

TRENDSPOTTING DISCUSSION GUIDE AND LESSON PLAN

OBJECTIVE:

This discussion guide and lesson plan are designed to introduce your students to the marketing practice known as “trendspotting” or “cool hunting.” The practice involves the hiring of teenage informants to spy on their peers and report back to marketers the latest trends in teen culture.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Explore with your students the “Trendspotting” section on CultureSpy.com. Make sure to read the text and view the video clips with them. Next, discuss with your students the implication of trendspotting marketing techniques. Use the following questions as a roadmap for the class discussion:

- Is it really possible to sell “cool”?
- Do you think that trendspotting and cool hunting are ethical practices? Why or why not?
- Are companies that participate in cool hunting practices stealing teen culture?
- What benefit do teens get when their culture is packaged, marketed and sold back to them?
- Do teens copy the fashions and styles they see in the media or does the media copy the fashions and styles of teenagers? Or is it a little of both?

- Can you think of any clothing products or accessories that could have been the result of trendspotting?
- Do you think you would like to work as a trendspotter or cool hunter?
- What kind of skills do you think you need to be a successful trendspotter?

TRENDSPOTTING LESSON

If your students have access to video cameras and a VCR you can build upon the discussion by conducting the following lesson that is designed to give them firsthand experience in the practice of trendspotting.

LENGTH OF TIME: 5 class periods

MATERIALS NEEDED: camcorders and VCR. If camcorders are not available still cameras can be used in their place.

LESSON

Class 1

Take your class on a fieldtrip to a location where many so-called “cool” teenagers congregate, such as a skateboard park. If this is cost prohibitive or logistically impossible, schedule this class to coincide with a large school event or gathering such as a pep rally, sporting event, school concert, etc. There, have the students document their peers using video cameras. The nature of the research will be open ended, with the teen observers asking their peers no specific questions. They are simply there to observe their peers and gather video footage of them. They should, however, pay special attention to capturing clothing, hairstyles on tape. They will be required to inform their peers of the purpose of the observation. This process mimics the techniques practiced by marketing agencies that specialize in the teenage population, like Tru Marketing, Look-Look, and Sputnik.

Class 2

Have your class review the video footage they shot last week and start the process of analyzing its content. Encourage the students to notice recurring images, themes, ideas and language in the video footage. Next, have them tabulate the recurrences of these specific words, behaviors and objects in the video footage.

Class 3

Conduct a focus group with the students to determine what media products they consume on a regular basis. In particular, look for media that purports to represent teens and teen life. When the class is done, there should be a substantial list of television shows, radio programs, music videos, CDs, DVDs, websites, and video games. Ask each student to bring in one example of media cited to the next class for a content analysis. If they cannot easily get a copy of their example, do your best to bring in representative examples yourself. Tape shows off of MTV, rent DVDs, buy teen magazines, etc.

Class 4

Have the students analyze the examples of teen media they bring to class in the same manner in which they analyzed the footage of the peer observations. They will be identifying and tabulating recurring behaviors, objects and language featured in the texts. Next, have them catalog the recurrence of these specific items.

Class 5

Have the students compare their findings from the peer observations analysis with their findings from the media product analysis. Have them look for similarity of objects, behaviors and language in both sets of data and tabulate the frequency of their recurrence. Have the class discuss their findings. The following are questions you can use to facilitate a meaningful discussion of the findings:

- Do teens copy what they see in the media or does the media copy what it sees in teens?
- Do teen hairstyles, clothing trends, and slang originate on the street or do they originate in representations of teens in the media?
- Have you ever dressed like someone you saw in the media? Why?

- Have you ever gotten your hair cut like someone you saw in the media? Why?
- Have you ever tried to talk in the same style that you heard someone in the media talk in? Why did you do that?