

America Votes Teacher's Guide

For Feature 4:

“Becoming Informed”

America Votes Quote: “Conviction is worthless unless it is converted into conduct.”
- *Thomas Carlyle, Scottish author, historian and essayist (1795-1881)*

Purpose:

The purpose of this feature is to enable students to recognize the role that the media plays in providing information and advertising about candidates. By developing awareness of the commonly used persuasion and propaganda techniques, students will be able to evaluate the pertinent information in media reports and ads.

Newspaper Activities:

1. Collect a variety of ads that exemplify the techniques listed in the in-paper feature. Ads may be print or TV examples. (If you cannot find political ads, use product ads.) Group the ads by technique, then answer the following questions.

- What is the key message communicated in each advertisement?
- Which type of ad is more memorable? Why?
- Which do you think would be most effective in persuading viewers to vote for (or against) a candidate or buy a product?
- Did you learn from the ads? Did they help you decide which candidate to support or which product to buy?
- What do all types of ads have in common? Do they provide factual information or do they evoke an emotional response?
- During which programs do the ads play? What time of the day do you see the most ads?
- What are the limitations of a 30-second commercial?
- How important is a candidate's/spokesperson's appearance in these ads? What type of image is being projected?
- If you were the campaign manager for a local candidate for Congress or for a company's product, what type of ad would you try to create?

2. Collaborate with other students to create a 30-second commercial in storyboard form and/or finished video product.

“Vote”abulary Words: (Underlined words appear in newspaper feature.)

Advertise - to make public announcement of, especially to proclaim the qualities or advantages of a product, business or candidate so as to increase popularity, sales or votes

Baiting - the practice of attacking or harassing a candidate with insults, distortions, etc., to provoke an angry reaction

Bandwagon Effect - the tendency for a candidate or proposal that seems to be winning to gather additional support simply because of being ahead; also called the "snowball effect"

Canvassing - the process of attempting to win votes by contacting voters directly (The candidate or a campaign worker typically contacts voters either door-to-door or by telephone. Canvassing is conducted increasingly via e-mail or the Internet.)

Mudslinging - the practice of making malicious verbal attacks against one's opponent in a political race (Mudslinging is a tactic of "dirty politics" and the running of a "negative campaign.")

Negative Ads - political advertising designed to attack a candidate by questioning character or past political record (Negative ads typically seek to give the impression that a candidate is dishonest or hypocritical in something said or done in the political sphere. Such ads may expose real personal foibles, crimes and misdemeanors, and try to demonstrate, usually through distortions of fact, that a candidate is likely to be an unsuitable officeholder.)

Persuade - to cause to do something, to urge or induce to believe something, to convince

Platform - a political party's formal written statement of its principles, policies and goals, which is drafted, revised and publicized during the presidential nomination process (The adoption of a platform is one of the main functions of a national party convention. The major challenge to the platform committee is to write a platform with which all or most party members can identify and which all party candidates will embrace and promote during their campaigns.)

U.S. Constitution Tie-ins:

Amendment 1 guarantees free speech and freedom of the press.

Internet Resources:

www.vote-smart.org - *Project Vote Smart*, go to Political Resources, Vote Smart Classroom

www.pbs.org/democracy/buildyourowncampaign - PBS Democracy Project: Build Your Own Campaign – What's the Spin?

usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/demo.htm - basic readings in U.S. democracy, including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and more

Kids Voting Resource:

“Processing Information through Decision Making”

Concept 3

I study the candidates & issues



Activity

Processing Information Through the Decision- Making Chart

Objective

Students gather and evaluate information on a candidate or an issue to help them make a voting decision.

Getting Ready

- ✓ Make copies or a transparency of the *Decision-Making Chart*.

Evaluate

- ✓ Individually or in small groups, instruct students to gather information on a candidate or an issue from at least five sources.
- ✓ Using the information gathered, instruct students to pass each item on their lists through the questions on the *Decision-Making Chart*.
- ✓ Students should continue this process until they have evaluated all the information.

Questions

- ☆ *What does credible mean?
Were you surprised at some of the results of passing your information through this test?*
- ☆ *Do you think voters often make uninformed decisions?*
- ☆ *Do you think voters often make decisions based on inadequate information?*
- ☆ *Why is it important to understand that not all information is credible?*
- ☆ *Which sources of information did you find most credible?*
- ☆ *Is the information you receive from major network newscasts, news magazine shows, talk shows, morning shows, cable TV news and public broadcasting news equally credible?*
- ☆ *How do you rank radio, newspapers, television, magazines, individuals, etc., in terms of their credibility?*
- ☆ *What information passed the test?*

Vote Quote

“Voting is the least arduous of a citizen’s duties. He has the prior and harder duty of making up his mind.”

–Ralph Barton Perry



DECISION-MAKING CHART

