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Tootsie Pop: Memorable Childhood Candy Commercial

Writing Process

Before I began writing the first draft I watched the Classic Tootsie Pop commercial multiple times and determined how the commercial effectively allured to the audience of both parents and their children. While I wrote my first draft, I continued to play the commercial and reminded myself of the lasting impact of this 1970s commercial as my classmates in elementary school conducted this licking experiment. After my first draft, I received feedback from a classmate and my professor. I took some of their advice, edited my paper, and turned it in.

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Tootsie Pop: Memorable Childhood Candy Commercial

Emily Newcomer

In the classic commercial “How Many Licks?” produced by Tootsie Roll, a boy approaches a cow, a fox, a turtle, and an owl, inquiring about how many licks it takes to reach the center of a Tootsie Pop. Each animal directs the boy to the next, wiser animal for all of them admit to being guilty of biting the sucker before reaching the center. By the end of the commercial, the boy’s question has still not been answered. The Tootsie Roll commercial effectively sells the Tootsie Pop, as well as the idea of the product, to children and their parents by incorporating a repeated rhetorical question that poses a challenge, imagery that evokes nostalgia, and the allusion that the Tootsie Pop is too good to simply lick to the core.

The rhetorical question, “How many licks does it take to get to the Tootsie Roll center of a Tootsie Pop?” (“Classic Tootsie Roll Commercial”) is repeated five times throughout the commercial to provoke curiosity in the audience watching the advertisement. Specifically, the inflection of the narrator who raises the question at the end makes the viewer feel as if the question is being asked directly of them. People are encouraged to find out themselves how many licks it takes, and to do so, must go out and buy a Tootsie Pop. Finding the answer to this question has become popular among elementary school students at science fairs, but the question has perplexed more than just children as scientists and universities have also developed complex experiments. There is no determinate answer, yet, which keeps people engaged to prove their model is the best, like students at Purdue University who created a licking machine (“Scientific Endeavors”). The commercial summons this determination in people to find the solution to the question with the unsettling phrase, “The world may never know” (“Classic”). It is human nature to thirst for knowledge and fear the unknown; however, the expression includes “may,” indicating that this problem is in fact solvable. The mysterious tone in the narrator’s voice and the repetition of the

rhetorical question subtly provokes the inquisitive viewer to find out for themselves just how many licks it takes to reach the center of a Tootsie Pop.

Not only does the commercial resonate with children, but the stylistic choices awaken the inner child within the parents. The imagery of the cartoon commercial effectively evokes nostalgia within the parental audience which allows them to connect a Tootsie Pop to childhood memories. Since children cannot drive and do not make a living, parents become the primary target market. Thus, the commercial must cater to the want of the child but focus on the appeal to the parent. A universal childhood rite of passage is cozying up on the couch and tuning into the cartoon station, which the Tootsie Pop commercial utilizes to remind the adult viewers of happier times. The characters in the commercial are of a simplistic nature, almost as if a child had drawn them, not as realistic and lifelike as can be seen today. Altogether, the commercial is not a huge production: the visuals, the audio, and the concept are all straightforward. Yet, the simplicity did not affect the memorability of the message as the “How Many Licks?” commercial remains one of the most popular commercials today since first airing in the 1970’s. The curious child is also a reminder to parents of how their life was unstructured at one point, how they were free to explore the world and their own creative questions about life. The nostalgic imagery reminds the parents that they were once kids too, and that by enjoying a Tootsie Pop, they might momentarily be able to enter the pleasures of their childhood again.

While the commercial successfully sells the Tootsie Pop, the focus is on selling the idea of the sucker through the allusion that the Tootsie Pop is simply too irresistible for the wisest parent and most curious child to fight the urge to bite. From the cow to the fox to the turtle to the owl, each animal directs the boy to the next by describing the animal as “much cleverer,” “been around much longer,” and “the wisest” (“Classic”). As the commercial shows though, no amount of experience or intelligence can stop the impulse to get straight to the center of the Tootsie Pop. However, the message is not that viewers are not smart enough to have a Tootsie Pop, but that even the most astute adults can succumb to the delicious taste. Additionally, there is music that decrescendos at the end with the image of Tootsie Pops diminishing until they eventually get bitten to the core. The sound is similar to the noise that an arcade game makes when a player loses, but the inability to reach the center without biting the sucker is not seen as a failure. Instead, the commercial portrays the indulgence as a normal phenomenon that intrigues both children and parents to see if they too cannot resist the sugary goodness.

The humorous statement at the end of the cartoon segment encompasses the rhetorical devices woven throughout the Tootsie Pop commercial. After the owl

bites the boy's Tootsie Pop, the boy remarks, "If there's anything I can't stand, it's a smart aleck" ("Classic"). The owl annoys the boy, who represents the curious youngsters in the audience, because he pretends to answer the boy's rhetorical question with a mere "Three." The term "smart aleck" resonates with parents who once used the label to admonish their exasperating friends at a time when they were still immune to inappropriate language. Lastly, the owl, wisest of them all, was wise enough to trick the boy into giving him his Tootsie Pop, yet not wise enough to savor the Tootsie Pop all the way to the Tootsie Roll. Within the minute-long commercial, both parents and children are left longing for the taste of a delicious Tootsie Pop due to the rhetorical question, imagery, and allusion that work together compellingly to capture their attention, make their mouths salivate, and feel the urge to go buy a Tootsie Pop.

Works Cited

"Classic Tootsie Roll Commercial – 'How Many Licks.'" *YouTube*, uploaded by Tootsie Roll, 15 August 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6rHeD5x2tI>.

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