

Santa Sells Soda

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SUMMARY

In this activity, kids will look closely at an advertisement for Coca-Cola featuring Santa Claus and will learn how advertising can help a product become popular in a new way.

WHY

Children and adults are constantly bombarded with product advertisements that aim to tell consumers a story about their lives with or without a particular product. By looking closely at advertising history and one ad in particular, children will sharpen their observation skills and practice thinking critically about the advertising stories they encounter.

TIME

- 20 minutes

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in kindergarten to 4th grade.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **advertisement:** something (such as a short film or a picture with words) that is shown or presented to the public to help sell a product or to make an announcement
- **consumer:** a person who buys goods and services
- **jingle:** a short song that is easy to remember and that is used to help sell a product on television or radio
- **spokesperson:** a man or woman who speaks for or represents someone or something

GET READY

- Read *Lemonade in Winter: A Book About Two Kids Counting Money* by Emily Jenkins, illustrated by G. Brian Karas. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Reading Guide (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/money>)
- Consider reviewing the Step Back in Time sheets and the Challenge Words from the Reading Guide.

YOU NEED

- *Lemonade in Winter: A Book About Two Kids Counting Money* by Emily Jenkins, illustrated by G. Brian Karas
- Advertising History sheets (*attached*)

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- Picture (*attached*)
- Directions sheets (*attached*)
- “Where did Santa Come From?” sheet (*attached*)

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/money/>.



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Advertising History, page 1 of 1



In the early days of the United States, most advertisements were simple announcements about what kinds of goods and products a merchant had on hand. These ads used few if any pictures and were more about delivering information than telling a story.

During the 1800s, American companies began to use factories and large numbers of workers to produce a huge number of new goods. New railroads and the national postal system allowed companies to sell their products all over the nation. But these changes brought new problems. How could a company convince consumers to buy their products and not the products of another company? This is where advertising stepped in and began to grow into the industry it is today.

Starting around 1880, advertising agents began to design advertisements that made things like peanuts and cookies more than simple foods. These ads included pictures, catchy words or songs, called jingles, and characters like the Nabisco Slicker Boy and Mr. Peanut. Mr. Peanut was actually designed in 1916 by a teen boy living in Virginia. Planter's, the company that sold peanuts, gave Mr. Peanut a top hat, a walking stick, and a monocle to highlight the quality of the product. Anyone who bought peanuts with Mr. Peanut on the bag knew that what they were buying a quality product.

Over time, advertising companies began to design ads for particular audiences, like children or parents, and used their designs to convince consumers that their products were the best, the cleanest, or the toughest. Today, advertising continues to play a daily role in the lives of people all over the world.



Color card ad for NABISCO by the agency N.W. Ayer, & Son.
[Archives Center, National Museum of American History]

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How the story goes: Santa Claus is a fictional holiday figure who supposedly visits the homes of children around the world on Christmas Eve, shimmying down the chimney to leave gifts before moving on to the next house. Coca-Cola began featuring Santa Claus in advertisements like this one in the 1920s. Copyright Coca-Cola Co. 1960.

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Directions, page 1 of 2

For kids and adults to do together.

1. Begin by reading *Lemonade in Winter*. Why do Pauline and John-John have so much trouble selling lemonade at the beginning of the story? What strategies do they use to help them sell more of their drinks?

2. Talk about what kinds of drinks you like. Are they cold drinks, or hot drinks? When do you like to drink them? Would you want to drink a cold drink on a cold day?

3. Now take a close look at Coca-Cola's Santa Claus advertisement on the *Picture* page. What is happening in this picture? What colors do you see? What kinds of clothes are the people wearing? What time of year do you think it is?

4. How does this picture make you feel? Happy, or sad? Look again at the people in the picture: do they look happy or sad? How do you think Santa is feeling in this picture?

5. Why is Santa happy? What is Santa drinking?

6. Is Santa Claus part of your family's holiday tradition? If so, do you leave out a snack for Santa when he comes? What do you leave for him? Many families leave milk and cookies out on Christmas Eve, but in this advertisement Santa does not want any milk. Instead, Santa wants a Coca-Cola. Why do you think that is?

Think

Pauline and John-John have trouble selling lemonade because it is cold outside and their neighbors don't want cold drinks on a cold day. The strategies they used to sell more lemonade were advertising, entertainment, a sale, and decorations. Coca-Cola used Santa Claus to tackle the same problem.

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Where Did Santa Come From?, page 2 of 2

Coca-Cola used Santa Claus in their advertising so that people would associate Coke with Christmas. Think Santa, think soda!

So who is Santa Claus...and how did he get that outfit?

Around the world, Santa Claus comes in all shapes and sizes, but in the United States, one version of Santa reigns supreme. A jolly old man in a bright red suit, spreading joy and gifts during the Christmas holiday season, America's Santa is instantly recognizable in TV commercials, department store windows, and holiday movies.

So where did he come from? The answer is simple: from the mind of Haddon H. Sundblom. Sundblom worked for Coca-Cola from the 1930s to the 1950s as an advertising artist for the D'Arcy Agency. It was Sundblom who drew Santa as a plump, cheerful man with snow-white hair, dressed in Coca-Cola's company colors, red and white.



"Merry Old Santa Claus" by Thomas Nast. Published in *Harper's Weekly* January 1, 1881.

Santa's story goes back much further than that.

Sundblom did not invent Santa all by himself. In 1822, American poet Clement Clarke Moore wrote a poem for his daughters about "The Visit from Saint Nicholas" (better known as "Twas the Night Before Christmas"), describing the holiday gift-giver as a "little old driver, so lively and quick" who was small enough to fit down chimneys. By the 1860s, famous cartoonist Thomas Nast had turned Santa Claus into a fully human-sized character and given him a home at the North Pole. Sundblom simply ran with what Moore and Nast had already built.

How did Santa Claus help sell Coca-Cola?

In the 1920s, Coca-Cola faced a major problem: they needed to convince consumers that soda was not just a summer drink but should be enjoyed year round. The company decided to publish ads featuring Santa sharing a Coca-Cola with his elves, or expectant children leaving out Coke for Santa on Christmas Eve instead of milk, hoping that people would start to think of Coke as a holiday drink. Year after year, Santa peddled Coca-Cola, and the strategy worked. Nowadays, Coca-Cola has become a staple of the holiday season, all because of advertising.

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WHY

Illustrations and pictures are an important element of teaching children to read and to analyze. But the need for these skills does not evaporate as soon as they move on to chapter books and beyond. As children grow and encounter images with different messages in different settings throughout their lives, they must be able to identify, interpret, and evaluate what they see in order to make effective decisions.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be better able to:

- Identify what products an advertisement is selling.
- Think critically about the story an advertisement is telling and selling

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Makes detailed observations about an advertisement.
- Demonstrates understanding by offering similar examples about modern advertising and draw comparisons.

STANDARDS

IRA/NCTE Language Arts Standards

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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NCHS History Standards

K-4 History Content Standards

- 2A: The student understands the history of his or her local community.
- 3C: The student understands the various other groups from regions throughout the world who came into his or her own state or region over the long-ago and recent past.

Therefore the student is better able to: Examine photographs and pictures of people from the various racial and ethnic groups of varying socioeconomic status who lived in the state 100-200 years ago in order to hypothesize about their lives, feelings, plans, and dreams, and to compare ways in which their experiences were similar and different.

K-4 History Thinking Standards

- 2H: Draw upon the visual data presented in photographs, paintings, cartoons, and architectural drawings.

Common Core Standards

English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.3 With prompting and support, describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.7 With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear (e.g., what person, place, thing, or idea in the text an illustration depicts).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.9 With prompting and support, identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic (e.g., in illustrations, descriptions, or procedures).

