

Topic: V. The Media

What the students do: Take the roles of candidates and their staff members or reporters for different media outlets and conduct a simulated press conference. Members of the media will endorse a candidate, candidates and staff members will create their last ad before the hypothetical election.

[CA History-Social Science Standards: 12.6.3](#)

[CMS Promising Approaches: 2, 6](#)

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Press Conference

Overview

Day 1

Students first discuss the role of candidates running for various offices (sheriff, school board member, and county supervisor) as well as the role of local media reporters covering a campaign. Students should also discuss and agree on a local problem that should be addressed by each candidate. Next, each student will take on the role of a candidate, a campaign staff person, or a reporter. Once everyone has a role, students should begin working in small groups. The candidates and their staffs develop a one-minute statement setting forth their positions to deal with local problems. The media groups prepare a set of questions they will ask at the candidates' news conference.

Day 2

The candidates hold press conferences. Next, the reporters endorse candidates in television, radio, and newspaper editorials. The candidates put on campaign ads describing their position on the local problem discussed yesterday.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Identify various candidates in local elections.
2. Describe a local issue.
3. Describe the role media plays in the election process.
4. Develop effective questions.
5. Develop and defend positions on local issues.

Materials/Preparation

Handout 1: “Candidates’ Instructions” — 18 copies

Handout 2: “Media Instructions” — class size minus 18

Possible Resource Persons: A reporter from your local paper, radio or television station could work with media groups. An elected officeholder or campaign worker could help candidate groups.

Procedure

Day 1

A. Set Up the Simulation

Ask the students to name some of the most important issues they think their community faces.

Write the students ideas on the board and ask the students:

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A. Set up the Simulation (continued)

Which of these issues do you wish elected officials (or candidates) would emphasize more?

Hold a class vote to select the issue.

Tell students that today some of them are going to become candidates running for local offices, and some of them are going to become reporters working for different media groups.

Explain that for this activity, the candidates are running for the following local offices:

Sheriff

School Board

County Supervisor

Discuss the roles/responsibilities of these positions to ensure student understanding. Briefly brainstorm how each public official might address the issue your class selected to ensure that students will have ideas to get started on the assignment below.

B. Preparing for the Press Conference

Step 1. Tell students to imagine that it is the final days of a campaign. Candidates are scrambling to reach out to as many voters as possible before Election Day. A final press conference has been arranged by a local non-partisan group for the candidates running for sheriff, school board, and county supervisor. The morning newspaper, a local radio station, and a local television news station have yet to endorse candidates, and all three will be at the press conference. Those endorsements are very important, and this press conference provides a great opportunity to make a lasting impression on the voters.

Explain to students that they are going to get a chance to take part in the press conference as candidates and staff or as members of the media.

Step 2. Assign the following roles for students:

- Two candidates each for sheriff, school board, and county supervisor. Each candidate must have two staff members.
- Divide the remaining class members equally into reporting teams for three media organizations: (1) Newspaper, (2) Radio, or (3) Television.

Step 3. Distribute **Handout 1: “Candidates’ Instructions”** to candidates and staff and **Handout 2: “Media Instructions”** to media members. Review the instructions with the class and remind students that the issue they selected as a class is the issue the candidates and the media will focus on.

Step 4. Use the rest of the class session for groups to prepare.

Day 2

The Press Conference

Step 1. Assign each pair of candidates and their staffs to a different area of the room. Have media organizations send reporters to cover each candidate pair.

Step 2. After about 10 minutes, conclude the press forum. Monitor groups as the candidates prepare 15-second radio ads and the media groups prepare endorsements for candidates. (If desirable, the radio station can read its endorsement, the TV channel can do a newscast, and the newspaper team can write its endorsement.)

Step 3. As time permits, have the various groups present their endorsements and radio ads.

Step 4. Debrief the activity using the following questions:

- Was the press forum a good way to get information about the candidates' views? Why or why not?
- As a candidate, how did it feel to have to answer media questions?
- As a reporter, how did it feel to try to get the candidate to respond to your questions?

Candidates' Instructions Preparing for the Press Conference

You are a member of a candidate's election team. You are in the final days of the campaign. Candidates are scrambling to reach out to as many voters as possible before Election Day.

A final press conference has been arranged by a local non-partisan group for the candidates running for sheriff, school board, and county supervisor.

The morning newspaper, a local radio station, and a local television news station have yet to endorse candidates, and all three will be at the press conference. Those endorsements are very important, and this press conference provides a great opportunity to make a lasting impression on the voters.

The voters want to hear about the burning issues, and to get the media endorsements you need, your candidate needs to share his/her vision for addressing the number one issue your community faces. (Use the issue your class decided should be a top priority for elected officials.)

To prepare for the press conference:

1. Choose one member of your group to serve as the candidate.
2. Review and discuss the information presented in class regarding the local issue facing the community.
3. Brainstorm ideas for addressing the issue that your candidate (sheriff, school board, or county supervisor) might be able to move forward if elected. Select one plan or program to share at the press conference. Prepare a brief statement that describes your plan for your candidate to share at the press conference. Help your candidate prepare to answer questions that the reporters might likely ask.
4. When the press conference begins, the candidate makes the presentation and then takes questions from the press. The staff should stand by the candidate during the press conference and call on reporters, help field questions, and help with anything the candidate needs.
5. After the press conference, return to your groups and prepare your candidate's last political ad. This is your candidate's chance to say anything that wasn't said during the press conference and to clarify anything that was said! Your teacher will let you know what format your ad should take.
6. Present your ad to the class.

Media Instructions Press Conference

Imagine that you are on a political coverage team for one of the media outlets: news radio, television, or newspaper. It is your job to cover the upcoming press conference where candidates running for sheriff, school board, and county supervisor will be. Your paper or station has not yet endorsed a candidate for these offices, and your editor is counting on you to help make the final decision about who will be endorsed.

The public wants to know about the candidate's views on the burning issue your community faces. (Use the issue your class selected.)

Your team needs to be prepared to ask the candidates "the tough questions" about this issue and how he/she would address the issue if elected.

To accomplish the task, complete the following steps:

1. Assign at least one reporter to cover each of the candidates.
2. Review and discuss the information presented in class regarding the local issue facing the community.
3. Brainstorm and develop questions to ask the candidates at the press forum. Think about questions appropriate for the office the candidate is running for. Each candidate should be asked at least two questions.
4. At the press conference, wait for both candidates to complete their statements. Then raise your hand and direct your questions to each. Take notes about their responses.
5. After the press conference, return to your teams. Select one of the candidates from each of the races for endorsement. Write an endorsement for each, specifying at least two reasons for your organization's endorsement.
6. Present your endorsement to the class.