

V. The Media

Topic: V. The Media

What the students do: Learn about and find examples of different advertising strategies used in political ads then create their own political ad for the candidate or ballot measure of their choosing.

CA History-Social Science Standards: 12.6.3

CMS Promising Approaches: 2 and possibly 3, 4 if students share ads with candidates/organizations

Thanks to: [University of Virginia Center for Politics: Youth Leadership Initiative](#)

Campaign Advertising

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to political advertisements and help them understand how those advertisements influence the issues and candidates in campaigns.

Objectives

- Students will identify the different types of political advertisements.

Card stacking	Contrast
Glittering generalities	Mudslinging
Plain folks	Testimonial
Transfer	
- Students identify possible consequences, both intended and unintended, of political advertisements.
- Students will be able to explain how candidates use political advertisements to influence voter opinion on campaign issues.
- Students will be able to predict how candidates might use different types of advertisements to reach different groups of people.
- Students will list the many ways that commercials are used to influence the electorate.
- Students will be able to construct a political advertisement of their own.

Materials/Preparation

Handout 1: Types of Political Advertising Guide—1 per student

Handout 2: “Media Chart”—1 per student

Procedures

- I. Warm Up:** Students are asked to describe a popular ad from television. They can do this orally, draw a picture, write a description, etc. The teacher may then ask students, “What features of this ad made it so memorable?” The teacher may choose to record responses on the board under the heading, “techniques used by advertisers.”
- II.** Discuss student responses. Which techniques are the most effective? The least?
- III.** Distribute **Handout 1: “Types of Political Advertising Guide”** to each student. Discuss the different types of advertising listed on the handout using questions like:
 - Do the advertisements appeal to specific audiences?
 - How can advertisements influence public opinion about campaign issues?

- IV. Tell students that over the next few days (or assign your own timeline), they will have a chance to get acquainted with candidates and propositions through looking at campaign ads on television, radio, and in print media. Distribute **Handout 2: Media Chart** and be sure the students understand how to fill in the blanks. Discuss the fact that some ads may use more than one advertising strategy, and that it is okay to list and describe more than one strategy per ad.

Provide students time to complete the assignment, then on the due date:

- V. Ask students to share several of the ads they critiqued, ensuring that they understand the different strategies. Then ask:

What ads stood out to you? Why were these memorable? Which of the ads did you think was particularly effective? Why?

- VI. Have students create a political advertisement for a candidate or ballot measure of their choice. Suggested guidelines include:
- A. Students should research the politician's background and know where he/she stands on at least three central issues, or research the ballot measure in terms of who supports/opposes and the rationale/implications each side describes.
 - B. Students would then choose one of the types of ads from Handout 1 and create their own ad in that style. Components of this ad could include
 - Dialogue for the advertisement
 - Music or other background sounds
 - Setting
 - Special effects
 - C. Depending on time, students could create their ads using a variety of media. They could present their work as a PowerPoint presentation, a skit, or a storyboard.
 - D. The teacher may also wish to add a written component to the assignment. Suggested questions include:
 - Who is your intended audience? What issues are important to your audience?
 - What are you trying to convince them to do or think?
 - What issues are important to your candidate? How does your ad address these issues?

Extension Activities

- 1) The students find examples of each type of commercial and bring descriptions or the actual tapes to class.
- 2) Students write a letter describing why they think their ad would be effective and send their ad ideas and drafts to the candidate's staff or to the appropriate organization supporting/opposing a ballot measure.
- 3) A student contacts an elected official and interviews them about political advertisements.
- 4) A student could contact a candidate and watch the production of an advertisement.

Rubric to Assist Teachers in Assessing Student Work

Acceptable	Strong	Exceptional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrates on 3 issues. • Identifies audience they are trying to reach. • It is clear that the ad is trying to convince the voter. • The writing has few grammar or spelling errors. • Describes the look of the ad. • Suggests music or sound for the ad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrates on 3 issues in some detail. • Clearly identifies the target audience they are trying to reach • The ad is convincing on the majority of the issues raised. • The writing has no grammar or spelling errors. • Describes the look of the ad in detail • Chooses music or sound for the ad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrates on three issues in detail. • Clearly identifies the target audience they are trying to reach • The ad is convincing on every issue. • The writing has no grammar or spelling errors. • Ad includes symbolism, metaphors, alliteration or artistic elements for special effects. • Chooses music that develops the theme for the ad.

How Do Candidates Get Your Attention? A Guide to Campaign Advertisements

A. *Testimonial*—endorsements from celebrities and other well-known people.

Example: Michael Jordan’s endorsement of Bill Bradley for President; Senator Warner’s endorsement of George Allen for Senate; any local celebrity or well known community leader’s public endorsement of a candidate for office.

B. *Mudslinging*—often referred to as “attack ads,” the TV, radio and print advertisements make assertions about the opponent in a variety of unflattering ways. Name-calling and/or groundless assertions about one candidate by his/her opponent. This advertising strategy is used by a candidate primarily to create a negative impression of one’s opponent. This strategy may backfire and create a negative impression of the candidate who is responsible for the creation of the negative ad if used excessively, or in a manner that is perceived as false, deceptive, “tasteless” or “going too far.”

Example: The Bush “Rats” Ad; 1996 Democratic Presidential and Congressional commercials that “morphed” the candidate into images of Pat Robertson or Newt Gingrich.

C. *Transfer*—Use of popular symbols to create a positive connotation for the candidate or the use of negative or controversial symbols to create a negative connotation of one’s opponent.

Example – Positive: Ads that feature pleasant music, beautiful outdoor country or rural scenery, happy families, playful children, successful teams or businesses etc.

Negative: Talking about an opponent’s record with ominous music in the background, using black and white photos, visually shocking images such as oil spills, home foreclosure, car accidents, prison bars etc. Images of one’s opponent in slow motion causing the eye’s to blink slowly, thereby giving the impression of disinterest, laziness and/or intoxication.

D. *Card stacking* – Use of statistics, often in a one-sided manner; the omission of information that is crucial to drawing an informed and balanced conclusion.

Example: 95% of citizens surveyed support Mrs. Jones for City Council; “Time after time, my opponent voted against legislation that would have supported new jobs in our community.”

E. *Plain Folks* – An attempt by a candidate to appeal to the average voter as just “one of the people.”

Examples: Lamar Alexander in 1996 wearing his trademark red and black-checkered shirt. Any candidate ad where he or she appears with no jacket or suit, shirtsleeves rolled up and/or wearing a sweater. Usually doing everyday task such as shopping at the supermarket or walking down a street or “visiting” with neighbors. Another technique that fits this category is one where the candidate does not appear in the ad, but “average” people on the street stop to talk about the candidate. The negative version of this would be “man on the street” interviews where the interviewees are critical of the opponent.

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E. *Glittering Generalities* – Usually the first type of ad used in a campaign, these spots are designed to introduce a candidate to the voters. Needless to say, like any introduction, these types of ads are almost always very positive. Designed to leave the viewer with a very good first impression. This ad type uses very vague words and phrases that have a positive effect on the viewer and appeal to a variety of interests.

Examples: Ads use images and phrases that are virtually impossible not to like such as: “Working for your family,” “Building a Bridge To The Future,” “Saving Our Schools” “Improving America” “Saving Social Security” “Building One America” etc. The images are usually of a perfect world with happy families and children in pleasant surroundings on sunny days with blue skies or images of the candidate hard at work, sleeves rolled up, actively engaged in conversation with people in a “responsible” business environment.

F. *Bandwagon* – Similar to card stacking, this is an attempt to convey a sense of momentum and to generate a positive “everybody’s doing it so you should too” mentality.

Examples: Voice-overs in commercials stating “Polls show Robert Stone leading in the race for the United States Senate.” Large groups of people greeting a candidate or carrying signs in support. Group testimonials and/or corporate endorsements such as: “Endorsed by the National Association of Retired Persons,” or “Endorsed by the National Education Association.”

G. *Contrast Ad* – Juxtaposing positive images of one’s candidacy with negative images of the opponent in the same ad.

Examples: Split screens with Hillary Clinton in color moving at regular speed and her opponent Rick Lazio in black and white moving in slow motion. Images of two candidates on screen as a voice over denounces the opponent followed by a red X appearing over the opponent’s face.

How Do Candidates Get Your Attention? Media Chart

As you view, read, or listen to different campaign ads on television, radio, and print media, complete the chart below. For each type of ad, fill in the definition section, describe one of the ads you critiqued and evaluate its persuasiveness.

TYPE OF AD AND DEFINITION	WHAT TECHNIQUES ARE USED IN THIS AD?	WHAT MADE THIS AD EFFECTIVE OR INEFFECTIVE?
<i>Testimonial:</i>		
<i>Mudslinging:</i>		
<i>Transfer:</i>		
<i>Card Stacking:</i>		
<i>Plain Folks:</i>		
<i>Glittering Generalities:</i>		
<i>Bandwagon:</i>		
<i>Contrast:</i>		