



Lesson 11

Marketing: Under the Influence

[Lesson Duration: 50 minutes, plus 15 optional minutes]

Social Studies

Health



Lesson Overview

The typical American child saw an estimated 4,787 televised advertisements for food and beverages in 2013—over 13 per day. Fast food was advertised more than any other product.¹ Students will examine how food companies market their products, explore the impact of **food marketing** on individuals' choices, and discuss how food marketing should be regulated.



Learning Objectives

- Examine common food marketing strategies.
- Describe how food marketing influences food choices.
- Critically consider if and how food marketing should be regulated.



Essential Questions

- How do food companies market their products?
- How does food marketing affect food choices?
- How should food marketing be regulated, if at all?



Materials

- Student handout
- Presentation slides
- Teacher guides
- FoodSpan Infographic
- Optional: Magazines and newspapers containing food ads



Resources

- *Food Marketing and Labeling* primer (www.foodsystemprimer.org/food-and-nutrition/food-marketing-and-labeling/)



Teacher Note:
The Take a Stand and Why Do We Eat What We Eat? activities in Lesson 12 can help students start thinking about influences on food choice, including food marketing.

Warm-up: Brand Recognition and Food Marketing Overview

Social Studies [10 minutes]

To demonstrate the power of **advertising**, students will test their brand recognition. They will also learn the definition of food marketing.

Display the **Brand Recognition slides** and challenge students to identify as many companies or products as they can in two minutes. Use the **Brand Recognition Teacher Guide** to reveal the answers. Discuss:

- *Where do you see this logo, and how often?*
- *Do you think your recognition of this logo affects your food choices? If so, how and why?*
- *Which logo is the most recognizable? Why?*

Explain that when given a choice between comparable products, consumers typically choose the brand they recognize.² Ask: *What does this tell us about the power of advertising?*

Explain that building brand recognition is one of many marketing tactics. Provide a definition of food marketing: the activities involved in distributing, promoting, and selling a food product. Ask: *Imagine that you are a marketing director for a food company. What tactics would you use to increase sales of your products?* If students need prompting, explain that marketing includes:

- Advertising
- Building relationships with customers
- Developing “new and improved” versions of products
- Designing attractive packaging and labeling
- Attracting celebrity endorsements
- Paying stores for prominent shelf space

“We may believe that we make informed decisions about food choice, but we cannot do so if we are oblivious of the ways food companies influence our choices.”

– Marion Nestle



Teacher Note: Students may conflate marketing with advertising. Remember that marketing is the overall strategy of distributing, promoting, and selling a product, whereas advertising is a form of communication used to persuade people to buy a particular product.

Main Activity: Analyzing Ads

Social Studies [20 minutes]

To deepen their understanding of corporate food marketing tactics, students will analyze food advertisements. Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the following food categories:

- Breakfast foods
- Soda
- Juice
- Fast food
- Meat
- Candy/snacks
- Vegetables
- Dairy
- Fruit

Instruct each group to research several advertisements promoting products in their selected category. For example, a group assigned to breakfast foods might find ads for Kellogg's cereals, Quaker Oats, or McDonald's breakfast sandwiches. Groups may look through newspapers, magazines, or websites, such as food commercial compilations on YouTube.

Have each group choose one ad and present it to the class, answering these questions:

- *What is the product being advertised?*
- *What type of ad is this (e.g., TV commercial, magazine, Internet)?*
- *Why would the company choose this type of ad?*
- *What methods does the company use to draw attention to its product (e.g., loud music and bright lights, a likable cartoon character, or a celebrity endorsement)?*
- *Who is the target audience for the ad?*
- *Why do you think the ad might be successful?*
- *How, if at all, would you modify this ad to make it more effective?*

After groups present, discuss: *Which products are most often the subject of advertising campaigns? Why?* (Refer to the **Food Marketing and Labeling primer** for an explanation.) Then display and discuss the **Food Advertising Spending slide**, which shows how much money is spent advertising different foods and beverages in the U.S.



Placing candy and other tempting products at the cash register, a strategy called "impulse marketing," is designed to encourage spur-of-the-moment purchases.

Photo credit: Brian Costin, 2008. Flickr. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



Most children under 8 years of age are developmentally unable to understand that the purpose of commercials is to persuade them to buy products.

Photo copyright.

Main Activity: Trivia Game: Food Marketing in Action

Social Studies, Health
[15 minutes]

Students will play a trivia game covering three topics: Brand Recognition, Influence of Ads, and Advertising Tactics. Questions have three point values (10, 20, and 30) and are available in the **Trivia Game Teacher Guide**. Write the categories and point values in a *Jeopardy*-like style on the board or a flipchart. Some categories have follow-up questions for discussion.

Divide students into 3-5 teams. Team A takes the first turn at selecting a category and point value and has the first chance to answer the question. If they answer incorrectly, other teams may raise their hands to answer. The team that gives the correct answer is awarded the points. Regardless of the outcome of that question, Team B selects the next category and point value, and so on. Keep track of the points on the board. Continue until all questions are answered or time runs out.

Discuss:

- *What fact about food marketing surprised you the most? Why?*
- *How does marketing influence what people eat?*
- *Has this activity changed how you think about marketing?*

Optional Activity: Debate: Marketing Soda in Schools

Social Studies, Health
[15 minutes]

Divide students into three groups and distribute the **Soda Ban Case Study Handout** about the California ban on soda in public schools. Have all groups read the handout. Instruct Group One to prepare an argument supporting the ban, and Group Two to prepare an argument opposing it. Each group will present its argument to Group Three, the jury. Each member of Groups One and Two will present at least one statement to support their group's case. After hearing from both sides, each juror will decide which group has presented the stronger argument and write 2-3 sentences justifying their position. Count the jury's votes and reveal the results.



Share Your Knowledge: Have students share what they've learned by tweeting the most striking food marketing fact from the trivia game. What should others know about food marketing? Tag **#foodmarketingfacts** and **#foodspan**.

Wrap-up: Regulating Food Marketing

[5 minutes]

Students will write a journal entry in response to this prompt: *How should food marketing be regulated, and why?* Optional: Have students share their responses.

Extensions:

Revisiting the Infographic (Social Studies)

Distribute copies of the **FoodSpan Infographic** (students may already have their own from previous lessons). Ask students to identify parts that represent food marketing. Ask: *Do these accurately and fully represent what we learned about food marketing? If not, what could we add to make the infographic more accurate?* Working individually or as a class, have students draw their own versions, create a collage, or add images to the existing infographic. Share photos of students' work on social media and tag #foodspan.

Healthy Food Marketing Campaign (Social Studies, Health, ELA)

Students will work in groups to design a marketing campaign for a healthy food in their school. Challenge students to consider how they would measure the impact of their campaign on consumption of their target food. Students can watch a 2010 Canadian broccoli campaign as an example of healthy food marketing: www.adweek.com/adfreak/tv-spots-fool-canadians-eating-broccoli-12161 and www.tvb.ca/pages/broccolicase. Encourage students to share their campaigns on social media using #foodspan.

Advertising Awareness Experiment (Social Studies)

Students will track the number of times and places they see and hear food advertisements every day for a week. Students will write a reflection or give a presentation on their findings, offering details about the type of ads, where they saw the ads, what foods were advertised, the time of day they saw or heard the ads, and how many times they saw or heard them.

Food Marketing History Project (Social Studies)

Students will conduct a research project examining the marketing history of a food product of their choosing. Each student will describe how and why the company's marketing strategy evolved over time, and which tactics were successful.

1. Dembek CR, Harris JL, Schwartz MB. *Trends in Television Food Advertising to Young People: 2013 Update*. Yale Rudd Center; 2014.

2. Macdonald EK, Sharp BM. Brand awareness effects on consumer decision making for a common, repeat purchase product: a replication. *J Bus Res*. 2000;48:5-15.