

1950s Cinema Advertising and the South London Press

The copies of the *South London Press* pages from 1950 can be used to explore how cinemas advertised at the time. They also offer opportunities for work on comparing cinema advertising then and now, encouraging children to consider the differences and similarities.

Outlined in the bfi Education publication, *Look Again, The Case for Moving Image Education for 3-11yr olds*, (2003) one of the basic teaching techniques of moving image education is **Attracting Audiences**, examining the relationship between film, the film industry and audience.

For KS2 pupils, it would be particularly interesting to link this historical work on cinema-going and advertising to their own experiences and media advertising today. The following is an extract from *Look Again!*:

| Basic Teaching Technique | Key Questions | Learning Objectives |
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| <p>5. Attracting audiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pupils find examples of a range of merchandise/ promotional items related to a currently popular film/TV programme (eg dolls/action figures, T-shirts, computer games, cereal/crisp packets). ▪ Groups or pairs present their findings (eg. as live presentation, poster montage etc) to the rest of the class indicating what it tells us about whom the film/programme is intended for. <p><i>Possible follow-up</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pupils devise an outline for their own moving image text aimed at a particular audience and then design a series of merchandising items/ promotional tie-ins to promote it. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>What kind of products are offered? eg free gifts/ promotional packaging related to the film/ programme. (Does the film/programme help sell the merchandise/ product or vice versa?)</i> ▪ <i>Is the merchandise/promotional material aimed mainly at boys? Girls? Both? How do you know? (How is gender represented in the design of the products? Is there evidence of stereotypical expectations of what will appeal to boys or girls?)</i> ▪ <i>Are children the only people the merchandise will appeal to? (Is there evidence of more than one type of audience being targeted? eg adult collectors)</i> ▪ <i>How else was the film/programme publicised? (Is there evidence that the merchandise/promotional material is part of a wider, co-ordinated publicity campaign?)</i> ▪ <i>Why do you think the makers of the film/programme might be particularly keen to appeal to a young audience? (Why are children seen as a valuable target market for a wide range of products?)</i> | <p>Pupils should learn that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marketing and promotional strategies are central to most moving image industries. ▪ Moving image texts can be promoted in many different media. ▪ Marketing a film/programme involves promotion through a range of mutually re-enforcing products (synergy). ▪ Children are often specifically targeted as a valuable market for products. |

Basic key questions relating to individual films and also questions to think about when looking at the South London Press pages and any modern film advertising or promotional material also include:

- Who do you think this film's audience is?
- Who is the advertising/promotion aimed at?
- How was this film promoted to audiences?
- Where can/did you see advertising about this film? Collect examples.
- Why were certain techniques used and not others?

Did You Know?...

All the information below can be found from looking at the South London Press pages. Much of the information makes you ask 'Why?' or 'How can we tell?':

- Each cinema only had one screen
- There were two films in every programme (unless the main film was exceptionally long). Programmes usually lasted over three hours and filled a whole evening
- Films were shown continuously (i.e. back to back and then repeated)
- Some smaller cinemas did not bother advertising showing times. Many people would go in at the middle of a film, watch the end and stay to watch the beginning... up to where they came in. (You could telephone if you really wanted to know the start times)
- Cinemas changed their programmes on a Sunday or Monday (smaller cinemas or those showing older films changed on a Thursday as well)
- Most films were in black and white. If a colour film was showing it was mentioned specially in the advertising
- Cinemas in the London area were not allowed to open until 4pm on a Sunday
- Major new films showed with a lesser B feature, which was given less advertising space. Many films that were not appealing enough to be shown as a main feature were put on with other similar films to attract audiences to a 'Double Bill'. They were advertised together in a space split diagonally
- There were 3 major cinema circuits for the best new films; the Gaumont, the ODEON, both owned by J Arthur Rank and showing films from all major Hollywood companies, except MGM and Warner Bros, which were mainly played by the ABC cinemas
- If there was no major cinema in the area smaller cinemas would show the major new releases on a weekly basis. If you missed a big film at a major cinema, you had to wait for it to appear at a smaller one, much later
- Up until October 1950, cinemas were required by law to show British films 40% of the time, unless specially exempted. (It went down to 30% in 1950)
- Some cinemas showed weekly serials, (Why?...to encourage people to return next week).
- Some cinemas had an organist
- There is one example of a News Theatre... At Waterloo Station.

Cinema Advertising and Merchandising

There are and have been for many years, different forms of cinema advertising. Today merchandising surrounding films is almost as important as the film itself with products, particularly aimed at young audiences, often on sale before the film is released.

As highlighted in the section from *Look Again!*, merchandising and marketing provide excellent starting points for exploring the power of film advertising in attracting audiences. The following are examples of advertising and merchandising from the 1940s, 1950s and 1970s.

Children might use these as inspiration for creating their own marketing ideas, e.g.

- Other media 'spin offs' – such as CDs, DVDs, VHS covers
- Sequels and TV spin offs – such as the Superman series
- Posters
- Children's products
- Stationery
- Clothing
- Logos and symbols
- Character masks/costumes
- Food

Looking at materials such as the Paramount poster and the Film News bulleting (Woody Woodpecker) highlights how styles have changed, how audiences are attracted, trends in film genre, what passes as 'eye-catching'. It is interesting to compare these with examples of today's advertising campaigns.

Others ways of exploring advertising might include:

Looking at how and where films are advertised and where merchandise is sold.

- Collecting information, posters, foyer bills and flyers from your local cinemas
- Looking in local and national press
- Collecting examples of merchandising the children are familiar with
- Looking at how and when films are advertised TV and the internet

How do children see themselves as 'audience'?

- What kinds of advertising are aimed at them?
- Do they respond to the advertising?
- How do they choose what films to watch, at the cinema, on TV, on DVD/VHS?