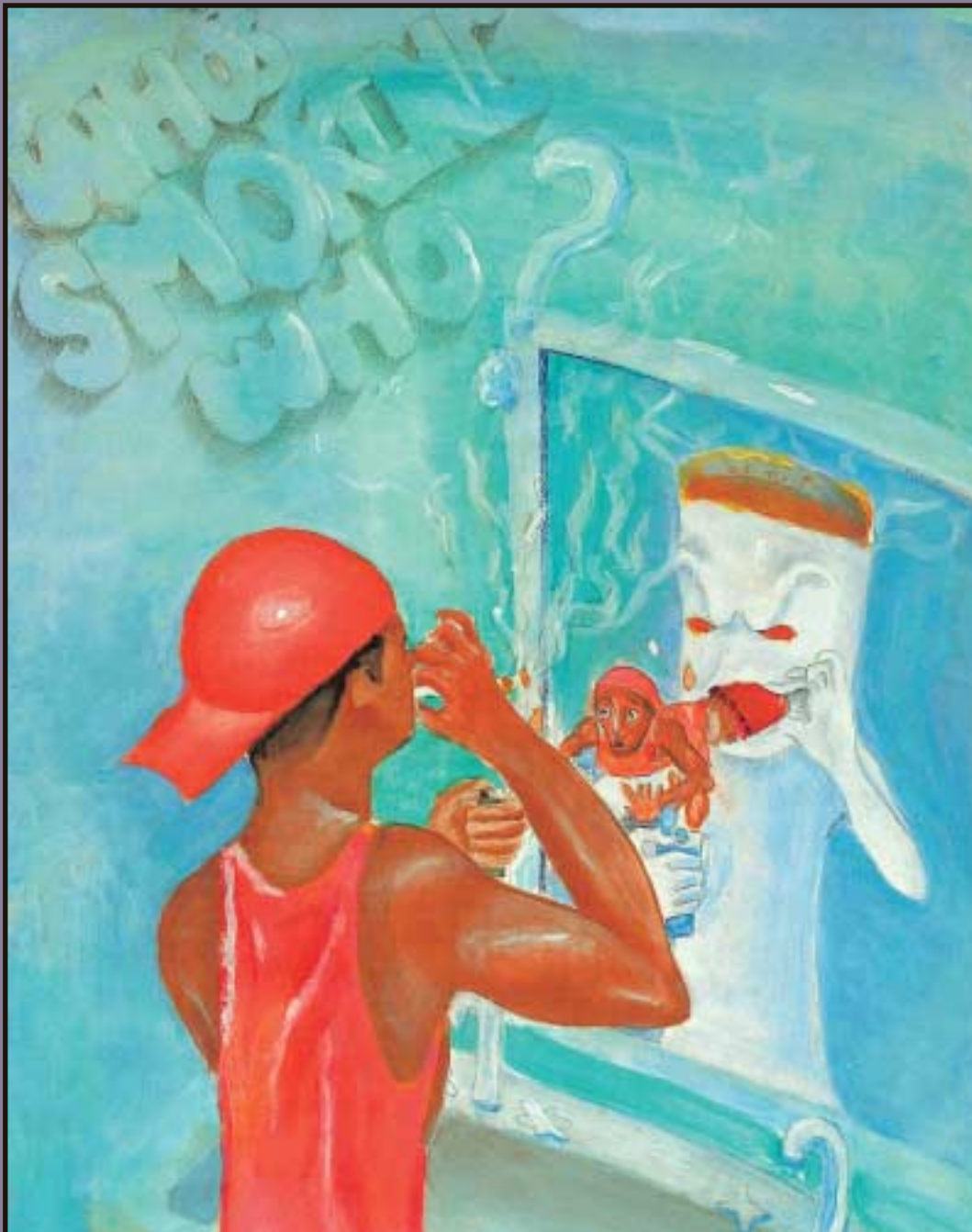


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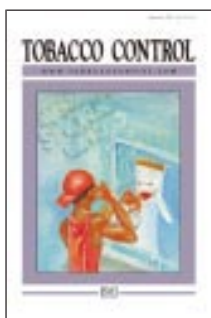
## COVER ESSAY

## Kids campaign against tobacco

R M Davis

*Tobacco Control* 2003;12:243–244

Counter-advertising contests, in which children are encouraged to submit artwork promoting awareness about the harmful effects of smoking, provide an effective form of education



The cover and cover essay of the June 1996 issue of *Tobacco Control* featured children's artwork from several tobacco counter-advertising contests.<sup>1</sup> These contests, pioneered by the organisation Doctors Ought to Care (DOC), continue to be used widely to "inoculate" kids against the messages in tobacco advertisements and promotions. The American Academy of Family Physicians, for example, sponsors "Tar Wars" ([www.tarwars.org](http://www.tarwars.org)), a tobacco-free educational programme—which includes a national poster contest—targeting students in grades 4 and 5 (ages 9–11 years). The American Medical Association's House of Delegates, at its annual meeting in June 2003, adopted a resolution to "encourage state and specialty medical societies to establish or support statewide anti-tobacco poster contests designed to promote awareness among young people about the harmful effects associated with tobacco use."

The cover of this issue of *Tobacco Control* features artwork from the Tobacco Counteradvertising Contest for School Children in Southeast Michigan (USA). This initiative was sponsored by the Wayne County Medical Society Foundation (WCMSF) during the 2001–2002 school year, supported by a grant from the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan. Background information and contest rules were distributed to schools in the Detroit area through posters, brochures, and a project website ([www.counteradvertising.com](http://www.counteradvertising.com)). Participating schools

submitted students' artwork to WCMSF, and a judging panel consisting of community leaders and healthcare professionals selected award winning counterads. First and second place winners in each grade (kindergarten to grade 12) received \$2000 and \$1000 savings bonds, respectively, and their schools received \$100 awards.

WCMSF published a booklet containing artwork from the contest,<sup>2</sup> modelled after similar booklets published by Smokefree Educational Services, Inc and Washington DOC.<sup>3,4</sup> The WCMSF booklet is available online ([www.wcmsnet.com](http://www.wcmsnet.com)). Viacom Outdoor donated space on 60 local billboards for the display of six drawings from the contest. WCMSF is working with the American Medical Association (AMA) to construct an online collection of resources on tobacco counter-advertising by kids, to be hosted on the AMA's website ([www.ama-assn.org/go/tobacco-counteradvertising](http://www.ama-assn.org/go/tobacco-counteradvertising)).

The artwork on the cover of this issue of the journal also appeared on the cover of the WCMSF booklet. Omar Paulk, a student in grade 8 (ages 13–14) at Amelia Earhart Middle School in Detroit, was the artist. His description of the drawing is poignant:

In the neighborhood, the phrase "to smoke" means to kill someone. "He got smoked" means he got killed. When smokers finish a cigarette, they say they are killing the cigarette. My drawing asks the question, "Who's smoking who?" It means that the cigarette is killing the smoker.

The artwork shown in fig 1 was produced by Edwin Andrews, a student in grade 12 (ages 17–18) at the Renaissance High School in Detroit. He described his drawing as follows:



**Figure 1** Human evolution and the effects of smoking. Artwork produced by Edwin Andrews, a grade 12 student from Detroit.

Correspondence to:  
Dr Ronald M Davis, Center  
for Health Promotion and  
Disease Prevention, Henry  
Ford Health System, One  
Ford Place, 5C, Detroit,  
Michigan 48202-3450,  
USA; [rdavis1@hfhs.org](mailto:rdavis1@hfhs.org)

This depicts stages in human evolution and the effects of smoking. The third image is an upright man, before society was exposed to harmful tobacco products. The fourth image shows a man slouched over, holding a cigarette and exhaling smoke. The last image, that of a tombstone, represents death resulting from the prolonged habit of smoking.

The insightful drawings and commentaries produced by these and other students suggest that counter-advertising contests are an effective form of education. The participatory nature of these contests is likely to give them a stronger and more long-lasting impact than conventional didactic instruction on the dangers of tobacco use. However, little if any research has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of counter-advertising contests. Ideally these contests would be one component of a sustained and comprehensive tobacco control programme.

Organisations concerned about the health of young people should be encouraged to sponsor tobacco counter-advertising contests. Potential sponsors should be attracted to the many benefits offered by these contests: (1) they focus on kids; (2)

they are implemented at the community level, allowing the programme to be tailored to local needs; (3) community efforts can be linked to, and coordinated by, state or national campaigns; (4) diverse organisational participation is possible (schools, hospitals, voluntary health agencies, professional associations, the media, and so on); (5) community leaders can be involved as contest judges; (6) the outcomes are highly visible (individual drawings, booklets, displays donated by local media companies, etc); (7) the contests are relatively inexpensive to administer (the main expenses are for staff time, printing, and prize money, some of which can be defrayed by co-sponsors); and (8) many resources are available to guide contest organisers, including those cited in this essay.

#### REFERENCES

- 1 **Davis RM**, Howell F, Tobias A, *et al.* Counter-advertising by kids. *Tobacco Control* 1996;5:100-4.
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## The Lighter Side



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