



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 5 to 8
About the Author:	This unit was created by James Warkentin as part of a Media Education course taught by John Pungente at the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, 1992

Elections and the Media

Overview

This lesson helps students to reflect upon, understand and filter the many media messages within political platforms and around political personalities. Students begin by collecting, and then discussing and deconstructing, examples of campaign materials from a wide range of media. Understanding of the importance of the media in the political process is further developed through a series of activities, including the creation of a school-based election campaign.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- recognize that the media construct reality and identify ways in which this might be done
- compare the pros and cons of using different mediums
- dissect campaign literature for symbols, colours, etc.
- tour a local media production facility
- produce a group ad for a class election.

This unit is designed to be part of a larger unit on Canadian political life and decision making, but could be used separately as well.

Preparation and Materials

Two weeks prior to this lesson, ask students to collect campaign materials of all types, including:

- Campaign literature
- Radio and TV ads
- Newspaper stories, editorial cartoons and press releases
- For this unit, reserve a video camera and tape recorders



Procedure

- Divide your class into groups of five students.
- Have the groups read, view, listen to and categorize the campaign materials that they have collected. (Categories could be based on type of media, message - we're good vs. they're bad - perceived effectiveness, etc.) Have groups show their collections to the class.
- With the class, choose one medium to examine closely. Observe words emphasized in the text; font sizes; colours; the angle, actions and framing of pictures; the style and lyrics to background or lead music. Then look at what is absent in the same material (names of opponents, opponents' colours, controversial issues, etc.)
- Make a class *What's In, What's Out* chart. Have the groups pick five items, speculate as to why they were included or excluded and share their ideas. (This would be a good time to ask "How does the inclusion of something make you *feel* -- for example, upbeat music vs. no music at all.")
- To emphasize the importance of music, use different kinds of background music, while students dramatize a wedding or funeral. Ask students what it felt like to bury someone to a polka.
- Ask students, as individuals, to analyze a politician's photograph and to decide if they would use it in a campaign. Why or why not?
- In small groups, ask students to do a similar analysis with a newspaper.
 - How many pictures and stories relate to the campaign front-runner?
 - Where are they placed, as opposed to those pertaining to the other candidates?
 - Does this placement change with a perceived change in popularity?
 - What are the pictures "saying" about the candidates?
 - Would those pictures and quotes be used in the candidates' literature? Why or why not? What have the editorial cartoons focused on or portrayed?
- Have class members keep a log of political cartoons. Ask them to write a sentence or two to explain why each cartoon has been included. Display the week's editorial cartoons in a prominent place. Discuss the symbols in the cartoons and have the class design their own. (Daryle Caigle's Political Cartoon Index contains examples of several Canadian editorial cartoonists: <http://www.cagle.com/politicalcartoons/>.)
- Take a trip to a media production facility (for example, a newspaper, a TV station, a print shop, an ad agency or a radio station) or have a media person come to the class. Discuss the *What's In, What's Out* chart. The formulation of questions to be asked of the professionals should be part of this exercise.
- Having looked at the materials produced for one medium, ask the groups to rank their campaign ads in order of effectiveness and to be prepared to defend their answers to the class. Students should hand in a list of the pros and cons of using each of the possible media. Where possible, they should have done some research (for example, what does a 30-second radio spot cost?)
- Ask the groups to produce a TV or radio ad that will help get a candidate for class leader or student president elected. (Deadlines, as well as scheduled and supervised use of the video equipment are necessary for this to work.)

Evaluation



- Individual Assignments - cartoon log, editorial cartoon and/or photo evaluation - as well as participation and co-operation.
- Group work - hand-in assignments (media pros and cons), peer evaluations (finished ads) and self-evaluation as a group member. Co operative strategies would play a large part in the group work. I find peer evaluation to be direct and often more honest than anything I could come up with.

Feedback

- I ask for students' written comments about what they learned, liked or disliked, and felt could be improved. I also offer my thoughts through discussion of their written work.

Resources

- To help students better understand the electoral process, the Elections Canada website has a Youth section that features election simulation resources. http://www.elections.ca/content_youth.asp?section=yth&document=index&lang=e&textonly=false

