Behind the Pitch

Read media messages closely and test their claims against evidence.

8.CC.8 "Identify and analyze persuasive and propaganda techniques used in visual and verbal messages by electronic, print, and mass media, and identify false or misleading information."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two claims meant to persuade you, circle a claim the trial results contradict, and number the facts that help you check it.

The SparkStep Campaign

1. At Cedar Grove Middle School, a company promotes its new study app, SparkStep. A printed flyer beside the cafeteria says, "Eight out of ten students improved their quiz scores with SparkStep!" Below that claim, a slogan reads, "Don't be the only one left behind." The flyer offers a free first week, followed by a fee of eight dollars a month. Students begin passing the flyer around because a quiz is coming up. Some assume the large number proves the app works for everyone.

2. That afternoon, a short audio ad plays before a school news podcast. A cheerful voice says, "Your friends are already getting ahead. Will you fall behind?" The announcer adds, "A top learning expert calls SparkStep the smartest choice," but gives no expert's name or study. The podcast host did not create the ad; it was paid for by SparkStep. By the end of the day, several students repeat the announcer's words as if they came from the host, who usually checks facts before reporting school news.

3. The school paper asks SparkStep for the results behind its flyer. The company sends a record of a trial with twenty volunteers. Eight students scored higher on a second quiz, seven earned the same score, and five scored lower. The quizzes covered different topics, so the results cannot show that the app caused any change. The paper reports that eight out of twenty is 40 percent, not eight out of ten. Its article also notes that the ad never shows whether any classmates have signed up.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Which claim on the flyer do the trial results contradict? Use the numbers in the passage to correct it.

2. How does "Don't be the only one left behind" try to persuade readers? What information would help you test its suggestion?

3. How might the podcast ad's mention of a "top learning expert" influence listeners? Why is that claim hard to check?

4. Why might listeners mistake the paid ad for reliable school news? Use one detail from the passage in your answer.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a two-sentence ad for a fictional study tool using a persuasive technique from the passage. Then write two sentences explaining your technique and naming one specific fact someone should check before believing your ad.

ANSWER KEY

Behind the Pitch

GRADE 8 · 8.CC.8

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two claims meant to persuade you, circle a claim the trial results contradict, and number the facts that help you check it. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Which claim on the flyer do the trial results contradict? Use the numbers in the passage to correct it.	**The flyer says eight out of ten students improved. The trial shows eight out of twenty improved, which is 40 percent.**
2	How does "Don't be the only one left behind" try to persuade readers? What information would help you test its suggestion?	**It creates fear of being left out and suggests other students use the app. Sign-up numbers would help test that suggestion.**
3	How might the podcast ad's mention of a "top learning expert" influence listeners? Why is that claim hard to check?	**It makes the app sound endorsed by a trusted authority, but the ad gives no expert's name or study to check.**
4	Why might listeners mistake the paid ad for reliable school news? Use one detail from the passage in your answer.	**The ad plays before a school news podcast whose host usually checks facts. SparkStep paid for the ad, and the host did not create it.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Unlock a calmer study night with PagePilot. Its quick word games make every practice session feel easy. The ad uses comforting language to connect the tool with less stress. I would check whether students actually report feeling calmer after using it.

Accept other supported descriptions of emotional appeal, social pressure, or an appeal to authority. For Part 3, the fact to check should relate to a claim or suggestion in the student's ad.