The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom. In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

Core Skill Sets: These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

You can use your buying power to change the world. (Photo credit: Getty Images, Picturenet)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- Green washing emerged as a trend in the 1980s as oil companies began extensive marketing campaigns to direct consumer’s attention away from their negative impacts with supposed green initiatives. As a practice, though, it reaches much further back in marketing history. (The Guardian)

- Cause marketing also traces its roots to the 1980s, when American Express partnered with a nonprofit group that was raising funds to restore the Statue of Liberty; following the massive success of their campaign, there has been a huge expansion of this type of profit-nonprofit partnership. (The Balance)

- Some ads were deemed too political and were changed in advance of the game. (New York Times)

- As society has become more polarized, there has been increased pressure for companies to take a stand on political and social issues; for the most recent example, two ride-sharing apps, Lyft and Uber, had opposing reactions to policies enacted by the US government and saw ridership climb or drop accordingly. (Good Magazine)

- 66 per cent of consumers would pay more for an environmentally or socially responsible product. (Nielsen)

- Advertisers paid more than $385 million in all for ads during the Super Bowl. (Bleacher Report)

KEY TERMS

Cause marketing—a partnership between a for-profit company or product that benefits a nonprofit charity or supports a social cause in some way.

Cause washing—when brands, companies or products claim a social good and align themselves with a cause despite not contributing anything besides a public relations campaign.

Gender equity—the process of being fair to women and men (for example, in hiring practices or in promotions in the workplace) that will lead to wider gender equality.

Shareholder equity—a shareholder is a person that owns a part of a company; by virtue of their ownership, they have a voice in how that company is run and can therefore advocate for ethical, sustainable or responsible practices.
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

- **Themes**: Socially Conscious Living, Activism, Values and Ethics, Information Literacy
- **Course Connections**: Language, Social Studies

MATERIALS

- Front board
- Paper and writing utensils
- Computer/tablet with Internet access and video capability
- Video recording device

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Interpret media texts and analyze overt and implied meaning and messaging.
- Identify social issues and demonstrate an understanding of how an individual can raise awareness.
- Recognize how consumer choices can have an impact on important social issues.

DISCUSS

1. Why does the article warn readers that “Awareness is not an outcome, it’s the start of a journey”?
2. What is “brand activism”? Does it influence what you buy?
3. Why is it important to recognize false advertising? Why is it often a difficult thing to do?
4. In what way did the advertisers at the 2017 Super Bowl break the rules?
5. Which social issues are most important to you? How can the choices you make about what you buy impact those issues?

DIVE DEEPER

Share with students the videos of the following Superbowl 2017 commercials. “84 Lumber Superbowl Commercial”


www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQn5wiDyUHo (1:00) “Coca-Cola ‘Together is Beautiful’ Commercial”

www.youtube.com/watch?v=JchALYBVEGw (0:00-1:00). In pairs or small groups, ask students to discuss the following questions about the commercials:

- What do you already know about the brands advertised in the commercials?
- Do you buy products from those brands?
- What influences your decisions to buy products?
- What are the key messages in the commercial? What are the commercials trying to sell?

As a class, read the *Global Voices* article. Discuss whether or not the commercials changed the students’ views or expectations about the brands, and whether or not they would influence their purchasing decisions. If time permits, watch the commercials again. What elements of the commercials were relevant for them? What other types of information would you need to make a decision? How do you know whether these commercials represent the true values of the brands? What might the brands’ motivations be for creating these commercials?

In the same pairs or groups, ask students to select their favourite brand (for example: MAC cosmetics, ME to WE, Microsoft, Michael Kors) and research this brand’s advertising. Does this brand promote false advertising? What is the brand trying to sell to its consumers? What is the key messaging being communicated about the brand to the consumers?

Ask students to create an alternative television or online media advertisement that effectively communicates the key messaging of the brand and product without using false or exaggerated information. Ask students to think about how the company could support a social issue. For example: a makeup company could ensure that they do not support products that have been tested on animals. Encourage students to include messaging for positive social change in their advertisement. Students can either record a video of their advertisement or role play it for the class.

Asks students to reflect on the advertisements. Would students consider buying the products advertised by their peers? Did they find the connection to the social issue authentic?