

Going for the Look – Teacher’s Guide

In this module you will be asked to evaluate the advertising and hiring practices of several companies.

Items needed to complete the module:

- Article: “Going for the Look, but Risking Discrimination” by Steven Greenhouse
- Internet access
- Handouts:
 - Activity 5: Annotations Chart
 - Activity 7: Content and Purpose Chart

Instructions: Complete all of the activities on a separate piece of paper. Label each activity so that it is easy for your teacher to check your work.

Activity 1: Introducing Key Concepts

Look at the following clothing websites and then answer the question below.

www.gap.com

www.target.com

www.ae.com

www.walmart.com

www.abercrombie.com

<http://www.abercrombie.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/Casting?catalogId=10901&storeId=10051&langId=-1> (If website doesn’t work- try going to the Abercrombie website and then click on “Experience A&F” and then on “Do you have what it takes?” Scroll through the headshots of the models representing Abercrombie and Fitch.)

1. What do you notice about the ads themselves? What is being advertised?

- Gap: colorful/bright, attire for whole family, features special sales/good prices; shows outfits/ensembles; models are hip, young, stylish (Aug. 2012 ad features all white models)
- Target: emphasis on variety and price; trendy and staples; models only used for torso to show how clothes fit; heads & feet cut off; no scenes or backgrounds
- AE: young, cute, in-shape models; show ensembles; a kick-back (beach, jeans) easy lifestyle; models are somewhat diverse; seems to be featuring the clothes the most.
- Walmart: stark by comparison; shows only torsos of models; emphasis on value; not aimed at younger shoppers
- Abercrombie: features a “look”; preppy and sexy; seems to be advertising a privileged lifestyle; models are striking; thin (females) and chiseled (males)
- Abercrombie models “Do you have what it takes?”: thin, muscular, tan/sun-kissed; natural beauty (no noticeable make up); pouty and seductive; advertising human flesh!

2. Who is the target audience for each company?
Gap: young to middle age families; Target: all families; AE: teenagers and college age;
Walmart: bargain hunters; Abercrombie: tweens, teenagers, college age
3. When looking at the Abercrombie headshots, what do you notice about the models?
See notes above
4. Why do some of the pictures show more of the model’s body than the clothing they are supposed to be selling?
They are using a sexy appeal to sell the brand
5. How are the ads on the Target and Walmart websites different from Gap or Abercrombie?
See notes above

Activity 2: Quickwrite

Write a paragraph in response to the following question:

Should companies be able to hire only people who project their image?

Accept all reasonable and well-supported answers

Activity 3: Surveying the Text

Before you read “Going for the Look,” answer the following questions. Possible answers

1. What does the title of Greenhouse’s article, “Going for the Look, but Risking Discrimination,” tell you about the topic of this article?

I’m not sure what “the look” is, but it sounds like maybe it’s about trying to look stylish. I don’t understand why looking stylish could lead to discrimination. I need to read more to find out what the connection is.

2. The article was published in *The New York Times*. What do you expect from an article published by this newspaper? Will it be interesting? Will you be able to believe what the author says?

The New York Times is an important newspaper. I expect that an article published there would be very factual. *The New York Times* is also supposed to be pretty liberal, so the article might be slanted in a liberal direction. It would probably be long and hard to read. It could also be boring.

3. What can you tell about the article by looking at its length and the length of its paragraphs?

The article isn’t as long as I expected, and the paragraphs are mostly really short, sometimes even just one sentence. But I guess that’s typical of newspaper articles/

Activity 4: Making Predictions and Asking Questions

1. Read the first five paragraphs of the article. What are they about? Now read the last paragraph. Melissa Milkie states, “Whether that’s morally proper is a different question.” What is it that she is wondering about?

When Elizabeth Nill goes into an Abercrombie & Fitch store, managers offer her a job just because she looks good. But that means that if somebody doesn’t look good, especially if they aren’t young and blond, they might not get the job. That doesn’t seem fair.

2. What do you think this article is going to be about?

Now I understand the connection to discrimination. This article must be about hiring people because they are good looking, not because they are necessarily well-qualified.

3. What do you think is the purpose of this article?

I think the purpose of this article is to look at the arguments for hiring for looks that business owners might make, but also it raises the question about whether it's right to discriminate based on appearance.

4. Who do you think is the intended audience for this piece? What other audiences might be interested in this topic?

Since this article comes from *The New York Times*, I assume it's for a general audience. It's not just for high school and college kids who like to shop, and it's not going to be for people who manage stores. Anyone can pick up *The New York Times*, and if you want to get a story read, that's the place to be.

5. Will the article take a position on the topic of hiring people to project a certain image? Why do you think so?

I think it's probably going to talk about both sides of the issue. The title only says stores are "risking discrimination." I think it would probably be different if the article was going to just talk about how it's wrong to hire people because of their looks.

Read "Going for the Look, but Risking Discrimination"

Activity 5: Annotations

Complete Annotation Chart – see handout

Activity 6: Thinking Critically Questions

1. Why did Greenhouse tell the story of Elizabeth Nill's experience at Abercrombie & Fitch? What is your reaction to the story?

Tells the story to grab the reader's attention and introduce the topic. Accept all reasonable reactions.

2. In the conclusion, Greenhouse quotes a sociology professor, Melissa Milkie, who says, "Maybe companies have noticed that hiring [good-looking people] impacts their bottom line" (paragraph 29). What does this mean? Is it a good justification?

It means that hiring good looking people may help increase profits. There is no justification for discrimination. Businesses need to make money, but hiring processes need to be fair

3. Who do you think makes the best argument either for or against hiring for "the look"? Why?

Possible answers are: Mr. Serrano (against—bullied into quitting for not following Abercrombie's hiring policies); Tom Lennox (for—Abercrombie's communications director who promotes "brand representatives"); Marshal Cohen (for—explains importance of "brand enhancers"); Donna Harper (against—attorney who says hiring a certain look naturally discriminates against people who don't look that way); Stephen Roppolo (against—lawyer who explains that hiring for an image can lead to discrimination); Elysa Yanowitz (against—forced out of L'Oreal company for not firing a woman who wasn't attractive enough). Student must explain why that person's argument is the best.

4. Have you observed stores or restaurants that seem to have hired their employees to project a certain image? How do you feel about this practice?

Accept all reasonable and well-supported answers.

5. Do you think that Greenhouse represents both sides of the argument objectively or does he appeal to the reader’s emotions? Give examples of either the way he is objective or the way he slants the arguments.

At first he seems fair since he never offers his opinion one way or the other. He leaves us with a moral dilemma in the final paragraph. However, when I re-read the people he quotes in the article, it appears that he is slanted against the retailer. He makes the retailers sound like all they care about is making money. He presents the stories of fired employees Mr. Serrano and Elysa Yanowitz with more empathy.

6. Stephen J. Roppolo, a New Orleans lawyer, says if employers hire on the basis of people’s looks, they “may inadvertently discriminate in an impermissible way” (paragraph 23). Is he implying that the employers are discriminating because they are greedy and want to make a bigger profit? Why or why not?

No, he says they may inadvertently discriminate, which means it’s not intentional. He works for the retailers, so he wants to give them the benefit of the doubt and not say that all they care about is money.

7. Greenhouse says, “That is where things can get confusing and contentious” (paragraph 8). What does “contentious” mean? What is this paragraph saying about the trend toward hiring people on the basis of looks?

Contentious means likely to cause arguments. It’s saying that hiring attractive employees is not necessarily illegal, but it can raise questions about whether a company is discriminating based on age, sex, or ethnicity. It’s confusing because it’s not always clear when the employer has crossed over the line and is discriminating.

8. What do you think of the argument that “a guy wants to go hang out in a store where he can see good-looking gals” (paragraph 17)? Do you think that statement is a fair way of making the retailers’ argument?

Terrible argument; sexist! Stores should not hire women just so men can look at them. If he had said that people want to shop at stores where the salespeople are attractive, he would have had an argument. Instead it comes across as sexism.

9. Greenhouse says, “In doing so [hiring for looks], some of those companies have been skirting the edges of antidiscrimination laws and provoking a wave of private and government lawsuits” (paragraph 8). Do you think you would be justified in suing a company like Abercrombie’s if they turned you down for a job and you thought it was because you weren’t “blond, blue-eyed and preppy”? Why or why not?

It would be justified because what they did is illegal and unfair. They shouldn’t be able to discriminate against me because I don’t have “the look” when I meet all the qualifications for the job. Discrimination like this will hurt lots of other people, too.

Activity 7: Content and Purpose

Complete Content and Purpose Chart - See Handouts

Activity 8: EPT Essay

Schedule a time to have the student come in to complete the Timed Practice EPT. You will have 45 minutes to plan and write an essay about the Greenhouse article. This essay will be scored using the EPT Rubric and is intended to mirror the English Placement Test for California State Universities. The essay *must* be completed in front of a teacher.

Turn in your completed Module Packet when you meet with your teacher for the practice EPT.

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