

Mission Critical Thinking

Critical thinking skills are increasingly important as the information age expands at warp speed. One of the most effective ways to build and enhance critical thinking skills is to use primary sources in student-centered activities and projects. The key, however, is to use primary sources in ways that highlight the targeted content in instructionally sound ways.

Barat Education Foundation, in collaboration with the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Program, provides free teacher professional development to increase best practice use of digital primary sources to deepen student content understanding and improve media literacy. This program combines in-person workshops and online learning with ready-to-implement class projects. In-person workshops are offered year-round to Illinois educators at their own schools in Northern Cook, Lake, Woodstock, Belvidere, Prairie Hill, and Rockford counties, while web-based materials are freely available to educators across Illinois and the country.

The no-cost *Learning @ the Source* workshop series helps educators learn how to navigate the Library of Congress (LOC) website and use the millions of photographs, prints, and other digital resources in instructionally sound activities and projects that promote critical thinking. One satisfied teacher said, “I believe that all teachers should have access to this class. I have learned so much that it is so beneficial to teaching.”

To date, nearly 2,000 educators have benefitted from the Barat in-person and web-based training. The four online skill modules reinforce workshop learning and skills. Seven project preparation modules help educators prepare to implement primary-source learning in their classrooms. One of these projects—*Print Advertising Across the Centuries*—was created from LOC primary sources in conjunction with ICSS board member and master teacher Marla Horwitz (Carl Sandburg Junior High, Rolling Meadows) and library media director Katie Kirsch (Lake Bluff Middle School). The lesson plan for this engaging and thought-provoking project is summarized below.

Print Advertising Across the Centuries

Overview

Advertisements showcase products and the latest technology while reflecting life and society as we know it, or wish it to be. This project encourages students in 5th through 12th grades to use their natural curiosity about the similarities between the past, present, and future to analyze, compare, and contrast historical, contemporary, and hypothetical print advertisements of the future.

Learning Goals

To complete this project, students will . . .

- learn about advertising persuasion techniques.
- analyze a historical print advertisement from around the turn of the 20th century and a contemporary advertisement from the early 21st century for the same product or a similar one.
- compare and contrast historical and contemporary advertisements.
- create an advertisement for a product, similar to the product promoted in the historical advertisement, that will be sold in the early 22nd century.
- compare and contrast the contemporary advertisement with the hypothetical advertisement of the future.
- discuss how advertisements change over time and the reasons that might account for the changes.

Illinois Learning Standards

This project meets the following Illinois learning standards and goals for 6th through 8th grades in Language Arts, Social Science, and Fine Arts.

- **5A** Locate, organize, and use information from various sources to answer questions, solve problems, and communicate ideas.
- **5B** Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources.
- **5C** Apply acquired information, concepts, and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.
- **16A** Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation.
- **16D** Understand United States social history.
- **25B** Understand the similarities, distinctions, and connections in and among the arts.
- **27A** Analyze how the arts function in history, society, and everyday life.

Sessions

Session 1

- The class reviews and discusses advertising persuasion techniques.
- Students study the advertisements from the past, then answer questions about them by filling in a worksheet.

Session 2

- Students look through magazines, newspapers, or printed ephemera to find contemporary print advertisements promoting the same or similar products as showcased in their assigned historical advertisements.
- Students study the advertisements from the present and then answer questions about them by filling in a worksheet.
- Students compare and contrast the advertisements from the past and the present using a Venn diagram.
- The class discusses the following: how lifestyles, goods, and services have changed over time; why advancements in technology lead to improvements in some consumer goods while others remain relatively unchanged; and how advancements in media capabilities influence advertising.
- For homework, students design advertisements for products, similar to the products promoted in the historical and contemporary advertisements, that will be sold in the early 22nd century. Students should identify their target audience(s), incorporate one or more advertising techniques that would appeal to the audience(s), and, when appropriate, illustrate improvements that have been included to update the advertised products.

Session 3

- Students study future advertisements created by their peers and then answer questions about them by filling in a worksheet.
- Students compare and contrast contemporary and future using a Venn diagram.
- The class discusses the following: how lifestyles, goods, and services might change over time; why advancements in technology might lead to improvements in some consumer goods while others will likely remain relatively unchanged; and how advancements in media capabilities might influence advertising in the future.

All teacher and student materials for this project are free and available online at Americanmemory.org/TR_Print_Advertising/index.htm. More projects and other free resources can be accessed at Americanmemory.org/teacher.htm.

Middle school and high school students are also invited to have fun while learning about the Illinois government and history with LinkOn Illinois, a web-based interactive educational game. To play, go to www.linkonil.com. When prompted, enter *linkonil* as the username and *ssconf07* as the password.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please e-mail us at info@americanmemory.org or call us at (847) 574-2465.