



MEDIA LITERACY & FOOD MARKETING II

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION: PACKAGED FOODS

This document extends the research findings and activities outlined in Media Literacy and Food Marketing I. This research stems from a project jointly funded by Alberta Innovates Health Solutions (AIHS) and the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA), and supported by the (CIHR) Canada Research Chairs program. The research conducted to inform this project included 16 focus groups with students (Grades 1-9), and an in class survey interrogating children’s understanding of packaged foods. Media Literacy and Food Marketing I and II collectively draw from the input and perspectives of over 600 Canadian children.

The Media Literacy & Food Marketing Lesson Plans seek to help expand children’s critical capabilities when it comes to understanding food packaging and labelling.

THE ALBERTA CURRICULUM: FOOD AND NUTRITION OUTCOMES

Table 1 outlines the food and nutrition outcomes defined by the Alberta Education Health and Life Skills Curriculum. Activities in the Media Literacy and Food Marketing II Lesson Plan build upon and extend these outcomes in light of the packaged food environment.

GRADES 1-6 ALBERTA CURRICULUM: FOOD AND NUTRITION OUTCOMES ¹

Grade 1	Students will recognize the importance of basic, healthy, nutritional choices to well-being of self; e.g., variety of food, drinking water, eating a nutritious breakfast
Grade 2	Students will classify foods according to <i>Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating</i> , and apply knowledge of food groups to plan for appropriate snacks and meals
Grade 3	Students will apply guidelines from <i>Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating</i> to individual nutritional circumstances; e.g., active children eat/drink more
Grade 4	Students will analyze the need for variety and moderation in a balanced diet; e.g., role of protein, fats, carbohydrates, minerals, water, vitamins
Grade 5	Students will examine ways in which healthy eating can accommodate a broad range of eating behaviours; e.g., individual preferences, vegetarianism, cultural food patterns, allergies/medical conditions, diabetes
Grade 6	Students will analyze personal eating behaviors—food and fluids—in a variety of settings; e.g., home, school, restaurants
Grade 7	Students will relate the factors that influence individual food choices to nutritional needs of adolescents; e.g., finances, media, peer pressure, hunger, body image, activity
Grade 8	Students will evaluate personal food choices, and identify strategies to maintain optimal nutrition when eating away from home; e.g., eating healthy fast foods
Grade 9	Students will develop strategies that promote healthy nutritional choices for self and others; e.g., adopt goals that reflect healthy eating, encourage the placement of nutritious food in vending machines

¹ Alberta Health and Life Skills Kindergarten to Grade 9 (Alberta Learning, Alberta, Canada: GRADE 1: <http://education.alberta.ca/media/352951/gr1.pdf>

THE ALBERTA CURRICULUM: SOCIAL STUDIES

Table 2 lists the Social Studies outcomes detailed by the Alberta Education Curriculum.

GRADE 9 ALBERTA CURRICULUM: SOCIAL STUDIES²

<p>Media Literacy Skills: “Media literacy skills involve accessing, interpreting and evaluating mass media texts such as newspapers, television, the Internet and advertising. Media literacy in social studies explores concepts in mass media texts, such as identifying key messages and multiple points of view that are being communicated, detecting bias, and examining the responsibility of citizens to respond to media texts” (Alberta Education, Alberta, Canada).</p>	
Grade 9	<p>Students will develop skills of critical thinking and creative thinking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • determine the validity of information based on context, bias, source, objectivity, evidence or reliability to broaden understanding of a topic or an issue • evaluate, critically (sic), ideas, information and positions from multiple perspectives • demonstrate the ability to analyze current affairs from multiple perspectives • re-evaluate personal opinions to broaden understanding of a topic or an issue • generate creative ideas and strategies in individual and group activities • access diverse viewpoints on particular topics by using appropriate technologies • assemble and organize different viewpoints in order to assess their validity

THE ALBERTA CURRICULUM: LANGUAGE ARTS

Table 4 lists the English Language Arts outcomes detailed by the Alberta Education Curriculum.

Grades 1-9 Alberta Curriculum: Language Arts³

<p>General Outcome: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts.</p> <p>General Outcome: Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to manage ideas and information.</p>	
Grade 1	Students will use knowledge of print, pictures, book covers and title pages to construct and confirm meaning
Grade 2	Students will use knowledge of how oral and written language is used in a variety of contexts to construct and confirm meaning; students will apply a variety of strategies, such as asking questions, making predictions, recognizing relationships among story elements and drawing
Grade 3	Students will ask questions to clarify information and ensure understanding
Grade 4	Students will explore ways to find additional ideas and information to extend understanding; students will distinguish differences in the structural elements of texts, such as letters and storybooks, to access and comprehend ideas and information
Grade 5	Students will use appropriate prior knowledge and experiences to make sense of new ideas and information; students will use text features, such as maps, diagrams, special fonts and graphics, that highlight important concepts to enhance understanding of ideas and information
Grade 6	Students will read, write, represent and talk to explore and explain connections between prior knowledge and new information in oral, print and other media texts
Grade 7	Students will discuss and respond to ways that content and forms of oral, print and other media texts interact to influence understanding
Grade 8	Students will discuss and respond to ways that forms of oral, print and other media texts enhance or constrain the development and communication of ideas, information and experiences
Grade 9	Students will use knowledge of visual and textual cues and structural features when skimming and scanning various print and other media texts to locate relevant information effectively and efficiently; Students will extend understanding by taking different points of view when rereading and reflecting on oral, print and other media texts; Students will combine personal experiences and the knowledge and skills gained through previous experiences with oral, print and other media texts to understand new ideas and information

THE ALBERTA CURRICULUM: SOCIAL STUDIES

Table 4 summarizes children’s understanding of packaged foods . Each finding is further explained in the Teachers’ Background information section, which corresponds to each class activity.

Table 4: Research Findings: Children & Packaged Foods. (2B=Grade 2 Boy; 2G=Grade 2 Girl)

<p>Finding 1</p> <p>Children view simple packaging (both colour and images) as a more healthy option. The children also view packaging as more trustworthy as they believe there is an ABSENCE of marketing. Because of this they are less analytical and more trusting of the plain products presented.</p>	<p>RESEARCH FINDINGS: COLOUR, MARKETING AND FOOD PACKAGING</p> <p>When asked “What makes a packaged food healthy,” children (in surveys and focus groups) viewed plain or “boring” packages as more healthy. Less colourful packages—or those without cartoons or “fun” images –were deemed to be healthier choices.</p> <p>Significantly, children did not regard “simple” packaging as marketing.</p> <p>After selecting a packaged food product they felt was a healthy choice, children were asked why they made that selection they did.</p> <p>Moderator: What makes a packaged food healthy?</p> <p><i>(Yogurt in a simple white container featuring green and black design and text)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To me that just looks healthy because the packaging is kind of (boring). (G9) • It’s not that colourful and it doesn’t catch my eye. (G6) • It looks ... less attractive. (G6) • Packaging “looks” like something healthy. (B3) <p><i>(Crackers in a brown-coloured box)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The box seems very dull. (G3) • I chose it because it doesn’t have bright colours. (G6) • Well, it’s more of a brown colour, and that symbolizes whole-grains. (G5) <p><i>(Cookies in a white package with muted brown colours)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not colourful. (G3) • The package doesn’t really pop out at you. They’re not trying to sell themselves off as a fun, sugary snack. They’re trying to sell themselves off as healthy. So they make the box a bit more like calm and not too much going on. With these, the printing is all big and puffy, there are swirls everywhere. (G5)
<p>Finding 2</p> <p>Children’s decisions about what is a healthy packaged food are based on product name and tag lines.</p>	<p>RESEARCH FINDING: MOVING BEYOND LITERAL TRANSLATION</p> <p>Focus groups & survey results revealed that children rely on a product name to make judgments. Some appeared willing to accept a brand, brand name or tag line at face value. For example, if a brand is called “Eating Right” children tended to claim the product was healthy because the name “said so”. Similarly, some children deemed “Bears Paw Home Style Oatmeal” a homemade product and “Vegetable Thins” a source of vegetables.</p> <p>Moderator: Why did you select this as the healthiest choice?</p> <p><i>(Oatmeal cookies in the shape of bears’ paws)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is made of home-style oatmeal. (G6) <p><i>(Hot dogs that feature the words “Eating Right”)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The title says eating right. (G6) • It says eating right. (G3) • It says eating right. (G3) • Says eating right. (G3) • It is healthy because it has eating right label. (G6) • It says eating right. (G3) <p><i>(Vegetable Thins Crackers)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is like vegetables. (G6) • It says vegetable. (G6) • Because it is vegetable flavoured. (G6) • It says vegetable. (G3) • Because it has vegetables in it. (G3) • It has vegetables. (G3) • Because it says vegetable. (G3) • I chose that it is the healthiest because it is like vegetables. (G6)

Table 4: Research Findings: Children & Packaged Foods. (2B=Grade 2 Boy; 2G=Grade 2 Girl)

<p>Finding 3</p> <p>Children’s decisions about what is a healthy packaged food are based on product names, health symbols and other claims.</p>	<p>RESEARCH FINDING: HEALTH SYMBOLS AND OTHER CLAIMS</p> <p>Health symbols, seals, and emblems give product credibility according to students regardless of their understanding of the claims, and of the category of food featured.</p> <p>Moderator question: What makes that a healthy choice?</p> <p><i>(Crackers)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 health symbols on the corner. (G6) • It has the green seal. (G3) • A green box with a sun on it on the side. (G3) <p><i>(Cookies)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has the whole grain symbol on it. (G3) • It says sensible solutions. (G5) • Also it has the sensible solutions. (G6) <p>Moderator: Wonderful. What does sensible solutions mean to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It just means that it’s a healthier choice. That’s what it means to me. <p><i>(Meat: Hot Dog)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Check. (G3) • And the health check. (G3) • It has a checkmark. (G3) • Healthy label. (G3) • Says health check. (G3) • It has a health check on it. (G6) • It has Heart and Stroke Foundation health check symbol. (G6) • Healthy choice checkmark. (G6) • It has a health check on it. (G6)
<p>Finding 4</p> <p>Children remain unclear on how apply and evaluate calories, however they are still influenced by the numbers.</p>	<p>RESEARCH FINDING: CALORIES ON PACKAGES</p> <p>In focus groups, children do not present a single way to interpret information about calories, whether on the front of packages or on the Nutrition Facts table. Conversations about calories as “good and bad” in grade three, transition to calories as “too much” in grade four. In grade five, children volunteer decisions about how many calories they are willing to consume: “It’s in 100 to 140 range of calories and I don’t like eating over 140” (5B). The learning activity for this section emphasizes that while marketers use calories to advertise their products, calories are neither good nor bad, they simply measure how much energy food gives us.</p> <p>Moderator: What made you choose this packaged as a healthy choice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The calories it says 150. (2G) <p>Moderator: Is that good or is that bad?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I’m not sure. (2G) • They had the least calories. (4B) <p>Moderator: So strictly calories?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yeah. (4B) <p>Moderator: Are calories bad?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes. Too much calories. (4B) • It had fifty calories, which isn’t that too much? So it has fifty calories. That isn’t very much. (4B) <p>Moderator: Is a calorie a good thing or a bad thing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be good. It gives you energy. (3B) • They’re good if you don’t have too many of them. So if you have less, that’s a bit better. (5G) • Even though it says 100 calories, it doesn’t mean it doesn’t have lots of sugar and stuff in it. (6G)

Table 4: Research Findings: Children & Packaged Foods. (2B=Grade 2 Boy; 2G=Grade 2 Girl)

<p>Finding 5</p> <p>Children are confused by the quantities of sugar & sodium, and how to measure what is an acceptable amount.</p>	<p>RESEARCH FINDING: SUGAR AND SODIUM: A LITTLE OR A LOT?</p> <p>Sodium</p> <p>Children consistently noted that the amount of sodium in a product is important to making a healthy choice. Their quantity concerns are vague, “low sodium” (3B), yet include an acceptance of salt as a nutrient: “I think salt is kind of healthy, just if you don’t eat too much” (3G). Students across the grades did not know how much sodium was acceptable, and did not know how to pursue further information about sodium on the box.</p> <p>Moderator: What do you think makes a packaged food healthy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low sodium, low fat, low sugar. (3B) • I think salt is kind of healthy, just if you don’t eat too much. (3G) • That one’s got salt. (4G) <p>Moderator: Is that bad or is that good?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well, too much salt is not very good. (4G) <p>Moderator: Too much salt is not good, but...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A little bit. (4G) • You need to have salt to survive. (4G) • Yeah, this is too much. (4G) <p>Moderator: What makes this packaged food less healthy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes. I put that, again, because, well it’s over fat by quite a lot and it’s still pretty high in sugar and the sodium is a lot. (5B) • They put a lot of salt in it, and it’s not always good. (5G) <p>Moderator: What’s the problem with having too much sodium?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I heard it does something to your heart. (6B) • Not too much salt. You don’t want too much salt on your food because that can leave you with heart problems. (6G)
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<p>Finding 5 Children are confused by the quantities of sugar & sodium, and how to measure what is an acceptable amount.</p>	<p>Sugar Sugar is a complex entity in foods for children. Children’s lack of ability to explain choices for healthy or less healthy quantities of sugar, their value judgements for different types of sugar, and their common impression that they should not eat too much—but know that they love sugar—are fundamental conflicts in their choice of healthy packaged foods. For both girls and boys, sugar was the most frequently mentioned ingredient in choosing healthy foods. Children described two challenges in their analysis of sugar that are dealt with in these learning activities: (1) deciding how many grams of sugar are acceptable; and (2) navigating different types of sugar.</p> <p>Moderator: How much sugar is a lot of sugar?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10,055g. (1G) • 2g only. (1G) • Maybe 10 or 15. (1G) • 15. (1G) <p>Moderator: 15g in a day?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes I have. (1G) <p>Moderator: What makes this packaged food a less healthy choice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has two grams of sugar, and that means 20 sprinkles of sugar. (2B) • The cookies look all right, but they’re probably pretty much made up of sugar. But the icing I know is mostly sugar, probably lots of artificial colours and flavourings too. (5G) <p>Moderator: So you saw honey on the cover.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, which is sweet and probably has some sugar in it. (2B) <p>Moderator: Is honey bad for you then?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, but it’s—bees make it, but it’s sweet and might have some sugar in it. (2B) <p>Moderator: What would be a good sugar for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banana sugar. Bananas have got sugar in them. (4G) • Well, it’s brown sugar, which is better than white sugar if you’re going to have sugar at all. (5G) <p>Moderator: Okay, so brown sugar is bad?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well, it is sugar. But it’s not as bad as white. (6B) • And brown sugar is better than white sugar. (3B) • There are sugars that are good for you. (4G)
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<p>Finding 6</p> <p>Claims like “a source of”, “a good source of” and an “excellent source of” influence children’s perception of packaged food, although they remain unclear on what fibre, vitamins and minerals do.</p>	<p>RESEARCH FINDING: FIBRE, VITAMINS & MINERALS: DIGGING DEEPER</p> <p>The healthiness of fibre, what it is at all, is confused across the early grades. By grade four, children notice and discuss fibre as healthy through front-of-package claims (e.g., “Source of fibre”), pictures (e.g., “The picture actually looks all seedy and healthy”), and the Nutrition Facts table (e.g., “Fibre 2 grams”). When fibre is used to define a good choice, it is done through a comparison to other nutrients, specifically sugar. Children did not demonstrate knowing how to integrate the information provided by the Nutrition Facts table into their argument for a good choice.</p> <p>Moderator: Do you know what source of fibre means?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes. (2B) <p>Moderator: Is it a good thing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good thing. (2B) <p>Moderator: Okay. What about this? Whole grain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bad. (2B) • Good. (2B) • I don’t know. (2B) • What does source of fibre mean? (2G) <p>Moderator: Source of fibre is something you get in...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk. (2G) • I think it is calcium that is... (2G) <p>Moderator: What about the fact this one says its whole grain, and that one says a source of fibre. Do you think that makes it a healthy choice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don’t know. (2G) <p>Moderator: What made you choose this as the healthy choice as well?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because it has oat fibre. (3G) <p>Moderator: Because it has oat fibre? What about this one?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A source of fibre. (3G) • All of them have 25 percent. (3G) <p>Moderator: Is there any other reason that you picked this one?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nothing really, it just looks kind of healthy, and also at the back, the picture actually looks all seedy and healthy. (4B) <p>Moderator: Is fibre good?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes. (5B) <p>Moderator: Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don’t really know. (5B) • It had a lot of sugar in it and, I’m not sure, but I don’t think it had much fibre in it. I think maybe 1g, or none. (6G) • I picked it because it has some fibre and it didn’t have too much sugar. (6G)
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