Points.....	17
Discussion Questions.....	17
Assignments.....	18
RESISTING COMMERCIALISM: Local Activism	
Key Points.....	19
Discussion Questions.....	19
Assignments.....	19
WHAT'S AT STAKE: Keeping Schools Public	
Key Points.....	20
Discussion Questions.....	20
Assignments.....	20

NOTE TO TEACHERS

This study guide is designed to help you engage and manage the information presented in this video with your students. Given that it can be difficult to teach visual content – and difficult for students to recall detailed information from videos after viewing them – the intention here is to give you a tool to help your students slow down and deepen their thinking about the specific issues this video addresses. With this in mind, we’ve structured the guide so that you have the option of focusing in depth on one section of the video at a time. We’ve also set it up to help you stay close to the video’s main line of argument as it unfolds. The structure of the guide therefore mirrors the structure of the video, moving through each of the video’s sections with a series of key summary points, questions, and assignments specific to that section.

Previewing Discussion Starters are designed to inspire preliminary discussion about the issues the video addresses prior to viewing.

Key Points provide a concise and comprehensive summary of each section of the video. They are designed to make it easier for you and your students to recall the details of the video during class discussions, and as a reference point for students as they work on assignments.

Questions for Discussion & Writing provide a series of questions designed to help you review and clarify material for your students; to encourage students to reflect critically on this material during class discussions; and to prompt and guide their written reactions to the video before and after these discussions. These questions can therefore be used in different ways: as guideposts for class discussion, as a framework for smaller group discussion and presentations, or as self-standing, in-class writing assignments (*i.e. as prompts for “free-writing” or in-class reaction papers in which students are asked to write spontaneously and informally while the video is fresh in their mind*).

Assignments for each section encourage students to engage the video in more depth – by conducting research, working on individual and group projects, putting together presentations, and composing formal essays. These assignments are designed, at base, to challenge students to show command of the material presented in the video, to think critically and independently about this material from a number of different perspectives, and to develop and defend their own point of view on the issues at stake.

USING THIS VIDEO IN THE CLASSROOM

- » View the video prior to showing it to your students.
- » Review the study guide and choose which exercises you will use with your students.
- » Use the previewing activities to help your students prepare for the ideas presented by the video.
- » Encourage *active listening*. Because the content of this video is likely to elicit emotional responses from the students, it is important that the students engage with each other in ways that ensure everybody has the opportunity both to speak and to be listened to. It is advised that you set guidelines or norms to ways to “actively listen” in advance of classroom discussions. Check out MEF’s handout, *Techniques for Active Listening*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdf/ActiveListening.pdf>)
- » Have the students keep a journal. It will be an effective place for them to explore their own attitudes and opinions and to record their observations about the media.
- » Review and discuss the handout *How to be a Critical Media Viewer*. (<http://www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdf/CriticalViewing.pdf>)
- » Incorporate activism and advocacy into your media literacy study. They are an important part of empowering students.

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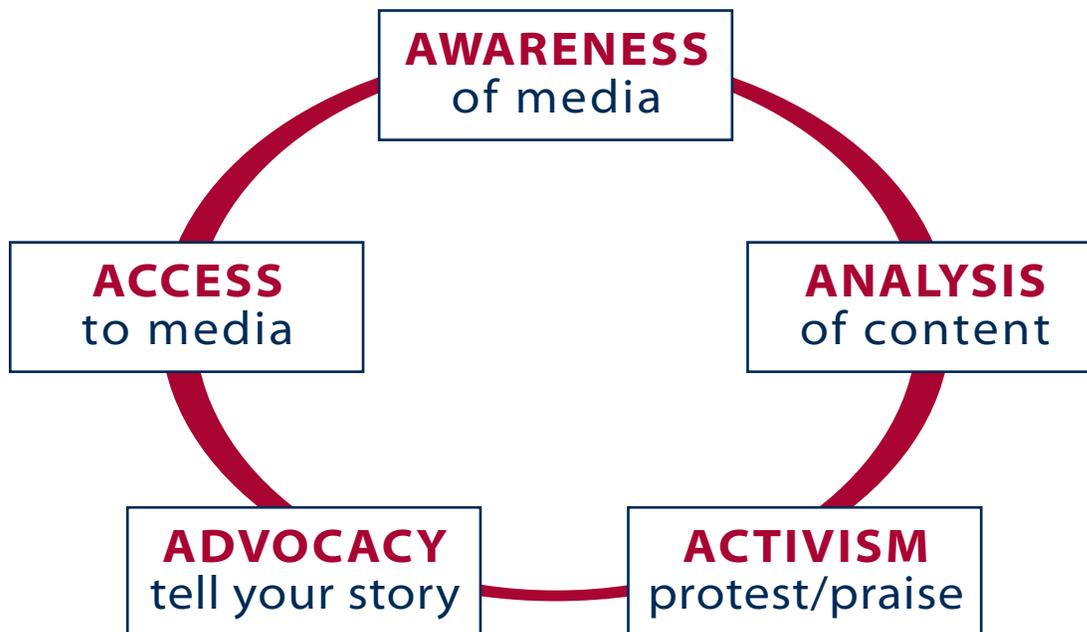
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- » View the video prior to showing it to your students.
- » Review the teacher’s guide and choose which exercises you will use with your students.
- » Use the previewing activities to help your students prepare for the ideas presented by the video.
- » Encourage *active listening*. Because the content of this video is likely to elicit emotional responses from the students, it is important that the students engage with each other in ways that ensure everybody has the opportunity both to speak and to be listened to. It is advised that you set guidelines or norms to ways to “actively listen” in advance of classroom discussions. (*Handout: Techniques for Active Listening*)
- » Have the students keep a journal. It will be an effective place for them to explore their own attitudes and opinions and to record their observations about the media.
- » After viewing and discussing the video, handout E.D.A.P.’s *Tips for Being a Critical Viewer of the Media* (<http://www.edap.org/media2.html>)
- » Incorporate activism and advocacy into your media literacy study. They are an important part of empowering students.

THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT¹



THE MEDIA LITERACY CIRCLE OF EMPOWERMENT EXPLAINED

AWARENESS

Students learn about the pervasiveness of the media in their lives.

ANALYSIS

Students discuss the forms and contents of the media's various messages as well as the intent of most media to persuade an audience.

ACTIVISM

Students develop their own opinions about the negative and positive effects of the media and decide to do something about it – this can be in the form of praise for healthy media, protest of unhealthy media, or development of campaigns to educate others with regard to the media, to change media messages, etc.

ADVOCACY

Students learn how to work with media and use their own media to develop and publicize messages that are healthy, constructive, and all too often ignored by our society.

ACCESS

Students gain access to the media – radio, newspaper, internet, television, etc. – to spread their own message. This in turn leads to further awareness of the media and how it works, which leads to a deeper analysis and so forth.

1. Diagram and explanation adopted from E.D.A.P.'s GO GIRLS! Curriculum, (c) 1999 (<http://www.edap.org/gogirls.html>)

OVERVIEW

Our public school system was founded on a promise to young people and the future of democracy. There is nothing more American in spirit than the proposition that every child, without exception, is entitled to an education, and nothing more democratic in spirit than providing open access to an education designed to inspire free, informed thinking in a safe environment immune to preaching and propaganda. Our public schools were conceived in this spirit, not as an accessory to democracy but as a democratic necessity: the very institutional enactment of **Thomas Jefferson's** concern that "our present state of liberty [would be] a short-lived possession unless the mass of the people could be well-informed," and his subsequent fight for a public education system "adapted to the years, to the capacity, and the condition of every one, directed to their freedom and happiness."¹

Today these ideals are in jeopardy as this democratic brand of public education rapidly gives way to the corporate *branding* of public education.

Too many schools now find themselves struggling to adapt not only to the "years, capacity, and condition" of their students, but to their spending power as consumers. Facing intensifying financial and political pressure, schools have grown increasingly receptive to "free" resources offered by corporations in exchange for precious advertising time and space. The result is a fundamental and disturbing change in the look, feel, and purpose of public education.

Captive Audience: Advertising Invades the Classroom examines this deepening commercial penetration of public schools and its consequences for the health and education of young people. It reveals how slick ads, the glow of big-name brands, the temptations of fat and sugar-saturated soda and food now hit students with accelerating frequency and force during the course of their education. How advertisements compete for space in textbooks, notebooks, and classroom curricula. How corporations target kids from the walls of school hallways, classrooms, and bathrooms – greeting them in "educational" TV programming in the morning and sending them home for the day from banks of vending machines and sponsored after-school events. Most importantly, the video shows how we can stop this corporate movement to commercialize and privatize public education.

Along the way, *Captive Audience* lays out a passionate case and a practical blueprint for challenging the incredible cynicism of corporate advertisers who see our young people as a captive market demographic and our schools as an efficient delivery system for their propaganda. Drawing on the insights and experiences of educational theorists, legislators, school officials, teachers, and students, the video demands that we break the tightening grip of private business interests and restore public schools to their founding mission: to serve as an ideal marketplace of ideas, not as an ideal market for corporations.

PREVIEWING DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. What do you know about the issue of advertising in public schools? Does it bother you one way or the other? Do you think ads belong there? Do you think it matters?
2. Do you think there's a contradiction between trying to educate kids to think for themselves and allowing advertisers into schools? What is the purpose and mission of public schools? What is the purpose and mission of marketing and advertising firms? Is there a contradiction? Do you base this on your own experience?
3. Do you think advertising in schools, the taking of private money by public schools, poses any dangers to young people? To their education or their health or both?
4. Do you feel that private money (from corporate sponsors) is an appropriate way to fund public schools?

1. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations/jeff1370.ht>

INTRODUCTION

KEY POINTS

- » While public schools once operated solely on the basis of public investment and trust, more and more schools have had to turn to advertisers, marketing consultants, and fast-food businesses for funding.
- » This change in public schools, which used to be commercial-free zones, has occurred as corporations have come to recognize the sheer potential of the youth market – a demographic of immense size and spending power, and fertile ground for turning kids into lifelong, brand-loyal consumers.
- » What makes public schools especially attractive to corporate advertising is that students are essentially a captive audience, with no choice but to be there, and no power to zap an ad and make it go away.
- » By targeting schools, corporations reduce young people to objects and consumers, the primary interest being sales and profit – not their health, education or well-being.
- » The argument in favor of advertising in schools – that kids are targeted by ads everywhere, all the time, anyway – amounts to a rationalization: Lost is the sense that schools might have a responsibility to be the one place where kids might be educated to think critically and with healthy skepticism about those whose very mission is to reduce citizens to consumers and spectators.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of advertising have you been exposed to during the course of your education? Have you noticed any changes in either the number or style of these ads over time?
2. Were you to look at an internal cost-benefit analysis of a corporation thinking about advertising in public schools, what do you think you'd find there? What costs (*other than the price of making and placing the ads*) would you expect to find? What benefits?
3. Do you agree with the statement in the video that targeting students with advertising reduces them to objects? What do you think is meant by this?
4. Who do public schools belong to? And what differences do you see between public and private space? What *is* public space? What *is* private space?
5. Do marketers have a right to have their messages heard in public schools? Is this a matter of free speech? Do their free speech rights on the street, in privately owned spaces, extend to the public space of public schools?
6. In what ways might advertising in public schools undermine the education of young people? In what ways might it enhance their educational experience?
7. Should it be the parents' or the schools' job to safeguard kids from advertising and commercialism?
8. Some of those who support commercializing public schools argue that it doesn't make any difference because kids are exposed to ads all the time anyway. What do you make of this argument?
9. Do you feel that schoolteachers and officials implicitly endorse the products advertised in schools? If yes, what are the possible implications of such an endorsement?
10. Would you support or vote against legislation that would require schools that accept ads and corporate money to develop an independent media literacy curriculum designed to inspire critical thinking about advertising in schools? How about legislation that would require corporations who advertise in schools to pay for the development of such a curriculum?

INTRODUCTION

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Make a list of all the advertisements you see in a single day at your school, college, or university. Also list all of the food and drink products your school sells that have brand names that are visible and clearly marked. As you compile this list, make notes that address the following questions:
 - » How many *different* company brands have a presence in your school?
 - » Does one umbrella company seem to be more prominently represented than others? In terms of the food and soda vending machines, what kind of variety is there?
 - » Is there a wide or a limited range of offerings?
 - » What do the choices you're given have in common? How are they different?
 - » Do you feel that some of these products are more appropriate than others to be advertised in a school setting?
 - » And finally, do you notice any patterns or themes that run through different ads? A certain common style, a common attitude, a common type of product being sold?
2. Write a paper responding to the argument that ads are okay in our public schools because kids are exposed to them all the time anyway. Argue for or against this specific justification of the commercialization of schools.
3. You are an aide to a state legislator who is considering whether or not to support the two pieces of legislation mentioned above (in **No. 10**). He asks you to write a memo detailing the pros and cons involved, and to conclude with your own recommendation. Write that memo.

THE SHADOW CURRICULUM

KEY POINTS

- » One of the ways advertising makes it into the schools is through curricula and course materials like textbooks, television and video.
- » The turning of course materials into media for advertising is embraced, in part, because of the understandable desire of teachers to make abstract educational material relevant to the lives of their students.
- » Lessons get built around brands, on the partial assumption that kids relate to brands; the end result is that the school and the teacher are assumed to be sanctioning and pushing these brands – while also reinforcing the perception that brands are what’s most relevant to kids’ lives.
- » The use of ads this way not only encourages consumption during valuable class time that might otherwise be devoted to critically understanding topics like commercialism and consumerism; it also means that the product being pushed isn’t likely to get critically examined.
- » The fact that a growing number of public schools are desperately in need of money, short on books and other class materials, naturally makes it more likely that schools will accept these “free” materials as a trade-off, despite the advertising content in them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think it’s appropriate for schools to allow the placement of ads – which, of course, are designed to make kids buy things – in educational materials that are designed to make kids think?
2. Do you feel there is a substantial difference between explicit advertising in schools (*for example, a Nike poster*) and “product placement” in textbook exercises (*for example, a math word problem that asks kids to make a calculation based on the number of Nike golf balls sold in a year*)? What makes them different?
3. What would be the difference between the last example, above, and a textbook that featured exercises that called attention to some of the more unflattering – but factual – things that corporations do? (*For example, a math word problem that asks kids to make a calculation based on the number of times Nike has been investigated and charged with using sweat shop and child labor.*) If one textbook consisted entirely of favorable or neutral mentions of a brand, in exchange for money, and another textbook consisted entirely of factual and documented statements about the way that brand operates, do you think they would have different effects on students’ perceptions? Even if students are simply using these textbooks and reading these problems to do math?
4. If, as some argue, brands are used in textbooks and curricula simply to make material relevant to student’s lives – and if, as some argue, it doesn’t really matter because the kids are focusing on the exercises they’re doing, not on the brands – if these things are true, then why do you think that corporations are spending so much money to get their brands in textbooks?
5. What do you think of the argument some adults have made that putting brand names in the curriculum makes boring and abstract ideas more relevant to the lives of students? Can you think of other things – other than brand names – that would be more relevant to your lives and would bring abstract ideas to life?
6. If we agree with a lot of adults in powerful school administrative positions that brand names and corporations are what kids relate to most, does it follow logically that this is a reason to splash brand logos and ads all over their schools and their books? Is there a logical case to be made that this would actually be a reason not to?
7. Do you feel a teacher who works in a school who takes advertising money should be able to openly criticize the commercialization of schools? Should the teacher, on the basis of fact, be able to openly criticize a specific company that pays for class materials in her school?

THE SHADOW CURRICULUM

8. If advertising and commercialism are flooding our schools, should media literacy courses, and courses about how to critically read advertising, be required? Why or why not?
9. Are there any brand-name products that you think would be more acceptable than others to be advertised in schools? Are there brand-name products you feel shouldn't be advertised? On what basis would you make such a distinction?
10. Are all "sponsored" materials inherently biased? If so, does that make them inappropriate for the classroom? Should we have as much suspicion about the potential biases inherent in a *Greenpeace* video about environmental protection as we do in a video about the same subject made by *Exxon*?

ASSIGNMENTS

1. A marketing executive asks you to write a series of exercises for a 12th grade textbook sponsored by *McDonald's*. (See **No. 2**, above, in the discussion questions for this section, for an example that uses *Nike*.) The executive tells you that you can write the exercises for whatever subject you want, as long as you create 5-10 questions designed to advance students' general knowledge about *McDonald's*, along with their knowledge and skills in the subject area you choose (e.g. *math word problems; history questions; geography exercises; economics problems*).

This is exactly what the *McDonald's* ad executive tells you:

"The point here is to enhance our brand recognition with kids, to make us a necessary part of their lives – but to do it in a way that helps them learn their traditional subjects and further the aims of education. We want you to use our brand to bring the subject to life for them. Bottom line: use our name and our food and the other things we offer kids to make their boring school work more relevant to their everyday lives."

For info about *McDonald's*, go to: www.mcdonalds.com

For info about *Burger King*, go to: www.burgerking.com

For info about *Taco Bell*, go to: www.tacobell.com

2. Alternative version of **No. 1** (above): A media literacy educator concerned about advertising's effects on kids asks you to write a series of exercises designed to increase students' awareness about the dangers of fast food, and the nature of the fast food industry, for a 12th grade textbook sponsored by the *Media Education Foundation (MEF)*, which produced this video and guide. (See **No. 3**, above, in the discussion questions for this section, for an example that uses *Nike*.) The educator tells you that you can write the exercises for whatever subject you want, as long as you create 5-10 questions designed to advance students' critical understanding of *McDonald's*, *Burger King* or another fast food chain, along with their general knowledge and skills in the subject area you choose (e.g. *math word problems; history questions; geography exercises; economics problems*).

This is what the media educator tells you:

"The point here is to enhance the media literacy skills of kids, to help them understand how they're targeted by corporations, and to make media education a necessary part of their lives – but to do it in a way that helps them learn their traditional subjects and further the aims of education. We want you to use a fast food brand like *McDonald's* or *Burger King* to bring the subject to life for them. Bottom line: use the *McDonald's* or other fast food brand, its food and other products, to make media literacy and their boring school work more relevant to students' everyday lives."

THE SHADOW CURRICULUM

For info about *McDonald's*, go to: www.mcspotlight.org

For info about *Burger King*, go to: www.mcspotlight.org/beyond/companies/bking.html

To find out the exact “nutritional” content (*fat, calories, etc.*) of specific fast food products from a range of fast food restaurants, go to the searchable database created by the Minnesota Attorney General’s office at: [www.olen.com/food](http://www olen.com/food)

For an interview with **Eric Schlosser**, and an article about his best-selling book *Fast Food Nation*, a scathing indictment of the fast food industry, go to: www.theatlantic.com/unbound/interviews/ba2000-12-14.htm

3. Traditionally, our public schools have been the battleground for a number of debates about the meaning of free speech, and about the responsibility of schools to allow a free exchange of ideas. Consider, for example, recurring debates about whether the Pledge of Allegiance or prayer should be mandatory in schools. In both of these cases, each side in the debate claims their position is the free speech position. For example, advocates of prayer in school argue that it’s the right of young people to be able to express their religious or spiritual beliefs freely, while others argue that the exercise of this “freedom” infringes on the freedom of other young people to be free of certain religious ideas. Now it’s your turn to enter this debate, this time with a focus on advertising in schools.

Write a paper, or prepare a talk, with this title: *The Commercialization of Our Public Schools: A Free Speech Issue*. Your assignment: To argue that it is either an extension or an abridgement of free speech to allow private, commercial advertising into public schools.

RESOURCES

» The First Amendment to the United States Constitution reads as follows:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

» For an article on whether advertising should be protected as “corporate speech” under the free speech guarantees of the First Amendment, or considered a less-protected form of “commercial speech,” subject to local consumer laws, not the First Amendment, go to: www.news.uiuc.edu/biztips/03/05ethics.html

» For more on the free “corporate” speech vs. commercial speech debate, with a specific focus on a legal case involving *Nike*, go to: www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/sweatshops/nike/668.html

CHANNEL ONE

KEY POINTS

- » The commercial “educational” network *Channel One* is now a presence in public schools across the country.
- » Schools sign a contract with *Channel One*, a corporate enterprise, and in exchange for TV monitors in every classroom, VCRs and a satellite dish, free of charge, schools agree – and are required – to broadcast a 12-minute *Channel One* program every day featuring ten minutes of “educational” “news” content and two minutes of advertising.
- » Student viewing of this programming is mandatory.
- » Once again, the rationale, or rationalization, for requiring kids to watch commercials in school is that it’s a small price to pay – a smart, practical trade-off – given that kids see hundreds of ads a day anyway, and that the commercial content runs for only two minutes amid good educational content.
- » Quite apart from the extremely questionable practice of requiring kids to watch advertisements for any length of time at all, an analysis of the educational value of the “news” content reveals deeper problems with the *Channel One* phenomenon and the way it’s pitched.
- » Of the ten minutes of “news,” an average of approximately three minutes is devoted to current events – many of which are soft news stories, sports, and weather or disaster coverage.
- » There are approximately two minutes, average, in any given daily broadcast, devoted to breaking news – the same amount of time dedicated to advertisements.
- » The quality of even these two minutes of breaking news is itself questionable, usually consisting of flashy fragmented clips that are light on content, ostensibly to maintain the attention of the audience – translating into “educational” content that is high on style and low on substance – which would seem to be educating young people that “news” is about entertainment more than diverse information in context.
- » The way *Channel One* sells itself to buyers reinforces the critique that its main motives are not educational – but rather to package and sell a ready-made student audience to advertisers.
- » The bottom line, then, is that *Channel One* appeals to students as consumers – not only in its explicit advertising, but in the very style of its presentation of news and information, which mirrors the kind of hip and branded “youth lifestyle” construction that runs through youth-targeted advertising generally.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel that what schools get in return for buying into *Channel One* is worth it? In your opinion, what are the benefits of *Channel One*, and what are the costs?
2. What criteria do you feel school officials should use when they decide whether or not to buy into *Channel One* and bring it into their school system? Are there any contradictions in your list of criteria? If so, what should the bottom line be when the decision is made?
3. Do you feel that it’s right to require students to watch the advertisements featured on *Channel One*? Do you see any difference between, say, making attendance in English class mandatory, and making it mandatory to sit through commercials?
4. When *Channel One* is selling itself to schools, its executives seem to stress the educational value of what it offers. When it sells itself to other businesses, however, they seem to stress the fact that their network’s a great place for them to advertise because kids are forced to watch it. What do you make of this difference in the way they talk about themselves? Do these two things contradict one another? If so, how? If not, why not?

CHANNEL ONE

5. You'll often hear media experts on TV arguing against censorship of TV programming by talking about freedom of choice. They say things like "if you don't like it, you can turn it off," and that "nobody's forcing you to watch it." Do you feel that students should have freedom of choice when it comes to TV commercials in the classroom? On what basis would you argue your position on this?
6. Have you ever seen *Channel One* programming? What do you think of it? Do you agree or disagree with the argument in the video that the level of educational content of *Channel One* is overstated and overrated?
7. The video also argues that the non-commercial, "educational" content of *Channel One* itself bears the marks of commercialization. What do you think the video means by that? In what ways, beyond *Channel One*, might the commercial nature of media shape the way its content looks, what it says, and how it says it?
8. Given the video's argument that *Channel One* coverage of "breaking news" is usually lightweight, fragmented, disjointed and presented outside of a meaningful context, do you feel that it is possible that *Channel One* doesn't educate kids about the world as much as it teaches them that what matters in the world – what we call the "news" – doesn't really matter at all unless it's entertaining? In other words, from a fundamentally educational perspective, do you feel it's better to have a couple of minutes of "news" presented in a slick and superficial way, accompanied by an equal amount of commercial time, or better not to have any news at all? If the latter, can you think of ways for students to learn current events from sources other than *Channel One*?
9. Do you feel that it makes sense to show *Channel One* "news" and advertisements during homeroom period? Or do you think it would make more sense to show it on tape each day during a regular class period – during social studies or English, for example, classes where students would normally discuss and analyze not only what's going in the world, but the way the media often distort it?
10. *Channel One* has developed its own media literacy curricula. They claim that *Channel One* is a good thing to use to develop students' media literacy skills. First, what would be your definition of media literacy or media education? And would it include looking at media in its entirety – not just at media images, but also at the business of media: the way it makes its money, the ideas it crowds out, etc.? And second, based on this last point, do you think *Channel One* would agree to include in its media literacy curricula a series of lessons that encourage students to look critically and explicitly at *Channel One* itself – in the same way this video does?

ASSIGNMENTS

1. *Captive Audience* argues passionately against the educational value of *Channel One*. This represents one side in a major and ongoing debate within media literacy circles. The other side of this debate has been advanced most prominently by media literacy expert **Renee Hobbs**. Hobbs (*who has been paid by Channel One to develop curricula*) has argued passionately in favor of *Channel One* and its educational value.

This is Hobbs, with **Paul Folkemer**, on the value of *Channel One*:

"Schools have used *Channel One* to create opportunities to strengthen students' skills of analysis and communication, and to help integrate the media-literacy concepts into the school curriculum and students' daily lives. *Channel One*, in our view, presents an opportunity for teachers and students to engage in the kinds of discussions and activities that help build ties between the classroom and the culture, to allow students to see the relevance of schoolwork to the larger culture."

Clearly, this is a very different view of *Channel One* than the view advanced in the video. Both sides cannot be right.

CHANNEL ONE

Your assignment: Get ready for a classroom debate on this issue. You and a few others in your class will get together and prepare to defend one side of this issue. Put together your argument as if it is being heard by a local school board deciding whether or not to let *Channel One* into their schools.

Note: The most effective way to be convincing in a debate is to know, and to do justice, to opposing views. This will mean knowing both sides of this issue. For the con side (*against Channel One*), use the overall argument of *Captive Audience*, the argument in this section in particular, as well as a critique of *Channel One* written by **William Hoynes** and published in *FAIR Magazine* (found at www.fair.org/extra/9705/ch1-hoynes.html).

For the pro side, see the rest of the Hobbs article quoted above at her website:

www.reneehobbs.org/renee's%20web%20site/Publications/a_new_lens_on_channel_one.htm. You can also get to this article by going to www.reneehobbs.org, clicking on “publications” from the home page and, once there, scrolling down to the article called *A New Lens on Channel One*.

To lend depth to your argument, no matter which side you’re on, you might also want to check out other links on that site, and links at the *Media Education Foundation* website at www.mediaed.org.

2. Media literacy expert **Renee Hobbs** has written that “one purpose of education is to help students tolerate complexity, manage uncertainty, and appreciate ambiguity and paradox.” Write a paper, using the arguments advanced in *Captive Audience*, explaining whether or not you feel *Channel One* accomplishes Hobbs’ vision. (See also www.channelone.com for further examples of the kind of “complexity” – or lack of complexity – your paper will describe.)

3. A school board rules that *Channel One* can be used in its schools, but only on the condition that students are given exercises designed explicitly to make them think critically about the value of *Channel One*. They turn to you for help. Write a series of assignments for 12th grade students in a public high school. The goal of these assignments should be to help students educate themselves about how *Channel One* educates them.

SCHOOLS IN NEED

KEY POINTS

- » To understand the presence of advertising in schools, it's necessary to understand the political and economic factors that have forced public schools to look for new sources of revenue.
- » Since the Reagan administration of the 1980s, the political, ideological and economic climate has turned against public schools, devaluing them through a series of funding cuts and local property tax freezes that have been justified by claiming that big-government spending is responsible for bad performing schools.
- » Since universal public education was established in the 1920s, federal spending rose throughout the 20th century until the early '80s. It went from 9.8% in the early eighties to 6.1% in 1990.
- » Ideological political attacks on big government, the politics of tax-cutting, and a deregulatory political environment have bled schools of funds and rendered them vulnerable to advertising revenue.
- » In this tax and budget-slashing environment, corporations emerge as benefactors, willing to pick up the slack by offering a "public service" to schools in need.
- » The image of the corporate benefactor partnering with schools in a public-private model of new efficiency and educational service is contradicted when the materials donated become vehicles for bombarding kids with advertisements.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the source of public education funding prior to the addition of advertising dollars?
2. Why have school officials been so willing to allow the commercialization of their public schools over the past few years? It was never like this in the past, so what accounts for this change?
3. According to the video, what political or ideological forces have contributed to the de-funding of schools?
4. With regard to advertising in schools, do you see any relationship between the ideologies, or political beliefs, that have contributed to cuts in public education, and the kinds of beliefs being expressed in the actual content of public school advertising and programming from sources like *Channel One*?
5. What specific political beliefs, from the Reagan Administration in the 1980s, to the present Administration, have led to a backlash against significantly increasing federal funds for public education?
6. On the local level, what is the relationship between taxes and funding for public education? What kinds of taxes have traditionally funded local school districts? And what problems do you think this way of doing things might present?
7. What do corporations and schools mean when they say they enter into "partnerships" together – and that this is a "service" performed by corporations in the "public interest"? What do all of these terms actually mean? And do you feel they apply as they're used in these instances?
8. How have corporate tax breaks contributed to the funding crisis in public education? In turn, how has corporate America benefited at the expense of public schools?
9. There is a growing political consensus, led by the Bush Administration's *No Child Left Behind Education Act*, that the funding of schools with taxpayer money should be linked to the performance of schools. In other words, if a school doesn't meet certain standards – if its teachers or students fail government-mandated standardized tests – then the public shouldn't keep investing in the school. Given this concern for standards, for student and teacher discipline, and for a traditional curriculum that gets back to basics, should there be equal concern from the Administration about the increasing amount of educational time and space being taken up by non-educational

SCHOOLS IN NEED

and superficial advertisements?

10. Some see allowing advertising in schools as a purely practical decision: schools may not like it, but they need the money – which in the end, they claim, also benefits the students. What argument is made in the video to challenge this practical argument that it benefits students?

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Go to the following two documents on the web. Write a paper comparing and contrasting them based on the arguments presented in this section of the video – and in the video overall.

The first is a speech by **President George W. Bush** on the anniversary of the passage of his education bill: www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030108-4.html

The second is an interview with the writer **Jonathan Kozol** about his book *Savage Inequalities*, in which he examines the inequalities built into the way our public schools are funded:

www.ascd.org/readingroom/edlead/9212/scherer.html

As you read these pieces, and as you write about them in relation to one another, be sure to pay attention to: a) the major points of emphasis in each; and b) the values inherent in each argument. To supplement the figures presented in the video and in these documents, you may also want to do some of your own Web research into education funding sources and trends over the past few years.

2. When corporations enter into what they – and school officials – have called “partnerships” with schools, and when they claim that they do so as a “public service,” do you feel this is contradicted by what they get in return: namely, prime advertising space and a captive audience to push their products and brands? Prepare to argue (*in a talk, or in a position paper*) for or against the position that this is more of a classic business transaction than a partnership or a public service. And in supporting your case, try to account for how something can be a “service” to the public when it works to yield profitable returns.

3. Do some research on the Web on a major corporate brand. Go to a big-name corporate website and surf around it in search of any statements they make about “partnerships” that they are involved in to “serve” the “public interest.” Read what’s said carefully, and pay close attention to the language they use. Write up a reaction to what they’re saying, in light of the issues brought up in the video. Key here is to note whether you sense any contradiction between what they say on these parts of their website and what they say in other – more business-oriented – sections of their site. (*This will work best if you find statements about their service to education, public education in particular.*)

4. You’re hired to help school administrators develop a public relations strategy and campaign for public schools. The goal of the campaign is to come up with a plan that will win more community support for public schools, and to get people thinking about alternatives to corporate sponsorship.

SWEET DEALS

KEY POINTS

- » One of the fastest growing commercial trends in public schools is the placement of vending machines on school grounds.
- » There are USDA rules that govern the placement of vending machines on school property, designed to prevent competition with government sponsored lunch programs, but these rules are regularly circumvented in the name of selling more products, and therefore earning more money.
- » Apart from bringing brand promotion into schools, the products sold in most vending machines carry health risks, sending mixed messages to students by fundamentally contradicting the health and nutrition campaigns and curricula that are standard in most schools.
- » For many students, soda and snack foods from vending machines – what the USDA calls “foods of low nutritional value” – have become a substitute for breakfast and lunch.
- » The presence of vending machines, and their strategic placement to maximize sales, is especially disturbing given the documented rise of obesity and the traditionally adult form of Type 2 diabetes at younger and younger ages.
- » The increased of sugar-filled beverages has been determined by virtually every health authority to be one of the key health risks to kids.
- » Schools sign “exclusive contracts” with soda companies: in exchange for money school officials agree to sell one brand exclusively – a tested and cost-effective strategy for corporations to transform students into brand-loyal consumers.
- » The corporate desire for prime sales locations, combined with the need of schools for money to offset budget cuts, has resulted in an alliance that poses serious health threats to kids.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to the video, what rules are in place to regulate how vending machines are set up and used in schools? What is the rationale behind these rules? How are these rules often circumvented – tampered with or ignored outright – by school officials? Why?
2. What health risks have proven to be associated with products sold in vending machines?
3. A number of health officials have warned that obesity and Type 2 diabetes are being diagnosed at unprecedented levels among kids. Numerous others have pointed to excessive consumption of sugar-saturated sodas and fast food by kids as a key contributor to these health problems. Given that kids are held virtually captive in schools, and that their food and drink choices are limited to what’s available in schools, what does it say about the priorities of school officials when they accept vending machines full of these products?
4. If the argument for allowing vending machines and ads is that kids enjoy this stuff and eat and drink it all the time anyway, then should this seemingly democratic logic be applied to other areas as well? For example, if kids don’t like exercising, and rarely exercise anymore anyway, should they be exempt from gym? Or better, should they be offered the choice of either going to gym class or playing videos in a *Sony-sponsored PlayStation* room – given that we know that playing video games, like drinking soda and watching ads and eating candy and fast food, is also something a lot of kids do all the time anyway?
5. According to the video, what does it mean to sign an “exclusive contract” with a soda company?
6. If courts have held that public schools cannot promote religious ideas or beliefs in the classroom, and cannot accept money in exchange for doing so, do you feel there is a legal case to be made that schools

SWEET DEALS

should not be able to promote the faith of young people in a corporate brand? What case would you make for such a legal challenge? What case against?

7. If we uphold the principle of “separation of church and state,” could we also make a case for the separation public and private? On what grounds? How might such a case affect the debate about commercialism in schools – beyond the health issue?

8. Argue for or against the following proposition: In health courses and “Health Awareness” functions, the commercialization of public schools should be recognized as a health issue.

9. What would be your response to a panel of school officials if they told you that they are sending no mixed messages to kids when they make health education part of the curriculum while taking money to push products known to be extremely dangerous and unhealthy to kids?

10. If the justification for all of this commercial product and branding in schools is simply the need for money, can you think of other ways schools might be able to get the money they need?

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Go on a little fact-finding mission. (*Although the issues the video addresses deal with public schools, this assignment can raise interesting questions if done in private schools, colleges and universities as well.*) Walk around and make a note of all the soda vending machines on the grounds. Note also where they are placed. The point here is to try to determine *a)* whether or not your school seems to have an “exclusive” soda contract, and *b)* whether or not the machines seem to be placed strategically to maximize sales.

2. Copy down the ingredients of the most prominently displayed beverages at your school. Pay particular attention to the figures for sugar content, but be sure to compile a list of every different ingredient you see in all of the beverages you examine. Then read an article by the American Academy of Pediatrics entitled *Rise in Childhood Obesity Linked to Increase in Type 2 Diabetes* at www.aap.org/advocacy/archives/mardia.htm. Bring your list of ingredients and any notes you make about important points in this article to class for a discussion of your findings.

3. Write a letter to your school board, informed by the video, and your research in **No. 1 & 2** above, explaining your position on vending machines in public schools.

RESISTING COMMERCIALISM: LEGISLATIVE ACTION

KEY POINTS

- » Educators and lawmakers concerned about the commercialization of schools and its attendant health risks have begun to fight back against the vending machine trend – only to come up against powerful corporate lobbies.
- » Maryland State Senator **Paul Pinsky**, for example, drew up a potentially precedent-setting bill designed to establish tighter controls on the kinds of products that could be sold in vending machines, and when the machines could be turned on.
- » The rationale for the bill was that schools have a responsibility to resist participating in the fast-food marketing bombardment of kids in virtually every other space they move through – and also a responsibility to take a stand and attempt to change the commercial-drenched dynamic of youth culture.
- » Industry lobbyists vigorously opposed the bill, invoking a “slippery slope” argument that regulating vending machines in schools would lead to government’s dictating what a free people should be allowed to eat.
- » Lobbyists working on behalf of school boards and principals also opposed the bill, invoking the necessity of maintaining local control to make decisions based on local funding needs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the nature of the legislation proposed in Maryland to regulate vending machines in school? What did it seek to accomplish? What was the rationale behind it?
2. Who opposed this bill?
3. What roles did lobbyists play in the legislative process? What is a “lobbyist”?
4. Why would a politician, local or national, listen to a lobbyist? When might he or she not listen to a lobbyist?
5. It seems logical that a corporate lobbying firm would work against this bill, but why, according to the video, were lobbyists who represented principals and school boards also against this bill?
6. Should the issue of what goes on in schools be an issue of local control, or should it be dealt with at the state or federal level? What do you base your opinion on?
7. What argument did corporate lobbyists use to oppose the bill? And how did it differ from the argument used by the representatives of the principals and school boards?
8. What do you make of the concern expressed by one corporate lobbyist that if vending machines were regulated out of concern for kids’ health, then this would open the floodgates to total government control of all of our eating habits? Do you find this convincing?
9. How do you think this gentleman would respond to an argument that used his own logic against his own position: a similar “slippery slope” argument that if we allow ads and vending machines into schools, then there will be no stopping the corporate flooding of our schools and the minds of our kids?
10. As far as you can tell, did any of the parties involved in blocking this bill do so on the basis of the interest of kids? Can you think of any reason that blocking this bill would be in the interest of kids? For example, could one make the case that trying to control what kind of food and drink is sold in schools is against the interests of kids because it controls them and limits their choices – even though vending machines are usually accepted under an exclusive contract that limits the choices of kids and controls their choices?

RESISTING COMMERCIALISM: LEGISLATIVE ACTION

ASSIGNMENTS

- 1.** You are selected to represent students at a legislative hearing concerning the regulation of soda vending machines. Your assignment is to argue in favor of the kind of legislation proposed in Maryland. Put together your defense of this legislation. Back up your argument with relevant points from the video. You may also find it helpful to go to an article by the American Academy of Pediatrics entitled *Rise in Childhood Obesity Linked to Increase in Type 2 Diabetes* (www.aap.org/advocacy/archives/mardia.htm), and to the website of the American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.com).
- 2.** This section of the video talks about the power of corporate lobbies. Devise a creative strategy for undermining the influence of retail lobbyists on this issue. Remember, they have a lot of money, and you have a lot less. So that's why this needs to be a creative strategy.
- 3.** Make a list of what you feel are the interests of public school kids. Make a list of what you take to be the interests of public school officials. And finally, make a list of the interests of corporations who hope to advertise or place their sodas and snack foods in public schools. Try to be as fair and as inclusive as possible in these lists – from the point of view of the reality of how each of these three groups functions and survives. When you're finished, make one final list of all of the points of contradiction you find as you read each of these three against the others.

RESISTING COMMERCIALISM: LOCAL ACTIVISM

KEY POINTS

- » If there is to be serious debate about the relative benefits of commercializing public education, local school officials must be educated about its costs to students.
- » The successful work of a coalition of concerned parents and teachers in Pittsburgh is evidence that the commercialization of public schools is in no way inevitable.
- » When Pittsburgh school board members and local lawmakers became more educated about the full range of potential effects of advertising in schools – including, especially, the cost to the health of young people – the benefits of increased revenue faded in importance.
- » As the Pittsburgh case revealed, if vending machines sell products that are known to be unsafe and unhealthy, school board members face a fundamental conflict of interest: entering into business contracts that require maximizing sales of these products clearly compromises the best interests of their students.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to the video, what needs to happen to challenge and reverse the increasing commercialization of schools?
2. Why did Pittsburgh school board members and legislators decide that the benefits of advertising money were not as important as the costs the products would inflict on kids?
3. In your opinion, why do smart people in the higher ranks of education and the policy-making world need to be educated about this issue? What are some possible reasons why they wouldn't understand or seem to care about this issue before it's explained to them?
4. At one point in the video, the argument is made that challenging the commercialization of schools needs to be done strategically – by emphasizing the issue of health. Strategically speaking, why do you think health is a good way to argue against commercialism in schools? Why might it be such a good organizing issue?
5. Beyond health, why is the commercialization of schools, in general, an urgent issue?

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Pick an issue that you feel is important to schools or a local school district. Devise a strategy for addressing this issue with the kind of “local activism” described in this section of the video.
2. The video suggests that the most effective and practical way to prevent the commercialization of public schools is to emphasize the health risks that sodas and snack foods present to kids. The video also suggests that changing things is less likely if the focus is on the overall commercialization issue itself. Write up a strategic proposal for ways to convince school officials and legislators that all forms of commercialization – all forms of branding and advertising in schools, not just food and drink – present fundamental risks to public education and the well-being of kids.
3. Write a letter to your Congressional representative, your Senator, your state representative and/or your local school board telling them – either way – how you feel about this issue.

WHAT'S AT STAKE

KEY POINTS

- » In the end, to fight against the commercialization of public education is to fight for the right of young people to be educated in public schools that remain public.
- » Young people, regardless of their background, are entitled to have access to a public space not saturated by material and commercial values.
- » Kids are also entitled to be treated not as mere consumers and targets in a grand marketing scheme, but as independent thinkers and democratic citizens.
- » This is the traditional reason for the American public school system: to assure that democracy remains in everybody's hands, not just in the hands of a select few people who were fortunate enough to have access to private schools.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you see advertising as a powerful teaching force? Do you see a difference between the kind of learning you get in schools and the kind of learning you get from ads? Could a case be made that schools are in competition with advertisers for the minds of young people? If so, how should schools adjust to this changed circumstance?
2. Up to this point in your life, do you feel that most adults have appealed to you with respect, as a smart, questioning and freethinking person capable of making your own decisions? Or do you feel that most adults have appealed to you as passive and a potential means to further their own ends?
3. With regard to the previous question about how adults have appealed to you in your lifetime: Does your response change if you include all of the adults in the advertising industry, and the executives of the corporations they represent? Why or why not?
4. What, in your opinion, should be the role of education in a democracy? Would your answer be different if the question were: What should the role of education be in a market economy? Do you see any contradictions or tensions between the two? Is it possible for education to perform both functions? How?
5. What effect has branding and advertising had on your life? If you think that it's had little or no effect, why do you think corporations have spent billions of dollars targeting you, your friends, and those your age around the globe? If you think it has had an effect, do you feel public schools should teach you to think critically about those effects?

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a paper about the relationship between public education and democracy, using the quotes from **Jefferson** in the overview section of this guide as a starting point. Also consider **John Dewey's** observation from the video that education is a force for democracy because it's a place where we're all theoretically equal, where we can learn how to participate in democratic institutions free of private interests.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES:

Jefferson: The University of Virginia website features a nice compilation of Jefferson quotes on a range of issues, including the need for a public education system.

For Jefferson's observations on "publicly supported education" go to:

etext.lib.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations/jeff1370.htm

For Jefferson's observations on the importance of "educating the people" go to:

etext.lib.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations/jeff1350.htm

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Dewey: The entire text of John Dewey's influential work *Democracy and Education* is online at: www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/dewey.html.

See especially **Chapter 2: Education as a Social Function**, where Dewey talks about the need for schools to provide a social environment conducive to democratic education. In this chapter, Dewey writes:

"It is the business of the school environment to eliminate, so far as possible, the unworthy features of the existing environment from influence upon mental habitudes. It establishes a purified medium of action. Selection aims not only at simplifying but at weeding out what is undesirable. Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse. The school has the duty of omitting such things from the environment which it supplies, and thereby doing what it can to counteract their influence in the ordinary social environment. By selecting the best for its exclusive use, it strives to reinforce the power of this best. As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society. The school is its chief agency for the accomplishment of this end."

2. After writing in response to **No. 1**, above, add another dimension to your discussion. Informed by the arguments presented in *Captive Audience*, and by your own sense of what democracy is all about, examine the relationship between democracy, public education and the commercialization of schools.
3. Prepare for a debate in which you will argue for or against the following proposition: "If private corporations are allowed to persuade young people in public schools about the value of their brand and what it can do to make kids' lives better, then religious groups should be able to convince kids in public schools about the value of their religion and what it can do to make young people's lives better – even if this means that one religious group is awarded an 'exclusive contract' that eliminates other religious points of view."
4. Write a paper outlining your vision of the role of schools when it comes to educating kids about moral, political, and ethical issues.