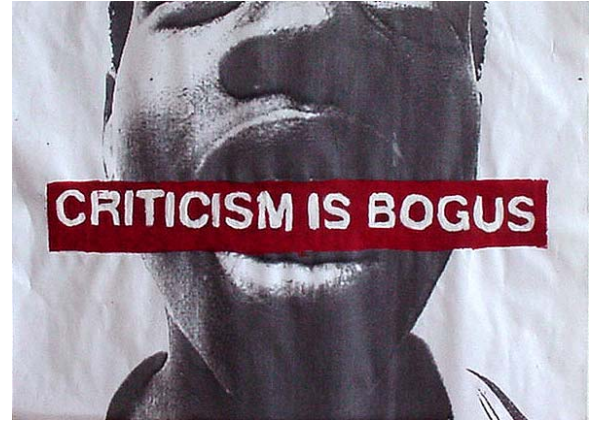




THE POWER OF ADVERTISING

This project was developed by Tracy Van Duinen, art teacher, at Austin Community Academy High School for the UIC Contemporary Community Curriculum Initiative 2000.



Students are constantly exposed to advertising messages designed to make them believe they can't live without a certain product. Even though the average teenager knows it is *advertising* and is probably stretching or distorting the truth, he or she still is effected by the charm and appealing presentation of advertising.

Contemporary artists, such as the Guerrilla Girls, Jenny Holtzer, and the collaborative artist team of Elizabeth Sisco, Louis Hock, and David Avalos use the style and sometimes the means of mass media to bring their messages to the people. These artists use bus, billboard, and poster graphics along with traditional museum and gallery exhibitions and installations to show their work. The messages come from social and political issues. These include everything from feminist issues to immigration and labor issues. This democratic, and often, controversial approach to artmaking is a nice fit for a majority of urban youth who rarely are given an opportunity to see contemporary "fine art," but who are very savvy about the arts of popular culture.

To begin this project, the students looked at the ways in which artist Barbara Kruger pairs text and image to examine how culture shapes our awareness and sense of reality and possibility. Using an inexpensive digital camera and a couple of computers, the art students created powerful statements about education, police brutality, Black on Black violence, teen pregnancy, fatherless homes, self esteem, and other issues which effect their lives.

Each student created a series of related pieces--looking for ways to most effectively capture attention and generate thought about the issue. Initially students tended to create text that literally described the image



or issue. After much discussion and observation of other students' works-in-progress, they gradually developed more complex approaches to combining text and image.

Objectives

- ◆ Create a classroom environment where students are able to investigate and question received truths and their own belief systems.
- ◆ Investigate “non-traditional” forms of art making using modern technology.
- ◆ Provide the student with the means to use art to investigate themes by creating multiple text/image versions based on one issue or idea.

Lesson Plan

QUESTION TRUTH

Create a worksheet that asks questions about issues related to your students' communities, race, social situations, and other relevant topics. The questions will have to be designed by each teacher in response to the context. Ask questions that encourage students to articulate what they believe to be the “Truth” about their situations.

My questionnaire for Austin High School asked the students what they believed about themselves or other people. I tried to use concrete questions that stimulate immediate ideas and discussion. Sample questions: Name one thing a family member told you that you know was a lie. Can men do more than women can? Are women smarter than men are? Do you believe everything you see on television or in textbooks? Why not?

DISCUSS ART

Discuss the works of artists who use popular media as a vehicle for their art. (See Artists chapter.)

Sample questions for this discussion include: What is this artist trying to sell? Is work considered art if it's on a bus or a billboard? Why would the artist choose to place the artwork on a bus rather than a museum or gallery?

CHOOSE AN ISSUE

Have students name an issue or message they feel needs to be “PROMOTED” within their community (or possibly globally). They can refer to the questionnaire or you can break them up into small collaborative learning groups and have each group come up with three ideas.



WRITE A SLOGAN

Once each student or group has chosen an issue, have each group create a slogan like “Just do it” or “Crack is Whack”. It is best to have the saying be no more than 4 or 5 words. This is really the most difficult part of this project. Most students will simply write down a statement of the issue and be satisfied with it as the slogan. You will need to challenge them. Tell them to reduce it to the least amount of words possible without losing its meaning. Have them rewrite it and exchange certain words with slang words they use everyday.

TAKE PICTURES

At this point you will need a digital camera and a computer with a printer. Most digital cameras will come with the software you’ll need to download pictures. The project at Austin High School was created with a \$200. digital camera and 5-year old Macs.

Show students the process of taking pictures, downloading images on computer, and printing the image out.

Discuss with students the expressive qualities of pose and cropping. It is best when working with photography and copy machines to have as much detail as possible. This is why close up shots are preferable. Limit your students to no more than two people in a pose and encourage zooming in even closer than they might feel comfortable with. You should produce teaching samples or find advertising images to show your students how feelings can be expressed using just your hands, eyes, or body language.

When images have been shot and downloaded, encourage students to make choices on-screen before printing and to consider whether each image could be made more dramatic or dynamic by further cropping.

Note: This process of image creation could also be done using traditional photography, found images, copying machine, or stencils if you do not have access to the technology or are not proficient with it. Be creative.

COMBINE IMAGES AND TEXT

The students can type their slogans on a computer and print them out or use stencils to create strips of lettering. (Having the text strips made up in various sizes through printing out or xeroxing helps students to consider various formal relationships of text and image.)

For this project, we did not explore various styles of lettering as we were basing the look of our artwork on the simple, bold style of Barbara Kruger. By limiting ourselves to simple, sans serif (without feet) type, we focused on how scale and placement effected the relationship of image and text. We aimed for strong, bold compositions.

Have the students compose the two elements in an advertising format of their choice. Do they imagine the final product to be a bus graphic, billboard or magazine ad?

You can use a digital camera to re-photograph the work to get a sense of how well it would stand out in a cluttered everyday environment. Doing this experiment early in the project will tend to encourage students to create simpler, bolder image and text combinations.

Using rubber cement to affix the text to the images allows for errors and excess glue can be rubbed away. This could be the final product or you can extend it using the following ideas.



IF YOU HAVE LOTS OF COMPUTERS

If you have enough computer stations, this project can be created solely on computer, but realize that if this is a beginning art class, you may find yourself bogged down in teaching a page design program such as Illustrator. It may be better art teaching to focus on the photography, writing, editing, and conceptual aspects of the project and leave the teaching of programs for another time.

Developing The Project Further

- 1.** Go to a Kinko's that has a large format copy machine and blow the small text/image pieces up to poster scale. This makes the advertising feeling more tangible.
- 2.** Scan the final piece back into the computer. Electronically place the image onto digital pictures from around the community. Have students write or discuss where a particular person's art could have the most meaning or impact if placed on a certain corner or billboard in their community.
- 3.** Distribute images in the community. Large format works might be displayed in store windows, the community library, or on telephone poles. Small versions might be printed in a community newspaper, an organization's newsletter, or a local church Sunday service pamphlet.
- 4.** As a class project have students try to sell their ideas to outdoor advertising companies or local organizations as a community service campaign.
- 5.** Contact a suburban school that is unlike your own and have them do the same project. Once completed, exchange works and display them in your schools. Redo the project in reaction to these new perspectives.