

Reading Practice

Read this selection. Then answer the questions that follow.

from **Advertising on the Brain: How to Outsmart the Power of Advertising**

by Margie Markarian

My notes about
what I am reading

- 1 When Aidan T., 13, saw the iPod touch commercial promising “good, good times around the bend,” he knew it was the iPod for him. The ad’s 30 seconds of high-energy music, eye-popping graphics, and in-your-face camera angles were all he needed to see.
- 2 “It looked awesome and had all these really cool applications,” says Aidan, an eighth grader who lives in Franklin, Mass. A few months later, Aidan plunked down money he had been saving to become the first of his friends to own one of the slick gadgets. He’s now the go-to guy for questions about the latest apps, games, and other downloads.
- 3 Aidan’s positive reaction to the commercial is what iPod maker Apple and other companies have in mind when they create advertising. Most ads aren’t designed for the part of your brain that controls reasoning, called the *prefrontal cortex*. Instead, they target the part of the brain that controls your emotions. The hub of that section is called the *amygdala*. Speaking to your emotions is a powerful way to grab your attention, make a lasting impression, and get you to spend money at the mall.
- 4 “Advertisers know how our brains are wired,” explains Erin Walsh, coordinator of the MediaWise programs at the National Institute on Media and the Family. “They know the pathway to the emotional brain is faster than the pathway to your logical-thinking brain.” That’s why many ads don’t tell you practical details about how a product is made or what it will cost at the store.
- 5 Once your emotions are aroused, it’s easy to link them to a specific product. Advertisements often make that

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connection for you by dangling tempting promises. “‘You’ll be the coolest kid in school if you use a certain hair gel’ or ‘you’ll be hosting fun parties with lots of friends if you own a particular video game’” are two examples, says Latoya Peterson. She is a spokesperson for the Center for a New American Dream, an organization that helps people be responsible consumers.

Advertising Overload

- 6 Advertising is everywhere. On average, American kids see about 40,000 TV commercials a year. When you start counting print ads, radio commercials, billboards, signs around town, Internet ads, and previews at the movies, that number soars much higher. You may not even be aware of all the different types of advertising you see throughout the day.
- 7 “Any product or box with a name on it is a form of advertising,” says Douglas Gentile. He is a professor who runs the Media Research Lab at Iowa State University. “If you’re wearing a shirt with a logo, it’s advertising. So is a can of Coke and the box of cereal on your breakfast table in the morning.”
- 8 When you see your favorite character on TV, in a movie, or in a video game using a specific brand-name product, it’s most likely because a company paid for it to be there. That is called product placement, and it’s one of the fastest-growing forms of advertising. The Transformers movies are filled with product placements for General Motors cars. In *Gossip Girl*, Blair and Serena text and chat using the trendiest Verizon phones.
- 9 Brand names are even showing up in songs and popular book series. When Sharpay sings about her pink Prada tote and Tiffany hair band in *High School Musical 2* she’s hyping products. There’s also subtle product promotion happening when characters in the Clique books strut around in Ralph Lauren skinny jeans or teen spy Alex Rider whips out a specially equipped Game Boy to escape danger in *Stormbreaker*, by Anthony Horowitz.

Ways to Be Smart About Advertising

- 10 Advertising is a part of life. It helps pay for the TV shows you watch, the Web sites you surf, the social networks you use, and the magazines you read. Becoming media smart is the best way to make sure you’re not pressured into buying things you don’t really need or want. These tips will help you become a smarter consumer:

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11 **Realize that advertising is always trying to sell you something.** As entertaining as some ads can be, remember that ads are a form of persuasive speech. “Don’t treat them like a friend,” advises Gentile. “Sit there with your arms crossed, and look at them skeptically. That will slow down their effect somewhat.”

12 **Watch commercials more carefully.** Walsh suggests making a game of it by watching commercials with family or friends. “After the first 20 seconds, stop [the commercial] and list all the emotional tricks you see and hear,” she says. Typical tricks include hip-looking kids in hot fashions, great music, fun camera angles, unusual lighting techniques, celebrities, and comical situations. “You might not even be able to figure out what the commercial is for because product names often don’t get mentioned until the very end,” Walsh says.

13 **Analyze marketing messages in all forms of advertising.** To do this, says Cynthia Scheibe, a developmental psychologist and media literacy expert with Project Look Sharp at Ithaca College in New York, ask yourself some critical-thinking questions. Those include:

- Who paid for the commercial or print ad? Why do they want to get your attention?
- Who is the target audience?
- What kinds of lifestyles or values are being represented? Are they glamorized? If so, in what ways?
- Is this ad sending a healthy or an unhealthy message? How so?
- What is the literal, or exact, meaning of the message’s words and images?
- What are the hidden or suggested messages behind the ad’s words and images?

14 The goal of being media smart isn’t to bash advertising. “The goal is to teach people to think critically about the ads they see,” Scheibe says. “Sometimes advertising is very informative, and there are some good products out there that you wouldn’t know about without it.”

Teen Spending Power

If you're wondering why marketers are so eager to get your attention, follow the money trail. Twenty-six million people ages 12 to 17 control \$80 billion of their own spending money. That same group also influences about \$110 billion of family spending. Among all teens, the biggest categories of spending are clothes and entertainment. When it comes to girls versus boys, here's how the spending breaks down.

Top Five Things Teenagers Spend Money On	
GIRLS	BOYS
1. Clothing 2. Jewelry and accessories 3. Makeup 4. Music 5. Movies	1. Video games 2. Electronics 3. Clothing 4. Music 5. Movies

Use the excerpt from “Advertising on the Brain” (pp. 82–85) to answer questions 1–5.

- 1 In paragraphs 3 and 4, what type of evidence does the author provide to support the claim that advertisements are designed to appeal to people’s emotions?
- A Statistics
 - B Anecdotes and examples
 - C Facts and expert views
 - D Logical reasons
- 2 Which of the following best states the controlling idea of the section titled “Advertising Overload”?
- F Most advertising is “in-your-face” because advertisers want to have a big impact on consumers.
 - G Advertising is found in popular movies that appeal to young people.
 - H Teenagers are surrounded by advertising every day, although some of it is almost too subtle to notice.
 - J Advertisers who want to reach teenagers shouldn’t waste their money on old-fashioned TV advertisements.
- 3 Which of the following is a valid conclusion to draw from the chart on page 85?
- A Boys spend more money on clothing than girls do.
 - B Teenagers spend \$80 billion dollars on clothing and video games each year.
 - C Girls and boys spend equal amounts of money on electronics.
 - D Boys and girls both spend much of their money on music and movies.
- 4 Which of the following best summarizes the section titled “Ways to Be Smart About Advertising”?
- F It’s not possible to avoid advertising, and sometimes ads provide good information. However, you should understand the purpose of advertising and carefully analyze the ads you see.
 - G In this section, the author provides some excellent tips for analyzing advertisements. Teenagers who apply these tips will be well on their way to becoming smarter consumers.
 - H Consumers need to know that advertising is not their friend. They should analyze each ad with a critical eye because most ads have an unhealthy message hidden behind the glamour.
 - J Analyzing TV commercials with your friends and family can be more fun than watching the actual television shows. Just be careful you are not persuaded to buy anything.
- 5 The author’s overall purpose in this article is to —
- A summarize advertising techniques that have the most effect on teens
 - B teach teenagers to become more critical consumers of advertising
 - C present an insider’s view on how advertising works
 - D analyze common messages that advertising sends to consumers

Name _____ Date _____

Answer the following question in the space provided.

- 6** In “Advertising on the Brain,” is the author critical of advertising, positive about advertising, or neutral? Explain your answer and support it with evidence from the selection.

