

Learning to Be Consumers: The Emergence of Catalogs and Advertising



Learning to Be Consumers: The Emergence of Catalogs and Advertising

Caroline Harrison: Sports and Popular Culture

Skill: High School/College
Time Required: Three to four class periods



Standards Compliance
NCSS Strand 1 Culture
NCSS Strand 2 Time, Continuity, and Change
NCSS Strand 3 People, Places, and Environments
NCSS Strand 5 Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
NCSS Strand 7 Production, Distribution, and Consumption
NCTE Standard 2 Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of human experience.
NCTE Standard 3 Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
NCTE Standard 8 Students use a variety of technology and information resources to gather, synthesize, and communicate knowledge.
ISTE Standard 3 Technology productivity tools
ISTE Standard 5 Technology research tools

Introduction:

The idea of having one store to buy the basic needs of life is no longer commonplace in the United States. Shopping Malls have come to replace the 'General Store' that was in each town in the 19th century. For people in rural areas, or in very small towns, catalog shopping, largely from Sears and Montgomery Ward, revolutionized the way many people purchased what they needed and wanted. In addition, most Americans were very frugal and used things up or until they really wore out. What was needed in the blossoming industrial age was a way to encourage people to buy the things our industries produced. And the answer was advertising.

Objectives:

Students will learn about and compare the prices and ways of marketing consumer goods in the last part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century with the prices and ways of marketing today. Through the analysis of current and past advertising and marketing, students will develop an

appreciation for how much (or little!) things have changed in today's society.

Materials Required:

Computer Internet access Word processor (or paper and writing utensil) Research tools (books, videos, photos, and magazines) Printer

Procedures:

1. Students should discuss how they and their families purchase goods to use in the home. What kind of checking do they do before buying? What criteria do they use to make selections?
2. After this discussion, ask students to come up with ten items to research; the items must be the kinds of things that have been available for a very long time, e.g., soap, washing machines, clothing, etc.
 1. Divide students into three groups. **Group I** will work on finding prices and analyzing marketing language and pictures of these ten items in the 19th and early 20th centuries; **Group II** will explore the history of the development of mailorder houses, especially Sear's and Montgomery Ward and look at how they marketed these items to the public; **Group III** will do contemporary research on these items available in stores and catalogs today as well as on the nature and critique of consumerism today.
 2. Once students have completed their research, each group should prepare a report to share with the class. This can be written, or in the form of a PowerPoint, or perhaps, posters. Included in the report should be comparisons of pricing (related to average income) and marketing...what ideas have been used to "sell" the public on certain items?
 3. The class as a whole should then discuss how advertising has changed over the past 150 years or so, paying particular attention to the power of electronic media to create a "need" for a particular item.

Extending the Lesson:

- Stage a debate on the pros and cons of consumerism in contemporary society.

Sources & Resources:

Websites:

Group I websites

- 19th Century advertisements
 - <http://advertising.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fadvertising.harpweek.com%2F>
 - Emergence of Advertising in America
 - <http://advertising.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fscriptorium.lib.duke.edu%2Faaa%2F>

Group II websites

- History of the Sears Catalog
 - <http://www.searsarchives.com/catalogs/history.htm>
- <http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/acs/1890s/sears/sears4.html>
 - Mail Order Houses
- http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_055800_mailorderhou.htm

Group III websites

- Overcoming Consumerism
 - <http://www.verdant.net/society.htm>
- Consumerism and the New Capitalism
 - <http://www.westland.net/venice/art/cronk/consumer.htm>
 - Consumerism
 - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consumerism>

Credits:

This lesson was developed by Marian Maxfield, Kent State University

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