"It's Just That Easy"
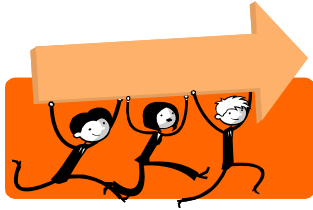

Using the power of persuasion to promote the curriculum - the loathsome 'infomercial' as an engaging teaching tool in the middle school classroom.

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Middle school students create an infomercial to learn about the power and techniques of persuasion. This is a parody of infomercials. The intent is not to lie and deceive, but to persuade.

Subject areas	Topic ideas
ELA	Sell a book from the Active Readers series www.scholastic.ca/bookfairs/choosing/msprod.htm Sell a product to make you a better speaker www.school-for-champions.com/speaking/knowledge.htm www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Grisby1.html http://www.teachingideas.co.uk/english/intervie.htm
Math	Sell a silly "math help" device that will make you a math wiz http://www.jmmsofdc.com/index.html Sell artwork or objects using math patterns www.artlandia.com/products/SymmetryWorks/solutions/
Science	Save an animal or ecosystem www.worldwildlife.org/ Alternative energy products www.energyforkeeps.com/energy_sites.html
Social Studies	Social justice issues www.one.org Current issues from news headlines www.world-newspapers.com/canada.html
PDR	Secrets of selling self-help products http://www.all-in-one-business.com/20050511/ Dove Campaign for Real Beauty – original video http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.ca/flat2.asp?id=7134
Visual Arts	Product design for target audience Logo design for target audience www.brandsoftheworld.com

PART 1 – Introduction

Overview

Persuasive communication aimed at our youth comes in many forms. It is directed toward changing another person's beliefs both in a positive or negative way and affecting their long- term attitudes
Our daily decisions are affected by what is happening around us. What we see and hear in various media technologies play a huge part in the persuasive communication around us. It is important that our youth can critically evaluate how style, form, source and medium influence the validity of the choices they make as individuals and as a part of a conscientious society.
Over the period of this activity, students will be asked to formulate decisions and use various technologies to follow a motivated sequence:

- Establish the needs of your audience
- Propose your plan for satisfying those needs
- Explain how the plan will be carried out
- Describe how the results will satisfy each need
- Ask your audience to take the action your plan requires.

Timeline

This project can be manipulated to meet the time requirements allotted by the individual teacher. The opening day of this project will require a minimum of 60 minutes to introduce, through class discussion, samples of various media technologies, and the framework of the project required from each student. You may want to break up the assignment and have deadlines for various sections. For example, the students can pass in a storyboard or outline before they produce the assignment.

Logistics

Considerations should be given for the following:

1. Video gathering and editing takes more time

i) A video camera could be set up on a tripod in a quiet space in the school and students could take their turns recording their presentation at a time they sign up for.
ii) In order for students to have the opportunity to use the camera and computers, teachers can post a sign up sheet providing the opportunity for students to use

equipment needed at various time throughout the day. This time could be used during another subject area where cross-curricular goals are being met.

iii) The theme of the projects could be cross-curricular based thus providing time in other subjects during the day for project work. For example, students could work on the research and script writing in ELA and taping in science or PDR to provide more time with the cameras. The infomercial assessments could even be included as part of the student's mark in both subjects.

2. Permissions

Video, audio and other media technologies should meet with the School Board's privacy of information policy.

PART 2 – Background: The Power of Persuasion: The Infomercial

Persuasive language is…

…used to influence, to manipulate, to change someone's mind
…speaking with conviction (really believing what you are saying)
…putting people in the mood to listen/spend $
…disguising how easy it is to do $omething (break task down into parts)
…different from speaking as a news reporter because…
…uses "If…then…" statements to show how your actions (sending $) will change something (their feelings, appearance, an animal's life)
Example: "**If** you don't send in the $ right now **then** hundreds of birds will disappear forever!"

Structure of an infomercial

- Break the word down: "Info-"… information / to inform
  "-mercial"… commercial / commerce
- To inform, to request, to persuade
- Discuss with students how an infomercial is different from a commercial (it is much longer, often has a host leading a presentation, flashes the phone number and payment details on the screen…)

Discuss and view examples for the two main types of infomercials: those that sell a product and those that ask for money to support a cause

Teachers could generate a chart with students to get a clearer picture of the two types of infomercials. The chart that follows is just a start.

|	$elling a product	$upporting a cause
vocabulary	if they might not recognize a word, have a visual to support	
sentence structure	short sentences, sounds more like talking than formal writing	
rate of speech	fast	slow
tone	expert, pushy, excited	thoughtful, pleading
repetition	recap phone number and package details often	
hook	improved appearance, improved self-confidence	guilt, sympathy

Basic Structure of an Infomercial

- Beginning: often begin with questions and promises
- Middle: often includes research stats, video proof
- End: usually has testimonials and payment details

Discuss the use of **_incentives_** to persuade people to view their spending as "worth it."

Discuss the use of **_testimonials_** to convince people with "real" people. This is based on the premise that we can trust an average person, but not the salesperson/host.

Discuss **_deceptive_** pricing schemes that make it SEEM easier to buy a product.
(ex. "In just 4 easy payments of $19.99 this incredible product can be yours!")

Examples
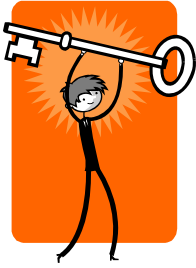
- For an excellent website that outlines the written structure of an infomercial, click here http://www.successful-sites.com/articles/copywriting-claiborne-infomercial.php

- For a website that has a transcript (annotated with an expert's critique) of an infomercial, click here http://www.infomercialwatch.org/tran/trudeau.shtml

There are many examples available, obviously on TV. There are also some examples on the Internet. However, not all examples are appropriate for students – so screen them beforehand.

- The first generation infomercials for products such as the Veg-o-matic and Chop-o-matic, plus a Saturday Night Live parody for the Bass-o-matic. (Please note: Real Media Player is required to view these video

- Typical infomercial for beauty products (bareMinerals) – Select the menu item "How-To". These videos give a few examples of the infomercial structure.

- Two infomercials on FingerPrint America – a child identification kit. Good for some infomercial techniques.

- An Infomercial Spoof – good example of the characters that students can use and the ridiculous nature of infomercials.

NOTE: It may be necessary to stress that this activity is a parody of infomercials. Students are using the format of an infomercial to present legitimate information that supports the curriculum. They may not understand the idea of using parodies to promote positive messages, so use some examples of ad parodies from AdBusters (print ads and TV commercials) to show how they took the format of commercials to spread their messages of media awareness.
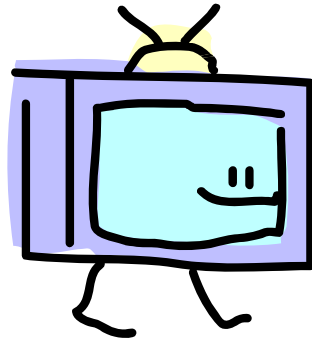
Create an Infomercial

Using your notes from class discussions of persuasive speech and the structure of an infomercial, **create an infomercial that is AT LEAST 2 minutes in length.**

Your infomercial may either sell a product **OR** ask people to send in money for a particular cause. Your product or cause may be **either real OR fictitious (made up.)**

Choose one of the three formats to create and share your infomercials:
> 1-live in front of class using a computer
> 2-an audio file
> 3-a video

Papers to be handed in with your presentation:
> ➢ A **WRITTEN SCRIPT** of what is said in the infomercial
> ➢ All **ROUGH COPIES** and planning notes you made
> ➢ Completed checklist
> ➢ A **list of websites, books, magazines, experts (people)** you went to for research.

NOTE If you ask a friend to be a part of your presentation, YOU must write the words they say. They are only actors in your presentation.
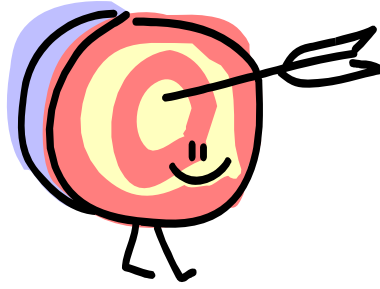
STUDENT CHECKLIST

Use the following checklist to be sure that your infomercial is complete. This sheet must be handed in with your presentation.

[] The product that I will sell is _____.
                            or
[] A cause I will promote is _____ .

[] My audience is _____.

[] My "hook" is _____.

[] The incentives (bonus/"thank you" items) I will offer are _____.

[] One of my sentences that show my persuasive speech style is

_____

_____.

[] I open with these questions / promises:

_____.

[] Circle what you've used to prove your point: statistics (numbers), video, photos, other _____

[] My "sneaky" pricing scheme is _____.

[] The phone number that I repeat clearly **and** often is _____.

[] I have included testimonials from the following people _____.

[] I have written my script as a character would speak in my role

[] I have explained any important words or ideas that my audience might not

understand using… (circle one) words, photos, video clips, drawings

Assessment choices:

- -

INFOMERCIAL MARKING SLIP
Student Name: _____
Product or cause: _____

____ Spoke slowly and clearly
understanding)
____ Style of writing appropriate for purpose
____ Style of speaking appropriate for purpose
____ Script copies (good and rough!)
____ Checklist filled out and handed in
____ Professional and mature attitude while performing
____ Persuaded audience to send in money
____ **Total**

5=superior (professionally done!)
4=competent (a good

3=acceptable (some understanding)
2=borderline (a little understanding)
1=poor (did not understand)

/35

- -

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**/35**

RUBRIC FOR INFOMERCIAL

(use cells to checkmark or include a comment)

|	1 POOR Did not understand	2 BORDERLINE A little understanding	3 ACCEPTABLE Some understanding	4 COMPETENT A good understanding	5 SUPERIOR Professionally done!
Used a **writing voice** appropriate for chosen audience					
Used a **speaking tone** appropriate for chosen audience					
Used **persuasive** writing and speaking techniques					
Made eye contact and spoke clearly					
Handed in rough notes, good copy and completed checklist					
Followed the **structure of an infomercial**					

Part 3 – Technology

Equipment Requirements:
(depending on your project you may some of the following)
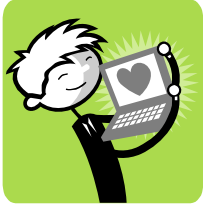
- Digital video camera(s)
- IEEE Firewire cord or USB
- Computer(s) with video editing capacity – connection for importing video (IEEE preferred) and software (Pinnacle, iMovie, Windows Movie Maker, Premier Elements). Should also have audio recording/editing software (Garageband, Audacity, Sound Studio). Also, presentation software (PowerPoint, Keynote).
- Microphone (although, the built-in mic will work if you're stuck)
- LCD Projector
- External audio speakers

Activities:
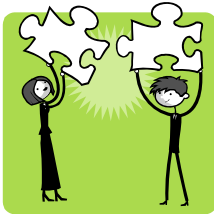
There are a number of different formats that an infomercial can take place in – which means that there are a number of different technologies that you can integrate. The idea of presenting with the goal to persuade means that you want to appeal to your audience in as many ways as possible. Multimedia applications and hardware allow information to appeal to all of your audience's senses and will give a message more emphasis.

For this activity, we will outline three possible scenarios using technology to deliver the infomercial. Each provides various levels of experience and will appeal to a broad range of technical skills. The following outline will provide the necessary steps and resources to use technical tools.

1. **Video – Students can create a video and present it to the audience in the same packaged multimedia message that television infomercials actually follow. Students will plan their infomercial in a storyboard, record the footage, and edit the footage to output it as a video.**

   - Students need to plan their video. They have gone through the elements and language of an infomercial in Part 2, now they need to put those parts in a visual presentation with audio. This is the point that you want students to go through the elements of capturing video.

     ➔ Go to Atomic Learning for free videos on shooting video, techniques, and storyboarding. Also includes free storyboard creation software. There is also a

handout on the storyboarding process with links to additional resources.

- Following their plan in the storyboard, the students can use a digital video camera to record their footage. It is important that they have a plan so that time is not wasted – especially if the group is sharing equipment with other groups. Again, make sure that the students shoot at different angles and perspectives. Also, make sure that they are familiar with the operation of the camera and the elements necessary to take good footage.

  ➔ Adobe has a good section for students on digital video (and pictures as well). In addition, here is a free online course in using a digital video camera and its functions.

- Once they have the footage, then students can edit the footage on the computer. This is where the storyboard is made a reality by taking raw footage and following the storyboard outline to make a finished product.

  ➔ Depending on your software, here are some good tutorials on common video editing applications. Pinnacle Studio, Pinnacle Studio Part II, iMovie, iMovie Part II, Windows MovieMaker.

2. Audio – Students can also work in another medium to spread their message. Digital audio recording has grown in popularity and students can create full audio productions with little experience or time. In this case, students can create their infomercial as an audio presentation – much like a radio broadcast.

- Rather than create a storyboard, the students need to create a script to follow. They need to consider the different characters involved and whether they want a narrator. They need to consider whether they want music and sound effects to go with their production. They may also want to create a "jingle" to go with their product.

➔ Think about the recording environment. Here are some tips in setting up to record audio. Try this site from BBC on recording audio, which focuses on Shakespeare, but has practical tips.

- Record the presentation using a digital recording application. This allows you to record the different segments and then edit your work, also adding any music or sound effects.

➔ Again, it depends on your operating system, but there are a number of good audio recording applications. For Macs, try Garageband or Sound Studio (both come free with OSX). You can also try Audacity (free for PC or Mac).

- Once you have your recording complete, there are a number of different ways to output the file. If you want to play the file from the computer, just leave the file on the computer. If you want the file to play on a regular CD player, then export or save it as a WAV file.

➔ Here is a [good overview of the use of audio and the different formats](#).

3. Live Presentation – Rather than prerecord the infomercial, they may wish to perform in front of a live studio audience. In terms of technology, there are many ways to support and animate a presentation. The most likely support in the classroom will be the use of visuals through programs such as PowerPoint, Hyperstudio or iWork's Keynote.

- The students still need to create an outline or script for their presentation. They should have an idea of how they are going to introduce their topic, persuade the audience, and then conclude the presentation. Using software, such as PowerPoint, allows students to highlight their main points, present testimonials, show data visually, and control the pace of the presentation. Students should write out a brief outline before they actually create a multimedia presentation.

    ➔ Try using [Inspiration](#) to map out the presentation. There are also some good handouts that students would find useful in [planning a multimedia presentation and interactive report](#).

- The students can start working on their presentation. Remind them that technology is only there to support the presentation. The PowerPoint (or other application) should show the main points or other elements that the hosts cannot provide. They will NOT be reading the presentation off the screen.

    This is also a good opportunity to incorporate multimedia elements such as video, still photos, graphics, charts, sound bytes, etc. Students should consider ways to support their main points using these tools and as a way to break-up the oral presentation.

    ➔ The most common application in schools is PowerPoint. Here is a good [overview of the program](#), some [good templates](#) they may use. Also, you may want to use [Hyperstudio](#) or Apple's [Keynote](#) application.

General Considerations – All of these presentations will require some setup. Teachers will need to use audio and video equipment to present the final products. Try these tips and tutorials if you need some guidance.
The best idea when dealing with hardware is to enter the brand name and model number in a search engine. Most manuals and support services are online.

- [Setting up an LCD Projector](#)
- [Presenting from a Computer](#)

Examples of correlations to ICT and curriculum outcomes:

English Language Arts (By the end of Grade 9)

GCO 2: Students will be able to communicate information and ideas effectively and clearly, and to respond personally and critically.
 Including 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4

GCO 3: Students will be able to interact with sensitivity and respect, considering the situation, audience, and purpose.
Including 3.1, 3.2, 3.3

GCO 4: Students will be expected to select, read, and view with understanding a range of literature, information, media, and visual texts.

GCO 5: Students will be expected to interpret, select, and combine information using a variety of strategies, resources, and technologies.
Including 5.1

ICT Integration

Basic Operations and Concepts

BOC 9.1- operate a wide variety of school media, computer, and other educationally appropriate equipment for learning, communication, and the representation of their learning, independently and safely with teacher.
BOC 9.4 – manage their electronic files and correspondence efficiently.
BOC 9.5 – form a range of resource options, knowledgeably select, manage, and use technological resources to solve curriculum problems and enhance their learning, with teacher guidance
9.6- understand and use a wide range of terminology they use for learning.

Social, Ethical, and Human Issues:

SEHI 9.1- demonstrate understanding of the nature of technology and its impacts on different societies and environments; using technology, in logical and global contexts, with due regard for the legal and human.
SEHI 9.2- identify and demonstrate the values and techniques of mass media, pop culture and electronics information.
SEHI 9.5- identify technology-related career opportunities
SEHI 9.6- follow the Internet Access and Use Policy

Productivity:

PTS 9.1- use software to brainstorm
PTS 9.2- explore curriculum concepts under study using specialized software.
PTS 9.3- explore curriculum through a wide range of print and electronic forms.
PTS 9.4- create, manipulate sound images and video using digital equipment and computer based editing.
PTS 9.5- develop multimedia presentations

Communications:

CT 9.1- use language in a range of aural, print, media and electronic forms to explore
CT 9.2- design and build an internet website
CT 9.3- critically evaluate style.

Research, Problem Solving, and Decision Making
RPSD 9.1- select appropriate measuring and recording devices and/or software to collect data.
RPSD 9.3- write and represent their research using with fluency
RPSD 9.4- assess the quality, comprehensiveness, biases, and perspectives of print and media
RPSD 9.5- critically evaluate how style, form, source and medium influence validity
RPSD 9.6- select and refine a research topic
RPSD 9.9- accurately and independently cite information resources

Social Studies

Culture
2.1 examine and develop a general concept of culture
2.5- demonstrate an understanding of the issues and events surrounding cross-cultural understanding locally, regionally and globally.
2.7 demonstrate an understanding of the local and global forces that cause cultures to constantly change

Economics

3.1 examine and explain the role that basic economic principles play in daily life.
3.3 evaluate the importance of economics in entrepreneurship.

Technology

4.4   analyze how technology affects transportation and communications in the
        Atlantic region
4.7   evaluate the effects of technology on recreation, home life, and community life

Health Education/PDR

 Values and Practices for Healthy Living

GCO C: Students will demonstrate knowledge of factors that contribute to healthy living values and practices.
C3.4   demonstrate an awareness of changing attitudes toward adulthood and ageing

GCO D: Students will demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to live happily and productively as an individual, within a family, and within the community.

D1.2   identify and practice strategies for living with change and uncertainty
D3.1   demonstrate respect for the feelings and beliefs of others
D5.1   identify social, economic, and technological trends that affect life/work building
D5.3   demonstrate an understanding of the ongoing role of decision making in life/work building

Visual Arts

Creating, Making, and Presenting

GCO 1: Students will be expected to explore, challenge, develop, and express ideas, using the skills, language, techniques, and processes of the arts.

1.1   manipulate and organize design elements and principles to achieve planned compositions
1.2   assess and utilize the properties of various art media and their ability to convey messages and meaning
1.3   respond verbally and visually to the sue of art elements in personal works and the work of others

GCO 2: Students will be expected to create and/or present, collaboratively and independently, expressive products in the arts for a range of audiences and purposes
2.5   work interactively, co-operatively, and collaboratively

GCO 3: Students will be expected to demonstrate critical awareness of and value the role of the arts in creating and reflecting culture**.**

3.1   examine the role and the influence of visual images in their daily lives, including mass media and popular culture
3.4   recognize and describe the role of the visual arts in challenging, sustaining, and reflecting society's beliefs and traditions

GCO 5: Students will be expected to examine the relationship among the arts, societies, and environments.
5.3   demonstrate an understanding of how individual and societal values affect our response to visual art