

# Media: Resisting Media Manipulation

## Responsibility

### Character Education Focus:

1. Recognizing media manipulation
2. Developing resistance to media manipulation
3. Applying analytical and critical thinking skills to mass media messages
4. Developing critical thinking, resiliency, empowerment, citizenship, life skills, and courage

**Curriculum Connections:** Math, Social Studies, Writing, English, Critical Thinking, Art, Music, Technology

### Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

1. Complete a “media scoring sheet” for three TV shows, movies, or online games.
2. Develop appropriate research questions to apply to the collected class data.
3. Apply math and logic skills to analyze data and graph the results.
4. Engage in decision making to divide work in a fair manner.
5. Incorporate oral communication skills as they work in small groups, present findings to the whole class, and participate in class discussions.
6. Evaluate how and why sex and violence are used to sell products.
7. Explore how “branding” works to manipulate consumers.
8. Appraise tobacco advertising as a form of media manipulation.
9. Examine the relationship between tobacco advertising and teen smoking.
10. Compose a report on the relationship between tobacco ads and teen smoking.
11. Demonstrate understanding of the lesson in a creative, service-oriented, final project.

**Materials:** printed ads and/or comic books or novels (optional) and several class packets (copies of the class’s completed “Media Scoring Sheets” stapled together), enough so that every four students can share one packet

**Vocabulary:** advertising, manipulation, branding, media

RESPONSIBILITY

### Procedures

Tell students that this lesson will focus on how the media can manipulate young people and what they can do about it.



**Activity 1a:** Say, “Adults often worry about the amount of violence and inappropriate behavior that kids see on TV, in movies, on websites, and in video games. But is there really that much violence and sex in what you watch? Let’s find out! We are going to do a media study: we will individually score our favorite TV shows, movies, websites, and video games for how much violence and sex they contain, and then analyze our results.”

Create a four-column chart on the board. Have students come to the board and list their favorite TV programs, movies, websites, and video games in the appropriate column. Try to get at least one response from every student. Once you have a list of shows, movies, websites, and games, have each student choose three that they will watch and analyze, using the “Media Scoring Sheet.” (They can tell their parents it’s homework!)

Hand out the sheets and have students look at the categories. Say, “Before we can use these scoring sheets, we have to agree what each of the categories listed means. For example, what kinds of actions that you might see in a TV show, movie, website, or video game would we interpret as ‘a strongly violent act?’” Have students work in small groups of three to five to construct working definitions of each of the following categories from the “Media Scoring Sheet”: strongly violent act, mildly violent act, and implied violence.

To guide your students, ask (for each category), “What kinds of actions would illustrate this category?” For example, does a raised fist illustrate “implied violence”? Should a gun, even if it’s not pointed at anyone? Help groups brainstorm ideas and develop a consensus about what each category means. Write their final shared definitions on the board and have students write them down for future reference.

Explain that they will have three days (or however much time you want to give them) to view their three choices and analyze each one with the scoring sheet. Make sure they understand all the categories; explain that while they are watching the show or playing the game, they should make a mark in the row next to the appropriate category each time they see or hear something that fits the description. They will keep a running score in the middle column, and add up the totals for each row at the end of the show or game. Remind them that it will require real concentration to avoid getting caught up in the show or game and forgetting what they’re supposed to count.

When your students have completed the assignment, collect their completed scoring sheets. Copy the completed scoring sheets to make enough class packets (stapled sets of the class’s scoring sheets with one completed sheet from each student) for your students to share in small groups.

Divide the class into groups of four students and hand each group a class packet. Say, “As these packets show, this class has gathered a lot of data about violence in what we watch. But what does it all mean? To make sense of it, we will need to summarize and record all of the data in some way. Only then can we see and talk about our results.”

Have students work in small groups to create summaries of the class’s data in graph form. Each group must decide how they will graph the material in the class packet. There is no one right way to do this; how they graph the data should be determined by what they want to evaluate. For example, if a group wants to assess which TV shows are the most and least violent, they could create a bar graph that ranks all the TV shows the class watched by the number of violent incidents seen in each. (If several students looked at the same show and got different results, they should use the

average number reported.) Another group may want to break down how many violent acts each member of the class witnessed in various media during this study, in which case their graph would have the class members' names along the horizontal axis, while the vertical axis would be a ruler indicating the numbers of violent acts seen by each student. (Mild ones could be indicated in a light color and strong ones in a darker color.) There are many other issues the class's data could be used to explore, such as whether or not video games show greater numbers of strongly violent acts than TV shows.

Once each group decides what information they want to pull out of the data and how they will graph the data to reveal this information, they must decide what each person in the group will do to accomplish this. For example, if the group is analyzing how many violent acts were seen by each student, then three members of the group could divide up the names of the students in the class and go through the data to count up the total numbers of mildly and strongly violent acts seen by each of these students, while the remaining member draws the group's graph, using the information the others collect. Wander around the room and help as needed. This activity may take more than one class period.

When all groups have completed their graphs, have each group defend their work. What question were they trying to answer? What does their graph show? Does their graph show what they wanted it to show? Did they have enough information to answer their question? What did they learn?



**Activity 1b:** Facilitate a class discussion about the previous activity. Start by saying, “We did our media study to examine how much violence we see on TV, in movies, on websites, and in video games. Interpret how the graphs you made either support or deny the idea that there is a lot of violence in what you watch. Express what the graphs show about the violence you watched during this study. (There are many things the graphs can't show, including who the perpetrators and victims were and whether this reinforces stereotypes in the media; how being exposed to various acts and words affected students; whether hearing inappropriate language has more impact than viewing violent or vulgar acts; whether older movies contain more or less violence; how representative this sample was of students' usual viewing; etc.)

Initiate a discussion using the following: “Interpret how seeing these acts affects you. Communicate whether our society has become desensitized to violence in real life. Debate the fact that even though we know media violence is fake, seeing a lot of it can still make us more aggressive in real life. Whether or not you agree there was a lot of violence in what you saw and heard during this study, what effect do you think violence in the media has on viewers?”

Some arguments may include:

- Showing violence appeals to our basest instincts and may affect us in a way that takes away our ability to appreciate more subtle or challenging material;
- Increased expectations for, and reactions to, violence in our own lives;
- Creating a false belief that violence, vulgarity, and promiscuity are routine in our culture, or proof of being “grown up”;
- Illustrating racist or sexist stereotypes.

Finally, have students interpret why they think there is so much violence in the media, even in material marketed to kids their age. (Some reasons may include:

violence is dramatic and gets our attention; it helps sell products and make money for the advertisers and creators of the shows and games; advertisers' understanding that the more insecure people can be made to feel about themselves, the more they will buy things that promise to make them sexier, better-looking, or more popular.) Have students argue whether or not this should bother us.

**Activity 2a:** Say, "Now we're going to look at a different kind of media manipulation: the use of brands. Brands are used to convince you to buy products or ideas, and can be a logo, a symbol, a slogan, or a catch phrase. Many companies use brands to get young people to buy their products." Have students "turn and talk" to a partner. Give them two minutes to create a list of popular logos, brands, slogans, etc.

I want you to think of yourself as a product, and your name as your brand. Write your name on a piece of paper. This is your brand name. Make an "equals" sign after your name, and think of the traits that this brand name suggests. They're your own traits: are you tall or short, blonde or black haired, chubby or athletic? Are you easygoing? Funny? Intelligent? Stubborn? A good listener? Quick-tempered or slow to anger? Like hip-hop? Hate hip-hop but love country music? A big fan of football or of ballet? The answers to these questions give you the characteristics of your personal brand. Write down some of your personal traits and tastes; these are the traits of your brand. When people who know you see your name, they think of these qualities.

Your life experiences also shape your brand. Are you an only child? Do you like school? Are your parents divorced? Do you consider yourself a member of an ethnic, racial, or religious minority? Have you traveled to another country? All of these important experiences mold your brand's identity; add them to the list of your brand's characteristics. Your name—your brand—is the image you present to different people. A brand is the trademark or distinctive name that identifies a product, a manufacturer, or an idea." Have students share their "identity lists" with their classmates.

**Activity 2b:** The following are two activities to help students recognize how and why one brand is more appealing than another brand in a given situation.

### **Brand Exercise I**

Say, "Imagine you are having a personal crisis. You just had a big fight with a family member, missed the cut to get onto a sports team, or messed up the audition for a play. Focus on who you would call to talk about this crisis, the one person whose shoulder you could cry on and they would never tell anyone. The person who would listen quietly as you get out all your frustration and anger without judging you or giving you unwanted advice.

"Now, visualize the name(s) of that person or small group of people in your head. Focus on why you chose the person or people that you did. Evaluate their characteristics. You probably chose them over your other friends and family members because of their characteristics, or brand traits. Most likely, the persons you chose are good listeners, compassionate, discreet, and kind.

"Now, for a completely different type of brand, imagine this scenario:

### **Brand Exercise II**

"Imagine you're going out for a wild time this weekend. You've been invited to a party at the home of a cool ninth-grader whose parents are out of town. There will be a live band, attractive members of the opposite sex, and new experiences of all kinds. You can invite one person to join you for this craziness.

“Think of the name of the person you would invite. Now, establish why you chose that person. Examine his/her characteristics. Is this the same person you would call in a time of crisis? If not, it might be because their characteristics are more along the lines of fun-loving, outgoing, daring, popular, and adventurous.

“Think of brands that same way. Brands have very different characteristics, or traits, that appeal to different types of people. Keep in mind that a brand name acts for a product exactly as your name acts for you—Nike, McDonald’s, and Marlboro suggest certain traits, just like your friend’s name suggests the traits you associate with him or her.”

**Activity 2c:** Say, “Now let’s talk about product brands and why certain brands appeal to teens.” Write the following on the board:

Gatorade	Easy, Breezy, Beautiful	Taylor Swift
CoverGirl	Because I’m Worth It.	Michael Jordan
Nike	Is it in you?	Eva Longoria
L’Oreal	Just Do It	Cam Newton

Invite students to match the spokesperson and the slogan with each brand. Have students communicate what images each brand evokes. What traits do the companies want you to associate with each brand?” Have students conclude that brands try to convince us to buy products based on the desirable associations they evoke; these associations often have little to do with the actual product. This is especially true for advertising targeted at young people.

Have the class work in small groups of two to three students and choose another example of a brand that is popular with their age group. Have them interpret what traits are associated with their brand and how these traits are communicated (choice of spokesperson; advertising images; where the ads are placed, for example, MTV versus The Discovery Channel; product placement, for example, in movies targeted at youth, concert tours, and sports events; etc.). Have students evaluate the image they are trying to buy for themselves and what, if anything, the image has to do with the actual product they take home.



**Activity 3a:** Say, “So why are we learning about how brands are used to manipulate us? Because brands are also used to sell young people on some pretty harmful activities. A big example is smoking. For years, the tobacco industry has used manipulative advertising campaigns and marketing strategies to ‘recruit’ YOU to be smokers and carriers of their products’ brand. Much as Michael Jordan is for Nike, and Bill Cosby is for Jell-O, teens are representatives of tobacco brands. And unfortunately, YOU are not paid millions of dollars like those spokespersons, but are instead eventually charged with millions in healthcare-related costs. Let’s see how savvy you are about tobacco advertising.”

Have students access the Teen Smoking Quiz at [www.intelihealth.com/IH/ihtIH/WSIHW000/22017/24554/339536.html?d=dmtContent](http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/ihtIH/WSIHW000/22017/24554/339536.html?d=dmtContent) or distribute the “Teens and Tobacco Quiz.” Tell students that you will not collect or grade these quizzes—they’re for the students’ own information and fun. Give students a few minutes to take the quiz and then have them share their answers with the class. (Note that the only false statement on the paper quiz, the only one they should have circled, is No. 10: smoking among teen girls has in fact increased significantly). Ask if any of these facts surprise them.



**Activity 3b:** Have students research tobacco brand advertising, its effect on youth, and youth resistance to this media manipulation online. Pass out the “Web Resources” sheet to get them started. You can have them prepare written or oral reports on what they discover and report back to the class.



**Activity 3c:** Have students choose and develop one or more of the projects on the “Project Ideas” handout. These projects could be done individually, in pairs, in small groups, or as a whole class. Then let students take what they’ve learned about tobacco advertising (an example of media manipulation) and use it to make a difference with their peers. Say, “You’ve learned quite a bit about how tobacco advertising manipulates young people to get them hooked on an addictive product that kills. Now you can put your knowledge to use and fight back. How? By becoming an activist and educating your friends. After all, who are they more likely to listen to about the dangers of smoking and media manipulation by the tobacco industry—parents and teachers, or you? There are lots of ways you can educate them. Here are some ideas to get you started, but keep in mind that the possibilities are endless. You’ve got the power, creativity, and ability to make a difference.” While supporting a sense of empowerment in your students, you should also acknowledge that activism takes courage and self-confidence, and that although some of us have these qualities more than others, we can all acquire them. Students who feel timid about expressing themselves interpersonally can still have an important effect on others through indirect means like zines, websites, blogs, and posters. (See the “Project Ideas” handout.)

**Reflection:** Say, “Evaluate how the activities in this lesson made you feel. Rank the activities from the most worthwhile to the least worthwhile and defend your decision. Express what you have learned about media manipulation from these activities. Examine why reflecting about media manipulation is important. Assess what you can do in your life to be aware of media manipulation and to resist it.”

**Resource Help:** Teen-led anti-tobacco activism groups can provide your students with powerful tools, not only for resisting media manipulation, but also for learning about advocacy and self-empowerment in general. See the websites listed in the accompanying “Web Resources” handout for more information.

**Source:** Information from “Reality Check Summit 2001” used with permission of Media Research Center, Alexandria, Virginia.

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

## Media Scoring Sheet

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (name of TV show, video game, website, or movie)  
Date watched/played:

Category of Act	Number of Occurrences	Total
Strongly violent act		
Mildly violent act		
Implied violence		

2. \_\_\_\_\_ (name of TV show, video game, website, or movie)  
Date watched/played:

Category of Act	Number of Occurrences	Total
Strongly violent act		
Mildly violent act		
Implied violence		

3. \_\_\_\_\_ (name of TV show, video game, website, or movie)  
Date watched/played:

Category of Act	Number of Occurrences	Total
Strongly violent act		
Mildly violent act		
Implied violence		

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

## Teens and Tobacco Quiz

How much do you know about tobacco advertising and teen smoking? Circle each statement below that sounds false, and find out:

1. R.J. Reynolds launched "Joe Camel" ads targeted at youth in 1988. Within two years, one in every three smokers under age 18 had switched to Camels (or started smoking using Camels).
2. Teens are more likely to be influenced by cigarette ads than by peer pressure.
3. In 1998, tobacco lawsuits required cigarette makers to promise not to target teens. Since then, cigarette advertising has increased 33 percent in magazines like *Sports Illustrated* and *Rolling Stone*, which are read largely by teens.
4. At least 4.5 million kids aged 12–17 are smokers.
5. Tobacco kills more people than AIDS, murder, drugs, suicide, alcohol, and car crashes combined.
6. Cigarette companies target teens because they need to replace all their dead customers.
7. The number of eighth-graders who smoked in the past month is more than 20 percent higher than it was 10 years ago.
8. Three thousand teens start smoking every day in the U.S., more than one million a year. More than one-third of them will eventually die from smoking.
9. Tobacco companies spend about \$8.24 billion a year on advertising and marketing—more than \$22.5 million a day, almost \$1 million an hour.
10. Smoking among girls aged 12–17 has decreased 45 percent since 1995.
11. Each new habitual smoker earns the tobacco industry \$50,000.
12. Cigarette smoke contains acetone (used in nail polish remover), mercury (the stuff in thermometers, highly toxic), lead (another highly toxic metal), and formaldehyde (used to preserve dead bodies and a known carcinogen).
13. Almost 90 percent of all smokers started at or before age 18.
14. Seventy-three percent of teen smokers who plan to quit are still smoking five years later.

15. More than 18 million cigarette packs a year are illegally sold to youth in New York alone.
16. Nicotine, the addictive chemical in cigarettes, is more addictive than cocaine or heroin.
17. Smoking makes females more likely to become infertile and males more likely to become sexually impotent.

## Web Resources

**Youth Activist Organizations**—Some of the many statewide groups of teens fighting the tobacco industry:

- California Youth Advocacy Network (CYAN): <http://cyanonline.org>
- Florida’s “Students Working Against Tobacco” (SWAT): <http://doh.state.fl.us/tobacco/SWAT.html>
- Maryland Teens Rejecting Abusive Smoking Habits (TRASH): [www.marylandtrash.com](http://www.marylandtrash.com)
- Massachusetts’ Smokers’ Helpline: [www.makesmokinghistory.org](http://www.makesmokinghistory.org)

**Tobacco Watchdogs**—Organizations dedicated to keeping an eye on the tobacco industry; great resources for up-to-date information:

- Tobacco.org: [www.tobacco.org](http://www.tobacco.org)
- Action on Smoking and Health: [www.ash.org](http://www.ash.org)
- Search tobacco industry documents: [www.tobaccodocuments.com](http://www.tobaccodocuments.com)

**Tobacco Sites**—It’s important to learn about those who see you as a potential customer. These sites give you the official line of the tobacco industry; for the inside scoop, check out the watchdog sites above.

- Philip Morris: [www.philipmorris.com](http://www.philipmorris.com)
- R. J. Reynolds: [www.rjrt.com](http://www.rjrt.com)
- Lorillard: [www.lorillard.com](http://www.lorillard.com)
- Liggett Group: [www.liggett.net](http://www.liggett.net)

**Health/Statistics**—Sources for facts and stats. Check out the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids’ “Fact Sheets” in their Research Center for all the up-to-date info.

- Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK): [www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org)
- American Lung Association: [www.lung.org](http://www.lung.org)
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC): [www.cdc.gov/tobacco](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco)
- American Heart Association: [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)
- American Cancer Society: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- Tobacco.org: [www.tobacco.org](http://www.tobacco.org)

# Project Ideas

**Project Option 1: Act Out!** Use performance—acting, debating, reciting, or music skills—to create awareness about tobacco and youth. There are many ways to do this:

**Skits.** Create a short five- to eight-minute play, a dramatic representation of a situation, and its solution. These work best performed on a stage, perhaps at an assembly or talent show.

**Spoken word.** Spoken words are long, train-of-thought, hard-hitting prose/poems that are meant to be read out loud before an audience, like what Maya Angelou does with her poems “Still I Rise” and “No, No, No.” You may also want to try writing and performing your own rap.

**Music.** Take a popular song or a song that means a lot to you and change the lyrics to represent what you believe about the tobacco industry.

**Produce a video/Create a blog or website.** Create a video, blog, or website about smoking or chewing tobacco in your community. It can be used to show your peers, teachers, community residents, and local companies that support the tobacco industry the devastating and manipulative way tobacco is marketed to teenagers.

- Begin by deciding what you want the message to be. Then compose a script or text detailing your thoughts. Keep your audience in mind when deciding what to do.
- Decide what visuals and graphics to include. For example, you could try filming existing tobacco ads near your school, a convenience store, or gas station.
- Interview other teens expressing how they are targeted through magazine ads and movies that glamorize smoking.
- Include survey results showing how widely tobacco is used by teens.
- Once you have completed the project, you can share it with local schools to be used as an educational tool or as a video during morning announcements.
- You can also share it with local businesses, urging them to oppose—rather than support—tobacco use and sales to minors.
- Contact your local newspaper and TV reporters and see if they might be interested in using your video or distributing your website or blog information as part of a larger story on teen smoking in your community.
- Contact local cable companies about airing the video on a public access channel or adding a link to your website/blog on their own website.

**Project Option 2: The Buzz.** Use traditional media outlets like TV, radio, and newspapers to get the word out.

**Write a public service announcement.** Create a public service announcement (PSA) and get it broadcasted on your favorite radio station!

1. Work with an adult to write a four- to seven-sentence statement that captures people’s attention, expresses the anti-tobacco message you want to convey, and tells listeners where to go for more information. It should read something like: Ever heard the phrase “You’ve been scammed?” Well, the tobacco industry has been scamming you with their manipulative marketing practices. Like putting ads ALL OVER convenience stores because that’s where teens hang out! PUHLEASE! The Tobacco Control Movement is about turning it back on them. Letting them know we won’t stand for it anymore. Get involved. Get back. Call \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Once you’ve written your PSA, contact the station’s program manager—not the on-air DJ—about airing your PSA.
3. Fax or email your PSA statement to the station’s program manager.
4. Accept the fact your PSA might air at odd hours (which may be a good thing, since your audience may be listening at less popular times).

**And now for a special report.** Write a report for your school TV station or newspaper about teen smoking and how the tobacco industry targets teens; include photos! You might also include interviews or poll results. (Write your own questions, check with a friend to make sure they’re clear, distribute and collect the poll, and tally the results.) Check your local cable listing for call-in shows on public access TV, and talk to them about the issue. Or write to your favorite teen magazine or community newspaper, and see if they’d be interested in having you do an article for them—explain why it’s important and how you would write the article. (If they accept it, you might even get paid!)

Whatever you decide to do, remember these key points:

1. Make sure you’re well-spoken when you call any form of media. Practice first.
2. Get your message across in a fun, energetic, and powerful way.

**Project Option 3: Rant.** Use your creativity to spread the tobacco control message through a combination of art and the written word. You can make a difference in lots of ways:

**Zines/E-Zines.** Zines are “underground” newspapers, magazines, or websites created out of a passion for an issue, belief, or hobby. Zines include photographs, drawings, funky fonts, poetry, rants, and short stories—if you’ve got something to say, you can say it however you want to in a zine. Want to know more? Check out [www.zinebook.com](http://www.zinebook.com) or [www.undergroundpress.org](http://www.undergroundpress.org).

**Spoofs.** Spoofs are anti-ads that turn popular ads against themselves. Spoofs use shock, humor, satire, and irony to make a point and help create change. How to make your own spoof:

- Establish your purpose—what do you want to say?
- Characterize your target audience—whom do you want your message to reach?
- Decide on your format—poster, ad in school newspaper, comic strip, etc.
- Visualize your concept—brainstorm and start sketching.
- Construct your headline and copy—figure out what to say to make your spoof come alive.

**Project Option 4: Tag.** Call some friends, grab a paintbrush, and create a work of art that everyone will be talking about. Art is one of the oldest ways to express thoughts, opinions, and emotions, and that doesn't mean it has to be something hanging in some stuffy museum. Try:

Wall murals      Photography      Sidewalk art      Posters      Graffiti

Some important tips before you get started:

- Make sure your message is clear. You don't want people to miss the point and think you're glorifying smoking when in fact you're trying to spread the truth about tobacco.
- Location, location, location. Whether it's a wall mural or a photo, make sure that you're spreading the message where lots of your peers will see it.

**Remember to get permission before "tagging" any public location.**

**Wall murals and graffiti.** Go to an area where your peers hang out, and talk to local owners of businesses patronized by teens (coffee shops, movie theaters, the mall, video arcades) about "donating" an exterior wall or a storefront window for your mural. When talking to business owners, make sure you let them know: a) how popular the tobacco control movement is with their customers and b) how good an artist you are. (Show samples of your work.) Don't worry; they'll love the idea because it will help jazz up their storefront and make it even "cooler" with their customers; just be prepared to show them the design before starting.

**Posters.** The possibilities are limitless. Your poster could be a spoof of a tobacco ad, a satirical cartoon, or an announcement for a tobacco-free event. Put it up anywhere your friends hang out, like coffee shops, video arcades, music stores, and even school.

**Sidewalk art.** Get a big bucket of colored chalk and create a masterpiece that people can't help but notice. You could organize a contest: create a sidewalk mural with a message about tobacco and win a (donated) prize. Talk to your school—they may even let you do this on school property.

There are tons of websites on activism through art, so search the Internet for ideas and inspiration.