Buster the Boxer – Critiquing multimodal Christmas adverts	
A complex task for advanced learners	

Task:	How do you evaluate the latest online Christmas adverts?
	Writing a critique for your school's blog.
Summary:	Students explore the 2016 Christmas advert *Buster the Boxer* by analysing the salient marketing strategies employed; they research contextualising information as well as comments and reviews in order to discover the different cultural narratives underlying the stories told in the adverts. On the publication of the most recent annual Christmas adverts, usually some time in November, they analyse a number of new clips and write a comment in English for their school's blog on an advert of their own choice.
Level:	Advanced learners of English in secondary school (year 11/12), B1
Competencies:	Analysing a multimodal video clip, investigating a clip's underlying narrative, expressing their own views about its cultural content in a blog entry
Available materials:	John Lewis Christmas Advert 2016 *Buster the Boxer*, provided online e.g. by *The Guardian* https://www.theguardian.com/global/video/2016/nov/10/meet-buster-the-john-lewis-2016-christmas-advert-video or YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKZB_xEF9RI

Preparation:	Teacher introduces students to the media hype around the latest Christmas video published by large British retailers such as Sainsbury's, Tesco's, or John Lewis.
	Warm-up discussion about potential reasons for the media hype and why retailers invest large sums in the production of an annual Christmas advert (e.g. £7 million for *Buster the Boxer*).
Task demand:	Concept of 'image marketing', commercial representation of Christmas, specialist vocabulary relating to marketing
Task support:	Online dictionaries e.g. *Cambridge Dictionary* to explore technical terms
First viewing and first reponses:	Students watch the clip *Buster the Boxer* and speculate about reasons for its popularity and why it may have won several awards
Task demand:	Background knowledge about the genre of the Christmas advert
Task support:	Additional information about the video and the awards given e.g. provided by Internet Movie Database IMDb
Repeated viewing and analysis:	Students identify the most salient marketing strategies that have contributed to the clip's success
Task demand:	Audiovisual complexity of the clip, effects on various levels, e.g. pop song instead of traditional Christmas carol, cute animals and animation for an emotional response, clearly structured narrative (Christmas eve early evening and late evening, Christmas Day morning), powerful motif (realisation of one's dreams), proverbial message *Every dog has its day*

Task support:	Repeated viewing in three parts, extracts from Rodionova (2016) in *The Independent*: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/john-lewis-christmas-advert-the-emotionally-manipulative-techniques-behind-buster-the-boxer-a7409876.html Plenary discussion of the claim that the clip works because of its feel good factor (Rodionova 2016).
Repeated viewing and critical assessment:	Students analyse the story underlying the advert in **small groups**: • What are traditional elements of this Chistmas advert? • In what sense does it break with traditions and tell an innovative story of a family's Christmas experience? • How can the portrayal of culture in this clip best be described? In the **plenary**, students exchange their views: • about the main function the advert may have (including the final slogan *Gifts that everyone will love*) as well as its main target group, • whether they think that *Buster the Boxer* is or isn't worth viewing, • whether it is worth spending £7 million on video marketing.
Task demand:	Cultural stereotypes, idealised Christmas experience, excessive consumption during the Christmas sales, retailer-customer relationship
Task support:	Relating objects used in the clip to social groups and their financial status
Follow up and personal views:	Students discuss **either a)** a critical comment about the representation of animals in this clip by Barkham (2016) https://www.theguardian.com/media/shortcuts/2016/nov/14/wildlife-charities-react-john-lewis-christmas-ad **or b)** a satirical comment by Heritage (2016) about how the advert relates to general trends in 2016 (Brexit in the UK, presidential election in the US) https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/nov/10/john-lewis-christmas-advert-buster-the-bouncing-dog-a-sledgehammer-to-2016
Task demand:	Anthropomorphism in adverts; zoological knowledge about the animals shown in the clip Political background information to be able to contextualise the clip and detect the critic's satirical take on *Buster the Boxer*
Task support:	Discussion in small groups; (for group a) access to factual information about the animals featured in the clip (e.g. squirrel, badger, fox, hedgehog); (for group b) timeline of 2016, access to dates and names of 2016 in the UK and the US

Final target task:	Watch a selection of the latest Christmas adverts, choose your preferred example and write a critical review for your school's blog to be read by fellow students, by teachers, parents and people who might be interested in online Christmas ads.