

## Propaganda in Presidential Elections

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### Rationale

Did you know that the average American is flooded by over 500 advertisements per day? That's a crushing 183,000 per year! How do we handle all these messages? How do we separate fact from fiction and information from emotion? One of the most persuasive devices in advertising is the use of repetition. A response to a specific stimulus, according to Pavlov's 1920's experiments, is learned if that stimulus is repeated again and again. We are conditioned to buy the product.<sup>i</sup> Advertising is a means to attract and promote a particular product or service in hopes that a customer would purchase the item. The ad promotes the idea that the purchased item would in some way benefit the consumer.<sup>ii</sup> Advertising is also propaganda. Propaganda is a "deliberate, systematic attempt to shape positions, manipulate cognitions and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist"<sup>iii</sup> Although the propaganda may not be false it could be erroneous. The goal of propaganda is to have an expected response that fits the propagandist's plan. Propaganda is emotional and may not be subject to rational arguments and reasons. It relies on our emotions in order to persuade us to accept a particular position. My goal is to have my students examine the impact of propaganda in politics, specifically the power of propaganda in American presidential elections. Although we will look at election advertising throughout United States History, I would like to focus on political advertising and the changes that have taken place in the last 12 years. Twitter, blogging, and internet usage have changed the face of our election scene. Students need to become better equipped as to how this tremendous variety can be utilized efficiently and appropriately.

Middle schoolers are ripe for the plucking when it comes to media advertising. They are bright but often so very gullible when it comes to the overwhelming sell of the product. They believe what they hear and see, often not questioning the validity or even the possibility of what that product offers. If this is the case with a pair of the latest \$200 pair of Nike sneakers what is their understanding of political advertising and propaganda? They believe what a candidate promises them (or their parents) and do not even consider the Constitution and the system of checks and balances. How can I challenge them to see beyond the glittering YouTube ad? Most of them do not dig for the truth behind a folksy testimonial about what Romney did for America's Heartland; the truth behind the "47%" who do not pay taxes; Goldwater's "we will bury you" ultra patriotic 1964 television commercial or the challenger's "Daisy Girl" commercial inviting nuclear war if you vote for Goldwater; or the 1988's brutal Willie Horton ads that brought down candidate Dukakis. If these 13 year olds are to become politically savvy voting citizens by the age of 18 they need to understand the reality behind political propaganda and the intricate advertising processes used by all the parties involved.

## **Background**

I teach eighth grade US/NC History at Bailey Middle School in Cornelius, North Carolina. It is a suburban school within Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools and has a population of slightly over 1500. My class load is four classes every day with about 32 students per class. The classes run for 67 minutes. My classes should be heterogeneous but I often find them driven by the Language Arts and Algebra/Math 8 classes. Language Arts is divided into Honors (above grade level) and Standard (at grade level or slightly below). Algebra is a high school course and Math 8 is at standard level. This means that at least two of my classes will be above grade level and one to two will be standard at grade level or slightly below. I also have several resource students (self contained for Language Arts and Math in classes of six to eight max)) whose IQ's are in the low 70's. These students are mixed in with my higher level classes but an assistant works with them. Students within that class also are paired with them during certain assignments. Work is heavily modified for these six students. There are no Limited English or regular Inclusion (Exceptional Education with Individual Education Plans) on the team this year.

North Carolina has also recently adopted the Common Core Standards in K-12 Math and Language Arts/English. These standards provide a consistent and clear understanding of what our students are expected to learn. The national standards are intended to be robust and relevant to the real world. They reflect the knowledge and skills needed for our students to be successful in their careers and college. This will impact my class as I am expected to explore not only US/NC History but also incorporate the other academic core subjects to a greater aspect into my teaching. Even more emphasis has been placed on primary sources, argumentative and expository writing, and incorporating the use of 21st technology into the classroom.

This unit will offer me an opportunity to address the use of primary sources as artifacts and advertisements will be heavily utilized in the study of previous elections. Incorporating the use of 21st century technology will be easily employed due to the nature of the changing scene in electioneering – tweeting, blogging, YouTube – since the late 1990's. We are subjected to a greater amount of information today and from many more sources than ever before. The need to navigate this information from all these sources is imperative for my students.<sup>iv</sup> My students should become responsible consumers of that information and they should also be able to carefully evaluate these messages they encounter, especially when those messages urge some sort of action.

My students will be studying propaganda and other forms of advertising in US History all year. We will have scrutinized Paul Revere's engraving of the Boston Massacre. The engraving presents the events of the massacre selectively and even possibly lying by omission. The desired result of the piece was to influence the Americans of British brutality and further the political agenda of the Sons of Liberty. Newspapers from the

nineteenth century often provided an unsuspecting medium for sustaining propaganda by trying to pull people to their side,<sup>v</sup> especially in politics. The percentage of Americans reading in the late nineteenth century dramatically increased from 50% earlier in the century to 90% (males, white) by 1890.<sup>vi</sup> Increased readership appealed to politicians looking to garner votes and win the election or persuade the reading public of unscrupulous doings of their political nemesis. Thomas Nast's Boss Tweed cartoon entitled A Group of Vultures appeared in Harper's Weekly<sup>vii</sup> September 23, 1871 issue. Students can imagine how much anguish this eventually caused Tweed and that it led to his downfall. The Emancipation Proclamation was timed to encourage defections from the Confederacy along the Border States and it was exploited by Union reps in Europe hoping to destroy any support for the Confederacy<sup>viii</sup>

Along with the above study of primary source propaganda comes the inspection of political advertisements. I want to engage students in an interactive process of our election history. Although the unit will focus more on present day strategies, investigating what was used in the past needs to be discussed so as to understand what the present day strategies are. Students will have an opportunity to view slides, print, audio and video materials. This will assist in developing critical thinking skills as students learn core historical information about presidential election campaigns from 1800 to today. Students will be reading original text, view images, and listen to audiovisual messages as they examine many different media documents which reflect the history of our presidential campaigns. This also supports our Common Core goals in developing citizenship skills and attitudes. It will coach students to ask crucial media literacy questions and to especially identify bias in our media. This enhances the critical reading of historical documents and in the answering of document based questions (added to our middle school curriculum a few years ago due to students entering AP History and not being prepared in that document component). Most importantly, this gives students a better understanding of how the media influences public opinion of presidential candidates and current events. I believe it will help to lay the foundation for students to become more responsible voters as they explore political issues in our history where the media is involved.

Throughout our history several types of media have been used to transmit propaganda and advertising messages in regards to elections. These have included news reports, historical revision, and government reports with facts, books, leaflets, movies, radio, television, buttons, clothing, and posters. A poster from an 1860 election can now be reduced to the size of a stamp. With election coverage on the television, internet, and radio, propaganda style electioneering can be found on news, current-affairs or talk show segments, and as advertising or public service announcement type spots. Campaigns usually follow a strategic broadcast pattern program that targets a specific group. Each generation has brought about changes in the advertising process. Little trinkets were used in the 1850's, 1870's transcontinental railroad bringing the candidates to the people, newsprint into the early part of the 20th century, radio in the early twenties, and

television in the 1950's. The advent of internet radically changed the playing field in the 1990's. Since 2000, elections have spread their wings into the blogosphere, twitter and YouTube. Would what passed muster 70 years ago still pass today with evidence readily available at our fingertips? How you sell yourself as a candidate in 1850 with the stump speeches has evolved into a rapidly changing world fed by the internet. Each election since 2000 has seen rapid changes. Everything is now out there, ready for almost immediate exhibition, consumption, and factcheck.org leaving little space for the old days of smoke filled rooms where deals were cut without the knowledge of the American public.

Students will need to analyze the different types of propaganda: white, gray, and black. White usually comes from an identified source and is usually considered a gentler form of persuasion, like standard PR techniques. It is often a one-sided presentation of the argument. Grey propaganda is without any identifiable source or author. Making enemies believe falsehoods using a straw arguments a common tactic.<sup>ix</sup> To make you believe A, someone releases B, the opposite of A. In phase two, B is discredited using some straw man. You will then presume A to be true! Black propaganda is defined as coming from one source but it is actually from another. This might be done to disguise the true origins of the propaganda, whether from an "enemy" or from a group with a negative public image. It can be subversive, provocative, and an embarrassment. It undermines the credibility of the target through rumors, slogans or visual symbols.<sup>x</sup> This may be harder to do today or should I say too quickly checked on factcheck.org.

Along with studying propaganda students will have to learn to analyze the seven advertising techniques. These are tactics which accentuate the use of emotional stimulations to prompt a person to take immediate action.<sup>xi</sup> They are: name-calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, bandwagon, and finally card stacking. Name-calling a technique used by the advertiser in order to make a person form a conviction without assessing the proof on which it has been based.<sup>xii</sup> Newt Gingrich's GOPAC mailed a pamphlet entitled Language, A Key Mechanism of Control to Republicans across the country in 1990. The booklet's key words were: Decay, Insecure, Crisis, Liberal, Compassion is not enough, and destroy, just to name a few.<sup>xiii</sup>

Glittering generalities means the usage of highly esteemed beliefs to attract a person's sense such as calling a terrorist a freedom fighter. It is the opposite of name-calling. Stalin might become "Uncle Joe", as America is emboldened to give money and assistance to the starving Russians at the siege of Leningrad because they are now on the same side against the evil Nazis. Uncle promotes a positive image. Gingrich's list of positive, governing words that GOP candidates were told to use when speaking about themselves or their policies included: Activist, Citizen, Commitment, Crusade, Dream, Duty, Moral and Success.<sup>xiv</sup>

Symbols are often used in transfer. Waving the red, white, and blue would stir our emotion and win our approval, especially after Union victory in 1863, or after Iwo Jima in 1945. Shifting the blame is used in political ads. A politician may try to transfer negative feelings to his opponent in order to make himself appear more positive in the eyes of his constituents. Cynthia Myers writes in *What is Transfer Advertising* that “too much negative transfer advertising can backfire, however, as when the public tunes out negative political advertising.”<sup>xv</sup> Circumstances can alter an advertisement. “For instance, if the celebrity a company uses to advertise its product is involved in a scandal, the consumer may associate the product with that negative image.”<sup>xvi</sup> What is the speaker trying to pitch? Students need to question the merits of that idea independently of the convictions about other people, proposals or ideas.<sup>xvii</sup>

Testimonials use esteem and control to send a message. The opinion of a doctor or a farmer could be used to send a message. MoveOn.org, during the 2004 election, used a testimonial from Nathan Ward, a laid off computer technician. “I can’t believe that this is the best that we can do,” when voicing his change from a Bush vote in 2000 to Kerry in 2004. Professor Darrell West at Brown University said “If you have ordinary people testifying to a person’s virtue or vice, their opinion can be very credible.”<sup>xviii</sup>

The plain folks approach is used to convince the audience that the speaker is a humble sort, someone you can trust, someone who has your interests at heart.<sup>xix</sup> Use every day language and gestures in order to reach that audience and have them identify with their view. Would this person be trustworthy if they were removed from the situation being discussed?<sup>xx</sup> Not a political ad but famous nonetheless, the little boy singing about the virtues of Oscar Mayer Bologna. How much more “plain folks” can you get than a four year old espousing his favorite lunch meal? If a four year old says it’s good it has to be good! How about the September 2000 30-second commercial that the New York Democratic committee used during Hilary Clinton’s campaign? Everyday New Yorkers react to “certain positions that were attributed to Rep. Rick Lazio,” Clinton’s opponent. It backfired because one of the plain folks interviewed once worked for Democratic member of New York’s State Assembly. Names of the participants in the ads were not released, leaving “some doubt as to the ad’s veracity.”<sup>xxi</sup>

Bandwagon techniques might influence the audience to follow the crowd, creating a notion of widespread support. You have to be on the winning side. It plays on your feelings of loneliness and isolation. You will be left out if you don’t join. The term has its origins in the 1800’s. Politicians used wagons with all sorts of music and circus like entertainment. The crowd would gather and the politician would speak. Other politicians might often try to get a seat on a popular bandwagon in the hopes of taking advantage of its success. Students need to see this as an attempt to be part of a successful or popular effort merely for the sake of its popularity, something very middle schoolish! Joe the Plumber (2008) is plain folks but also bandwagon. Average Joe. After meeting Obama and questioning him on his tax plan, both Obama and McCain jumped on the Joe

bandwagon, both of them doing their best to work his name into their rhetoric. “Five million members and growing! Everybody’s doing it! All the people are going to say yes on April 10” Everyone else is doing it you should too. “The Jackson campaign has the popularity it takes to win the election.” Where is the evidence for or against the candidate or issue? Others are supporting this but why should I? More information is needed to consider the pros and cons.

The final technique is card stacking. Make the best possible for your side and the worst possible for the opposing view by carefully using only those facts that support his or her side of the argument.<sup>xxii</sup> It can leave out necessary information that we need in order to make an informed decision. We have to decide what is missing or what is being distorted. Students need to get as much information as possible before making a decision. Consider a Join the Marines poster from 1930. It emphasizes the travel and adventure involved while you serve, but deemphasizes the possible sacrifices a soldier might have to make. Another is reading the fine print. The least attractive terms of your contract will appear in small and barely legible type. Before and after advertisements also fall into this category. The weight loss in an after picture looks to be significant but is you seeing the different hair style, make up and additional jewelry that adds to that dramatic weight loss? A Clinton/Gore television ad from 1996 is an example of card stacking. The cards were meant to discredit Bob Dole by listing several programs he had voted against in the past. This implies that Clinton was for all the programs that Dole was against. Dole doesn't care, therefore Clinton does.

### **Strategies and Activities**

As I teach US/NC History all year I would like to begin this unit within the first two weeks of school and conclude at year end. One of the main focuses of eighth grade history is the examination of primary sources. Once students are equipped to study primary sources they will be ready to evaluate the item(s) as we come across them. The items studied are: newspaper articles, engravings, passenger manifest of immigrant ships heading to America starting in 1607, diary entries, political cartoons, paintings, wartime enlistment posters, and political advertisements through several mediums. Primary sources are studied in the sixth and seventh grade as the result of a program called Pre AP DBQ ATTACK. Started here in Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools in 2003 the program was to help high school AP teachers by introducing a greater variety of primary sources to middle school students and to incorporate that study into answering Document Based Questions in the form of both short answer and essays. The desired result would be students developing the ability to inspect primary sources at an earlier age and bringing that knowledge with them into high school history and government classes. Students won't have to crash course introduction to primary sources but instead come prepared and probably will need just a very short review. There is also a heavy emphasis on persuasive and argumentative writing which is a part of the Common Core program recently instituted in our state.

This unit will be year long. Although the election portion of the unit will end in November, all the activities can be utilized throughout the year. Once activities are initialized at the start of the school year in late August I think it is just a matter of review as we approach a greater variety of primary sources. The initial lessons build on each other and basically it will be a set up of how to view these primary sources on down the line. The lessons will consist of how to examine photos, advertisements, news clippings, video, and then move into advertisement and propaganda techniques. Although this unit is primarily geared to visual artifacts, I will include assessment of written sources as well. The initial idea of thought of how a picture is worth a thousand words can be repeatedly throughout the year.

The strategies I plan to utilize include:

- KWL charts – What do I know? What do I want to know? What have I learned?
- Jigsaw – reading text, become an expert, share with specific group, return to original group with new knowledge
- Think-pair-share – writing what has been learned, pair with peer, share with larger group
- SOAPSTONE Speaker/Occasion/Audience/Purpose/Subject/Tone
- Analyzing propaganda/photo worksheets
- Propaganda gallery walk – evaluate patriotism, scapegoating, stereotyping, and conformity found in propaganda posters and political cartoons. Similar to brainstorming.
- Peer editing/review
- Carousel brainstorming – groups are assigned a video, analyze it and comment on post its or newsprint, move on to migrate from video to video adding comments to each one they see, returning to their original video and consider remarks added to their original comments by the other groups. What did others catch that they might not have initially seen?

Students keep interactive notebooks for my class. Some of the work will be done in the notebook individually and also in groups. It is an easy way for my students to organize the information they receive from me, the work they do in class and then it also serves as a reference and review point for future activities.

Ad man David Ogilvy once said, “I do not regard advertising as entertainment or an art form, but as a medium of information.”<sup>xxiii</sup> An advertisement imparts information to the consumer. Advertising sells a message. An ad can be educational, informative, or raise awareness about a specific issue. Whether the ad sells shoes, pollution, or voting issues, the ad conveys a particular message. I want my students to take on the role of a vigilant, critical consumer, and make smart choices. I hope that these activities will lead them to becoming wiser customers of whatever information is being delivered to them.

## **Activities**

Activity one: three to four days. Items needed: KWL, think-pair-share, magazine covers, photographs, variety of primary source documents, question/answer worksheets, SOAPSTONE overhead as a reminder, Media Construction of Presidential Campaigns: A Document-Based History Kit, YouTube, and Presidential Campaign Posters: 200 Years of Election Art. I would like to employ Professor Dan Grano's (UNCC) lessons that I participated in this summer on evaluating photos and combine that with the SOAPSTONE (Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, and Tone) procedure done in sixth and seventh grade. Students will assess a variety of photos with the idea in mind that there is no one meaning to visual images. Students can create a KWL chart they will use over the course of the lesson. Students can brainstorm what they know about the photos and primary source documents, what they want to know about them and what they have learned. Brainstorming can be conducted in think-pair-share groups. I would pair them with a peer (probably according to the interest survey results from day one). The KWL and brainstorming can be done in this manner. They can share their ideas and then we can discuss with/as a larger group. As this is a presidential election year I think this provides students with an amazing array of images to investigate. I want to start with photos then graduate into passenger manifests from immigrant ships, newspaper clippings from the 1800's, posters on early elections from the Presidential Campaign Posters book, television ads from the 1950's provided by the Project Look Sharp, internet, specifically YouTube (Using YouTube to Teach Presidential Election Propaganda: Twelve Representative Videos by Wayne Journell).<sup>xxiv</sup> This article and videos are going to be used multiple times throughout the unit. Groups of four to five can think pair share as to the problems of evaluating photos and the techniques used to produce those photos (thinking about photo shopping). They will study visual images that are juxtaposed with words and emotions. In their groups they can ask the question of do the images represent reality. Does the picture present any historical detail? Are there multiple presumptions? Is the perspective of the photojournalist invisible? So many photos are staged, especially in an election season. How does the angle that the photo is taken affect the way you perceive it? A photo taken from below, for instance, illustrates the figure as threatening, larger than life.<sup>xxv</sup> Students will have a worksheet for this activity. They will be asked to investigate the following items in the visual pieces: figure and ground, shapes and space, balance and direction, color and lighting, soft/hard focus, angle, and subject position.

Activity two: one to four days (depending on grade level). Needed items: Computer access, *Media Kit*, paper, post it notes, newsprint, color pencils, markers, and SOAPSTONE notes. These activities are geared to introducing students to a vast array of available websites. What type of activity you do depends on the site you choose. Presidential election years offer an overwhelming selection of sites. Off year elections are not necessarily a drawback because you can view prior campaign commercials without having the competition of an actual election going on. Do take a look at SpringBoard's website evaluation page before assigning the website viewings.<sup>xxvi</sup> This will help determine domains, sponsor, purpose, authors, and workable/unusable links. It gives a good basic outline for evaluating a website's credentials and can be found on page 388 of



the 2011 edition. Where you start with the sites below is up to you. As an eighth grade teacher I thought this order would work best for me. The sites/publications I am recommending and why are as follows:

*Media Construction of Presidential Campaigns – a Document-Based History Kit* funded by Project Look Sharp. The kit can be downloaded for free (a stunning 500 pages, try double paging it) but it is so worth it. Every election since 1800 is in this compendium. The purpose of the publication is to provide educators with the necessary materials needed to engage students in a vigorous and interactive process of interpreting election history objectives, learning standards in regards to media literacy and democratic citizenship are provided.<sup>xxvii</sup> The kit provides training in identifying and using a variety of techniques for communicating messages in different media formats. A major theme of this kit is that all media messages come from a particular point of view and have a bias that reflects the perspective of producer and sponsor. The kit itself has a bias.

The documents are divided by campaigns from 1800 to 2004 and then further subdivided into sections such as the birth of modern campaigning, advent of television; nation in crisis, mass marketing, and targeting the spin. Activities can also be accessed by categories such as race, class, labor, foreign policy, fear, music etc. A media timeline illustrating big changes in campaigning (news print, radio, TV, internet) is also provided. At first, I would like students to be able to jump around in this kit. So, spending a few minutes allowing them access to eras and types of advertising, radio ads, and music used would be a start. I can then draw them back in with viewing power point slides provided in the kit. A gallery walk would work for this activity, especially since this involves computers. Putting students into groups of three or four is a good number. Paper is available for them to ask and post questions. Questions can gauge knowledge and comprehension or tap into higher level thinking skills. They can post their questions and comments in places around the room that deal with that specific slide or video. The groups can then congregate and discuss the questions. Students can add new content. Groups continue to rotate until all the slides/videos have been addressed. I can circulate and clarify question or comments or address misconceptions. I would write the misconceptions down to address them at the end of the exercise. It's also a way of informally assessing what they learned. The final part of the activity is to report out or do an oral report to the class. This involves a whole class discussion. My Honors class would also do a written report as a group. Slides may address television and big money, for instance, ads promoting fear such as the "Daisy" commercial from the 1960's, and speeches from Bush and Gore in 2000. The seven advertising techniques are on a worksheet for them to check as they talk and begin to view other ads. Class discussion would take place then they can investigate again. Primary sources from the Lincoln/Douglas 1860 election can be compared to sources from the 1904 Roosevelt/Parker campaign. Students can be grouped in a think pair share fashion to find what they think are the most interesting ads, create a short power point, and then do a gallery walk. As they walk and take notes, each group can then pick the most interesting

ads overall and engage in a short discussion as to why that campaign ad was picked. What advertising techniques were used? They will identify name-calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, bandwagon, and card stacking. The ultimate goal is to expose them to the elections throughout US history and the types of advertising available in various eras. Once they have seen several elections and sources they can start investigating the present election.

Another engaging site comes from an article Using YouTube to Teach Presidential Election Propaganda: Twelve Representative Videos by Wayne Journell. The article uses the rise of internet during the 2000-2008 elections. It engages teachers to train students to analyze propaganda they see and hear and ultimately produce a more engaged and discernable voters.<sup>xxviii</sup> Some of the 12 YouTube videos I am using are:

- Reminder of Good Times “Morning in America” Reagan 1984
- The Sound Byte “Nixon’s Experience?” Kennedy 1960
- Accomplished Biography “Bettering Society” Obama 2008
- Attacking the Record “Willie Horton” Bush 1988
- Fear Mongering “Daisy” Johnson 1964

I would utilize the same process as before. Seven techniques advertising worksheet used by students previously would work for the first part of this activity. The activity is called carousel brainstorming. Students will be placed into groups of four. Each group gets a sheet of newsprint. Each group is assigned an advertisement from the above selection. They view it. One student is assigned the role of recorder and he/she will title the newsprint with the video’s name. The others will give him/her all the terms they can think of that they associate with their advertisement. Categories would be the types of advertisement the YouTube video falls into and why. SOAPSTONE can also be used here. The sheet will then be passed over to the next group in a circular clockwise movement. The recorder receives the next sheet and the group views the new video and repeats the process. Each group will change newsprint until all videos have been watched. You may have to extend the recording time as they will deliberately look for things that the other group(s) has/have missed and will need more time for discussion. The last pass off is to the original group with which the paper began. You could do this “Graffiti” style, with sheets posted to wall as students move from site to sit but I prefer the students to stay in their little circle. To push it a little further have the original group look their sheet over, noting all the other comments/ideas that were added. Have the students tell the recorder to circle the three ideas that are most clearly illustrated from the video. Did they leave something out the first time and have something to add? They will spend more time critically evaluating the possibilities. If this is their first time doing this, they will be more vigilant next time. I call it “Be a Hawk” and catch what the others didn’t. It encourages more critical thinking. Have a reporter report all the findings to the rest of the groups and allow time for discussion.

Decision 2012 Curriculum from [www.nbslearn.com/portal/site/learn/decision2012/curriculum](http://www.nbslearn.com/portal/site/learn/decision2012/curriculum) offers K-12 curriculum on the election process. Each grade level has several activities. For eighth grade “scoring the debate” and campaign commercials are available. Students are questioned about what catches your eye and how the candidates choose to represent their platforms through commercials using positive and negative vocabulary. Students can be placed into groups and create a commercial representing a candidate from the 2012 debate and debate their viewpoints. Some of the video entries are titled The Meanest, The Dumbest, and Funniest political ads of 2006 and Believe in America Romney 2012. The activities for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade begin with responsible citizenship and end with the seniors choices such as felon voting, am I a Democrat or a Republican, and most importantly for a high school senior, Are you Registered.

A whole class activity can begin with <http://votesmart.org/voteeasy> . This is an independent research center based in Colorado with members (former and present) from quite a diverse group: Presidents Ford and Carter, former Congresswoman Ferraro, and Senator John McCain. Every candidate from local to national can be accessed. Included are voting records, bios, issue positions, interest group ratings, public statements, and campaign finances. The site is interactive. Issues pop up and you can select your position. Be careful! The issues are many and range from gun legislation, abortion, Afghanistan, economy, and marriage. Pick something benign when you put this up to model it. Just click, read the questions (details provided if a student needs more info), pick an answer, and your candidates pop up. Your choice is in front and the opponent, who did not get your vote on the issue, dances around in the background. Have students try an issue, answer the question, and view the candidate they might vote for. The assignment is to take this home and have students and parents interact with each other on the web site. Are parents and their children on the same wavelength (often the case with younger students) or are they starting to develop a more individual political personality and viewpoint?

Similar in nature is <http://www.selectsmart.com>. You select issues important to you. The politicians’ positions are based on their record of voting, special interests, group ratings, and their statements in the public record. Model in class and have students take this home to use with their parents. Both of these activities would then generate discussion the next day in class. The higher the grade levels the more discussion. Keeping your views out of this can be a nail biter!

The last one is Mixed Messages: Tracking Political Advertising from the Washington Post <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/politicalads> The database includes political ads funded by campaigns, parties, committees, and their independent advocacy groups. You can browse by year (2000-08), type of race, candidate, state, party, issue, cue, dissemination (radio/TV/web), music (patriotic/somber/ominous/upbeat), narrator by gender, and finally by type (attack/bio/emotional). Featured, for instance on 10/25, were false claims in the final debate and a few debate violations.

Activity three: three to five days. Needed items: Seven techniques of propaganda and advertising (bandwagon, transfer, card stacking, glittering generalities, testimonial, etc.) handouts, think pair share groups, magazine, internet and television advertisements, presidential election posters, 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century propaganda items, video cam, tape recorder, props, construction paper, color pencils/markers, scissors, and glue. Students will view a variety of visual items. They can critique the ads and judge how well the company or candidate is “selling” the product. As a group they will create election advertisements in poster, radio or video form. They can re-write an ad or poster they have seen same with a video/internet ad. The following day they can review and peer edit the products. They would need to do some research on the computer. They will have a list of ads from Project Look Sharp to view. Each group will view different ads. The groups will share and discuss. They can scrutinize the new ads as a group and then report and share with the other groups in the class.

Activity four: several days throughout the year. Needed items: political cartoon analysis sheet, variety of political cartoons of your choosing, *Lustige Blatter* magazine covers 1917-1940's, Dr. Seuss WW2 political cartoons, poster paper or newsprint, color pencils, markers. I generally want my students to look at an even greater variety of primary sources, especially political cartoons as part of the election process.

[www.presidentlincoln.org](http://www.presidentlincoln.org) has a political cartoon analysis worksheet that you can download. The site also has several handouts on the history of political cartoons that are excellent to employ.<sup>xxix</sup> Students can evaluate the purpose of political cartoons from “Ograbme” (Embargo) pre-1812 War on into the Civil War, World Wars (Dr. Seuss) and present day. I use political cartoons as a warm up but I want to look at the election group that Project Look Sharp has. We can evaluate propaganda posters from the wars using the propaganda gallery walk (patriotism, scapegoating, stereotyping, and conformity). Magazines like *Puck* and *Lustige Blatter* have a unique twist and I think that this will be of great value as we move into political cartoons. Group work to determine underlying message, how is it delivered, determine fallacies and exaggeration, persuasive tactics used, stereotypes present etc. As a whole class students can determine how the posters and political election cartoons might affect the election. Finally, students create their own political cartoon. I am looking utilizing activities on analysis of election cartoons from Lincoln's time period and a lesson plan developed for Newshour by Jim Lehrer.

TheNews and theGov has several activities made for teachers to utilize in the classroom.<sup>xxx</sup> Students analyze several political cartoons of your choice. You can do ones from same election era first and then branch out to analyze other time periods. They address the following questions:

- What is the event or issue portrayed in the cartoon?
- Deconstruct each of the cartoons by explaining the use of labels, symbols, caricature in each.

- What aspects of the cartoon (if any) are difficult to understand? What further information do you need to fully understand the cartoon?
- Describe the cartoonist's message?
- Explain why you agree or disagree with the message of the cartoon.<sup>xxx</sup>

The second part of this activity is to create their own political cartoon.

- Assign a specific topic. Election campaigning is one topic. If we are out of the election time period, you can assign the era that you are currently studying. If students are familiar with the political cartooning process you can jump in at any time period. I personally will be looking at the Civil War, Progressive Era, World War 1 and 2, Depression, Vietnam, and Watergate.
- Have the students sketch out a rough idea of their cartoon (stick people are fine) incorporating the five questions above to guide them. They also need to consider how they are going to support their position in their cartoon, will words be necessary, and how are they going to express emotions or movement. The [www.presidentlincoln.org](http://www.presidentlincoln.org) site has tips for students creating their political cartoons. They range from using straight lines, severe (anger) or squiggly lines (playful, softer), viewing from different angles, adding shading for fun or foreboding, and using textured paper
- Have students explain their drawings and symbols used. Did they use exaggeration, irony, analogy, and captions or labeling? Why did they use these? They can fall back on the political analysis worksheet and handouts you provided from the [www.presidentlincoln.org](http://www.presidentlincoln.org) site for help

## Notes

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"The Official Website of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum." The Official Website of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

<http://www.presidentlincoln.org> This site has a collection of great lessons on analyzing political cartoons, worksheets, political cartoons, and vocabulary.

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<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews>. Lots of lesson plans are provided, websites, and discussion questions.

*Spring board: English textual power*. Annotated teacher ed. S.l.: College Board, 2011.

The book is generally used by Language Arts teachers but the last few pages have ideas on instructional strategies and how to evaluate online sources.

Sperry, Sox, and Chris Sperry. *Media Construction of Presidential Campaigns: A Document-Based History Kit*. Ithica: Project Look Sharp, 2008. This has everything you ever wanted on lessons from 1800 to 2004 – everything! I would say that if you solely used this free publication you would not need anything else on elections and campaigning!

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"The Learning Network - The Learning Network Blog - NYTimes.com." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. [http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20040702friday\\_print.html](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20040702friday_print.html) Multiple lesson plans provided. Their work is first class, easily adaptable for different grade levels.

Factcheck.org and flackcheck.org Great sites for balancing the candidates and issues – what is the actual truth and then backed up. I would like this for every ad!

<http://www.nbclearn.com/portal/site/learn/decision2012/curriculum> K-12 activities that can be used at any time. Activities include levels of government, responsible citizenship, scoring debates, history of Constitutional changes, electoral college, and determining your political party.