

PARENT TEACHING TIPS

. . . on Your Children and Propaganda

By Bill Welker, EdD

Your children are bombarded with propaganda (the art of persuasion) every day of their lives. No matter where commercial ads are found (e.g. newspapers, magazines, radios, television, billboards, the internet, etc.), children must understand that at least one form of propaganda is being used to persuade them.

Sometimes, even textbooks use subtle propaganda to persuade students to believe as the book's author does, especially in history textbooks. For example, all you have to do is to read an account of the American Civil War in a textbook utilized in Pennsylvania, and then compare it to a different textbook narrative of the same topic in a southern state such as Georgia.

Thus, students (as readers) must learn to use their "critical reading" skills – the ability to make judgments in order to extract the truth from the propaganda they are confronted with, both in and out of the school setting.

Students who have a deeper understanding of propaganda can (1) save them money; (2) assist them in making better political decisions at the ballot box; (3) help them to distinguish between fact versus opinion; and (4) aid them in reading their textbooks or writing more intelligent critical essay in school.

The seven most widely-used propaganda techniques are as follows:

1. *Bad Names or Name Calling* – This approach involves the use of disagreeable terms to arouse distaste for a person, thing, or belief.

Example: Don't vote for John Smith; he's a crook and a liar!

2. *Glad Names or Glittering Generalities* – This technique is just the opposite of bad names. Pleasant or positive terms are used to create good feelings about a person, thing, or belief.

Example: Buy Waldo's super deluxe hamburgers. They're the best!

3. *Band Wagon* – This type of propaganda appeals to the desire of people to be a "part of a group." In other words, it is an attempt to convince someone that he or she should support a person, buy a product or accept a belief because everyone else is doing it.

Example: All the smart people I know buy American-made products. Don't you think you should, too?

4. *Card Stacking* – With this propaganda device, the persuader does give accurate information, but only one side of the story. In other words, either the good side or the bad side is given, but not both.

Example: The rooms at Elite Hotels are gigantic, elegantly furnished, equipped with TV and internet, and cleaned twice a day.

5. *Transfer* – This propaganda strategy involves associating a positive characteristic of animals, symbols or famous people of the past with the person, thing or idea that one is endorsing.

Example: Buy a Cougar; it's the best car on the road! (Association: speed and strength). Or, a political candidate speaks next to a statue of Abraham Lincoln, waving an American flag. (Association: honesty and patriotism)

6. Testimonial – This propaganda approach is like transfer, except that a famous, living person endorses another individual's positive qualities, a product or an idea.

Example: Tiger Woods promoting a certain golf club in a television advertisement.

Or, Brad Pitt endorsing a candidate at a political convention.

7. *Plain Folks* – Persuaders who use this propaganda tactic attempt to associate their product, candidate or belief with the average, common, and ordinary people.

Example: A millionaire, promoting his stock, stresses that he still drives a Ford and takes a bag lunch to work everyday, just like his father who was a coalminer in West Virginia.

Now it's your responsibility to share the above propaganda techniques with your children. But first, let's see how much you learned in today's column. Study the statements below and see if you can determine which propaganda strategy is being incorporated. You'll find the answers at the end of the column.

1. An advertisement in a magazine described all the benefits for buying the Electra Car that runs only on electricity.

2. Buy the Fizzle power drink for great athletes – over two million sportsmen can't be wrong!

3. A candidate for his high school's senior class president says, "I'm a typical just like the rest of you."

4. Our superior dress shirts will feel as smooth as silk to your skin.

5. An investigative columnist for a magazine referred to a politician as a sad excuse for a public official and suggests that he had shady dealings with local underworld mobsters.

6. A video commercial on an internet website in which football great Terry Bradshaw endorses a new weight training system.

7. You should always fly Eagle Airlines!

In closing, “Don’t be a fool!” Watch out for propaganda wherever it occurs. Did I just try to persuade you?

(Propaganda Answers: 1. Card Stacking; 2. Band Wagon; 3. Plain Folks; 4. Glad Names; 5. Bad Names; 6. Testimonial; 7. Transfer)

Parent Proverb

“One machine can do the work of fifty ordinary men. No machine can do the work of one extraordinary man.”

- Elbert Hubbard

Next Month’s Column: “The Note-taking Study Skill”

(Editor’s Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He was selected as a “Teacher of the Year” by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. Dr. Welker is also a nationally recognized authority on amateur wrestling who has written 100s of articles and two books on the subject. His e-mail is mattalkwv@hotmail.com.)