Advertising the Lottery Online and In Print

Government-run lotteries are a widely used approach to generating revenue for states. In the following activities, you analyze how lottery advertisements are designed to persuade people to gamble their money and then inform people about their actual mathematical chances of winning lottery prizes.

A lottery is a **game of chance**. Players are not guaranteed to win; in fact, hardly anyone ever does. The thrill that keeps people playing and paying is the hope that "today might be your lucky day" - the time when it all comes together and you win big money with its accompanying celebrity status.

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Lotteries are a form of **regressive taxation** where lower-earning individuals spend a higher percentage of their incomes on games of chance in which they have little opportunity to earn back what they spend. A few people do win large amounts of money, but the likelihood is extremely small. The chance of winning a Mega Millions jackpot is about 1 in 302.5 million; the odds of being struck by lightning are 1 in 500,000.

"A ticket from the first public lottery in Massachusetts" | Public Domain

In 2023, all but five states (Alabama, Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, and Utah) have lotteries. Alabama and Utah have a prohibition against gambling in their state constitution.

You can learn more about lotteries as a form of taxation at [Progressive, Proportional and Regressive Taxation](#).

Activity 1: Analyze Lottery Advertisements

- Examine online and print advertisements for Mega Millions and your own or neighboring state lotteries.
  - For a primary source to analyze, here is the [Massachusetts Lottery and its promotions](#).
- During your analysis, consider the following prompts:
  - What do you notice about how lottery advertisements use words, colors, numbers, and graphics to encourage people to play?
  - Where do you see advertisements for the lottery? Sporting events, city billboards, diners, particular television shows, certain websites, other locations? Why do you think the lottery has chosen these places to advertise?
  - What visual and textual techniques do they use to persuade people to buy lottery tickets?
- Then, using the techniques of persuasion you uncovered during your analysis, **design your own print or media advertisement** to convince people to not spend their money on lottery tickets.

"1887 advertising flier for the semi-annual Louisiana State Lottery drawing at New Orleans, 14 June. Artwork shows a boy and girl with coins and banknotes, presumably to symbolize the schoolchildren the lottery was advertised as benefiting." Public Domain

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Analyze Lottery Advertisements](#) by Hana Abate

Activity 2: Inform People About Their Chances

While psychologists recommend that people only bet what they can afford to lose on lottery tickets and other games of chance, some individuals spend money recklessly in hope of winning big.

- **Create a series of TikTok or Snapchat videos** to inform people about their odds of winning a lottery.
  - You can review the math for the odds in Mega Millions in this [graphic from the Florida Lottery](#).
- Include alternative investment strategies where individuals might get a higher return on the money they are spending on lotteries every year.

Additional Resources

- Teacher and Student Guide to Analyzing Advertisements
- Study: Lotteries regressive tax on poor
- Why the Lottery is a Regressive Tax on the Nation's Poorest

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

Building Democracy for All: Should States Expand Lotteries to Raise Money for Communities?

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
  - *Give examples of tax-supported facilities and services provided by the Massachusetts state government and by local governments.* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) **[8.T6.9]**
- [ISTE Standards](#)
  - Digital Citizen
    - 2c: Students demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the rights and obligations of using and sharing intellectual property.
  - Knowledge Constructor
    - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
    - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
    - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
  - Creative Communicator
    - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
    - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
    - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
  - Ethics and Laws (CAS.b)
  - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
  - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
  - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
  - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7