

RHETORIC

Editor's Note

In Jill Estes' argumentative essay "Pulling Back the Curtains," she describes a remarkable advertisement that combines all the attractive features of former and current tobacco ads but ends with a twist. Estes believes that it is important to remind young audiences that smoking has long-term effects that belie its mystique, and for her, this ad is an important part of that fight. Notice how she weaves analysis with description: "In an age where the glossy pages of magazines are plastered with cartoon depictions of Joe Camel grinning with a cigarette perched conspicuously between his lips . . . one can see how easily impressionable adolescents can fall into the entangling web of lies. . . ." Estes argues that this ad effectively fights the battle against smoking; additionally, she embeds other claims in her argument. What are they? To view the ad she is describing, go to www.tobaccofreeca.com.

Pulling Back the Curtains

Jill K. Estes

I know that smoking is bad for you. I have listened to health teachers profess the detrimental effects of smoking on our health. I have read the general surgeon's warnings on every cigarette advertisement published. I have heard the statistics of lung cancer rates for those who smoke. I have wondered, however, has everyone been exposed to this preventive style of education? In an age where the glossy pages of magazines are plastered with cartoon depictions of Joe Camel grinning with a cigarette perched conspicuously between his lips, and attractive, glamorized women smiling seductively while holding cigarettes between their index and middle fingers, one can see how easily impressionable adolescents can fall into the entangling web of lies the tobacco industry wraps around us. For educated students and adults, deciphering these lies has become natural, but for today's youth, the tobacco industry's relentless and deceptive strategies have become a customary part of their lives. A commercial on television that dispels the long-term festering myths of tobacco companies in thirty seconds is a true feat worth striving for, and Tobacco Free California is the reigning champion.

Lounging on the couch, clutching the remote control in one hand, our bodies relax while our minds reel with the continuous exposure of commercials for self-indulgent products, emaciated models sporting the latest fashions, and delectable mouth-watering foods fresh off the grill. Suddenly, a fast-moving collage of recognizable smoking advertisements appears on the screen. Beginning with a real camel, the rugged Marlboro cowboy tears its way out of the hump, followed by the emergence of a grooving disc jockey, who transforms into the seductive shadow of a strutting woman featured on typical cigarette ads. The

RHETORIC

catchy music fades, and black curtains are drawn off the screen, leaving us face to face with a man struggling with every breath to tell us that “the reality is, you can end up looking like this.” The lingering scene of the man’s dying eyes in his ashen colored face, with an oxygen tube in his nostrils, and his cadaverous body confined to a wheelchair, penetrates our skin, striking our cores with an uneasy disturbance. The slow, heart monitor beeping in the background coupled with his gasping breath for every word, stuns us with its authenticity, veering our minds away from the embellished and air-brushed advertisements that surround us everywhere we look.

Whether we are chuckling with laughter from Citibank commercials, romanticized by jewelry advertisements, or stunned by the shot of a man dying from tobacco, each one is tapping into our emotions, subtly affecting the way we react and respond to the information presented to us. This powerful tactic is blatantly utilized in the commercial by Tobacco Free California, through the subtle adjustments in layout, transitions, and music. In a short thirty seconds, the audience is taken on a journey; we immediately recognize the reference to Joe Camel, hardy Marlboro cowboy, association of disc jockeys with parties and the concept of being “cool,” and the chic woman depicted on Camel advertisements. The rapid transitions, changing voices of characters and catchy background music draws us in, making us feel knowledgeable with our ability to recognize and name the referenced ads. However, when the music fades, and all is stripped away, we are simply faced with the reality of tobacco and its outcome on human beings. Seeing the imminence of death in the dying man’s eyes pulls us in, as if placing us in the wheelchair, with the oxygen tube as the sole support of our lives. This elongated scene allows us to breathe in the intoxicating and choking reality of tobacco, which is disguised and then promoted to our receptive youth by tobacco companies on a daily basis.

In addition to the compelling use of pathos in this commercial, filling our hearts with fervor to join the effort in discounting the tobacco industry’s ethos, and frightening us into never subjecting our bodies to the poison of tobacco, the underlying logistics and reasoning facilitates the expression of the main point to the audience as well. The commercial’s juxtaposition of the most famous smoking advertisements with the resulting effects of tobacco on a dying man rejects any of the authority these ads once had in the viewers’ minds. The commercial simplifies the statistics and surgeon general warnings into one simple statement. If you follow the lies of the tobacco companies, you will ultimately suffer for your actions like this man. Statistics and warnings are powerful, but when illustrated, it is like turning the impact of a billboard into a film projected onto an IMAX screen. Overall, the logic behind this commercial serves as the source of fuel, allowing the emotional reaction to ignite.

As the commercial’s ending scene comes to a close, the camera zooms out, exposing the bright white hospital walls and floor, empty, except for the dying

RHETORIC

man. He stops speaking, and our ears resound with the persisting beeps of the heart monitor. His simple surroundings keep us focused on the message of the commercial, while in the right hand corner, a red box with the bold words, “End the Deception” inscribed appears, which quickly switches to “TobaccoFreeCA.com.” Immediately our feelings are justified with the goodwill of the sponsoring company. We are not being sold a product to help individuals quit smoking, or a profitable group to join to end our smoking addiction, but rather simply being informed on the negative effects of tobacco. The purpose of the commercial is to educate, not manipulate into purchasing a product, and by displaying the name “Tobacco Free California,” the ethos and underlying purpose of the ad is legitimized.

Negative connotations of smoking have been directly and tactfully engrained into my education throughout my twelve years in the public school system. These years of tobacco education and recent exposure to anti-tobacco ads have allowed me to see past the glitz and the glamour, and into the metastasizing lies of the tobacco companies. The goal of spreading these truths is easily achieved through the broadcasting of these anti-tobacco commercials, and they are now reaching younger and younger audiences, enhancing the years of education to help them come to the conclusion that smoking is harmful. The media is an expert in enticing and embellishing companies and their products, but Tobacco Free California has used this power to pull back the curtains, and expose the hidden motives and illusions of the tobacco companies.

Jill Estes is a nutrition major at Cal Poly.