Lesson Plan: Anatomy of a Political Ad

By Rachel Roberson

Lesson opener: Do You Like Ike?

Play the "Ike for President" ad featured on The Lowdown post: "Ten of the Most Successful Presidential Campaign Commercials Ever Made".

Discussion/Quick-Write prompt:

What did this ad tell you about Dwight D. Eisenhower ("Ike") the candidate? What questions would you still have?

Objectives

Lesson objectives

- Students will analyze and evaluate the use of tone, language, images, sound and emotion in various famous political TV ads.

- Students will reflect on the power and limitations of positive and negative political ads to influence public opinion.

Relevance

Relevance: In this presidential election season, the American public is being inundated with political ads. Being able to analyze the imagery and tone of political ads is key to helping students learn to make informed decisions about the political process.

Lesson Structure

In this lesson, students analyze the tone, language, and use of images and sound in a collection of historic presidential campaign ads. Political ads can be divided into two main categories: "fear" and "cheer."

Fear ads, also known as attack ads, attack the policies and/or character of a political opponent and present a negative view at what could happen if that opponent is elected.

- Fear ads featured in the Lowdown post include: "Daisy Girl," "McGovern Defense," "Laughter," "Revolving Door," "Windsurfing"

Cheer ads highlight the favorable elements of a candidate's experience and/or character, and illustrate how that candidate would have a positive impact.

- Cheer ads: "Kennedy for Me," "Morning in America," "Man from Hope," "Yes We Can"

Activity: The Anatomy of a Political Ad

In groups or individually, have students watch all 10 political ads. To save time, students can choose a category of ad to view—either fear or cheer—and watch all the ads in that category. After exploring the ads, students should then choose one ad to analyze. Again, this can be done as a group or individually. Students complete this graphic organizer to analyze the tone, images and sound of their chosen ad.

Sharing and discussion/written reflection

1. Students or groups share out the ad they chose to analyze. Students can present orally using this graphic organizer (printed or online) or they can annotate the ads directly by downloading selected screen shots into a presentation program like Prezi or PowerPoint.

2. After presentations, re-screen the most popular analyzed ads in both cheer and fear categories.

3. Discussion or written reflection prompt: Why do you think ads on television or online are so powerful? How should responsible voters view political ads on TV? Remind students to support all claims with evidence from the ads they viewed.

Homework/extension

Homework: Assign students to watch two current political ads, one from each presidential candidate (featured online or on TV), and complete the same graphic organizer for these ads.

Extension: In pairs or groups, assign students to create contrasting "cheer" and "fear" ads about a place, event or issue of importance to them. For example: "cheer" and "fear" ads for their school look like? What about their neighborhood, an election issue, a sports team, etc.? Students can collect images and sounds online and create a video, short book, online collage or slideshow using platforms like WeVideo, Stupeflix and Storybird. For classroom media-making tutorials, check out KQED Teach.

Common Core reading/writing standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.