Media Literacy: Analyzing and Designing Cereal Boxes

1. Samples of Cereal Boxes

Credit: Altagracia Art/Shutterstock

2. Sample of a Cereal Box

Credit: Tribalium/Shutterstock
Media Literacy Background
Children are exposed to media every day through many sources, such as television, print advertising, and social media. Media literacy helps children to understand and think critically about media messages. Children need opportunities to view and listen to many different media texts and to identify some of the characteristics of simple media texts. They need to learn how to recognize the messages that are being communicated to them through media. Children also benefit from opportunities to create their own media texts.

Purpose
In these activities, children will have an opportunity to view cereal boxes marketed to children and to adults. They will analyze the design of the cereal boxes in terms of visual images, use of colour, lettering, message, and intended audience. They will relate the messages on the cereal boxes to their own experiences. Children will use what they have learned about cereal box advertising to create their own cereal box.

Materials
- A variety of cereal boxes, some marketed to children and others marketed to adults
- Paper, glue or tape, scissors
- Drawing and colouring materials such as crayons, markers, pencil crayons, paint

Analyze Cereal Boxes Marketed to Children
1. Introduce the topic of cereal boxes as media by asking children, What cereal do you like best? What do you like best about it? Then ask, How might you find out about a cereal that you have never tried? (I might see it on television. I might see it at the grocery store when I go shopping with my Dad.)
2. Show children the first group of cereal boxes above. Alternatively, show them one or more of your own cereal boxes designed to appeal to children. Allow time for children to talk about what they see on the cereal boxes. Ask, Would you like to buy this cereal? Why or why not?
3. Introduce the term “audience” to children. Point to one of the children’s cereals and ask, Who do you think this cereal is made for? In other words, who is the audience for this cereal? (kids) What is it about the box that tells you that? (It has a cute animal on it. It has a fun cartoon-type character on it.)
4. Ask children to look closely at the pictures on the four cereal boxes shown above. Ask, Why do you think pictures of these animals were chosen for the front of the cereal boxes? (They are really cute. They are animals that kids like.) How do the animals look? (They look happy. They have big smiles showing that they like eating that kind of cereal.)
5. Say, Think about real cereal boxes that you have seen. Do any of them show animals on the front of the box? (Yes.) What else do they show? (superheroes, characters from movies or shows such as Star Wars, Disney characters, cartoon characters, sports stars)

6. Ask, What else is on the four boxes above? (bowls of cereal, fruit) What flavours of cereal are shown? (honey, chocolate, coconut, strawberry) How do the people who made the cereal boxes show the flavours? (They show pictures of honey and fruit. They've made the cereal different colours). Why do you think they show pictures of fruit? (so parents will think the cereal is healthy; so you know what the cereal is made of) Do the colours used on the box make you want to look at it? (Yes.) Why? (The pink box makes me think of a drink made of strawberries and the strawberry is a yummy red colour. The brown box makes me think of chocolate and most kids like chocolate.) What colours would you have used to make kids want to look at the box?

7. Select one of the cereal boxes. Ask children, What would be a good name for this cereal? Why do you think that would be a good name? (Honey Puffs, because it tells you that the cereal has honey in it. Berry Bites because the cereal has a strawberry flavour and it looks crunchy.) Alternatively, if you are using real cereal boxes, ask, Is this a good name for a children's cereal? Why do you think that? Have children share the names of other cereals that are marketed to children. Discuss how the name of the cereal might make children want to try that cereal.

8. You might share with children the fact that grocery stores often put children's cereals on the lower shelves in the cereal aisle. Discuss why they think grocery stores do that.

**Analyze a Cereal Box Marketed to Adults**

1. Show children the second image of a cereal box above. Alternatively, use one of your own cereal boxes. Select one that is marketed to adults. Allow time for children to talk about what they see on the cereal box. Ask, Would you buy this cereal? Why or why not?

2. Ask, Who do you think this cereal is made for? Who is the audience for this cereal? (grownups) What is it about the box that tells you that? (There is nothing fun on the box. It just shows milk being poured on cereal and that's boring. The cereal doesn't have a fun name.)

3. Ask children to look closely at the pictures on the cereal box. Ask, What pictures do you see on the box? (a bowl of cereal, milk, corn) Why do you think that there are no animals, superheroes, or cartoons on the box? (Grownups don't watch cartoons. The cereal is meant for grownups, not kids.) Why do you think that the people who made the cereal showed a picture of milk and a picture of corn on the box? (Corn and milk are healthy foods. They want to show grownups that the cereal is healthy for them.)

4. Ask children, Do you think the colours used on the box will make people want to look at it? Why do you think that? (Yes, the colours make you think of corn growing in a field. Yes, I think grownups would like all the bright colours of yellow, green, and orange.)

5. Have children read the name of the cereal. Ask, Do you think that is a good name for a cereal for grownups? (Yes, because it tells you what kind of cereal it is. No, because the name is too plain; it's
What do you notice about the lettering in the name of the cereal? (The letters are big. They are at the top of the box. They use two different colours that catch your attention.) Alternatively, if you are using real cereal boxes, ask, Is this a good name for a cereal for grownups? Why do you think that?

Make a Cereal Box

1. Have children make their own cereal box. They can draw and colour the front of their cereal box on a piece of paper and glue or tape it to an empty cereal box.

2. Review some criteria that children will need to think about when designing a cereal box:
   - Who is my audience?
   - What name will I give my cereal?
   - What kind of lettering will I use?
   - What picture will I draw for my cereal box?
   - Will my picture work for my audience?
   - What colours will make people notice my cereal box?

3. When children have finished making their cereal box, invite them to show it to family members. Family members might wish to share some feedback with children using sentence starters such as:
   - I would buy your cereal because....
   - The part of your cereal box that I really like is....
   - The first thing I noticed about your cereal box is....
   - I think that the name of your cereal is....