

Exploring the Impact of Campaign Ads



Lesson Plan | Exploring the Impact of Campaign Ads

Overview

Students will explore a series of presidential campaign ads, from the first one, made in 1952, to those from 2016. They will describe characteristics and analyze campaign ads over time, assessing their effectiveness. Students will focus on a series of short documentary videos about ads that changed the political landscape. Students may also create their own campaign ads.

Subjects

Civics/Government (AP US Government & Politics; On level & Honors US Government); Current Events; U.S. History; English/ELA courses examining rhetoric

Grade Level: 9-12

Lesson Duration: Two 45-minute class periods

Essential Questions

- How have campaign ads affected voters?
- What makes campaign ads effective?

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze campaign ads over time
- Describe characteristics of campaign ads
- Assess the effectiveness of campaign ads
- Examine campaign ads that changed the political landscape

Materials

- Internet access
- A computer or device for each student (if you plan to do Day 1 activities individually or in small groups)
- At least six computers or devices for students to work in groups for Day 2 activities
- Chart paper and markers
- Sticky notes
- [Student Activity handout](#): Presidential Campaign Commercials Through the Years (best provided electronically w/links)

Links Needed:

- From Retro Report: [Political Ads That Changed the Game - Full Series](#)
 - [Willie Horton*](#) | [It's 3 AM](#) | [Morning in America](#) | [Daisy](#) | [Smoking Man](#) | [The Rock](#)

*Content advisory: The video "Willie Horton: Political Ads That Changed the Game" contains references to rape, murder and assault.
- From [The Living Room Candidate](#): Links and video clip titles are provided on the Student Activity Handout. The thumbnail numbers are included below the titles. These videos can also be found on YouTube.

Procedure - Day 1

Introduction (~15 minutes):

1. Show students the three-minute video [“Generic Presidential Campaign Ad: Vote Candidate for an American America,”](#) by Dissolve. Ask students: What is the purpose of a campaign ad?
2. [Think-Pair-Share](#): In what ways can campaign ads influence voters?
 - a. Think: Direct students to think about the question/prompt.
 - b. Pair: Have students pair up with a partner to discuss the question.
 - c. Share: Have partners share their discussion about the question with the class.
3. Affinity Mapping: Distribute sticky notes to students. On a large sheet of chart paper, write: What makes a campaign ad effective? Have students generate responses by writing ideas on sticky notes (one idea per note) and placing them on the chart paper. Next, have students group notes into categories, then label the categories and discuss why the ideas fit within them, how the categories relate to one another, and so on.
 - a. The lesson [“What Makes an Effective Ad?”](#) from the Museum of the Moving Image: The Living Room Candidate has an assessment rubric at the bottom of the page that includes the following categories: Emotion, Persuasion, Truth, Style.
4. **(~25 minutes)** Tell students they will be watching a series of presidential campaign ads. The handout includes ads from 1952 through 2016, organized in four sets (1950s and 60s; 1970s and 80s; 1990s and 2000s; 2010s). Have students choose two sets to complete on the Student Activity handout. The ads are one or two minutes long. Each video includes a transcript, a description of the historical context and a map with election results.
 - a. Before the videos are viewed, you may find it necessary to go over the following:
 - i. Candidate: Who is the ad about (for and/or against)?
 - ii. Mood: What emotion is the ad trying to evoke?
 - iii. Characteristics: List details that make the ad memorable. Consider images, language, background music, special effects and other attention-grabbing techniques.
 - iv. Is it Effective? Students should refer to the Affinity Mapping chart from the previous day, and should consider this question twofold: (1) Was the ad effective in its time period? (2) Is it effective today?
 - v. For the sake of time, you may want to let students know that it is O.K. to only watch each ad once, because that is how viewers would have seen it on television.
5. **Wrap-Up/Exit Ticket (~5 minutes):** Have students answer the questions on this section of the handout in complete sentences, citing specific ads and characteristics about those ads.
 - a. If there is time, have students share a favorite ad or two with the class, explaining what they liked.

Procedure Day 2 (45 minutes):

1. Tell students that they will now examine political ads that have changed the game, according to political scientists and historians.
2. **(~20 minutes)** Split the class into six equal groups. Each group will be assigned one of six Retro Report videos from the “Political Ads that Changed the Game” series to watch and prepare a group presentation about. You may want students to record their answers individually on the Student Activity handout before transferring their group answers to chart paper. In groups, students should watch the four-minute video clip.
 - a. On the chart paper provided, students should illustrate the following:
 - i. Which candidate is the ad about?
 - ii. What is the historical context of the ad?
 - iii. What is the message or purpose of the ad?

- iv. What are some characteristics that make the ad memorable?
 1. Consider mood, images, language, background music, actors, special effects and other attention-grabbing techniques.
 - v. Why is the ad famous? How did it “change the game”?
 - vi. What made the ad effective? Or was it?
 - vii. Would the ad be effective today? Explain.
3. **(~25 minutes)** Student groups present their findings to the class.
- a. Each student group should select a speaker to share their group’s findings. Be sure students clearly describe the ad so that the rest of the class can get a mental picture.

Relevant Standards:

C3 Framework for Social Studies:

Civics:

Evaluating Sources & Using Evidence:

- D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans’ participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.
- D2.Civ.10.9-12. Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights, and human rights.
- D2.Civ.12.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

History:

- D2.His.1.9-12 Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- D2.His.4.9-12 Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspective of people during different historical eras
- D2.His.9.9-12 Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them.

Evaluating Sources & Using Evidence:

- D3.2.9-12 Evaluate the credibility of a source by examining how experts value the source.
- D3.3.9-12 Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims

From the AP US Government & Politics CED:

- Unit 5: Political Participation; Topic 5.3: Political Parties; Topic 5.8: Electing a President; Topic 5.9: Congressional Elections; Topic 5.10: Modern Campaigns

About the Author:

Ashley Vascik has taught high school social studies since 2009. She currently teaches AP US Government and AP Comparative Government and coaches the We the People team. She is a National Board Certified teacher, department chair and an AP Reader.