

# Quality Street print advert

(1956)



**CHOCOLATE STRAWBERRY CUP**  
*Strawberry jam and cream encased in milk chocolate.*

**HARROGATE TOFFEE**  
*The delicious, smooth toffee with a most distinctive flavour.*

**CHOCOLATE TOFFEE FINGER**  
*Delicious toffee covered with plain chocolate.*

**What a delicious dilemma!**

**18** delightfully different  
toffees and chocolates in

**Mackintosh's**  
**'Quality Street'**

JOHN MACKINTOSH & SONS LTD., HALIFAX

Neil Baylis / Alamy Stock Photo

# Quality Street print advert (1956)

## Component 1: Exploring the Media

**Focus areas:**  
Media language  
Representation  
Media contexts

### PRODUCT CONTEXT

- *Quality Street* sweet tin made by Mackintosh.
- Originally created in 1936, inspired by the name of a play by J.M Barrie.
- In the 1930s, only the wealthy could afford chocolate boxes but the creator Harold Mackintosh aimed to sell them at a more reasonable cost to appeal to working families. By the 1950s, when this campaign started, society was in a post-rationing period where luxuries were once again becoming an acceptable part of grocery shopping.

### PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media language

#### Historical context

The icons of the *Quality Street* brand were two characters from the Regency era of British history. In the Regency era, Britain went through a period of elegance with regard to Fine Art and Architecture. The Regency era could also be compared to the 1950s for its significant social and cultural development. Between 1811 and 1837 the country was under the rule of Prince Regent and developments in technology (e.g. the steam-powered printing press), fashion and architecture were mirrored by a population boom. These similarities can be compared to England in the 1950s.

#### Social and cultural context

The 1950s saw a change in “high culture”, a time where fine art, decadence and theatre that had previously only been accessed by the upper classes

and those with money were now going to be made more affordable to the mass audience. The Conservative Party’s 1951 election campaign was spearheaded by the slogan “Set the People Free”, and this supported drastic change as entertainment and arts became more accessible and affordable.

#### Consider how media language creates and communicates meaning:

- **Structure and design of the advert:**
  - » anchorage of the gold frame – connotations of a halo effect around the man and the product
  - » typical triangular geometric **composition** of the poster to help secondary anchorage of the product
  - » product takes central **framing**.
- **Typography** is strong, forming the bottom third of the poster, and the strong purple colour stands out to draw the consumers’ eyes to the name.
- Hand-drawn, artistic nature of the design, with a rich **colour palette** of primary and secondary colours, links to the post-war consumerist culture.
- **Persuasive language techniques** such as alliteration, emotive language and superlatives are all indicative of a well-read educated audience; further enhanced by the bold, serif font styles connoting richness.

#### Consider how media language creates narratives:

- **Connotations** of the female characters being dressed similarly to the sweets that are shown close-up on the bottom third of the poster.
- Inference of a **dilemma** can be investigated at two levels:
  - » male ‘hero’ choosing between two ‘damsels in distress’ (Propp’s theory)
  - » females choosing the chocolate (see Representation section for discussion on female stereotyping).
- **Costume** and dress of male character indicating

the formal nature of his dilemma; connotations of a higher class and richer society.

- **Patriarchal** narrative, which is part of a range of similar adverts of this time.

**Consider intertextuality:**

- The characters in the gold frame, Miss Sweetly and Major Quality, are part of the **brand Identity** of the product since 1936.
- The characters are symbolic of the Regency era of British history referenced by the dress codes of the characters in the gold-framed picture at the back of the advert.

**Possible areas for further investigation:**

- The advert is part of a **campaign** from this time that uses a similar design. The brand identity of Major Quality and Miss Sweetly goes back to the origin of the product in the 1930s, so it is interesting to look at how their advertising has developed with these characters:  
[http://www.nestle.com/media/newsandfeatures/quality\\_street\\_75](http://www.nestle.com/media/newsandfeatures/quality_street_75)

**PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation**

1956



1956



**Social and cultural context**

Gender roles in the 1950s were remarkably different to the present day and it is important to consider the advertisement in this context.

The product itself was designed and planned for working families and the imagery is very aspirational of a higher class which links to the post-war era in Britain. Much of the branding indicates that the product was symbolic of elegance and

aspiration. The two female characters appear to be of a lower class than the man in the suit, and the man in the suit is of a lower class than the two characters in the gold frame. The item that brings all these classes together is the product in the centre of the image.

**Consider the representation of gender:**

- The image suggests a **male dominated society** with regards to ‘choice’ – he is in control of the product and is centrally framed. This links to Mulvey’s male gaze in relation to the framing (**feminist theoretical perspective**). The male character anchors the audience’s eyes to the product which has significant phallic symbolism.
- The dress code relates to the modern working businessman who may be the ‘provider’ of the brand.
- The women have two **stereotypes** being relied upon in the advert: firstly, that of their need for chocolate, a common and very traditional stereotype that still exists today, and secondly their subservient body language to the dominant man. The implication is that to be successful you will need to be romantically led by a man.
- There is also a secondary and **deeper analysis** here – a sense of manipulation with the women distracting the man through romance to access the ‘prize’ that is the product in the gentleman’s lap. This advert could be seen to be representative of the way in which society was moving at this time.
- The **historical** representations of the Regency characters show typical strong feminine colours, and the showing of flesh for Miss Sweetly, and the formal uniform dress of Major Quality signify importance and power in their own relationship.

**Consider the representation of age:**

- To discuss the representation of age, it would be important to make a comparison to a similar advert in this campaign with a much older couple in two chairs (see above).
- This advert is purposely for the young to middle aged adults (25–40), and the **target audience** could see themselves in the characters in the main section of the advert.

**Possible areas for further investigation:**

- Consider the **role of women** in advertising which is key to this discussion.
- Use some **examples of advertising from the early 1950s** to help understand the role of the housewife and how they would provide

