

Charm Offensive



Lesson Plan: Charm Offensive

Overview: For American politicians, the obsession with appealing to the everyman dates back to the raucous presidential campaign of 1840. William Henry Harrison's 1840 campaign set the stage for modern-day political campaigning. Harrison flipped the script, turning an insult into a winning strategy with parades, songs, and a log cabin image. These early tactics mirror today's campaigns, where image and public appeal can have an outsize impact.

Subjects: U.S. History, Civics/Government

Grade Level: 7-12

Lesson Duration:

- Two 40-55 minute class periods

Essential Questions:

- Is prioritizing a candidate's perceived "common touch" over their professional qualifications or personal history a beneficial form of campaigning?
- Why do voters often prioritize a candidate's perceived "common touch" over their professional qualifications or personal history?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Develop a position and present a viewpoint based on historical evidence.
- Analyze the effect of politicians' ability to connect with voters by watching a video, answering questions, completing an outline and drafting a paragraph.

Materials:

- Retro Report video "[Charm Offensive: Why Politicians Reach for 'Relatable'](#)" ([Transcript](#))
- [Video Guide and Question Sheet](#)
- [Video Guide Key](#)
- Paragraph Outlines
 - [No scaffolds](#)
 - [Partial w/Topic and Concluding Sentence](#)
 - [Partial w/Evidence to Sort](#)
 - [Full Scaffolding – Sorted Evidence](#)
- [Primary Source Pack](#)
- [Primary Source Analysis Activity](#)

Key Vocabulary:

Monarchy: A system of government ruled by a king or queen.

Representative democracy: A system in which citizens elect leaders to make decisions on their behalf.

Incumbent: A person who currently holds a political office.

Procedure:

1. **Preview:** Write or project the following attributes for a political candidate:
 - Relatable / “Common Touch”
 - Government Experience
 - Strong Leadership Personality
 - Detailed Knowledge of Issues
 - a. Ask students: If you were voting for president, which matters more? Have them individually rank the options from MOST important (1) to LEAST important (4).
 - b. Ask students to turn to a partner and explain their rankings, especially the top and bottom choices.
 - c. As an entire class, ask the question “Is it more important that a president feels relatable than experienced?” Ask for student responses for each side, with explanations (and possible connections to the present).
2. Transition to the video below.
3. **Guided Instruction:** Have students watch the “[Charm Offensive: Why Politicians Reach for ‘Relatable’](#)” video.
 - a. This can be done as a whole class, or individually on computers or using the EdPuzzle platform.
 - b. The video guide and question sheet pose two guiding questions for the whole video, along with several sentence stems that students can complete as they watch.
 - c. After reviewing responses and highlighting exemplary answers, the teacher will distribute the scaffolded outlines to students.
4. **Outline and Writing Prompt:** Each version of the outline has the same writing prompt. For this activity, students will respond to the following prompt:
 - a. **How should voters weigh a candidate’s ability to connect with the people versus their beliefs and command of the issues?**
 - b. Demonstrate how responses on the video guide and question sheet could be used to craft topic and concluding sentences.
 - c. Guide students through creating categories and details on their version of the Outline form.
 - i. Depending on time and classroom set-up, students can work together or independently to turn their categories and details into full sentences.
 - ii. Be sure to emphasize that each detail can be more than one sentence.
5. **Primary Source Analysis:** Have students complete one or more of the Primary Source Analysis activities provided for this lesson.
 - a. Students are encouraged to draw upon one or more primary sources to support their answer and evidence while constructing their outline.
6. **Outline Construction:** Have students complete whichever scaffolded outline they were given.
7. **Paragraph Construction:** Using the outline that students completed, have them construct their full paragraph.

- a. To learn more about the evidence-based instructional methodology used here for teaching writing, see: [The Hochman Method](#) | The Writing Revolution

Relevant Standards/ Frameworks:

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies

- **D1.5.6-8.** Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of views represented in the sources.
- **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.5.9-12.** Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.
- **D2.Civ.13.9-12.** Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences.
- **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 perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- **D2.His.5.9-12.** Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.
- **D2.His.14.9-12.** Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.
- **D3.1.6-8.** Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.
- **D3.3.6-8.** Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to support claims, noting evidentiary limitations.
- **D4.1.6-8.** Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.

Common Core Literacy Standards

- **CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.RI.11-12.3:** Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequences of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact or develop over the course of a text.
- **CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.RH.11-12.7:** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

About the Author: Chuck Taft teaches eighth-grade American History at University School of Milwaukee. He is the president of the Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies.