

Comparing and Contrasting Barbie and Joe Camel as Role Models

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Course: ENGL 101

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Essay Type: Compare/ Contrast

Whether you like it or not, Barbie and Joe Camel are icons in our culture and have been for a very long time. Barbie is beautiful, has a perfect body and seems to be a very successful woman. At the same time, she holds a very high standard for children who play with her. Joe Camel also seems to be successful, confident and well liked. Is he just a calm, cool guy, or is he representing something else? We have to ask ourselves if Barbie and Joe Camel are positive role models, or are they giving an impossible image that children will never be able to live up to, and if either of them are images that we want our children aspiring to.

In Emily Prager's "Our Barbies, Ourselves" she says, "Barbie is a liberated woman, a gal on the move" (376). Barbie is a liberated woman. In her lifetime, she has come a long way all on her own. Sure, there was Ken, her boyfriend, but no husband supporting her. Barbie varies anywhere from a beach Barbie, to a beauty salon Barbie, to a doctor Barbie, even astronaut and Olympic Barbies. This gives little girls hope that they can be anything they want to be. There are no limits. Barbie is beautiful and seems to have the perfect body, but being fit and trying to look your best isn't a fault. Barbie sets goals for little girls and shows them that being a woman and being successful go hand in hand; you don't have to be one or the other.

Barbie does have positive attributes, but is she sending a different message? When you first look at Barbie, you may think she is just another doll. You might not pay much attention to

her, but maybe you should. Do we really want our daughters to idealize this perfect, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, big-breasted doll? After years of playing with Barbie, you have to ask yourself what kind of impact this has on them. Anorexia and bulimia are becoming very serious diseases. Young girls who grow up playing with Barbie have it in their minds that they want to be just like her, and it is hard to believe that it doesn't carry over into teenage years, as well as adulthood. Even when describing someone you think is pretty, you might say, "she looks just like a Barbie Doll." This also affects boys. Barbie sets standards of how a girl should look, and little boys hold girls to these standards. Is Barbie creating a lifetime of self-doubt for young girls? You might think I am reading too much into this, but I'm not so sure. How do you explain the rise in breast implants, the craze for colored contacts, and other cosmetic surgery? Women will go to great lengths to look perfect, and the idea that they have to must have started somewhere.

Joe Camel is a very diverse character, but he has a lot to offer for some. In "Say it Ain't Cool, Joe" Coleman says, "Underneath Joe's cheshire cat-smug macho is a deeper message. Joe's not just another lung-collapse peddler. He's a self-respect maven. In rural bottoms and urban ghettos nationwide, rite with runaways and bored, unemployed youth, there's a serious shortage of self-esteem. Like Doc or Joe, you can fire up a coffin nail for instant attitude, the easiest way to strike a pose" (379). Joe Camel offers these youths hope that they do not have to live on welfare; they can dress nice and be confident. Joe Camel has many friends and is very generous to them. These inner city youths don't have many people to look up to, and although he might not be many people's ideal role model, he does give these kids an image that is better than what they see on the street. He is promoting cigarettes, but they have been exposed to much worse. Joe Camel is strong, laid-back and respected by his peers. These are qualities anyone would want.

“Joe Camel is offensive. Not only because cigarettes can be addictive and debilitating, but also because, at root, Old Joe’s shtick is plain-and-simple racist. He is composite of little-understood cultural traits designed to sucker in youngsters, especially black children” (Coleman, 379). Cigarettes are addictive, and promoting them is as bad as smoking them. If you are promoting smoking, you might as well be promoting poor health. Joe Camel does target younger black children, but I also think he targets younger people in general. Because he is a cartoon character, younger people are going to be drawn to him. I think the younger we can start educating our youth, the better. Cigarettes are bad enough for people, but it is almost unforgivable that advertising goes to such great lengths to glamorize Joe Camel to promote such a negative product. You always see Joe Camel with a lot of money, but have you ever seen him with a Job? Could it be money from selling drugs, or is it pool hustling? It makes you wonder.

As you can see, there are two sides to every story. While Barbie is successful and sets goals for our children, she can also be perceived as sending an inappropriate message of how a woman should look. Joe Camel is successful and sets goals for some, but he also sends another message. As children, we have to rely on our parents to teach us that having a role model is great, but we aren’t always going to be just like them. As teenagers, we have to take the morals and values our parents instilled in us and be strong and confident with what we do and how we look. As adults, we have to take a stand and try to set good examples ourselves and be that strong, confident person that we want our children to look up to. There are positive and negative aspects for both Barbie and Joe Camel. You have to take the good with the bad. Let’s face it, nobody is perfect and isn’t that what we are trying to get across?

Mica Fitzhugh is studying basic curriculum. Jennifer Oritz was her English instructor.

Ms. Ortiz's Comments: *I think that she did a fantastic job integrating text and opinion in an essay that showed both sides of the issue. This is a model for other students due to her integration of sources and opinion, and the level of writing.*