



WILLIAM F. EISNER MUSEUM OF ADVERTISING & DESIGN

Character trademarks Education Packet

<http://www.eisnermuseum.org/educators/index.shtm>

This Educators' Guide is intended to complement the Eisner Museum's Exhibition *Character trademarks*.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

What is a character trademark? What are their sources? This exhibition examines the concept of how marketers look at characters to sell products. This notion is tied to an emotional relationship that we have with a particular character in a way that no abstract identity or logo can. The value of these characters to a company is that they instill confidence in products and invoke thoughts of trust, integrity and honesty. We remember these little people (or anthropomorphic animals) in a way that resonates with the cultural values that we share at a particular time and place. The evolution of a single character trademark provides a fascinating glimpse at the changing ways we see ourselves.

The earliest character trademarks date to the 1860s and 1870s. At that time most Americans bought their foodstuffs and household goods without regard to brand identity. With the coming of improved methods of transportation in the form of the railroads and improved methods of communication in the form of the telegraph, and later the telephone, Americans began to recognize products by their packages. Taking note of

this change, manufacturers began to realize that some type of visual device was necessary as an aid in distinguishing their product from their competitors’.

The show examines the varieties and uses of character trademarks by dividing these figures according to type: human archetypes and blended characters; animal characters; elf archetypes; character as product; and live-action characters and celebrity endorsers.

Human archetypes and blended characters

Human archetypes are particularly effective character trademarks because of their ability to imbue the products they hawk with the particular qualities which they themselves represent. Classic examples of human archetype character trademarks are Aunt Jemima, the Quaker Oats Man, Betty Crocker and the Morton Salt Girl. Thus mixes adorned with images of Aunt Jemima and Betty Crocker become associated with the tradition of maternal care of the family even as they replace traditionally prepared meals from scratch. Similarly, when the Quaker Oats man was created in the late nineteenth-century, he embodied the contemporary notion that Quakers are moral, healthy and clean people and by doing so implied that the oats he represented would also be of superior quality.

One of the most interesting types of character trademarks is the blended character. These are figures that may have begun as either live action or illustrative, but, over time, evolved into another form. Two such examples are Mr. Clean, who began as a cartoon and eventually became human with an actor assuming the role, and Colonel Sanders, who morphed from an actual person to an illustration.

Animal characters

Animals have served as a variety of characters over most of the twentieth century. It has been suggested that their origins as character trademarks may lie in their function as team mascots. On another level, animals provide emotional associations that endear them to us. For example Elsie the Borden Cow serves as a friendly, maternal figure. Tony the Tiger takes on an assertive role, exclaiming that Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes are greaaat!! Ultimately, animal character trademarks grab our attention because they perform the unexpected. We don’t expect animals to talk and walk like people.

Elf archetypes

Neither human nor animal, the elf may represent a mischevious, humorous imp. He is sometimes joined by other magical figures, including pixies and fairies. Unlike these carefree creatures, the Elf is the worker bee of the magical world. Therefore, advertisers favor them. Elves have roots in classical mythology, folklore and children’s stories.

Character as product

This rare version of a character trademark is one in which the actual product being advertised is anthropomorphically manipulated: stacked tires become “Bibendum,” the mascot for Michelin, and three squirts of glitter toothpaste acquire pompadours and legs to become the “Crest Sparkles,” a fictional rock band which advertised Crest toothpaste.

Live-action characters and celebrity endorsers

Celebrities have lent their names and images as endorsements for a variety of products. We have included some of the most familiar of these. The Peanuts comic book characters, created by Charles Schulz in 1950, appear on a multitude of products, from toiletries to candy to insurance. Other cartoon figures endorse products. The most popular of these are the Simpsons. We've included the image of Bart Simpson, promoting Butterfinger candy bars. One of the most interesting celebrity endorsements is the magazine image of Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball promoting Philip Morris Cigarettes.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS



History

(High School)

As the show demonstrates, character trademarks evolve over time to reflect the values and desires of different eras. How might a particular character who was popular a hundred years ago be offensive today, and vice versa? What are some of the specific social and political changes that have occurred in the past century that might necessitate new or updated character trademarks? Thinking particularly about the changing roles of, and attitudes toward women and minorities, come up with two varieties of a character trademark for a generic product like bread, sugar or soap. The first should appeal to Americans of a hundred years ago, and the second should update the first by making it appealing to modern audiences.

(Middle School)

Ask your parents and grandparents about their favorite character trademarks. If you've never heard of them, why do you think those characters are no longer popular? Is it perhaps because they represent outdated cultural stereotypes or social values? Can you identify when and how those stereotypes and value changed? Or, if you *have* heard of your parents' and grandparents' favorite character trademarks, why do you think they are still used today? Do you think it is because those characters reflect qualities that are

always popular? Come up with a list of qualities you think are as appealing today as they would have been one hundred years ago.

(Elementary School)

Come up with a list of character trademarks that you see every day. Can you tell which are new and which are old-fashioned? How? Look at your list again. Are there more modern characters than old-fashioned ones? Why does that make sense?

Creative Writing

(High School)

Write a story from the point of view of one of the character trademarks in the show. Keeping in mind the qualities that the character is meant to represent to the customer, present what you think might be the character's own point of view of the product it endorses. For example, if Betty Crocker really is a traditional homemaker, what might she think of the mixes her image is used to sell? Similarly, what might be Poppin' Fresh's real opinion of being called upon to sell the very dough from which he himself is made? There are obviously contradictions here, so feel free to be subversive in your assumed voice.

(Middle School)

Imagine that you are a generic product like milk or gasoline; write a story which describes the sort of character trademark you would choose to advertise yourself. Why did you pick the type of character you did? Is it because you think one is more effective for selling certain kinds of products than another, or is it simply because you happen to like one type best?

(Elementary School)

Pretend you are your favorite character trademark. Write a story about what it is like to be that character. Do you like the product you endorse? Are you friends with other character trademarks? Do you have any special skills you are particularly proud of? (For example, Mr. Clean is expert at fighting dirt, and the Crest Sparkles are famous for their singing).



Drawing

(Middle School)

Following the example of Michelin Man and the Crest Sparkles, come up with your own version of a character trademark made out of the actual product it is meant to sell. As you draw, think about how the shape of that product might inform the shape of your character. And don't forget the product's tactile qualities—does it bend, ooze, crackle or do something else entirely? How might you incorporate these qualities into the personality of your character?

(Elementary School)

Pick one of the character trademarks from the show and draw an original ad using that character. Your drawing doesn't have to be perfect, but try to think about how to best represent the character you have picked. What sorts of things does that character typically say and do? Can you incorporate those things in your ad?



Mathematics

(Middle School)

Count the number of character trademarks in each section of the show (human archetypes and blended characters; animal characters; elf archetypes; character as product; and live-action characters and celebrity endorsers.) There should be a total of 58. Using what you know about division, figure out what percent of the total characters displayed each section accounts for. Extra Credit: Why is it likely that students will come up with slightly different answers? (Hint: remember that some characters can be counted in more than one group).

VOCABULARY

Anthropomorphic

an-thro-po-mor-phic

Pronunciation: "an(t)-thr&p&'mor-fik

Etymology: Late Latin anthropomorphus of human form, from Greek anthrOpomorphos, from anthrOp- + -morphos -morphous

Function: adjective

1. Described or thought of as having a human form or human attributes (anthropomorphic deities).
2. Ascribing human characteristics to nonhuman things (anthropomorphic supernaturalism).

Archetype

ar-che-type

Pronunciation: ärk-tp

Etymology: Latin archetypum, from Greek arkhetupon, from neuter of arkhetupos, *original* : arkhe-, arkhi-, *archi-* + tupos, *model, stamp*.

Function: noun

1. An original model or type after which other similar things are patterned; a prototype.
2. An ideal example of a type; quintessence.

Endorse

en-dorse

Pronunciation: n-dôrs

Etymology: Middle English endosen, from Anglo-Norman endosser, from Medieval Latin indorsre : Latin in-, *upon, in*; see en-1 + Latin dorsum, *back*.

Function: verb

1. To give approval of or support to, especially by public statement; sanction.
2. To place (one's signature), as on a contract, to indicate approval of its contents or terms.
3. To acknowledge (receipt of payment) by signing a bill, draft, or other instrument.

Generic

ge-ner-ic

Pronunciation: j-nrk

Etymology: From Latin genus, gener-, *kind*. See gen- in Indo-European Roots.

Function: adjective

1. Relating to or descriptive of an entire group or class; general.
2. *Biology*. Of or relating to a genus.
3. a. Not having a brand name: *generic soap*.
b. Of or being a drug sold under or identified by its official nonproprietary or chemical name.

Function: noun

1. A product or substance sold under or identified by a generic name.
2. A wine that is a blend of several grape varieties and does not carry the name of any specific grape.