

# TAP INTO PERSUASION

GRADES 6-12

## BACKGROUND

This video is a fun, high-energy celebration of tap water, encouraging students to drink water “straight from the spigot” instead of buying it in a disposable bottle. The main take-home message behind the catchy song and clever visuals is a positive one: tap water tastes good, is healthy to drink, and is immediately available.

Although bottled water may sometimes seem more convenient than tap water, and is often packaged to seem “better,” there are many serious reasons to avoid it. Bottled water is regulated differently than tap water, but not more stringently; on the contrary, multiple studies suggest that the federal regulations for tap water make it safer and healthier than bottled water, especially since the plastic bottling process adds contamination risks (see sidebar). In addition, bottled water is much more harmful to the environment, since it wastes nonrenewable resources at every step of production and produces millions of plastic bottles that end up as litter and garbage. And, of course, it costs much more than tap water, often thousands of times more. For the sake of the environment we share, we have to cut down on consuming bottled water. Tap water is a delicious, refreshing, inexpensive, and convenient alternative!

## MATERIALS

Computers or tablets with internet access, so that the following pages can be loaded (or, if no internet is available, get the pages loaded in advance onto the devices):

- “Bottled Water.” Environmental Working Group. <<http://www.ewg.org/key-issues/water/bottled-water>>
- “Bottled Water.” Food & Water Watch. <<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/bottled/>>
- “Bottled Water is Wasteful.” The Water Project. <[http://thewaterproject.org/bottled\\_water\\_wasteful](http://thewaterproject.org/bottled_water_wasteful)>
- Gleick, Peter H. (May 16, 2010). “The War on Tap Water.” <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126833795>> (scroll down to the article)

## BPA in Bottled Water

Polycarbonate plastic—the kind of plastic used for most bottled water bottles and can liners—contains an industrial chemical called bisphenol A (BPA). Research from 2008 onward has shown that BPA can leach out of the plastic and into the contents of the plastic container, such as the water inside a bottle. Even small amounts of BPA can cause damage to the body, including alterations of the hormonal system, so numerous organizations have voiced serious concern over its use in containers of food and drink.

The United States, the European Union, Canada, South Africa, and China have all banned the use of BPA in baby bottles, and in 2010 the Canadian government officially declared BPA a toxic chemical. However, despite mounting concern, it remains common in other containers, including bottled water bottles.

- Jemmott, Janet Majeski (February 2008). “Bottled Water Vs. Tap Water: Rethink What You Drink.” Reader’s Digest Magazine. <<http://www.rd.com/health/wellness/rethink-what-you-drink/>>

- Art supplies (paper, poster board, pencils, markers, magazine pages for collage, scissors, glue sticks, etc.)

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. After watching the video, get the students discussing what its goal is (to persuade people to drink tap water instead of bottled water) and how it goes about reaching that goal (making tap water drinking look fun; emphasizing how easy it is to get and how it’s essentially “free”).

2. Prompt students to think about why Water Rocks! might want to spread that message (environmental and health concerns).

3. When the students have started figuring out that there must be environmental reasons to prefer tap water over bottled water, explain that they’re going to try the persuasion process firsthand by developing ad campaigns for tap water. Divide the students into small groups and send them to the computers or tablets.

4. Direct students to start researching the differences between tap water and bottled water. The webpages listed under “Materials” are useful resources. An internet search for “tap water bottled water” will yield many other possible materials; just make sure the students are checking whether the sources are reputable (do the materials come from well-established, known groups and institutions?) and what the sources’ ulterior motives might be.

- *Note on citing sources:* Any citation system will work reasonably well for this activity; whichever system the students have used in past projects should work well, or a simple citation system can be improvised if none have been introduced in the classroom before.

5. When the students are starting to see the salient facts about the hazards and environmental concerns of bottled water, direct the small groups to use what they’ve learned to develop a persuasion campaign. The art supplies can be used to design ads and posters, or students might consider alternative ways to advertise: for example, filming an ad with a camera phone, or designing marketing for social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter. Since the students come across plenty of advertising every day, in various formats and media, they can discuss popular ad campaigns and how they might imitate their tactics.

6. As they’re working on the campaigns, some things for the students to think about include:

- What do bottled water companies do to make their products look worth buying? (Tactics include emphasizing convenience, glamorousness, tastiness, etc.) How might a campaign for tap water use similar tactics? (For example, to counter the convenience argument, a campaign might show that tap water is just as convenient as bottled water if you have your own reusable water bottle.)
- It’s fun to dramatize the dangers of negative behavior (e.g. environmental and health problems associated with drinking bottled water), but social psychology studies have shown that those techniques are successful only when the ad also suggests positive behavior to do

instead. So, use the learning resources to present the negative side, but also try persuading using the positive side (e.g. what we can do instead of drinking bottled water).

- If the students have covered any psychology topics in classes, those can also be used to make their campaigns persuasive (for example, studies about conforming suggest that people like to do things if they see lots of people already doing it; peer pressure also factors in). See what the students can come up with.

7. Have the student groups present their campaigns to the class. The presentation format will depend on the media they've chosen for the campaign itself, but each group should have a few minutes to explain their approach and the facts they're using.

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Since plastic water bottles can generate large amounts of waste, this activity ties in well to the Water Rocks! song "Isle of Plastic" and the enhancement activity "I Can Help!: Reducing My Carbon Footprint." Check them out on the Water Rocks! website and consider using them as a companion to this activity.