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Stereotypes

A stereotype is an oversimplified portrayal of someone. “Dumb blond”, “insensitive male” and “wicked stepmother” are all examples of a stereotype. Many forms of media use stereotypes. These are an easy way to get a point across quickly. However, stereotypes often end up hurting people.

Directions: Consider the scenarios in the chart below. Each uses a stereotype. Describe who is being stereotyped. Then explain who might be hurt by this media.

Scenario	Who is Being Stereotyped and How?	Who Might be Hurt By This Media?
<p>1. A bookshop films a new TV advertisement. In it, Asian people read soberly on benches beside shelves. White people laugh at tables in a bookshop's café.</p>		
<p>2. A newspaper runs an ad for mobile phones. In it, a very thin woman in a tight red dress holds a phone to her ear. Handsome men surround her. In one corner of the ad, a woman of average weight wears overalls and stands alone looking enviously at the woman with the phone.</p>		
<p>3. A children's book has a chapter in which the narrator, living in the 1800s, meets an Aboriginal Australian. The narrator says the Aboriginal Australian looks savage, is stupid because he can't speak English and doesn't have a house.</p>		

The War of the Worlds

In 1938, a young actor and director by the name of Orson Welles broadcast a piece on the radio that caused people great fear and, later, great shame.

Welles and his Mercury Theatre Company performed a play adapted from H. G. Wells' famous science fiction novel called *The War of the Worlds*. It was a book about Martians invading Earth. One section sounded like a news broadcast reporting the Martian invasion.

The play was so convincing that listeners believed their planet really was being invaded by Mars. Cars jammed the roads as people tried to escape. Other listeners hid in cellars. Some wrapped wet towels around their heads, hoping to avoid the Martians' poison gas. This was all despite the many references to it being fiction that were included in the broadcast.

Directions: Welles' radio show caused a panic. You can listen to it online or buy it on CD. Alternatively, you can read a transcript of the show on the Internet. Type the following words into a search engine: *War of the Worlds radio* or *Orson Welles radio* to find an appropriate link. Listen to part of the broadcast. Then, fill in the chart below. The relevant part of this broadcast occurs within the first five minutes.

<p>1. Briefly describe what is going on in this story.</p>	
<p>2. What details in this radio show made people really believe that Martians were invading Earth?</p>	
<p>3. Do you believe that the same panic could happen today because of a radio show? Explain your answer.</p>	

Television Advertisements

Apart from on the ABC, television advertisements have both entertained and annoyed viewers ever since television first began in Australia in the 1950s.

Even today, television advertisements are still a sought-after way for businesses to reach their target audiences. They are prepared to pay a lot of money to television networks for the airtime they use to show their ads, plus the thousands or even millions of dollars that go into making the ads themselves. The more popular the program their ad is featured in, the higher the cost.

Many television advertisements rely on a jingle – a catchy song that sticks in the viewer’s head long after the advertisement is over. Consider, for example, the songs that begin “We’re happy little Vegemites”, “My dad picks the fruit that goes to Cottee’s” or “I like Aeroplane Jelly”. You will probably recognise all of these from ads. Now consider that all of them have been used since many years before you were born. Some are more than sixty years old! Good jingles are kept because they work.

These days, researchers estimate that people watch about 40,000 television commercials a year. This form of media is seen as the most valuable form of mass-market advertising, even in the age of the Internet.

