USE OF ENGLISH AS-LEVEL SECTION E
DATA FILE

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Central Government Secondary School

Memo

From: C. Mak, Social Studies teacher
To: Chris Wong
Re: Project on advertising
Date: 5 March 1998

1. For your part of the project on advertising, you will
   (a) write an article titled, ‘A critical review of three posters on road safety’,
   (b) make recommendations concerning the acceptability of some proposed advertisements with reference to the Advertisers’ Code, and
   (c) complete a worksheet on techniques used in advertising.

2. Here are some suggestions for gathering data for your article. Ask the artist, Robin Lam (Form 6A), to tell you about each poster. Also, invite the Careers teacher (Ms So) and your English teacher (Mr Fung) to give their opinions. Distribute a written questionnaire among all junior and senior students to find out if they like the posters or not. You can also interview a smaller number of students to get their detailed comments on each poster.
Three posters on road safety and comments on them by the artist, Robin Lam, a Sixth Form student

**Poster 1**

Peter and Kathy say:

*Don't dress improperly, and don't drive dangerously on your motorcycle!*

**Artist's comment:** 'I drew a boy and a girl (Peter and Kathy) because I wanted both boys and girls to pay attention to my message. I drew Peter behaving dangerously and Kathy wearing unsuitable clothes. The caption tells everyone not to copy them.'

**Poster 2**

**ROAD SAFETY BEGINS WITH ME**

**Artist's comment:** 'I wanted this poster to stress the need for all young people to be actively involved with road safety. The picture shows a young person helping an old person to cross a busy road, which sets a good example for us all to follow.'

**Poster 3**

*Pay attention, girls! Road safety is everyone's concern!*

**Artist's comment:** 'In this poster, I show young people not paying attention to some good advice. The point is that everyone should learn about the importance of road safety.'
Comments on the three posters by Careers teacher, Ms So Wing Kar, and by English teacher, Mr Thomas Fung

Poster 1 — 'Peter and Kathy say'

Careers teacher, Ms So:
I'm sure the 'Peter and Kathy say' poster will catch young people's attention. The problem, however, is that some boys and girls might want to copy what Peter and Kathy are doing. They're wearing fashionable clothes and what they're doing looks exciting. But of course it's dangerous, so the artist needs to redraw it. It's okay to like fashionable clothes, but it seems that the artist is suggesting that dangerous behaviour is smart or trendy. Maybe he could redraw the poster to remove this idea.

English teacher, Mr Fung:
I think I would criticise the language of the poster titled 'Peter and Kathy say'. Commands can be hard to understand if they are phrased negatively. For example, 'Don't dress improperly!' is quite complex. It's clearer if we say, 'Dress properly!'. And the caption of this poster is just too long; there are 14 words! I think the artist should rethink the wording.

Poster 2 — 'Road safety begins with me'

Careers teacher, Ms So:
I liked 'Road safety begins with me' better than the other two posters. It draws attention to the difficulty that many old people have when trying to cross a busy road. I understand the artist's message, but why must the helpful teenager be a girl? Are boys unhelpful? Maybe the poster could be redrawn in the light of this problem.

English teacher, Mr Fung:
I'm not sure who is supposed to be speaking in this poster. Who is saying 'Road safety begins with me'? The old woman? The girl? The boys? I think road safety is everyone's business! The caption should be rewritten, I think. If that were done, this poster's broad appeal would make it the best of the three.

Poster 3 — 'Pay attention, girls!'

Careers teacher, Ms So:
The poster 'Pay attention, girls!' shows a male teacher talking to a group of teenage boys and girls about road safety. The poster shows some boys and girls not paying attention, but the teacher is scolding only the girls! Is that fair?

English teacher, Mr Fung:
The poster 'Pay attention, girls!' should make it clear that it's a road-safety lesson. Also, the caption suggests that only the girls are not paying attention so the wording actually detracts from the intended message.
Results of student questionnaire about the three posters

Do you like Poster 1 ‘Peter and Kathy say’?

Junior Forms

Senior Forms

Do you like Poster 2 ‘Road safety begins with me’?

Junior Forms

Senior Forms

Do you like Poster 3 ‘Pay attention, girls!’?

Junior Forms

Senior Forms
Notes of comments made by students during interviews about their opinion of the three posters

**Poster 1 — ‘Peter and Kathy say’**

**Junior students’ comments**
- Student A: ‘I find the words confusing.’
- Student B: ‘I’d like to try that trick at the traffic lights that Peter is doing.’
- Student C: ‘I like the picture but I don’t quite understand the words.’
- Student D: ‘I’m going to save up for a motorcycle jacket, just like Kathy’s.’
- Student E: ‘I’d like to have long hair like Kathy’s!’

**Senior students’ comments**
- Student F: ‘If the poster means that we should all dress like Peter and Kathy, I think that’s a bad idea.’
- Student G: ‘Young people may copy Peter and Kathy because of the way they’re dressed.’
- Student H: ‘I don’t feel that Peter and Kathy set a good example for junior students.’
- Student I: ‘I thought the posters were supposed to encourage road safety!’

**Poster 2 — ‘Road safety begins with me!’**

**Junior students’ comments**
- Student A: ‘It’s about crossing the road but I don’t understand the words.’
- Student B: ‘I don’t think the artist was right in showing that boys aren’t helpful.’
- Student C: ‘I think the old lady asked the girl to help her to cross the road.’
- Student D: ‘It means girls are helpful and boys are not.’
- Student E: ‘This shows that boys don’t help people when crossing roads, which isn’t true.’

**Senior students’ comments**
- Student F: ‘It shows that boys don’t like to help elderly people. That’s not fair!’
- Student G: ‘I don’t think it’s true that boys wouldn’t help.’
- Student H: ‘Is the poster aimed only at girls? Why does road safety begin with girls but not with boys?’
- Student I: ‘The message shouldn’t be just for girls. It should be for everyone.’

**Poster 3 — ‘Pay attention, girls!’**

**Junior students’ comments**
- Student A: ‘It’s boring. It’s just a picture of a classroom.’
- Student B: ‘Is it about learning in a class when the teacher’s angry with the girls?’
- Student C: ‘What’s the lesson about, actually?’
- Student D: ‘The teacher’s not fair.’
- Student E: ‘It means that boys work harder than girls, but that’s not true.’

**Senior students’ comments**
- Student F: ‘What’s the lesson about, anyhow?’
- Student G: ‘There are some inattentive boys, too.’
- Student H: ‘The poster shows a bias against females.’
- Student I: ‘Girls might be annoyed by this.’
- Student J: ‘Is the point of the poster road safety or paying attention in class – which?’
Memo from C. Mak, Social Studies teacher, to Chris Wong

Central Government Secondary School

Memo

From: C. Mak, Social Studies teacher
To: Chris Wong
Re: Project on advertising: ‘A critical review of three posters on road safety’
Date: 20 March 1998

1. I am pleased to see you have made such good progress in gathering your data.
2. Now write your article. Follow the outline that I’ve written and attached to this memo.

Outline for the article, ‘A critical review of three posters on road safety’ attached to memo from C. Mak dated 20 March 1998

A critical review of three posters on road safety

1. Introduction
   Briefly explain that you are going to review three posters on road safety. Describe how and where you obtained your information.

2. Information
   Under each of the following headings summarise the data on each poster from the artists, teachers and students. The headings you should use are given in this outline. Poster 1 is given as the example below, but remember to write about all three posters.

   Poster 1
   
   (a) Artist’s aim

   (b) Teachers’ reactions

   (c) Student questionnaire results
      Compare the results 1) according to sex (boys v. girls) and 2) according to age group (juniors v. seniors).

   (d) Junior and senior students’ comments during interviews
      Summarise the views of juniors and of seniors.

   (e) The drawing
      Explain specifically how the picture on each poster should be redesigned to improve it (but don’t talk about the actual artistic ability as demonstrated in the drawing. This is not an art project).

3. Conclusion
   State which poster would be the best if it was improved in the ways suggested in your article. Base your conclusion on the opinions you got while gathering your data.
Commercial advertisements that are directed specifically at children under 13 must follow the directives below before they can be accepted for publication or broadcast.

1.0 Superstitions and fears – Advertisements will not be accepted if they try to exploit superstitious people, or use fear of bad luck to mislead the consumer into buying the advertised commodity or service.

2.0 Factual presentation

2.1 Written, sound, and visual presentations must not exaggerate service, products or features as to speed, size, colour, durability, etc.

2.2 Advertisements must clearly show the relative size of a product by including something from the child’s actual world – e.g. a child, coins, pencils.

2.3 When advertising shows results from a drawing set or construction kit, an average child should be able to attain those results.

3.0 Product prohibitions

3.1 Drugs, medicines, and vitamins in liquid, powdered, or tablet form must not be advertised to children to show that they will feel better physically.

3.2 Products that are not intended for use by children must not be advertised to children, either directly or through promotions that are mainly child-oriented.

4.0 Avoiding undue pressure upon relatives

Commercials must not encourage children to put pressure on their parents or other relatives to make enquiries or purchases.

5.0 Promotion by well-known characters

5.1 Personalities and live characters featured on children’s programmes must not be used to promote products, premiums or services.

5.2 Cartoon characters and puppets must not be used to promote products, premiums or services. This prohibition does not extend to public service announcements or to factual statements about nutritional or educational benefits.

6.0 Price and purchase terms

6.1 Price and purchase terms, when used, must be clear and complete. When parts or accessories, which a child might think are included in the purchase price, are available only at extra cost, this must be made clear.

6.2 The cost must not be minimized as by the use of words such as ‘only’, ‘just’, etc.

6.3 Demonstrations and descriptions must clearly show how much assembly, if any, is required.

7.0 Safety

7.1 Advertisements, except specific safety messages, must not show adults or children doing dangerous things, e.g. playing inside a refrigerator, ignoring traffic regulations, handling dangerous substances, etc.

7.2 Advertisements, except specific safety messages, must not show products being used in an unsafe or dangerous way. For example, they must not show anyone transferring dangerous products from their original containers into other containers which children regard as safe or related to food or drink, e.g. pouring a dangerous product into cups, glasses or soft drink bottles.

8.0 Social values

8.1 Advertising must not encourage dishonest, immoral attitudes or behaviour.

8.2 Advertising must not suggest that possession or use of a product makes the owner superior, or that without it the child will be open to ridicule or contempt. This prohibition does not apply to true statements regarding educational or health benefits.

9.0 Substantiation required

Where claims are made regarding specific product qualities – performance, safety, speed, size, colour, durability, etc. – the advertiser must be able to provide evidence for these claims.
Use of jingles

The use of advertising jingles began on commercial radio stations in America. The first known jingle was for Carver’s liver pills, a popular ‘all-purpose’ medicine in the 1920s. It seemed that all of America could hum and sing the Carver’s jingle. Perhaps the most common technique used in jingles is the repetition of selected words or lines together with repetition of the same musical phrase.

The repetition of the musical phrase is important, because most people can’t remember a complicated tune. Sometimes the musical phrase is repeated without words to make the listener recall the missing words.

Repetition of key words, usually including the name of the product, drives home the message and makes it easy to remember. In one well-known television commercial for Comet Cola, the name was repeated twenty times in fifteen seconds! If the words in an advert rhyme, so much the better, because people tend to notice and remember rhymes. For example, in a popular advert for Silkskin beauty soap, the words ‘love’ and ‘dove’ are used very effectively.


The language of advertising

In most cases it is the visual content and design of an ad that makes the initial impact and causes us to take note of it. But in order to get people to identify the product, remember its name, and persuade them that it is worth buying, ads rely heavily on the use of language.

In public service advertisements, the language is usually clear, concise, and simple enough for most people to understand. In commercial advertisements, the language is usually positive, lively and somewhat exaggerated. Metaphors are common (e.g. smiling colour [Hairglow shampoo]), and grammatical constructions are vague (e.g. Super Jix gets clothes cleaner than what?), Many people say [who?], Panadax tablets treat aches and pains [all of them?]).

Aggressive ads often use a series of imperative verbs, apparently in an attempt to almost ‘force’ us to buy. For example, Buy now! Don’t delay! Hurry down to your nearest store! read the advertisement which appeared in a hugely-successful 1983 British advertising campaign for Washrite washing machines.

(Adapted from The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language, Cambridge University Press, 1987.)
The psychology of advertising

Let us examine some of the ways in which advertisers make use of language and psychology in order to persuade us to buy their products.

(a) The desire for security

Advertisers long ago realised that one extremely effective way to sell something is to make everyone feel that they must have the product, that they will not be 'secure' without it. Advertisers found that this desire to feel secure - by being like other people, dressing as they dress, doing as they do - is a basic human characteristic. No one wants to feel 'left out'. A successful American advertisement for Sunray sunglasses simply said: 'Be part of the in-group.' Those few words convinced thousands of people to buy Sunrays!

(b) The appeal to authority

Some advertisements make direct references to people in positions of respect. This is an appeal to authority. 'Doctors recommend Superman vitamin capsules...'. 'Scientists have shown that drinking Happytime apple juice actually helps prevent colds...'. Other adverts use well-known sportsmen and sportswomen to promote their product.

(c) The desire for ease and comfort

'Miracle' or 'magic' cleaners (e.g. Foamy toilet bowl cleaner), food that one simply 'heats and eats' (e.g. Eatatreat frozen dinners), these and other similar slogans target our emotions, not our reason. They suggest that there are easy solutions to at least some of our problems! But notice the unclear words used in such advertisements. How can a chemical be described as 'magic' or 'miraculous'?

(d) The appeal to a particular age group

Most advertisements use characters of the same age group as those targeted for buying the product. So, television commercials for certain health products (e.g. Sunset iron capsules) often show old people; similarly, ads for exotic travel (e.g. Daring Tours, Ltd) usually show well-to-do young couples in romantic settings.

(Freely adapted from K. Watson and F. Christie, Our Language in Use, Reed Education, Sydney, Wellington and London, 1972.)
Radio Interview with Ms P. K. Tsui, Editor of Consumer Journal
Interviewer: Ms Grace Ng
RTHK 4, 5 July 1997

Interviewer: Good afternoon listeners. Today, we are very pleased to welcome Ms P. K. Tsui, Editor of the Consumer Journal, who’s going to talk with us about advertising from the consumer’s point of view.

Ms Tsui: Thank you, Grace, it’s a pleasure to be here.

Interviewer: Now, we know advertising is important, not only to businesses but to all of us in our daily lives. But we also know that not all advertising is fair and honest.

Ms Tsui: Yes. Well, advertisements have become so complex and sophisticated that it’s difficult to know which claims are true so that you won’t be fooled by false statements. It’s important to read adverts or watch television commercials carefully and try to decide for yourself if what they say is possible or likely to be true.

Interviewer: Yes, too many advertisements claim to work miracles and promise to make life easy for us.

Ms Tsui: Correct. Household cleaners, car polishes, spot and stain removers often fall into this category.

Interviewer: Right. The ones that say ‘just rub on and then rub off’ or ‘Instant Shine detergent wax cleans your car in seconds’.

Ms Tsui: When we think carefully, we know that most products cannot work magic so we need to be sensible and not believe these claims.

Interviewer: Now, in television commercials, there are frequently songs or rhyming jingles that ‘go with’ the products so that you will remember the brand name and buy them, aren’t there?

Ms Tsui: Yes, people associate the song with the product. Viewers are influenced by the catchy tune of a song and buy that brand. Sometimes a tune may be irritating, but you still remember it. Many years ago there was a song for Zippy orange drink that drove me crazy. But, today, I still remember the tune and the product.

Interviewer: Yes, it’s difficult not to be affected by what we see and hear on TV. Now another thing that always bothers me is the fact that we see these ads or commercials and they have cowboys or wealthy businesswomen using the product or talking about how good the product is. But, actually the pictures are just of actors and actresses dressed up to look like the people they’re supposed to be.

Ms Tsui: That’s correct. Take for example, the adverts of a cowboy smoking Marlboro cigarettes. Of course, the Marlboro man is not a cowboy at all; he’s an actor being paid to pose for pictures or say what he says. Companies use professional actors and actresses because, frankly, their acting skills or good looks make them much more persuasive than ‘real’ people.

Interviewer: I see.

Ms Tsui: Now, another thing advertisers do is use scenes showing people with lots of expensive possessions. You know, adverts for something like the AMCO credit card showing people with fabulous jewellery, driving luxurious cars, and so on. This appeals to people’s desire to be seen as successful.

Interviewer: Of course. The idea is that if you have this popular credit card you’ll be able to have all those things. And that would show that you are successful.

Ms Tsui: Yes. Correct. But actually having the card won’t automatically make you successful...... Now the names chosen for products can also be misleading. Some products – perfumes, for example – are given attractive-sounding names which the company thinks will encourage the public to think positively about the product. There are perfumes called Heavenly Summer and Jade Dream and Magic Moment – it doesn’t really matter which, because the name has nothing to do with the actual perfume in the bottle.

Interviewer: Yes, I guess we are often tricked into thinking that the fancy name is important. So, what would you say to all of us who watch these adverts on TV or see them in the print media. What can we do?

Ms Tsui: Well, I suppose the best thing is if you can just always try to be aware of the fact that advertisers are using these techniques. You’ll probably still be influenced by them, but maybe not so much.