



Essential Question: How can you recognize advertising on a website?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students learn to recognize five different kinds of online ads prevalent on children's sites. They learn how to distinguish advertising content from other content on a website.

Students also discuss how some websites, similar to shopping malls, try to make visitors feel good, so that they will hang out, view ads, and want to buy products. Using the **Be an Ad Detective Student Handout**, students identify different kinds of online ads on a variety of children's websites.

objectives

Students will:

- Identify different kinds of advertisements on websites
- Understand that the purpose of online advertising is to make people want to buy products
- Learn that websites try to make visitors want to hang out there so they can see more ads
- Understand that online ads often target them

Materials and Preparation

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Materials

- **Be an Ad Detective Student Handout**

Preparation

- Copy the **Be an Ad Detective Student Handout**, one for every two students
- Preview the sites listed under **Teach 1** and **Teach 2**, and be prepared to help students distinguish advertising content from other content on these sites

Parent Resources

- Send parents the **Research and Evaluation for Elementary Students Parent Tip Sheet**

Key Vocabulary

- **Advertisement:** A message that draws attention to a product and encourages people to buy it
- **Brand:** A name and identity shared by products that are made by a certain company (e.g., Nike, Pepsi, Disney, etc.)
- **Banner Ad:** An online advertisement that looks like a bar or button on the website
- **Advergame:** An online advertisement that is also a game you can play
- **Video Ad:** An online advertisement that is a video and might look like a TV commercial
- **Pop-Up Ad:** An online advertisement that “pops up” over the content on the website
- **Sponsorship Ad:** An ad that specifically supports an event, activity, person, or organization



teaching plans

Introduce

Introduce the following scenario: Imagine visiting a shopping mall. Although it is freezing outside, it is warm and cozy inside. The mall is brightly lit and colorful. There are comfortable chairs to lounge on, as well as snack stands offering yummy treats. There are even jugglers and singers to entertain you. And all around you there are dozens of stores to explore. The stores offer free samples of things, from perfume to cookies, and you can try on clothes or try out new video games at some of the stores.

ASK *Why did the owner of the mall go to such expense to make you feel good?*

Sample responses:

- *To make you want to come to the mall*
- *To make you want to come more often and stay a long time*
- *To make you feel good, so you'll be more likely to buy things while you're there*

ASK *Why would stores give you free samples, or let you try things for free?*

Sample responses:

- *If you like the free samples of an item, then you might buy some*
- *After you try out a product, you might want to buy it*

DISCUSS with students the idea that the owners of the mall and the stores there want visitors to enjoy themselves, but their ultimate purpose is to encourage visitors to buy things. Explain that if visitors enjoy being at the mall, they are more likely to come often, stay longer, and make more purchases from the mall's stores.

Teach 1: Selling on the Web

CHOOSE one of the following sites to explore with the class. You may want to project your computer screen for the class to see, or you may group students around their own computers and have them follow along. If you have no Internet connection, print out pages from the sites for each group of students.

INTRODUCE the Key Vocabulary words **advertisement** and **brand**. **EXPLAIN** to students that companies pay websites to show their ads. For example, Coca-Cola would pay the American Idol website to display ads for their soda. Or, Cheerios would pay Neopets to show their cereal ads on certain parts of the website.

ENCOURAGE students to think about what some websites have in common with shopping malls. These websites may have a lot of fun things to see and do for free, but they also hope you will buy things during your visit. They want you to feel good while you're on the site, because that encourages you to stay a while and visit often. It also builds good feelings for the products or **brands** the site sells, and that makes you more likely to buy them. These sites use advertising to encourage you to buy things.

INTRODUCE the Key Vocabulary terms **banner ad**, **video ad**, **advergame**, **pop up-ad**, and **sponsorship ad**. Show the following examples of these types of ads to your students, and discuss how they are different from each other and from the other content on the website.



Banner Ad: Time Magazine for Kids – (www.timeforkids.com/TFK/)

(Look for banner ads at the top or on the right side of the page. Point out to students that banner ads can include graphics and moving images, but they are usually in a bar on a static spot on the website, usually at the top or the sides.)

Video Ad: Kids WB – (www.kidswb.com/)

(Tell students that video ads can appear either automatically, or you can click on them. Sometimes you are forced to watch the video ad until you can go to the part of the website you want. Other times video ads appear when you are watching, reading, or playing something.)

Advergame: Millsberry – (www.millsberry.com/)

(Millsberry is a kids' site for General Mills cereal. Advergames for cereals can be found on the home page. Click on one of them and show students the game.)

Pop-Up Ad: (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pop-up_ads.jpg)

(This example is a screen shot with a bunch of pop-up ads. Your school might block pop-up ads, so it might be difficult to show an example to students. Tell students that pop-up ads might contain spyware and other things that could hurt their computers, so they should never click on them, but just close them instead.)

Sponsorship Ad: (www.pbskids.org/lions/)

(Show examples of sponsoring organizations at the bottom of the webpage, which you can click into. Students who have watched PBS may have heard the phrase: “Brought to you by the following organizations” after a favorite show, which is an example of a sponsorship ad. A sponsorship ad might appear as a subtle logo, or it might say “sponsored by” or “brought to you by.”)

POINT OUT to students that on the examples cited above you can often know something is an ad because you will see in tiny letters “Ad” or “Advertisement.” But note that not all ads have this label, and that sometimes it’s hard to tell an ad from other content on the website.

EXPLORE one of the following websites, where there are different kinds of online ads and the advertising is more obvious.

- National Geographic for Kids (www.kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/)
- Sports Illustrated for Kids (www.sikids.com/)

INVITE students to explore the different features on the site. Have volunteers respond to the following questions, and encourage the class to discuss their responses.

ASK *What are some of the different things you can do on the site?* (Students may mention games, puzzles, contests, and videos, as well as shopping.)

ASK *Which parts of the site are advertising?* (Students may point to parts of the site that are most clearly designed to sell a product. Have them support their responses.)

POINT OUT to students that companies pay to have their ads on websites so that you will see them and want to buy their products. Websites also try to offer a fun environment so you will want to hang around and see more ads. They



also target ads to the person looking at the site. Students may be surprised to learn that websites target ads to them based on tracking their behavior, such as:

- the information students provide on the site
- the searches they do
- the other sites they visit

Teach 2: Be an Ad Detective!

ARRANGE students in groups of three to five, one computer per group. If your classroom doesn't have Internet access, print out a few pages from each of the websites below.

DISTRIBUTE the **Be an Ad Detective Student Handout**.

INVITE students to become advertising detectives. Explain that on some sites, it is very difficult to identify all the ads because they look like they might just be part of the website. And some brands use their website to advertise their own products. Finding all the ads on these sites requires some detective work.

ASSIGN each group to be an ad detective on one of the sites listed below. (Note: These sites were selected because they are the most common kinds of sites kids visit regularly outside of school: media, toys, and virtual worlds. Also, each of these sites has different ways of advertising. For instance, media companies advertise their TV shows and movies; toy companies advertise their toys and related products, and virtual worlds advertise their own sites through subscriptions and virtual world products.)

EXPLAIN to students that they will be looking for the five different kinds of ads on their site. Tell students:

- *You are each assigned to a site that's either a media company, toy company, or virtual world.*
- *Each type of site uses advertising in different ways.*
- *Each of these websites tries to make you want to hang around so you can see more ads that sell you things.*

ASSIST students by giving them clues (shown in italics below). The following sites are categorized as media companies, toy companies, and virtual worlds.

Group 1: Media Companies

Nickelodeon: (www.nick.com/)

Disney: (www.disney.go.com/index)

The sites in the first group are created by media companies, which make TV shows and movies. The shows and movies are part of what they are advertising. They may also be selling products related to these shows and movies. Use your detective skills to find out when they are trying to sell you something!

Group 2: Toy Companies

Barbie: (www.barbie.com/)

Lego: (www.lego.com/)

The sites in the second group are by toy companies. They encourage you to play online, but also to buy toys. Can you spot the ads?

**Group 3: Virtual Worlds****Neopets:** (www.neopets.com/)**Club Penguin:** (www.clubpenguin.com/)

The sites in the third group invite you to join clubs or groups. Some of what you can do at these sites is free, but some of it costs money. These sites also sell things related to the clubs. Bring out your magnifying glass to figure out where the advertising is!

SHARE detective clues with students:

- Look in the columns on the right side of the webpage. This is a prime place for advertising.
- Click on links. You need to look closely at some parts of the site to figure out whether they are selling something.
- Look for tiny letters on something that say “Ad” or “Advertisement.”
- Look carefully at the games, contests, and videos. They may be fun, but are they also encouraging you to buy things?
- Look for ads that seem to target kids. Do you think any of the ads are targeting you specifically?

ENCOURAGE students to look closely at their sites to help them answer the questions on the student handout. (Students may not be able to find all of the types of ads, but that’s okay.)

INVITE a volunteer from each group to share his or her findings with the class.

ASK *How could you tell if something is an advertisement?* (Students might see the word “advertisement,” or they might recognize a product being sold. Media companies might have video ads to promote their latest show or movie. Toy companies might offer advergames to advertise toys, or display links to their virtual store. Virtual worlds might advertise subscriptions to their site or products related to the virtual world. POINT OUT to students that different kinds of sites use different kinds of advertising, depending on what they want to sell. EXPLAIN that websites also target advertising to viewers based on the information they have collected about who the viewer is.)

ASK *Which parts of the site encourage you to buy the product?* (Students should recognize that oftentimes all of a site’s content is meant to do this. For example, Disney sells its own movies, TV shows, music, and other related products. Barbie sells its toys and other related products. Neopets sells subscriptions/memberships to its site, especially so you can earn virtual money and buy virtual things online. Neopets also promotes other products, such as cereal. Students may notice that the home page may have ads for a lot of different things.)

ASK *How did your website create good feelings about its brand?* (POINT OUT to students that kids’ websites try to be fun and have lots of things to do so that you will want to stay there. The longer you stay there, the more ads you will see, and you might want to buy things.)

**Wrap Up and Assess**

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK *What different kinds of advertising can you find on websites?* (Students should name banner ads, pop-up ads, video ads, advergames, and sponsorship ads.)

ASK *Why is it important to know the difference between ads and other kinds of content when you are looking at a website?* (Students should be aware of when a site is trying to sell them something, and not to confuse ads with noncommercial content.)

ASK *Why does a website want to have you hang out there a long time, like being at a mall?*

(Students should be aware that websites create an inviting place to hang out online – like a mall – where products are advertised, and where it is fun and comfortable. People will want to stay there, so they will see more ads and want to buy more products.)

**Extension Activity**

Encourage students to use what they have learned about advertising by creating an Ad Detectives poster. First, students print out a page or two from a website that illustrates a specific type of advertising. (Media creation activity: If students have access to computers, they can take screenshots of websites and include them in a PowerPoint presentation.) Students can then tape the website pages with the ads to the poster and use arrows and highlighters giving an explanation of the ad and identifying which type of ad it is. Students should also explain the purpose of advertising (to get you to buy stuff!).

**Homework**

Have students visit Admongo (www.admongo.gov) and play the game at home with a parent or family member. (Admongo is a site developed by the Federal Trade Commission that teaches kids about advertising.) If students do not have Internet access at home, you can use this game as an extension activity in school. After students have played the game, show them a magazine or online ad of your choice, and ask them to answer the following questions: *Who is responsible for the ad? What is the ad actually saying? What does the ad want me to do?*

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students® 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

1. Creativity and Innovation

- a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes

3. Research and Information Fluency

- a. plan strategies to guide inquiry
- b. locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media
- c. evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks
- d. process data and report results

Common Sense Media is an independent, nonprofit resource that helps families and educators teach kids how to be safe and smart in today's 24/7 media world. Go to www.commonsensemedia.org for thousands of reviews and expert advice.

**Name(s)** _____**Class** _____**Date** _____**Directions**

Be an ad detective! Find as many ads as you can on your website. For each kind of ad, write **what** was being sold and **where** you found it on the site.

Website name: _____**URL (Website address):** _____

KIND OF AD	What is advertised? Where did you find it?
Banner Ad	Energy Juice ad on top of home page
Advergame	
Video Ad	
Pop-Up Ad	
Sponsorship Ad	

Use Common Sense!

Ads are everywhere! Beware that the video you are watching or the game you are playing might really be an ad trying to sell you something!