



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 2 to 3
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Duration:	1-2 hours

Healthy Food Web



This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

Overview

In this lesson, students consider the role of snack foods in a healthy diet. The teacher then guides them on a tour of popular sites aimed at children, where the class identifies and classifies the advertising encountered there and looks at how the food products being advertised fit – or don't fit – in the food groups found in the *Canada Food Guide*. Students then play the game *Co-Co's AdverSmarts* to understand some of the techniques used by online food marketers and then create their own mock website promoting a healthy diet.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- begin to develop an understanding of the commercial objectives of immersive online environments, specifically those characteristic of food products' websites
- identify the purpose and the intended audience of these types of websites and describe how audiences might respond
- recognize and identify the advertising and marketing elements and characteristics associated with commercial websites
- identify overt and implied messages of websites that market to children their age
- utilize their information to simulate the creation of a media text
- demonstrate an awareness of the types of foods needed to maintain a healthy body
- identify the nutritional quality of foods advertised in online spaces aimed at children

Preparation and Materials

- Arrange for students to play the educational game *Co-Co's AdverSmarts* (available online at <http://mediasmarts.ca/game/co-cos-adversmarts-interactive-unit-food-marketing-web>)
- Photocopy the handout *Co-Co's AdverSmarts: Handout for Parents*



- Arrange for an Internet connection and a data projector or digital whiteboard

Co-Co's *AdverSmarts* includes audio with all of the game's text to accommodate different reading abilities. Younger children may, however, benefit from having a helper to navigate through the game. Here are some suggestions before you start:

- enlist a student from a higher grade to sit with two or three children as they play the game and help them out if they are having trouble. Children who need a lot of help on their first attempt should be given the opportunity to play again
- have a parent volunteer sit with a student while he or she goes through the game
- team up capable readers with less able readers to play the game together
- have pairs of students play the game and compare designs they create. Give them the chance to play again and create different playgrounds
- use a projector or whiteboard and navigate through the game with the whole class

Procedure

Ads for snacks

Start by asking students:

- What is meant by a "healthy" diet?
- What are the food groups that make up Canada's Food Guide? (Available at: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>)
(For a more in-depth look at the Canada Food Guide, see our lesson [Eating Under the Rainbow](#))
- Where do snack foods fit into our diet?
- Can we eat snacks and still be healthy?
- Is there a problem with too much snack food advertising?

What's advertised online?

Ask students to name their favourite websites. (If students have access to mobile devices, you may ask them to name their favourite apps as well.) Using a data projector or digital whiteboard, visit some of these sites: if some include multiple types of content (such as game aggregator sites or a video hosting site) make sure to look at content aimed at this age group (such as cartoons or games aimed at young children). As you "tour" the sites, have students raise their hands every time they see an ad. (On game-hosting sites, you may need to help students recognize advergames – games that include advertising content.) Each time a student spots an ad, record what was being advertised.

If you are concerned about the possible content you may encounter based on students' favourite sites, you can plan your tour ahead of time using these selections from MediaSmarts' list of young students' favourite sites:

- YouTube
- Roblox



- ABCYa!
- Coolmathgames
- NBA.com

Once you have finished your tour, go through the list of products that were advertised. Note to students the length of the list and ask them to compare it to the number of ads they would see while watching TV during a similar time period. (Commercial TV typically has about 8 minutes of ads, or 16-20 individual ads, in every 30-minute block. Public television has none, and store-bought videos will have either none or a small number of pre-roll ads.)

Now help students break the list of ads into categories based on the products being sold. Categories will likely include other games, toys, TV shows or movies aimed at children, and food. Focus on the “food” category and ask students what *kinds* of food are being advertised: all or almost all of the products will be snack foods or sugared cereal.

Remind students of the food groups listed in Canada’s Food Guide: fruits and vegetables, whole grain foods, protein foods and water. Where do the foods being advertised on these sites fit? Many of them don’t fit into *any* food group; go through the ones that *do* fit in a food group (remind students that not all grain products are made with whole grains) and research their nutritional information.

You can do this by entering the name of the product in quotation marks and then the word “nutrition,” eg: “honey nut cheerios” nutrition.

Ask students what about these products might make them healthful choices (high fibre, low sugar, vitamins or minerals added) or unhealthful choices (high sugar, high salt, high fat, added sugar in the form of marshmallows or other candy items). Point out to students that food companies often claim they only advertise “better for you” products (such as Honey Nut Cheerios as compared to Lucky Charms).

Design a healthy food website

Have students complete the game *Co-Co’s AdverSmarts* (consult *Preparation and Materials* above for different ways of having students play the game).

Next have students design a website for a favourite healthy food that is similar to the one depicted in the *Co-Co’s AdverSmarts* game. Unlike the Co-Co Crunch website, however, which uses gimmicks that may mislead or foster brand recognition, the purpose of the healthy food website is to educate and inform about the benefits of healthy food choices.

For their designs:

- Have students think of their favourite healthy food and select it as a product to promote on a website. Have students design a logo for the food type.
- Ask them to create, name and draw their own food spokescharacter. Let them draw or paint a picture of their new character with their favourite food. Have students consider how the design of the character can help depict the food type as healthy.
- Ask students:
 - the kinds of activities they would include on their website
 - how these activities would inform people of the healthy nature of their food type
 - how the videos, games and activities on the healthy food site would be different from those found on other websites



- if they would include other things like a nutrition information area
- Have students create a name for their website

Once students have finished brainstorming ideas for their website have them draw or paint a design for their homepage. Post the images of their healthy food websites onto the wall.

Remind students that it is important to think critically of media we encounter. While surfing the Internet we should ask questions such as “Who made this website? What is the purpose of the website? Is it trying to sell things to us? Is it to give us information or just for fun?” Remind students that when a website is trying to sell something we need to be aware of the ways we are being marketed to.

Extension Activity

You may consider supplementing this lesson with the TVOntario Original Series *Wacky Media Songs*. These short videos explore a variety of digital media literacy topics, including advertising and marketing. Here are a few suggested videos and discussion topics:

[Creating a Brand!](#) From packaging to creating a cool mascot, everything about a brand should give us good feelings. Ava creates her own brand of cereal. Plus, she plays a wacky, singing llama!

Before the video, ask: What does it mean when we talk about a “brand” in ads?

After the video, ask: Can you think of any ads that try to make you like the brand instead of telling you what’s good about the product? What are some ways that they do that?

[Hiding in Plain Sight!](#) Advertisers know that our emotions have a big impact on our buying decisions. They hit us in the feels with ads that make us feel good so that when we shop, we’ll remember those good feelings and buy their stuff!

Before the video, ask: Have you ever seen an ad that made you feel sad, or happy, or excited?

After the video, ask: What are some ways that ads make us feel a certain way? How can advertisers make something look like it’s good for us when it really isn’t? (They highlight one healthful thing about it without telling us about other things that make it less healthful. That’s called a “health halo.”) Why might advertisers want to make us feel a certain way, instead of saying something about the thing they’re selling? feelings when you’re shopping.)



Co-Co's AdverSmarts: Letter and Handout for Parents

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We are currently doing a lesson about online advertising. In this lesson, your child will learn about the ways that marketer's engage and advertise to children on branded websites.

As part of this lesson, students will be playing an educational game called *Co-Co's AdverSmarts*. In this game, they study online advertising strategies as they help a cereal mascot – *Co-Co* – create a website that will appeal to kids.

To help reinforce what they've learned, we are encouraging students to play *Co-Co* at home, to show their families what they have learned. You can access the game online at: <http://mediasmarts.ca/game/co-cos-adversmarts-interactive-unit-food-marketing-web>

To help you talk to your children about this issue, with this letter we are sending home some fact sheets about online marketing to kids.



Why Marketers Target Kids

Kids are an important target audience for marketers because they have lots of purchasing power; they influence their parents' buying decisions and they are the adult consumers of the future.

Marketers plant the seeds of brand recognition in very young children, in the hopes that the seeds will grow into lifetime relationships. According to the Center for a New American Dream, babies as young as six months of age can form mental images of corporate logos and mascots. Brand loyalties can be established as early as age two, and by the time children head off to school most can recognize hundreds of brand logos.

Online marketing

The Internet is an extremely desirable medium for marketers wanting to target children:

- It's part of youth culture. This generation of young people is growing up with the Internet as a daily and routine part of their lives
- Parents generally do not understand the extent to which kids are being marketed to online
- Kids are often online alone, without parental supervision
- Food advertisers prefer the Internet to TV, which has codes regarding advertising to kids, because the Internet is less regulated
- Sophisticated technologies make it easy to collect information from young people for marketing research and to target individual children with personalized advertising
- By creating engaging, interactive environments based on products and brand names companies can build brand loyalties from an early age

One of the best ways to reach children online is to create fun and engaging playgrounds where content and advertising are seamlessly integrated into graphics, games and activities. These branded playgrounds are called "Advergimes".

Special Issues for Young Children

One of the problems with younger children is that it can be hard for them to tell the difference between ads and entertainment. This is difficult enough for them to do on TV, and is even more difficult for them to do on the Internet.

With growing levels of obesity among young children, questions are being raised about the impact of aggressive food marketing on the Internet for products such as fast food, soft drinks and candy. Research has found that almost all of the food products advertised to children online are high-sugar, high-sodium and high-calorie foods.

Advergimes can also contribute to issues with excessive screen time and exposure to advertising. Unlike ads on TV, which may only last a few seconds, children can play advergimes online for as long as they want. These online playgrounds are very appealing: children are much more likely to visit websites with advergimes than other sites, and spend much more time on these sites than on other sites for kids.



Dealing with Online Marketing

To help your children avoid the many traps and pitfalls set up by online marketers, parents should teach their kids to:

Think critically about commercial websites

Kids need to be educated about online marketing so they can recognize when they're being sold to and how.

Because young children have difficulty recognizing ads, talk to your child about advertising from an early age. It is important for kids to understand that while commercial sites may be fun to visit, they exist for two reasons: to build brand name loyalty and recognition for their brand and to collect information from kids for marketing purposes.

Protect their personal information

Have your child always check with you first before submitting any personal information online. If they absolutely must give out an email address to participate in a commercial website, you can set up a "dummy" email account for them. (This is an email account that is only used when providing an email address to websites.)

Read online privacy policies

While most kids' websites have privacy policies, it's important to learn to read the fine print. A good privacy policy will come right out and tell you what information is being collected from kids and how it will be used. It should also allow parents to view any information collected on their child and edit or delete it if they wish.

The privacy policy is usually linked to at the bottom of each page. Here's what to look for:

- What information is being collected or tracked? How will this information be used? (It is especially important to understand whether it will be sold or transferred to a third party.)
- Do parents have the ability to change or delete any data that has been collected about their children?
- What steps are being taken to safeguard children's privacy when they participate in chat rooms, message boards and email activities on the site?

Know the difference between branded and non-branded sites

Branded commercial sites for kids are easy to spot. They're associated with a specific company or brand and feature products and characters produced and trademarked by the company. Their purpose is to build brand loyalty, to sell products and to use the information they get from visitors to develop their marketing strategies.

Non-branded commercial sites aren't as obvious since they don't appear to be affiliated with a specific company or brand. They may feature the products of a number of different companies or no product at all. Their chief purpose is to conduct surveys and research for the purpose of gathering personal information about the children who visit their site – either for the sole benefit of their site partners or to sell to other interested third parties.



Recognize online marketing gimmicks

Help your children build up their own 'adversmarts' by explaining how advertisers:

- use words and images to make a website feel as if it is a real place kids can join in
- put activities such as colouring pages and games on their sites to keep kids playing there for long periods of time
- use online contests, quizzes and surveys to collect personal information from kids to help them create marketing strategies to reach other kids
- use friendly cartoon mascots to attract kids and create good feelings about their products

Also explain that banner ads on commercial websites may link to other websites that may not be suitable for children, so they need to check with you before clicking on them.

Recognize responsible children's sites

To help you make sure that your child's favourite websites respect their young users, look for sites that:

- identify their partners
- clearly label any advertisements
- have a privacy policy that is easy to understand and can be reached both from the home page and from any other pages where kids are asked to submit information
- clearly state in their privacy policies that any information collected from children will **not** be sold to a third party
- ensure that parents are aware of any possible safety risks relating to various activities and take steps to safeguard the children who participate in them
- provide monitored chat environments
- require that parental consent be obtained before any child under 13 releases personal information.



Assessment Activity: Mock Website

	<i>Learning Expectations</i>	<i>Achievement</i>
<p>Use</p> <p>Skills and competencies that fall under “use” range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email, and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.</p>	<p>express preferences for a variety of oral, print and other media texts</p> <p>tell or write about favourite parts of oral, print and other media texts</p> <p>participate in teacher-guided online activities</p> <p>describe ways they use technologies</p> <p>analyze the factors that affect choices for physical activity; e.g., the impact of technology/media</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
<p>Understand</p> <p>Understand includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us.</p> <p>Understand also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.</p>	<p>share personal experiences that are clearly related to oral, print and other media texts</p> <p>give examples of advertising and propaganda that can affect individuals and the decisions they make</p> <p>give examples of how the influence of peers can affect personal decisions</p> <p>identify the purpose and intended audience of some simple media texts</p> <p>identify ways that messages are enhanced in oral, print and other media texts by the use of specific techniques</p> <p>demonstrate understanding that the purpose of product websites is to encourage buying the product and is aware of methods used to promote products on these sites</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>



	Learning Expectations	Achievement
<p>Create</p> <p>Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.</p> <p>The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.</p>	<p>use a variety of digital media (text, images, audio, and movie) to express him/herself creatively</p> <p>use words and pictures to add sensory detail in oral, print and other media texts</p> <p>use own and respond to others' ideas to create oral, print and other media texts</p> <p>communicate and demonstrate understanding of forms and technique</p> <p>identify the topic, purpose and audience for media texts they plan to create</p> <p>identify conventions and techniques appropriate to the form chosen for a media text they plan to create</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>

