



Teaching media literacy & geographies of consumption



a guide to running a subvertisement workshop

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This guide sets out an approach to teaching media literacy and the geographies of consumption that has been developed by the NGO Pro Ethical Trade Finland (Eettisen kaupan puolesta ry), with funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland. A subvertisement workshop involves interpreting and subverting the messages made in product advertising. With their teachers, students are shown how to critically read advertisements brought into the classroom and encouraged to work out:

- How images and texts are designed to convey a message about a commodity
- How advertisements convey relationships between people, places and things
- What claims advertisements make about the origins and uses of commodities and what information and imagery is missing
- How advertisements can be altered to convey alternative messages
- How and where subvertisements can encourage critical readings of advertisements?

Children and young people are bombarded by diverse commercial messages on social media, on the street, on TV, in movies and in games. Teachers can help students to learn the differences between journalism and marketing as well as develop their capacity to critically interpret what they see and hear. Treating advertisements as central to

the geographies of consumption, media literacy skills can also help students to better appreciate the geographies of international trade and what they can do to foster more sustainable trading relations (including various forms of civic participation such as ethical consumption, recycling, petition signing and subvertising). This guide also contains illustrations of student-made subvertisements tackling controversial issues such as climate change, inequality and fashion ethics.

This guide outlines a five stage workshop process, including definitions, aims, teaching methods and materials needed for each stage. Activities 1 and 2 place advertisements in the context of world trade. Activity 3 shows how to critically analyse the language of advertisements. Activities 4 and 5 detail ways to discuss culture jamming and practically make and display subvertisements. The activities have been designed for 60–90 minutes (or more) of lesson time in English, Media Studies, Communication or Geography courses, for example. They have been designed for 10 to 12 year old children but, by following the advanced top tips and link list, can be adapted for older students or special groups.

Alongside the serious ideas they bring out for discussion, these activities will enable your students to enjoy creative moments of self-expression, develop their motivation to participate in class, and impress you and each other with their critical mischief-making skills!

Best regards,

Anna and Eeva, Pro Ethical Trade Finland.



SUBVERTISEMENTS (or subverts) are advertisement parodies which convey another kind of message. By using humour and the language of advertisements they comment on the problems of consumer society such as the environmental destruction and human right abuses at sites of production, or beauty ideals at sites of consumption. A good subvertisement will interfere with what an advertisement is trying to do. It will ask critical questions of the brand and the impact that it is making in the world.

SUBVERTISEMENTS are part of a wider genre known as culture jamming which also includes street art and performance. Culture jamming is a participatory, creative and enjoyable way to engage people in discussions of controversial issues.

1 INTRODUCTION TO WORLD TRADE AND ADVERTISING



A subadvertisement workshop in the French-Finnish school of Helsinki, Finland. Photo: Eeva Kempainen / Pro Ethical Trade Finland.

AIM: To learn how to systematically analyse corporate advertising. To discuss the 'hidden lives' of commodities. According to the theme of your lesson you can examine, for example, the environmental and human rights impacts of the production of commodities, explore the mental images created by advertising and consider how adverts relate to students' ethical consumption.

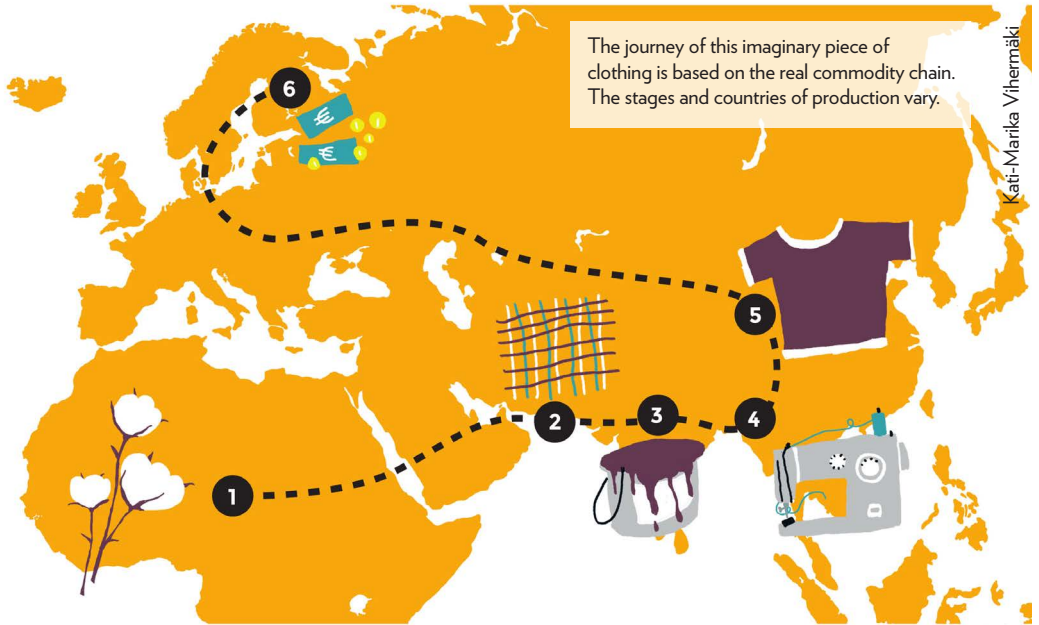
METHODS: Value line /continuum (see p. 5), examining the life cycle of a product, commodity chain map (see p. 4), pair discussion on a Banksy video (see activity 3), examining recent news stories or playing the Sim Sweatshop game (see www.simsweatshop.com).



Preliminary homework exercise

Ask students to:

- write down the brands or products they have seen in their favourite movie, at home, on the street or on social media during one day, and/or
- bring an advertisement to school which they think is interesting or provocative, and/or
- bring a news story related to the topic to class.



According to the lesson topic, world trade can be approached by examining the background of global trade in colonial and more recent history or the environmental impacts of production processes. Whose natural resources are we using and how much? How have the structures of world trade been formed and how can they be affected? The theme can be grasped, for example, using the map above which shows the journey of an item of clothing along its commodity chain. The value line exercise on the following page can work as an orientation to the topic.

Students may feel disconnected from other places and people in world trade so it would be useful to introduce this theme with concrete examples. The most engaging commodities are those which are close to them, worn by them or found in their pockets. Students can start by looking at the 'Made in' labels on their clothes and gadgets. News

stories and NGO campaigns, especially in relation to clothes, electronics and food, can be sourced online. The topic can also be grasped by discussing a Banksy video in pairs (see activity 3) and/or by playing the Sim Sweatshop game (see www.simsweatshop.com) and analysing with students how this reflects reality.

You can also introduce the session by going through a preliminary exercise and conclude by summarising the commercial messages identified by the students and briefly discussing thoughts arising from them. The aim is to pay attention to the pervasiveness of advertising that young people face. If the students have collected news articles, they can be gathered for a discussion. The more in-depth examination of ads is suitable for the following activity of the workshop.

VALUE LINE

ON A VALUE LINE or CONTINUUM students can express their opinions by positioning themselves on an imaginary line across the classroom - those agreeing with a statement standing nearer to one end and those disagreeing nearer the other - or by lifting their hands in the air to agree or touching the ground

to disagree. Some may partly agree or disagree, so they can position themselves accordingly. Once this has been done you can ask a small selection of students to explain their location along the line. This is a quick and easy way for all students to participate, and for instructors to appreciate where students stand on an issue.

STATEMENTS TO TRY OUT ON A VALUE LINE

- I see a lot of ads on a daily basis
- I receive useful information from ads
- I often get clothes and things I wish for
- Ads make me desire new things
- Ads make me feel unhappy because I can't have what they're showing me
- I have watched a film or news story about the production of a commodity
- I know where in the world my shirt has been made
- I know where my old phones have gone after use
- We have unused clothes or phones at home
- I know what a subvertisement is

TOP TIPS

- Practical exercises can motivate a restless group of students to work together in class. They can also increase students' energy levels and their need for personal attention.
- The 'Made in' labels or the commercial messages identified by students can be arranged into a collage or map to visualise the pervasiveness of the topic. The collage can be photographed and shared online using the hashtag #subvertisement.
- If you want to include a lesson in which students map stages of production using Google Earth maps, see a great plan with illustrations by the Royal Geographical Society (see link on p.18).
- Convenient exercises can also be found in the education resources produced for Fashion Revolution Day (www.fashionrevolution.org/get-involved/education).
- For a more advanced exercise, you can organise a group discussion to critically examine 'ethical consumption' and ways in which consumers can make a positive impact on the lives and environments of factory, farm and other workers along commodity chains. One way to make that impact is for students to write to companies with their concerns and questions. They could examine Corporate Social Responsibility statements of fashion brands like Mango and Patagonia (see links to the statements on p.18) and participate in a wider movement, such as Fashion Revolution Day.

2 ANALYSIS OF ADVERTISEMENTS

AIM: To learn to analyse advertising images, messages and language which can lure people into buying by employing particular signs, tactics and effects.

MATERIALS: 2 or 3 adverts for cosmetics, clothes, cars or mobile phones for example brought to class by the students (or chosen by you).

A preliminary exercise

Choose examples from the students' advertisements. Good questions for discussion are: What does an advert aim to do? What is a brand? Which logos or slogans can you remember? What adverts do you find interesting and why? Where were these advertisements displayed?

Examination of your adverts

Choose 2 or 3 adverts for closer examination. The exercise can be set up as a discussion with the whole group or in pairs. The aim is to learn how to deconstruct adverts in general by asking questions about a small selection of

adverts: Which products or brands can be seen in them? What can you see in the foreground and what is in the background? What kinds of people appear in the adverts, and who might be left out? What kind of atmosphere do these adverts create? How do you think their designers wanted the viewers to feel? Have these adverts been made in good taste? What makes this advert eye-catching? (see Appendix 1 for question prompt sheet)

Together, you should try to identify the signs, tactics and effects of these adverts on their viewers including, for example, the positioning and reading direction of their main imagery, their colours and lighting, their background views, make-up, editing, humour and slogans.

TOP TIPS

- In primary school you can use adverts directed at children or for commodities that are popular in class, such as breakfast cereals. Younger students may need some time to make sense of their visual culture, and to begin to question the meanings and effects of adverts.
- Students should pay attention to gender representations in choosing and discussing adverts. Do they seem to have been made for a certain gender of viewer? How do they represent people of that gender and/or others to their viewers?
- For a more advanced discussion, you can ask: is journalistic content (articles and columns) easy to separate from adverts? What are the main differences between journalism and advertising? Have you heard of advertorials? (Advertorials are adverts written in the form of an article).
- For a more detailed account of how to analyse advertising and other media, see UNESCO (2012) in the link list on p. 18.

3 ANALYSIS OF CULTURE JAMMING AND SUBVERTISEMENTS



The Pink Project – Seewoo and Her Pink Things (Part), Light jet Print, 2005 ©JeongMee Yoon.

AIM: To strengthen media literacy and open up means of culture jamming by examining photos, videos and a subvertisement gallery together.

METHODS: Photos, prints and/or a video of visual culture jams and subvertisements. Excellent collections of subvertisements can be found, for example, in Voima and Adbusters magazines/websites (see the link list on p.18). You can easily make a collection of your own examples through an online image search for ‘subvertisement’ or ‘billboard liberation’ in English or ‘vastamainos’ in Finnish. Including the name of a product or company in your search will help you to find subvertisements suitable for the age and interests of your students.

Questions for visual culture jams:

- What responses do they provoke?
- Which advertising signs, tactics and effects do they mimic?
- What messages are their makers trying to convey?
- How obvious are they?
- Which of them do you think work best?



Jani Leinonen. One Day, 2011. Acrylic on wood, 186 x 261 cm.
Photo: Vilhelm Sjöström.

Visual culture jamming

Culture jamming is a participatory, creative and enjoyable way to engage people in critical discussions of commercial culture using the signs, tactics and effects of commercial culture. Examples of culture jamming should be chosen according to the age of your students. Tell students that, in addition to shopping more ethically or making impacts in other ways (e.g. giving money to charity or signing a petition), they can make a personal impact through creating a visual culture jam that can shake, amuse and provoke others to think and talk about an issue. Excellent examples of culture jamming include the brand parody painting about global inequality by Jani Leinonen and the photograph series about consumption, colour norms and happiness by JeongMee Yoon. These images can be examined with your students. They could inform a thought-provoking discussion about the definition, role and limits of art in society.

Examining subvertisements

Subvertising is a kind of culture jamming through which artists and photographers create spoof or parody advertisements, which are critical of the ways that advertising both entices us to buy things we may not need and hides their commodities' problematic backstories. Subvertising is attractive to young people because of its playfulness and mischief-making possibilities. Students can find it difficult to understand the signs, tactics and effects of advertising's visual culture, but when subvertisers make mischief with them they are easier to see.

Making a subvertisement involves taking an existing advertisement and changing its message by modifying its original imagery, logo or text. In contrast to other visual culture jams, a subvertisement is more likely to take issue with a particular brand or commodity. Excellent examples include Smell by Harro Koskinen, Ä&O and Naïve by Voima Magazine and Nke by Adbusters.



Left: Voima magazine. So'Real, 2009. Subvertisement.
Right: Voima magazine. Brainfry, 2011. Subvertisement.



Exercise: subvertisement gallery

In a subvertisement gallery students interpret various types of subverts in pairs or a larger group. This enables students to soak up the inspiration and sense of humour and irony used in subvertisements that they will need when making their own. For this exercise you will need to print out a selection of subvertisements and arrange them on a large table or tables. Ask the students to walk around them and discuss with their friends or in their group:

- Which subvertisements do you like? Which ones don't you like? Why?**
- Which products or brands have been modified?**
- Are they funny or serious?**
- What issues are they trying to draw attention to?**
- Have they been made in good taste?**

After the students have spent sufficient time examining and discussing the subvertisements in pairs or in groups, ask them to share some of their answers.



Jana Balušíková. I'm growing it, 2012. Subvertisement, Mainoskupa [Ad bubble] subvertisement contest.

JANA BALUŠÍKOVÁ's subvertisement I'm growing it can generate laughter and its message can be brought out with some guiding questions: Which brand has the maker modified? What has been changed compared to the original ad? What is different about its slogan and what does the shape of the logo remind you of? What message is being conveyed by this image and why do you think it has been made?



The Yes Men. iPhone 4CF, 2010.
www.apple-cf.com.yeslab.org.

This website home page by **THE YES MEN** mimics the design and commercial language of the market-leading smartphone company Apple but reveals problems in the production of electronics through 'identity correction': creating a spoof website that shows what they think a corporation could and should be doing. The 'Apple' corporation was launching "the first ecologically and socially sustainable phone": the iPhone 4CF (CF = conflict-free). Its component parts did not include minerals sourced from mines in conflict zones like those in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The people working in the factories in China where it was assembled would have decent pay and conditions. You could print out a form and take into your local Apple Store to upgrade your existing iPhone to an iPhone 4CF, for free! This website was taken down, but its existence and takedown generated a great deal of discussion about why Apple and other electronics companies weren't producing phones like this, and how they could and should.



Banksyfilm Simpsons, 2010.

Youtube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX1plQQJTo.

The couch gag made for and shown in the animated TV series *The Simpsons* by the street artist **BANKSY** raises questions about the wellbeing of adults, children, animals and the environment in the production of the series and its merchandise. Discussions of this video are best facilitated by asking students in pairs to write down their questions about the video on sticky notes.

TOP TIPS

- While choosing subvertisements for your class, consider your students' age, gender sensitivity, cultural backgrounds and other special characteristics. Work such as the pink photograph by Yoon and the Brainfry subvert by Voima might generate interesting observations and discussion.
- With primary school students it is better to start off with collective discussion of subvertisements (e.g. displayed on a screen, one by one). In a subvertisement gallery, it is better to divide the class into 2 or 3 groups in which the students vote for their favourite subvertisement from 3 to 5 options which is then interpreted with the whole class. Group work and voting increase participation and a more tightly organised assignment can make it easier to keep the students on task.
- For a more advanced discussion, you can ask the students if they think it is fair to criticise companies in this way and if this can be done responsibly. Instead of easy mockery, a subvertisement should convey a clear message which encourages conversations between companies, advertisers, consumers and citizens. A good point for comparison is political satire.
- The examples on page 10 and 11 raise geographical questions about who makes our stuff and what kind of image manipulation are used for storytelling. If you want to move beyond the work of the Yes Men and Banksy, work by many other filmmakers, artists and activists who tell stories about the life cycles of products can be found on www.followthethings.com.
- Researchers and product innovators have been developing the idea of a conflict free smartphone from an activist stunt (the iPhone 4c) into a real product (the Fairphone). You can ask your students to explore the Fairphone website (www.fairphone.com) and discuss how ethical it is and what lessons it gives to market-leading brands such as Apple and Samsung.
- Other topics for advanced discussion are: Who has the right to use urban space for communication? Why is it important to find new ways to provoke discussion about important issues? What are the limits of the legal and illegal in street art? What is, and isn't, art?
- For background knowledge: subvertising is not illegal plagiarism. In the eyes of law, subverts are intended as individual pieces of art parodying original advertisements, they are not used in the course of trade or to sell a modified product.

4 MAKING YOUR OWN SUBVERTISEMENT

AIM: To learn media criticism in practise, to experiment with a new form of self-expression and to participate in discussions about controversial issues by making your own subvertisements individually, in pairs or in groups.

METHODS: A large selection of advertisements printed or cut from magazines, pens, paper, glue and scissors.



Activity: make your own subvertisement

These are the instructions you can give to your students. First, choose one or more advertisements that you think have an interesting or provocative message or design. Next, think about ways in which each advertisement's message could be changed by modifying the logo, image and/or text, by adding or erasing something, or by some other ingenious method!

A subvertisement can be made straightforwardly by modifying an advertisement. You can argue with its message, question or imagery by adding your thoughts directly to the ad. You can start with a blank piece of paper to make a subvertisement that doesn't necessarily mimic a specific advertisement, but parodies the language of advertising on a general level. You can cut imagery and text from an advert and create new meanings with them as a collage (with or without your own drawings and sketches in the spaces between). It's best to do this together and physically with scissors, paper, pens and glue. Talking about what you're trying to say and how that's possible with the materials with which you are working will inevitably involve discussions of world trade, advertising and subvertising.

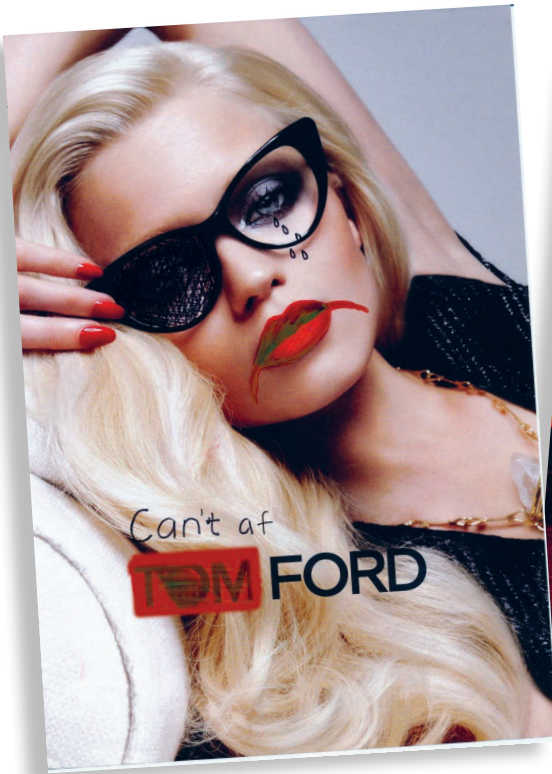
Some students will take to subvertising like a duck to water, and quickly make several pieces. For others, their ideas and creativity will emerge more slowly. For the instructor, it's therefore important to help everyone to start, to discuss emerging work and to provide positive comments with suggestions for further developments. For example, "That's quite a powerful slogan, how could you change it?" or "Would your idea work better if you drew or wrote something on the advertisement?" Here, less is often more. Tiny modifications to an advertisement can be just as powerful as major reworkings.

No matter how old your students are, they will need encouragement. As they experiment, it's a good idea to go around the class and remind individual students what subvertising is about. Adding a moustache, eyelashes or missing teeth to a model's face is something that many will have done before. But, if you see this, ask how it helps to illustrate the modified slogan or message they have come up with? Will these additions make that message clearer to their viewers? How could they make a subvertisement with originality and style?



Above: An example of student work made in a subvertisement workshop in Kortepohja primary school, Jyväskylä, Finland.

Below: An example of student work made in a subvertisement workshop in Joensuun yhteiskoulun lukio (upper secondary school), Joensuu Finland.



Left: An example of student work made in a subvertisement workshop in Vaskivuori upper secondary school, Vantaa, Finland.

Right: An example of student work made in a subvertisement workshop in Soukka primary school, Espoo, Finland.

TOP TIPS

- It's a good idea to divide the class into groups of 3 to 5 students in order to encourage concentration on the task and to enable even the most shy or reluctant students to participate. Some may come up with ideas in pairs or individually.
- Go through the instructions before handing out the advertisements, tell the students what time the task will finish and advise them to finish their work about five minutes before this.
- If a student is reluctant to take part, ask them to find a good or a bad advertisement or the best subvertisement and explain their choice. If a student thinks that the modifying of advertisements is bad behaviour, this could be the start of an interesting discussion about the ethics of advertising and subvertising (see additional questions in the top tips of activity 3). This work is provocative and should rouse feelings and discussion. Bear in mind that you cannot force students to be creative. However, you may find a more cautious student finishing the task with the best feeling if she or he has been able to participate, for example, as a commentator or narrator.
- With appropriate materials, equipment and student skills a subvertisement can also be produced with a smartphone/tablet app or photo/video editing software. Students' subVERTISEMENTS can be shared online using the hashtag #subvertisement.



Above: An example of student work made in a subvertisement workshop in Vaskivuori upper secondary school, Vantaa, Finland.

Below: An example of student work made in a subvertisement workshop in Vaskivuori upper secondary school, Vantaa, Finland. The models cut out of a children's clothing advertisement comment on child labour.

5 PRESENTATION OF STUDENT WORK AND CONCLUSION



A subvertisement workshop in Mikkilä primary school, Espoo, Finland.
Photo: Eeva Kempainen / Pro Ethical Trade Finland.

AIM: To go through the work created by students, thank them for their creative contribution, summarise the process they have been through, and draw conclusions from this.

METHODS: The subvertisements created by the students, a visualiser (to project them on a screen) or a noticeboard and pins or Blu-Tack.

Given appropriate support, students can create between 5 and 15 pieces of work in 30 minutes. You can ask the students to present the subvertisements they have made on screen (using a visualiser) or on a noticeboard. They should explain how they have modified the original

advertisements and compare different techniques they have used (e.g. modifying the logo, the image and/or the text, drawing, cutting and pasting, making collage, creating new advertisement art). Make sure everyone gets a round of applause!

Students' subvertisements will vary from easy-going jokes to strong social commentary. During their presentations you can discuss the trustworthy, parodic and/or provocative values of their work. Students will make subvertisements about beauty products, environmental problems, the healthiness of food and the ethical issues in the production of clothes, amongst others topics. In primary schools, you will need to be cautious with more 'grown up' topics in advertisements such as the photoshopping of models' bodies, the use of sex and sexuality, the marketing of luxury goods in times of austerity, and the ethics of

tobacco and alcohol. Your workshop's series of tasks may provoke confusion among your students but, with appropriate support, this can morph into in-depth reflection and further enquiry questions. This is exactly what you want! However, because the workshop will examine controversial themes, it is important not leave the students in a state of helplessness or guilt. The workshop should end with positive ways forwards so that students leave the classroom empowered and happy. One way to do this is by asking the students to form a concluding value line.

STATEMENTS TO TRY OUT ON A CONCLUDING VALUE LINE

- Today I learned new things about world trade
- I understand what advertisements are communicating to me
- I am going to recycle my old clothes and phones
- I will consider my impulse purchases more carefully
- Examining and modifying advertisements was interesting
- I recognise a subvertisement when I see one
- A subvertisement can change a consumer's buying decision

TOP TIPS

- The examination and creation of subvertisements is more than just a fun thing to do in class. When the students are presenting their subvertisements, you should comment on their work in such a way as to clarify the geographical terminology, theoretical ideas, tools of analysis and in-depth themes, such as inequality, environmental problems or binding beauty ideals. At its best, this can guide lively discussions about what is going on in the world.
- You could also create an exhibition elsewhere in your school, and/or on its website, of the students' work (including, perhaps, examples of the artist-produced culture jamming and subvertisements that informed this work).
- You can also see tips about how everyone can make a positive difference in the world in chapter 7 of www.globaalikuluttaja.fi, by using Google Translate.



SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Internet sources:

www.adbusters.org/spoofads

The subvertisements of Adbusters.

www.banksy.co.uk

The groundbreaking street art of Banksy.

www.cleanclothes.org

Clean Clothes Campaign website.

www.eetti.fi

The homepage of Pro Ethical Trade Finland.

www.ethicalconsumer.org/portals/0/downloads/ethical_consumer_guide.pdf

A guidebook of ethical consumerism.

www.fashionrevolution.org

Fashion Revolution (to find out if there is a Fashion Revolution group in the country where you live, see www.fashionrevolution.org/get-involved/countries).

<http://uusi.voima.fi/Vastamainokset/>

The subvertisements of Voima magazine.

www.followthethings.com

Films, art work, activism showing the life cycles of products.

www.gloabalikuluttaja.fi

Excercises [in Finnish] on world trade by Pro Ethical Trade Finland.

www.kuilutumpeen.fi

Kuilut umpeen blog [see tag 'English'].

www.mainoskupla.fi

Mainoskupla [Ad bubble] subvertisement contest.

www.osocio.org

Non-profit advertising and marketing for social causes.

www.patagonia.com/us/footprint

Patagonia's Corporate Social Responsibility statement.

www.fairphone.com

Fairphone website.

www.rgs.org/NR/rdonlyres/C93678D7-0244-47A7-A835-8B25F19F810A/0/KS2_GlobalTrade_3_LessonPlan.pdf

A global trade lesson plan by Royal Geographical Society.

www.shop.mango.com/web/oi/servicios/company/rsc/memorias.php

Mango's Corporate Social Responsibility statement.

www.simsweatshop.com

Sim Sweatshop game.

www.slideshare.net/eetti

The powerpoints of Pro Ethical Trade Finland.

Further reading:

Darts, D. (2004) Visual culture jam: art, pedagogy and creative resistance. *Studies in Art Education* 45(4), 313–327.

Lambert-Beatty, C. (2010) Fill in the blank: culture jamming and the advertising of agency. *New directions for youth development* 12, 99–112.

Sandlin, J. (2007) Popular culture, cultural resistance, and anticonsumption activism: an exploration of culture jamming as critical adult education. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 115, 73–82.

UNESCO (2012) How to Interpret Media. Module 4 in *Pedagogies of Media and Information Literacies* [especially p. 83–89]. (<http://iite.unesco.org/pics/publications/en/files/3214705.pdf>)

ORIGINAL TEXT IN FINNISH

Medialukutaitoa vastamainoksista - opas vastamainostyöpajan pitämiseen
by Eeva Kemppainen & Anna Ylä-Anttila, 2015. (www.eetti.fi/medialukutaitoa)

TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED

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FUNDED BY

Pro Ethical Trade Finland, Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland & Kone Foundation.
The content of this document does not necessarily represent the official views of the funding organisations.

COVER PHOTOS

Student work made in subvertisement workshops in Kortepohja primary school in Jyväskylä, Vaskivuori upper secondary school in Vantaa, Mikkälä primary school in Espoo and Riihimäki upper secondary school in Riihimäki, Finland.

PUBLISHER

Eeva Kemppainen & Pro Ethical Trade Finland, Helsinki 2016.
Printed in Suomen Uusiokuori Oy, Somero 2018.

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Kati-Marika Vihermäki

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What does an advertisement tell you and what does it leave untold?
What are subvertisements and how can you use them in teaching?

With the help of this guide, you can run a subvertisement workshop suitable for primary schools or groups of older students in which you learn to both consume and produce media texts. In this workshop you and your students can critically analyse advertisements, ask questions of world trading relations that bring products into your lives, and use this knowledge to make and present your own subvertisements.

The guide has been produced by Pro Ethical Trade Finland (Eettisen kaupan puolesta ry) with a funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland. We would like to thank all the classes who participated in the workshops and the volunteers who lead them. For co-operation we would especially like to thank Kivimäki school in Vantaa and the Suikkila unit of Teräsrautela school in Turku, Finland.



Pro Ethical Trade Finland is a non-governmental organisation which promotes fair global trade, sustainable production practises and ethical consumption. We generate discussion on the problems of global production and encourage companies towards corporate responsibility.