Ten Steps to a Winning PSA

Begin by distributing the mini-magazines to each student and reviewing the contest details together. Then use the easy activities below to help your students create persuasive public service announcements and build communication skills.

WHAT’S THE STORY? Ask each student to write a story describing how he or she feels about wearing a seat belt and why. Include characters, setting, introduction, body, and conclusion.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE: Make a list of all the ways to grab a teen’s attention. What do teens care about? What’s stopping them from wearing seat belts now? What might convince them to change?

WRITE A CATCHY SLOGAN: Explain that the most memorable slogans are short and descriptive, and capture the entire message of an ad campaign in just a few words. Ask each student to brainstorm a few memorable slogans and then pick a favorite.

CREATE DRAMATIC VISUAL IMPACT: Discuss how the images in a PSA should be as memorable and dramatic as the slogan. Brainstorm a list of ways to tell the story from Step 1 visually (see “Here’s Where You Start” in the mini-magazine). Each student should sketch his or her ideas or find examples in magazines, newspapers, or on TV.

SEARCH FOR SOUND AND MUSIC: Discuss the powerful, emotional impact of sound effects and music. Students should choose thirty seconds of a song that will tell their story emotionally.

WRITE A THIRTY-SECOND SCRIPT: Students should write a script for a 30-second PSA and read it aloud to the class. Does it sound natural? Based on the story, every piece of dialogue should be essential to relaying the main message.

DRAW STORYBOARDS: Ask students to use the Official Storyboard Template worksheet on the back cover of the mini-magazine. Students should pull their slogan, images, sound, and script together with a storyboard that outlines how each shot in the commercial will look. Each 30-second PSA should have six storyboard frames.

ROUND UP YOUR GEAR: Distribute copies of the Video Production Resources reproducible on the back cover for local organizations that can help students create their commercial. Students will need a video camera, video/DVD, and microphone, or they may use other multimedia resources if desired.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE: Students should practice their PSAs in front of the class before filming.

ENTER TO WIN: Collect each entry (including an entry form, six-frame storyboard, and a video/DVD of a completed public service announcement). Mail all entries to: Fasten Your Seat Belt...Go Far! Contest, Scholastic/SMP, P.O. Box 713, New York, NY 10013-0711.

FILMMAKER’S GUIDE

Filming: Most cameras have either square or rectangular viewfinders. To transfer your storyboard sketches to film, check that the shape of each storyboard frame is similar to that of the viewfinder on your camera. Storyboards: Approach your PSA in small steps by filming each storyboard frame separately. It may be necessary to film the same scene several times until the lighting, sound, and performances are perfect. Lighting: Sunlight, lamps, and flashlights can have a huge effect on a film, but remember to keep the lighting consistent. For example, if your actors are five feet from a light source in one scene, make sure that they are not standing ten feet from it in the next. Cameras: Your PSA should be filled with energy and movement, but keep the camera steady. For example, you can show movement by having an actor run toward a stationary camera. Actors: When scheduling time with actors, arrange for two blocks of their time so you can do initial shooting, edit your film, and then go back for additional shots. Color: Use vibrant colors and textured fabrics in order to capture the audience’s attention.

FACTS TO CONSIDER

1. Teens who don’t wear seat belts are breaking the law—in all 50 states.
2. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for American teenagers.*
3. Drivers aged 16–19 have the highest crash rate per miles driven. The rate is four times higher than that of all other age groups combined.*
4. Someone is killed in a car crash every 13 minutes.*
5. In 2003, more than 5,000 teens died in auto accidents; two-thirds of them were not wearing safety belts.*
6. 32% of teens believe their peers don’t buckle up because they feel seat belts are uncomfortable.**
7. 30% of teens believe their peers don’t buckle up because they feel seat belts are uncomfortable.**
8. Most teens know a friend or relative who has been in an auto accident who benefitted from wearing a seat belt.**
9. Statistics show that people increase their chances of surviving a crash by 50% if they wear seat belts.***

* NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) ** Volkswagen of America informal poll *** New Hampshire Chief of Police Association

RESEARCH RESOURCES

Automobile Association of America www.aaa.com
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration www.fmcsa.dot.gov
Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Highway Loss Data Institute www.hwysafety.org
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control www.cdc.gov/ncipc
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development www.nichd.nih.gov
National Safety Council www.nsc.org
U.S. Department of Transportation www.dot.gov

PERSUASIVE WRITING TIPS

1. Present your opinion clearly at the beginning and end of your PSA.
2. Consider why others might disagree with your opinion, and present a counterargument to their disagreement.
3. Research how your audience feels about your topic.
4. Appeal to your audience’s emotions.
5. Use a catchy slogan to help your audience remember you and your message.