

WEBSITE RESOURCE W12. 8

Case study: Non-fiction writing – organising ideas

As part of a school project on food and nutrition, Dana planned a teaching sequence for her ten and 11 year olds looking at the use of persuasive language in advertising. She recorded a series of television adverts for cereals, chocolate and yogurts as a starting point for groups to begin to analyse their use of language and other features to give particular messages. They discussed the effects of advertising for a short while, but Dana wanted the children to reach their own opinions. To help them organise their ideas she created a grid for jottings which she had designed as a scaffold to lead easily towards paragraphing. In order to get some comparisons about their responses, Dana asked six groups of four or five children to take one of the three series of adverts (two groups looking at cereals; two yogurts; two chocolate). When they had viewed the adverts and noted their ideas, they joined with the other group to compare their analysis and added to their initial jottings. Figure W12.8.1 shows one group's ideas.

In discussion, looking at the different types of adverts, the class found that the techniques used to persuade were very similar. However, although the cereal and yogurt advertisements gave information about the content of the products, the chocolate advertising gave hardly any information about the content. There were also differences in the advertisers' messages. Cereals and yogurt can be seen as good for nutrition, but there was no attempt to suggest that chocolate was anything more than an enjoyable extra. As homework, Dana asked the class to find advertisements for similar products in magazines and to view more television adverts so that they could add to their initial findings.

Dana asked the groups to prepare a research report about the ways that companies advertise their products. They would use this as part of an information topic that was to be put on the school website. She showed them examples of a short research report that she had written when she was at college. First of all, they looked closely at the way language was used in a report like this, noting the use of passive verb forms and specific language, for example, verbs *considered*, *analysed*,

	Advertisement 1	Advertisement 2	Advertisement 3
What product is it advertising?	Chocolate eggs	Posh chocolates	Chocolate bar
Realistic/cartoon?	Cartoon	Realistic	Realistic
Funny/serious?	Funny	Serious	Funny
What kinds of characters? – adults/children/ animals/ other...	Cartoon animals	adults	adults
Key words used -on screen - in voiceover?	Fun Enjoy	Unique Chocolatier individual	Smooth Silky don't share
What are the most obvious colours? What effect do they have?	Purple and a bit of green - matches branding	Browns, dark colours, gold - idea of luxury	Bright sunny colours - idea of a happy pleasure
What kinds of background music/sound effects are used?	Bouncy music quick tempo	Slow serious music	Lively quite quick
What did you notice about camera angles? Close-ups? Long shots?	Long shots of lots of rabbits + eggs Close up on eggs	Shot in semi-dark with light shining on vat of chocolate	Long shots to set scene / the story Close up on girl eating the chocolate
What are they NOT telling you?	Price Amount of sugar + other ingredients	Price Amount of sugar + other ingredients	Price Amount of sugar + other ingredients
What are the advertisers trying to persuade you to think?	That it's fun to hunt out, find and eat chocolate eggs	That you're special if you eat these chocolates	That the chocolate is too good to share

Figure W12.8.1 Initial jottings about advertisements

suggests, indicates, nouns like *sample, consumer, product, nutrition*, connectives like *however, although, overall* and *nevertheless*, and comparatives like *many, most, few*. Dana also pointed out that ‘analysis’ means being able to explain the effects of what has been found out. She suggested that the children might use the phrase ‘This means/suggests that. . .’ to lead into their analytical comments. They then discussed how the information in her report was organised into paragraphs and created a framework for writing using these heading:

- Background to the research
- Types of advertisement
- Persuasive techniques (language, colour, music, camera angles)
- What is missed out
- Purpose of the advertisement

Each group had time to create their reports on the computer.

Darwin group wrote:

Background to the research

A total of five television and six magazine advertisements for chocolate were considered. They were analysed for their content, presentation, the techniques they use to persuade the consumer and the purpose of the advertisement.

Types of advertisement

Most of the television adverts were realistic, featuring children and adults, although most of the magazine adverts were cartoons, many of them with cute animals. Almost all the adverts were funny. The only serious ones were aimed at adults. This means that in this sample the most usual advertisements were funny but there was no difference between the use of adults, children or animals.

Persuasive techniques

Both television and magazine adverts that featured children or animals used words like ‘fun’, ‘enjoy’ and ‘happy’. The adverts with adults in them used words like ‘smooth’, ‘luxury’, ‘secret’. This suggests that for everyone the main idea is enjoyment. The colours used were different according to the message. The children’s adverts were often brightly coloured and the adverts for adults were more dull, but there was also quite a lot of colour used for branding. Everyone knows which company uses purple for its chocolate! The background music was much the same; the children’s adverts had lively, quick music and the adults mostly had more dreamy music. The camera angles weren’t very different across all of the sample. The close ups were either on the chocolate itself, or the face of someone eating it. All these persuasive techniques add up to adverts that are mostly bright, lively and quite obvious.

What is missed out

None of the adverts said anything about the amount of sugar used in the chocolate or anything about the nutrition value. This suggests that the advertisers don't want people to know that chocolate can be very heavy in sugar and fats.

Purpose of the advertisement

All of the adverts for chocolate are meant to make people want to buy some for pleasure and enjoyment. Some of them say that chocolate should be something you keep to yourself and don't share. Overall, the advertisers are trying to sell a product that has no nutritional value but that everyone can enjoy

When all the reports were posted on the school web, the class ran a school assembly about advertising food as part of the school focus on food and nutrition.

	Advertisement 1	Advertisement 2	Advertisement 3
What product is it advertising?			
Realistic/cartoon?			
Funny/serious?			
What kinds of characters? – adults/children/ animals/ other. . .			
Key words used – on screen – in voiceover?			
What are the most obvious colours? What effect do they have?			
What kinds of background music/ sound effects are used?			
What did you notice about camera angles? Close-ups? Long shots?			
What are they NOT telling you?			
What are the advertisers trying to persuade you to think?			

Figure W12.7.2 Printable grid for reviewing advertisements