

"He Shoots, He Scores": Alcohol Advertising and Sports

Level(s): Grades 4 to 6

Overview

In this lesson, students explore the ways in which companies use sporting events and athletes to sell products and influence consumers – especially young people. The lesson begins, on Day One, with an "I love sports" show and tell that provides students the opportunity to discuss the sports they love to play and watch, and the values and attributes that make sports an important part of a person's development. After the show and tell, students integrate their feelings about sports into a classroom display of words, images and artifacts. On Day Two, students discuss words and images relating to sports and compare them with the ways in which advertisers – particularly alcohol advertisers – use these associations to sell products. Students also examine two case studies: beer advertising at the 2002 Winter Olympics and a controversial series of Molson commercials featuring the popular sports commentator Don Cherry. As an extension activity, students conduct a survey of ads that appear during a televised sporting event.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate an awareness of:

- the positive attributes associated with sports and athletes
- the ways in which advertisers use sporting events to influence consumer habits and attitudes
- how advertisers create positive associations with a brand by linking it to sports
- how alcohol companies use sponsorship of sporting events and athletes to promote products
- their own attitudes towards alcohol advertising during sporting events
- the negative consequences of drinking
- the regulations that govern alcohol advertising
- the issues surrounding the targeting of youth by alcohol companies

Preparation and Materials

- Read the teacher backgrounder [Alcohol Advertising and Sports](#)
- Have construction paper and art supplies on hand for "sports words"
- Prior to class, tell students you will be having an "I love sports" show and tell. Ask them to bring in a magazine picture, souvenir, piece of clothing or piece of equipment that is associated with their favourite sport, team or athlete.
- Photocopy the overheads [Racing](#) and [Don Cherry and Molson's Bubba o' Beer](#)
- Photocopy and distribute the [Letter to Parents](#) and [Sports and Advertising TV Survey](#) for Day Two's homework assignment

Procedure

Day One

Class Discussion

Ask students:

- How many of you like sports?
- What sports do you play?
- What sports do you watch?
- How often do you watch sports?

Sports Show and Tell

As students share their sports items, have them talk about what they like about the athlete or sport they have chosen. Have recorders write down some of the words and phrases kids use to describe their favourite athletes or teams.

Once students have finished, hand out construction paper and markers and have students make signs based on the "sports words" that were provided. (Two examples might be "sports are fun" or "go team go!".) On a classroom bulletin board, combine these signs with the sports pictures and memorabilia students have brought to class to create a display under the title: "Kids Need Sports."

Day Two

Class Discussion

Look at the sports words and pictures on the board. Ask students:

- Would you agree sports help kids to develop positive values?
- What are some of the values we learn through sports?
- Like kids, advertisers also like sports. Can you think why?
- Think about the sports you watch on TV. What kinds of products do you see advertised?
- What about companies that sponsor sporting events and teams – is this a kind of advertising?
- Sponsoring is a type of advertising that's more sneaky than a regular commercial. Can you think of some of the ways companies advertise during sporting events? (*Answers may include: signage at games, logos on uniforms, brands on racing cars, stadium names, analysis of games in sponsored, pre- and post-game shows, and so on.*)
- Are the products advertised mainly for kids or mainly for adults?
- Why might an advertiser want kids and teens to see ads for adult-oriented products such as a car or electronic equipment? (*The youth market is worth billions of dollars to advertisers. Every year, North American kids between the ages of 9 and 14 spend a total of \$1.7 billion of their own money and*

influence more than 10 times that amount in family spending – advertisers call this the "nag factor.")

- What about ads for adult products that are harmful to kids, such as alcohol? Have you ever seen such ads when you're watching sports on TV?
- What kind of alcoholic beverage do you see advertised most often? *(In both Canada and the U.S., just four brands of beer account for 58 per cent of all alcohol advertised during sporting events. During an average hour of sports programming, children see 1.5 ads for alcohol.)*
- Why would alcohol advertisers want to link their products with sporting events? *(Have kids review all the positive words they associate with sports. Alcohol marketers hope that by pairing their products with winning athletes and teams, consumers will make similar associations with their products. Kids see more ads for alcoholic beverages during televised sporting events than any other kind of programming.)*
- Do you think alcohol companies intentionally target kids and teens when they use sports to promote their products? *(No matter what they say, the reality is that alcohol companies need new drinkers to replace adult drinkers who die. At the very least, companies hope continued exposure to their brand will foster loyalty at an early age, so when young people do start drinking, they'll choose their products. Also, the industry needs problem drinkers and underage drinkers, as they consume a significant proportion of the total amount of alcohol consumed.)*
- Do you think kids and teens understand they are being marketed to when companies use sports to promote their products?
- Why might child development experts be concerned about alcohol advertising during sporting events? *(Research has found that young kids' exposure to alcohol advertising is related to higher drinking expectancies, as well as greater consumption. Children are most likely to model behaviour they perceive to be desirable, realistic and rewarding; pairing drinking with positive aspects of sports reinforces these perceptions. Children who are exposed to sponsored sporting events are likely to associate brands and logos with professional athletes. Research has concluded that youngsters develop awareness of alcohol at an early age in part because of exposure to alcohol advertisements and sponsorships.)*

Showing commercials during sporting events is one issue. What about alcohol ads featuring sports celebrities? (Put the [Racing](#) overhead onto the projector.)

Here are two magazine ads that feature sports celebrities.

- What sports attributes do these beer companies want consumers to relate to their beers?
- What words and images reinforce these messages?

- Both these ads are presented as tributes to athletes. What dominates the ad – the athlete or branding for the beer?
- Would either of these ads appeal to young people? What elements would appeal to youth?

Case Study #1

Now we're going to look at a television ad that featured a popular sports celebrity who is not an athlete – "Rock 'em, Sock 'em" coach Don Cherry. (Place [Don Cherry](#) overhead onto the projector, covering the CRTC Code.)

Ask students:

- How many of you know who Don Cherry is?
- How many of you have watched Don Cherry on TV?
- Have any of you seen these ads? (If yes, ask if they can recite the "Beer, Beer, Beer" jingle. Most who have seen the ads will be able to do this.)

In 2003, sports celebrity Don Cherry appeared in a series of commercials for Molson's mini-kegs called "Bubbas." These mini-kegs featured his pet dog Grapes and were "dressed" in Cherry's flamboyant suits – complete with his trademark "thumbs up."

As a well-known Hockey Night in Canada commentator, owner of a Junior "A" hockey team, and producer and host of the popular "Rock 'em, Sock 'em" hockey videos, Don Cherry is a well-known Canadian sports figure.

These ads were challenged by a Toronto public school trustee, who claimed they violated the CRTC's codes against using children's role models to advertise alcoholic beverages. (The CRTC is the regulatory agency that governs radio and television content in Canada.)

Molson's response was that these ads were intended for adults, that Don Cherry was a role model for adults, and that kids between the ages of 12 and 17 made up less than 5 per cent of their viewing audience (which, at close to four million viewers, translates into approximately 200,000 kids.)

Initially, Advertising Standards Canada approved the ads, but later decided that this ad did contravene the CRTC Code.

Let's take a look at what the Code has to say. (Review the Code at the bottom of the handout.) Let's apply clause (d) to the Don Cherry ads.

- Is Don Cherry a person who is well known to minors?
- Has he achieved success as a sports celebrity?
- Is he a person who might appeal to or influence minors?

- If you were a regulator responsible for alcohol advertising, would you permit this advertising campaign?

When it comes to sporting events, alcohol companies argue that sports are considered adult programming and that they have every right to advertise to adults. However, sports programs are also tremendously popular with kids.

- Should adult products that are harmful to kids be permitted to be advertised on TV during sporting events?
- Should adult products that are harmful to kids be permitted to be advertised on TV at all? (Tobacco advertising is not permitted on TV.)
- Are there some sports that kids are more likely to watch than adults? (For example, sports such as WWE wrestling and extreme sports – both sponsored by Molson Breweries in Canada – have great appeal to adolescents and teens.)
- Should alcohol companies be permitted to sponsor events such as these?

Journal Entry

In your journal, respond to the statement: "Athletes and sports celebrities have a responsibility to their fans to be good role models." Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Case Study #2

In 2002 a group of health organizations and advocacy groups tried to stop the U.S. beer company Anheuser-Busch (makers of Budweiser beer) from sponsoring the Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City. (Anheuser-Busch paid \$50 million for these rights.)

As part of their campaign, the Utah Alcohol Policy Coalition forwarded a resolution to the Olympic Organizing Committee. In their resolution they pointed out that:

- Alcohol is the most widely abused drug used by youth
- Alcohol leads to over 85,000 deaths each year in the U.S. (7,000 in Canada)
- Alcohol use in youth is directly related to poor school performance, rape, drowning, fights, assaults and vandalism
- The glamorization of alcohol through advertising sends mixed messages to young people
- The spirit of the Olympics is a family-oriented activity that promotes family values and athletic excellence
- The young athletes who compete in the Olympics provide role models for kids and teens

The Coalition suggested that:

1. No beer tents or low-cost alcoholic beverages be provided at the games
2. Beer advertising at the games be confined to a well-defined commercial area
3. Anheuser-Busch be limited to advertising that does not appeal to youth or young people

4. The Salt Lake Organizing Committee and the U.S. Olympic Committee acknowledge that alcoholic beverages have no place in the Olympic experience, a sporting event that promotes the highest ideals and the ultimate of athletic achievement to youth throughout the world.

Despite the efforts of this group, Olympic organizers permitted alcoholic beverages to be promoted and sold during the games. (One result of this was a riot involving 6,000 to 8,000 revellers who had been partying in the Olympic "Bud World" facilities.)

Writing Assignment

Pretend you are a member of this coalition. Think about everything we've discussed in this unit about sports and kids and advertising, and write a letter to the Olympic Committee stating why you think alcohol advertising should not be permitted at the Olympic games.

Extension Activity

Advertising Survey

Research indicates that parents can play a significant role in the impact of alcohol advertising on children. When parents co-view ads and programs with children, without commenting on content, this can actually reinforce the media messages presented. On the other hand, parents who actively watch and discuss sports programming with kids help them develop more balanced perspectives on the relationship between alcohol and sports. This activity is intended to act as a catalyst to promote discussion and active co-viewing.

Over the next week, watch a sporting event on TV. While you're watching, keep track of:

1. The products that are advertised during commercials
2. The products that are advertised through "sneaky ads" (Remind students to look at titles, for instance, "Molson's Hockey Night in Canada," logos on uniforms, sponsored pre- or post-game shows, signage, and so on.)
3. The number of commercials for alcohol that appear

For this assignment, it's recommended that an older member of your family watch with you. (Distribute the [Letter to Parents](#) and [Sports and Advertising TV Survey](#).) See if you can spot more sneaky ads than they do!

Once the assignment has been completed, take up and discuss answers with students.