



**Level:** Grades 9-10

**About the Author**

This lesson was written by Media Awareness Network.

Production of this lesson has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada.

## Lesson Plan

# Alcohol on the Web

## Overview

In this lesson, students explore issues surrounding the marketing of alcoholic beverages on the Internet. The lesson begins with a class discussion about personal experiences on alcohol industry Web sites, followed by a summary of the research findings of the U.S. Center for Media Education (CME) and Center on Alcohol Advertising to Youth on alcohol advertising on the Web. In addition, students become familiar with existing Canadian guidelines on the broadcasting of advertisements for alcoholic beverages and discuss the challenges of applying these guidelines to Web content. In groups, students deconstruct and evaluate current beer, liquor and wine Web sites using a checklist of youth-friendly marketing techniques. Group findings are presented to the class.

**Note to Teacher:** *In this lesson students will be visiting alcohol Web sites which, in theory, are not intended for minors. Because of this, you may wish to have parental permission before sending the kids into sites that are nominally age-restricted.*

## Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate

an awareness of:

- the Internet as a sophisticated marketing tool
- the techniques used by online marketers to attract kids and teens
- the issues surrounding alcohol Web sites and youth
- their own responses and those of their peers to youth-oriented Web content

recognition of:

- “youth-friendly” features on adult-oriented Web sites

an appreciation of:

- the challenges relating to regulation of Internet content
- elements of design on commercial Web sites

## Preparation and Materials

- Photocopy the student handouts Alcohol Advertising on the Web, CRTC Code for Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages on Radio and TV, and Alcohol on the Web Checklist
- Photocopy the alcohol Web site overheads: JB Liquor Fairy, Heineken & Budweiser and Malibu & Cuervo
- Photocopy the Group Evaluation Assessment Rubric

## Procedure

### Class Discussion

Today we're going to look at issues surrounding alcohol advertising to youth on the Internet.

Before we begin, the first question that needs to be answered is why alcohol producers would want to target young people in the first place. Any suggestions? *(The alcohol industry needs new drinkers because the drinking population is aging, consumption is dropping and brand competition is getting fiercer. If alcohol companies don't attract young drinkers, they will continue the downhill track they've been on for the past 20 years. By recruiting young people, the industry is developing a lifetime's worth of brand loyalty.)*

Let's move on to alcohol advertising on the Web.

- Have you or your friends ever visited an alcohol Web site?
- If so, for what product?
- Did you have to get past an age disclaimer? Was this a problem?
- Where did you get the idea to visit the site? *(from a URL in an ad, from a friend, personal interest/curiosity, and so on.)*
- Generally, did you enjoy your visit? Is it a site you would visit again?
- What activities or features did the site offer?
- What features did you like most?
- Would you say this site was similar to or different from other Web sites for teens? What are the similarities? What are the differences?

(Distribute the handout Alcohol Advertising on the Web and give students time to read it.)

Ask students:

1. For alcohol producers, what makes the Internet such an attractive medium for reaching young people? (It's a cool, youth-oriented environment, kids are usually online without parental supervision, it's difficult to legislate, it's interactive and provides opportunities to engage youth through online activities, it permits the collection of data from individuals through games, contests and memberships.)
2. What is relational marketing? (Relational marketing is the building of community around a brand or product.)
3. Why is the concept of "virtual community" important to marketers? (*Surveys show that most young people view the Internet as a communication and socialization tool. As a result, companies offer young people "virtual communities" or forums where they can interact and talk with like-minded people.*)

*Marketers value these "virtual communities" for a number of reasons:*

- *They attract a specific target audience.*
  - *They bring visitors back again and again.*
  - *They provide a place to promote and sell products, collect demographic and product-use information, and interact one-on-one with consumers.*
  - *They build consumer loyalty.*
4. In its survey, the Center for Media Education (CME) found more "youth-friendly" Web sites for beer and liquor than for wine. Why might this be so? (*This reflects existing patterns of consumption of alcoholic beverages by young people. Beer is the number one alcoholic beverage consumed by teens, followed by liquor [especially "alcopop" – malt liquor beverages]. Wine is not the beverage of choice for most teens and generally targets an older market.*)

We're going to examine a few examples of the Web sites that the CME studied back in 1997 and 1998. Can you identify the features that might make them attractive to kids and teens?

(Put the [JB Liquor Fairy](#) overhead onto the projector.)

Discussion Points:

This youth-oriented site is interesting because Scotch is not an alcoholic beverage commonly consumed by young people. The most notable feature of this site was its use of irreverent language and graphics to present drinking as rebellious fun. The image of the "goody-goody '50s Mom" liquor fairy reinforces the notion that anyone who doesn't "get" drinking is square.

The first Web shot, of the age disclaimer page, trivializes the importance of ensuring visitors are of legal drinking age by telling visitors that if they lie about their age, the liquor fairy will put a curse on them.

In the second image, the dangers of over-drinking are further trivialized, as visitors are encouraged to share their most embarrassing drinking stories. The flippant language of the social responsibility message "drinking in moderation beats vomiting in excess" – paired with an activity that glamorizes getting drunk – makes light of the more serious consequences of drinking.

(Put the Heineken & Budweiser overhead onto the projector.)

Discussion Points:

This Heineken Web page tied into the popularity of the first Austin Powers movie – and that of its star, Mike Myers – to attract young people.

The Budweiser "Whassup" page also used cross-marketing, capitalizing on its immensely popular television commercials. On this page, teens could translate "whassup" into a language of their choice – and e-mail the voice clip to friends.

(Put the Malibu & Cuervo overhead onto the projector.)

Discussion Points:

When the CME surveyed alcohol sites in the mid-1990s they discovered games and activities that would appeal not only to teens, but to even younger kids. On the Malibu Rum site, visitors could create their own tunes and then play them back. The Cuervo Tequila site featured a River Run game that had little critters speeding down a river avoiding obstacles and collecting tequila bottles for points. (Another site for vodka featured a "colouring" page where kids could "click and colour" a picture of a vodka bottle.) These activities mimicked those on popular sites for kids. One of the biggest problems relating to kids accessing alcohol Web sites is the fact that these sites aren't regulated in the same way that more traditional forms of alcohol advertising are. Although there are laws in Canada and the U.S. that apply to electronic marketing to kids, these laws apply to kids' Web sites. Because Web sites for alcohol sites are considered to be adult environments, these laws don't apply.

- How do alcohol Web sites let users know that they are intended for adults? (*Through the use of age disclaimers, where visitors must confirm that they are of legal drinking age before entering.*)
- Do you think these age disclaimers prevent or discourage teens from visiting these sites? Why or why not?

(Distribute the CRTC Code for Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages on Radio and TV handout and review with students.) These are the guidelines that apply to the broadcast of alcohol ads in Canada. Think of the Web sites we've just looked at. Did any violate these guidelines? (Review overheads if necessary.)

### **Group Activity**

Divide the class into four groups.

For this assignment, each group will deconstruct Web sites for beer, wine and liquor. Groups may either choose from the list provided or select an alcoholic beverage that

is commonly advertised in teen-oriented magazines such as *Spin*, *Vibe*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Rolling Stone*. Students will also be asked to compare one corporate Web site to a site for one of its beverages.

Suggested Web sites:

#### Group One

- Budweiser Beer: <http://www.budweiser.com>
- Anheuser-Busch Corporate Web site: <http://www.anheuser-busch.com/>
- Absolut Vodka: <http://www.absolut.com>
- Arbor Mist: <http://www.arbormist.com>

#### Group Two

- Molson Canadian Beer: <http://www.iam.ca>
- Molson Corporate Web Site: <http://www.molson.com/en/index.php>
- Cuervo Tequila: <http://www.cuervo.com>
- Kittling Ridge Wines: <http://www.kittlingridge.com>

#### Group Three

- Coors Beer: <http://www.coors.com>
- Molson Coors Corporate Web site: <http://www.molsoncoors.com>
- Captain Morgan Rum: <http://www.rum.com>
- Mondavi Wines: <http://www.mondavi.com>

\*Note: The Web site for Coors beer and its corporate site are one and the same.

#### Group Four

- Miller Beer: <http://www.millerbeer.com>
- Miller Brewing Corporate Web site: <http://www.millerbrewing.com>
- Skyy Vodka: <http://www.skyy.com>
- Fetzer Estates: <http://www.fetzer.com>

1. Using the Alcohol on the Web Checklist, students will deconstruct various alcohol Web sites and determine the intended target audience for each site.
2. In addition to completing the checklist, students will also record specific details about the youth-oriented features they come across.
3. As a group, students will decide on the overall messaging about drinking that's promoted on each site.

4. Students will also note whether any of the Web sites would contravene existing CRTC guidelines.
5. As part of this assignment, students will compare a corporate Web site with the Web site for one of its products. (In addition to comparing target audience, purpose and features, is there any contradiction between messaging on the corporate site and messages about alcohol on the product site?)

Once groups have completed their evaluations, they will present their findings in class. (Students may wish to use free software such as SnagIt to create overheads of specific Web pages.)

As part of their presentation, students will consider the CME recommendations from [Alcohol Advertising on the Web](#) and provide their own recommendations or guidelines for alcohol Web sites.

Once presentations are finished, ask students to consider the following:

- Compared with earlier sites for alcohol, would you say that, generally, today's alcohol sites are more or less likely to appeal to teens?
- What role does cross-marketing (that is, promoting Web sites through magazine ads, commercials or contests) play in attracting underage consumers to alcohol Web sites?
- Do you believe alcohol advertising through the Internet is a more or a less effective way to build brand loyalty and recognition than through traditional commercials on TV and in magazines?

### **Evaluation**

Teachers or students can use the [Group Evaluation Assessment Rubric](#) to evaluate group presentations.

## Alcohol Advertising on the Web

In the late 1990s, the U.S. Center for Media Education (CME) published a series of reports on how alcohol and tobacco companies were using the Internet to target young people. At that time, it was one of the first organizations to voice concerns over alcohol companies using the Internet to avoid the traditional advertising legislation in place for radio, television and magazines. The Web made it easy for alcohol marketers to blur the lines between marketing and entertainment. And, with its large youth demographic, it was a natural medium for reaching and influencing young drinkers.

Another part of the Web's appeal was its interactive nature, which permitted companies to engage individual users.

*The Web – live, interactive and reader-friendly – offers advertisers an astonishing array of tools for creating community among its users. The advertising industry calls this approach "relational marketing," and it is particularly useful for companies like alcohol and tobacco producers who are competing for a shrinking pool of buyers, where brand loyalty is viewed as key to long-term survival.*

*InfoActive Kids, Winter 1997.  
Center for Media Education.*

The CME noted that relational marketing plugs right into the adolescent market, where coolness and self-identity are based on belonging.



In its *Absolut Web* report in 1997, the CME surveyed the content of more than 100 commercial Web sites to see whether or not they were actively engaging kids and teens. (In an updated report in 1998, an additional 48 sites were examined.) Sites were analysed based on four categories: youth appeal, privacy/data collection, age disclaimers and information on substance abuse.

The study found several different types of online alcohol sites – geared towards different audiences. Generally, sites for microbreweries and wine companies appeared to target older, wealthier customers. But many commercial

sites for beer and liquor companies – 62 per cent of total sites surveyed – seemed specifically designed to appeal to college and high school students. The report concluded: "These sites exude a joyful abandon about drinking: that it is good, clean, sexy and rebellious fun that doesn't hurt anybody."

### Percentage of sites identified by the CME as appealing to youth

Total Sites	Beer Sites	Spirits Sites	Wine Sites
62%	82%	72%	10%

The CME identified the following strategies commonly used on alcohol sites to attract young people:



- **Ineffective age disclaimers** that do nothing to prevent underage visitors from accessing the site.
- **Glorification of youth culture**, featuring hip, attitude-laden language, humour, music, sex chat, popular performers, movie reviews and other events that would appeal to youth.
- **Games and contests**, often involving brands and brand-related characters.
- **Recipes**, especially for "bridge" drinks or "alco-pop" – sweet, alcoholic drinks that are designed to encourage new drinkers to try hard alcohol.
- **Information on rock concerts, company-sponsored sporting events, and links to other "cool" sites.**
- **Funky virtual communities** designed around the product brand.
- **Chat rooms** in the form of virtual bars, graffiti walls and clubs that must be "joined" by completing questionnaires before visitors can participate in the "fun."
- **Promotional screensavers** that can be downloaded onto home computers.
- **E-mail gimmicks that encourage visitors to mail promotional "postcards" to their friends.**
- **Branded products, clothing and lifestyles.**

In considering these techniques, the CME noted:

*Individually, some of these techniques do not necessarily indicate an appeal to youth. However, when used in combination – as they usually are – children can be kept at a site for hours and persuaded to return time and again. It is in this way that companies are able to build a long-term relationship with young people. The sites that appear to appeal to youth often strive to create a community of brand-loyal enthusiasts...*

*Absolut Web, 1997*  
Center for Media Education

In conclusion, the CME recommended that:

- Federal and state agencies act immediately to develop safeguards to shield youth from unfair and deceptive advertising of harmful products.
- Congress hold hearings to investigate online marketing trends.
- Health advocates, scientists and researchers address the threats to public health posed by interactive marketing of alcohol and tobacco products.
- Educators and health professionals develop an Internet-based curriculum to teach children about the dangers of smoking and drinking.

- Alcohol and tobacco companies take responsibility for their online advertising messages, especially those that may appeal to youth.

Despite the publicity surrounding their initial findings in 1997, when the CME conducted its update in 1998, it found alcohol companies as aggressive as ever in marketing their products to teens and college-age drinkers. Out of the 48 sites selected for the update, over three quarters used techniques that would appeal to youth.

Today, hundreds of alcohol sites continue to use the Internet to build brand loyalty and promote drinking as a fun, harmless and desirable activity. In fact, Web sites for alcoholic beverages have become an integral part of many magazine and TV campaigns.

An updated report on online alcohol advertising conducted by the Center on Alcohol Advertising and Youth in fall 2003 found little had changed since 1997. In fact, the report concluded:

*From video games to downloadable pictures of young women usually reserved for teenage male fantasies to the interactive toys of today's computer-literate youth such as instant messaging accessories and customized music downloads, alcohol Web sites offered a parade of attractions that appear to have little to do with the quality or taste of the alcohol product but speak loudly to the culture and mores of the Internet user.*

*Clicking with Kids: Alcohol Marketing and Youth on the Internet, 2003.*  
Center on Alcohol Advertising and Youth

The *Clicking with Kids* report also discovered that over a six-month period nearly 700,000 persons under the age of 21 had made "in-depth visits" to alcohol Web sites.

Currently, there is no legislation in either Canada or the United States that prohibits alcohol sites from using techniques on their Web sites that might appeal to underage drinkers.

## CRTC Code for Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages on Radio and TV

The CRTC's Code for Broadcast Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages contains 17 guidelines that outline what commercial messages for alcoholic beverages may and may not do. According to the code, ads for alcohol should not:

- attempt to influence non-drinkers of any age to drink or to purchase alcoholic beverages
- be directed at persons under the legal drinking age, associate any such product with youth or youth symbols, or portray persons under the legal drinking age or persons who could reasonably be mistaken for such persons in a context where any such product is being shown or promoted
- portray the product in the context of, or in relation to, an activity attractive primarily to people under the legal drinking age
- contain an endorsement of the product, personally or by implication, either directly or indirectly, by any person, character or group who is, or is likely to be, a role model for minors because of a past or present position of public trust, special achievement in any field of endeavour, association with charities and/or advocacy activities benefitting children, reputation or exposure in the mass media
- attempt to establish the product as a status symbol, a necessity for the enjoyment of life or an escape from life's problems, or attempt to establish that consumption of the product should take precedence over other activities
- imply directly or indirectly that social acceptance, social status, personal success or business or athletic achievement may be acquired, enhanced or reinforced through consumption of the product
- imply directly or indirectly that the presence or consumption of alcohol is, in any way, essential to the enjoyment of an activity or an event
- portray any such product, or its consumption, in an immoderate way
- exaggerate the importance or effect of any aspect of the product or its packaging
- show or use language that suggests, in any way, product misuse or product dependency, compulsive behaviour, urgency of need or urgency of use
- use imperative language to urge people to purchase or consume the product
- introduce the product in such a way or at such a time that it may be associated with the operation of any vehicle or conveyance requiring skill
- introduce the product in such a way or at such a time as may associate the product with any activity requiring a significant degree of skill, care or mental alertness or involving an obvious element of danger
- contain inducements to prefer an alcoholic beverage because of its higher alcohol content
- refer to the feeling and effect caused by alcohol consumption or show or convey the impression, by behaviour or comportment, that the people depicted in the message are under the influence of alcohol
- portray persons with any such product in situations in which the consumption of alcohol is prohibited, or
- contain scenes in which any such product is consumed or that give the impression, visually or in sound, that it is being or has been consumed

## Alcohol on the Web Checklist

**Web Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Product:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth-Oriented Techniques

Search the Web site you have selected for the following techniques. (If further information or explanation is required, make notes on an additional page.)

Technique	Yes	No	"Teen Appeal" of activity or technique
Use of cartoons/video			1 2 3 4 5
Branded merchandise			1 2 3 4 5
Games/contests/activities			1 2 3 4 5
Age disclaimer			1 2 3 4 5
"Bridge" drinks			1 2 3 4 5
Slang/youth-oriented language			1 2 3 4 5
Tie-ins to TV commercials			1 2 3 4 5
Downloadable sounds			1 2 3 4 5
Information on music/film/art			1 2 3 4 5
Sports information			1 2 3 4 5
Community building			1 2 3 4 5
E-mail activities			1 2 3 4 5
Screensavers			1 2 3 4 5
Chat			1 2 3 4 5
Brand spokescharacters			1 2 3 4 5
Messages about responsible drinking			Would these messages resonate with teens?
Use of "sex"			1 2 3 4 5
Other:			

**Overall Rating for Youth Appeal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary target audience:** \_\_\_\_\_

# Alcohol Web Sites

J&B

the Liquor Fairy.com

\* The 4D's are :  
Don't drink 'n drive, dummy.

Alright, the deal is you have to be **21** to enter this site. So what we have here is a situation where we have to trust your ability to tell the truth.

But know this: If you are under the age of **21** and you choose to lie about it, the Liquor Fairy will cast a spell on you and the day you turn **21**, the drinking age will mysteriously be raised to **23**. When you turn **23** it will mysteriously go up to **25** and so on and so on, so that when you get to be **65** you'll still be trying to scam fake id's from your **67** year old friends.

Please enter your YEAR of birth below.

Age Validate

J&B Blended Scotch Whisky, 40% alc. vol. (80 Proof), © 1999 Schieffelin & Somerset Co., New York, NY

J&B Liquor Fairy

EVERYone's got a tale  
Tell her yours...

\* drinking in moderation beats vomiting in excess.

The Liquor Fairy says,  
"If you're going to make an ass of yourself the least you can do is make an entertaining story out of it. TELL me a tale and I'll give you some good old-fashioned Fairy Advice. If it's really good, I'll post it here for all to see."

\* excerpt straight from the consumer's mouth

Fairy Tales

submit your Tale

"I think it was an autumn day much like this one...."

Home Liquor Fairy Bands Recipes News on the Rocks J & B Stuff

# Alcohol Web Sites

Bookmarks Netsite: <http://www.heineken.com/austin/> What's Related

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BEER BABY!

so send for these groovy goodies today!  
Move your mouse over these smashing items for more information. Click on them to download the e-commerce 60-style order form.

Heineken

AUSTIN POWERS THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME

for more information go to [www.austinpowers.com](http://www.austinpowers.com)

The screenshot shows a Netscape browser window displaying the Heineken Austin website. The page has a green background on the left and a yellow background on the right. On the green background, there are several promotional items: a yellow t-shirt, a beer can, a glass of beer, a star, and a male symbol. The Heineken logo is visible. On the yellow background, there is a large text graphic that says "IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BEER BABY!" and a smaller text block that says "so send for these groovy goodies today! Move your mouse over these smashing items for more information. Click on them to download the e-commerce 60-style order form." Below this text is a photo of a woman with glasses holding a Heineken beer bottle. At the bottom left, there is a logo for "AUSTIN POWERS THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME" and a link to "www.austinpowers.com".

Whassup?! Language Program - Netscape

CLICK TO LISTEN

- Vietnamese
- Hebrew
- Farsi
- Turkish
- Inooktatut Inuit
- Fijian
- Scottish
- Pig Latin
- Maori

AS SEEN ON TV

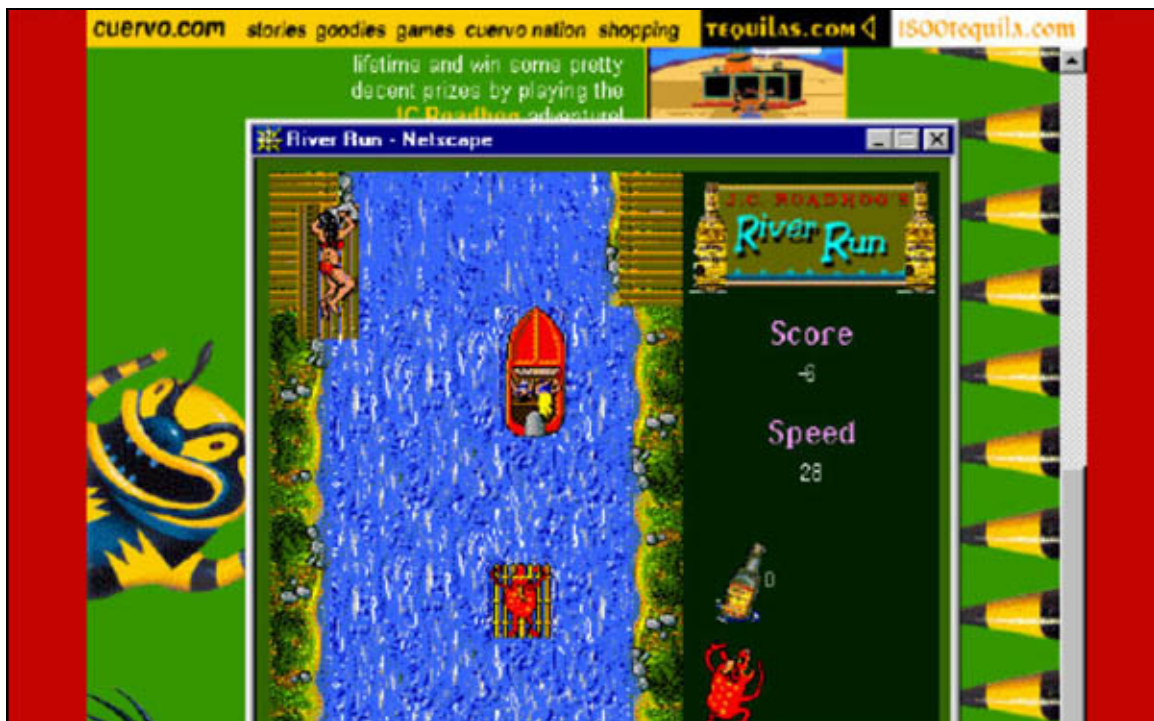
TELL A FRIEND WHASSUP?!

Budweiser

© 2000 Anheuser-Busch Inc., St. Louis, MO Budweiser

The screenshot shows a Netscape browser window displaying the Whassup?! Language Program website. The page has a blue background. At the top left, there is a photo of a man and a red box that says "AS SEEN ON TV". In the center, there is a large circular graphic with a black and white zebra pattern and the text "CLICK TO LISTEN" at the top. Below this graphic is a list of languages: Vietnamese, Hebrew, Farsi, Turkish, Inooktatut Inuit, Fijian, Scottish, Pig Latin, and Maori. To the right of the list, there is a photo of a man in a red jacket. At the bottom left, there is a yellow starburst graphic that says "TELL A FRIEND WHASSUP?!". At the top right, there is a Budweiser logo. At the bottom, there is a photo of a man sitting on a chair. The copyright notice at the bottom reads "© 2000 Anheuser-Busch Inc., St. Louis, MO Budweiser".

# Alcohol Web Sites



## Group Evaluation Assessment Rubric

**Group members:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Web sites:** \_\_\_\_\_

Content					
Application of checklist to each Web site	1	2	3	4	5
In-depth analysis of specific techniques	1	2	3	4	5
Comparison of corporate Web site with product Web site	1	2	3	4	5
Application of CRTC guidelines	1	2	3	4	5
Recommended guidelines for alcohol Web sites	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation					
All group members equally involved	1	2	3	4	5
Points clearly presented	1	2	3	4	5
Interesting and engaging	1	2	3	4	5
Use of visual aids	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Total score:</b>					