

CLUE SPOTTING 3: PERCENTAGES

Grades 3-4 (15 minutes; additional follow-up session required for optional step)

Learning to spot specific clues that indicate deception is a precursor to being able to avoid or dismiss misinformation. The clues function like a brightly colored sticker that signals students not to trust this source or not to take its claims seriously, or perhaps just to pause and think about it a bit more carefully.

This continues the Clue Spotting series of activities by engaging students in an analysis of popular “fruit” drink packaging to build on what they learned about cereal boxes and sugar content. They’ll repeat and reinforce clues like “artificial,” and learn new clues, including the difference between “juice” and drink.”

Analysis will also extend to the use of percentages on labels and common sale signage, such as “Up to 50% off!”

Prerequisite: This activity relies on material learned in Clue Spotting 1 activity.

Students will learn

- To spot additional clues that signal a package is wearing a “disguise,” including the label “drink” instead of “juice,” and pictures of real fruit when the product contains no real fruit
- The meaning of 100% and 50% and how marketers use them
- How advertisers use font size to direct attention towards some things and away from others.

Students will practice

- Analyzing beverage packages
- Listening skills
- Making careful observations and linking conclusions to evidence

Materials: A way to show videos to the group; whatever materials you need to show students how to use your library resources to research sugar and health

Images

[Kool Aid Package](#) – [slide #18](#)

[Hawaiian Punch bottle](#) – [slide #19](#)

[50% off signs](#) – [slide #20](#)

Step 1

Let students know that clue spotting doesn’t just apply to cereal boxes. Other foods use some of the same clues. Ask: *Do you think this Kool-Aid actually has an orange inside? How do you know?*



Lead an analysis of the Kool-Aid package, initially making sure that they notice the “artificial flavor” clue that they have already learned.

They have also already learned the word “sweetened.”

What do they think “unsweetened” means? If no student notices, point to the “add sugar” phrase. As needed, explain that this means the package contains no sugar, but it will have sugar by the time you drink it. Then ask if “add sugar” is a clue about whether there are actually oranges in the package.

Explain that

- If 100% of it – that is, all of it – is juice from real oranges, the label will always say juice.
- Those that are only orange flavored water will say “drink.”
- To make “drinks” taste sweet like a real orange, they add sugar or tell us to add sugar.

So if the package only says “drink,” that’s a clue that it isn’t real fruit and it does have a lot of sugar or artificial sweetener.

If you bring in an actual package of Kool-Aid powder, you could also encourage analysis through reasoning (inference) and logic: Could a real orange fit inside this package?

Step 2

Reinforce the learning by doing another practice analysis, this time with the image of a bottle of Hawaiian Punch.



Start by noting the many images of fruit on the label. Name them if they are unfamiliar and ask if students think there is real fruit inside. Allow them to spot clues on the label and fill in gaps as needed.

It’s a bit confusing because it says it is a “juice drink.” Because it uses “drink” we know it isn’t 100% juice. The use of “made with” means we don’t know how much real fruit it actually contains. Without looking at the ingredients list we don’t know if it contains any of the fruits in the picture. It may just include flavoring of those fruits. (Many juice drinks are mostly apple juice, but don’t include apples on the front label at all.)

Let students know that clues can mean different things in different contexts. For example, if someone offers them a “drink of

water,” it doesn’t mean the water has added sugar. But on labels of fruity drinks, it means exactly that.

Also remind them that you’re not telling them (or their families) what to drink. Clue spotting is just about having the information you need to make the choice you really want. So if you’re looking for 100% juice, stay away from bottles that use the word “drink.”

Step 3

Review the words and images that students have learned to use as clues and then add just one more.

Explain that food packages are a type of advertising. Certain types of advertising are not exactly lies, but they are misleading. One clue to look for is the phrase “up to.”

Show the sticker and tag examples and ask, “*What’s the difference between 50% off and “up to 50% off.”* What does “up to” mean?

If they don’t understand percentage, pause to show them by folding a piece of paper in half and explaining that each piece is 50% of the whole, i.e., a half. Perhaps they’ve even seen signs that said, “Half off.” That means 50% off.

In this example, something that originally cost \$2 would be \$1 on a 50% off sale. But if it’s says “up to,” the discount could be less than half off. It might only be a few cents!



If no one mentions it, ask, *What do you notice about different sizes of words or numbers?* Use questions to help students notice that the small size of the “up to,” especially on the middle example. *Why would a store make that phrase so tiny?*

End by affirming that not all media messages are misleading, but some are. That’s why we pay close attention and learn the clues to look for that may indicate misinformation.

Optional Step

Connect and reinforce the learning from Clue Spotting 1, 2, & 3 by inviting students to look for the clues they've learned on the media examples they have at home. Leave some time at a future session for students to share things they spotted.

Suggestion: Don't instruct students to look for clues at home without warning parents or guardians ahead of time. Share with them the clues that their child is learning, assure them that you aren't judging any particular products or family choices or telling kids what to eat. In fact, the examples

intentionally include a variety of examples so they don't single out any particular product.

Invite families to reinforce the learning by offering a conversation-starter prompt: *"Ask your child if they spot any of the clues they've learned on items in your home or at the store. Invite them to share what the clues mean – what are the messages."*

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Connect to math lessons on percentages and fractions. Find additional real-life math examples commonly used in advertising (e.g., BOGO – buy one get one free or buy one get one half off). Consider why a store would use these instead of just saying what each one costs (e.g., If you buy one for \$10 and get one free, why not just say the items are \$5 each)? How could they use math to make sure they are getting a good deal?

Connect to health and nutrition lessons by inviting students to flex their research skills and investigate how sugary drinks and 100% juice affect the body. Are they different or the same?

AASL Standards Correlations

- A. I. 2. Recalling prior and background knowledge as context for new meaning
- A. VI. 2. Understanding the ethical use of information technology and media.
- A. VI. 3. Evaluating information for accuracy, validity, social and cultural context, and appropriateness for need.

- B. I. 1. Using evidence to investigate questions.
- B. IV. 3. Systematically questioning and assessing the validity and accuracy of information.

- D. I. 2. Engaging in sustained inquiry.
- D. I. 3. Enacting new understanding through real world connections.
- D. III. 1. Actively contributing to group discussions.