

Lesson 11

Campaign Communications



GUIDING QUESTION

1 How can I evaluate political party messages?

PURPOSE

During the election campaign, political parties use many ways to present their leader and communicate their party's vision to the public. Being an informed voter means critically examining these messages and advertisements.

In this lesson, students dissect and analyze various political party communications or advertisements. In the *Consolidation* activity, students evaluate the strengths and limitations of each party's campaign strategy.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the lesson, students can:

- explain the purpose of political communications in elections;
- analyze a variety of media texts and evaluate their significance or effectiveness;
- work collaboratively with peers to analyze and organize information.

Tips For Teachers

- Please use the activities and combine them in a way that is appropriate for your class.
- This lesson builds upon Lesson 7. Please refer to it for additional guidance when assessing images.
- Set up a classroom Twitter or Facebook account to help your students track social media posts.
- Be sure to show options from each party in the same medium to ensure comparisons can be made on the same level and are not biased towards format.
- When choosing video advertisements, be sure to show ads of similar tone. Try not to compare a positive ad from one party with an attack ad from another. Compare positive and negative toned ads from the same party.
- Supplies/Needs: Chart paper and examples of political party advertisements or social media messages from the current election campaign (consider using screenshots of social media posts)
- Any ideas, slide decks, handouts and activity sheets in Word can be found at: studentvote.ca/canada.

Readiness

Ask students to document any campaign communications or political advertisements they see in the community or online in lead up to the lesson. Students can take pictures on their phone or capture screen shots.

Starter

1. Through a classroom discussion, invite students to share all the ways they think political parties and candidates try to communicate with voters and share their message (e.g., advertising, lawn signs, mailings/pamphlets, their website, social media, public events, door-to-door canvassing, news coverage, candidates' debate).
2. Ask students if they have noticed any of these efforts for the current election and invite them to share their photos from the *Readiness* activity.
3. Through a whole-class discussion, ask students which methods they think are most effective in reaching voters and why.
 - Which opinions shared in the video resonate the most with you?
 - Over the course of the Student Vote activities, has your opinion changed about whether voting is important?
 - What is the impact of high or low levels of voter participation?
 - Do you think it is important that students practice voting before they turn 18 years old? Why or why not?

Activities

1. Review the three types of media: paid, earned and owned. Explain to students that political parties use all of these forms of media to share their message with voters.
 - **Paid media:** Advertising that has been purchased, including online ads, billboards, broadcast or print ads, and promotional mailings.
 - **Owned media:** Communications shared by individuals or groups through their own platforms, such as websites, blogs or social media channels.
 - **Earned media:** Media coverage produced by news organizations or reported by others through social shares, mentions or word of mouth.
2. Share examples of political party advertisements or social media messages from the current election campaign. You could use images from each party or party leader's Instagram account or video advertisements found on their website or YouTube channel. Encourage students to look at language, colour, images, music, tone and content.

Using the 'Questioning Images Framework' (Handout 7.1) or the following guiding questions, answer the following questions with input from students. Place the piece of media (or printed screenshot of the video) in the middle of a larger piece of paper or chart paper and annotate their thoughts around the edge.

Guiding questions:

- a) Describe the content/situation: What is the content? How does it make you feel?
 - b) Identify the source: Who is the source behind it? Is the source clear?
 - c) Interpret the meaning: What are the key messages? How do the text/images/colours influence the message?
 - d) Analyze the purpose: What is the purpose of the message? Is it an attack ad? Who is the target audience? How might different audiences interpret it?
3. As a class, co-create criteria to evaluate political party advertising or communication. For example:
 - Is the message clear and concise?
 - Is the message factual?
 - Are the images relevant to the message(s)?
 - Do the message(s) target the intended audience?
 - Is the language of the message appropriate to the tone and content?

4. Divide students into groups and have them evaluate the communications of one of the political parties or candidates running in your school's riding. Select options from each party in the same medium(s) to ensure comparisons can be made on the same level and are not biased towards format. Place each piece of media (or printed screenshot of the video) in the middle of a larger piece of paper or chart paper. Ask students to annotate their thoughts around the edge. Encourage them to look at language, colour, images, music, tone and content.
5. Post each group's work around the classroom or down a hallway. Have students participate in a 'Gallery Walk' to look at their peers' work. For a further extension, give students sticky notes so they can add their own thoughts or ideas.

Consolidation

Have a brief closing discussion about campaign communications, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions:

- Evaluate the communications of each political party or candidate and rank them based on effectiveness. Explain the reasons behind your rankings.
- Which party's messaging is most appealing to you and why?
- If you were the leader of a party or candidate, what would be your communications strategy? What formats would you use? Who would you try to reach? What would be your main messages?

Extension Activity

Divide students into groups and ask them to track the communications of one particular political party or candidate over the course of the campaign. Students should collect the party or candidate's communications/messages from multiple platforms and in different formats (e.g., video, print material, social media posts).

Provide an overall checklist of what should be collected during the tracking period. For example:

- 3 video advertisements
- 10 social media posts (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)
- 1 party pamphlet
- 1 speech
- 2 media releases

Suggested questions:

- What are the party's key messages? Are they consistent across all platforms or communications?
- Are they focused on highlighting their own ideas or do they focus on commenting on another party's negatives?
- Which platform do you think is most effective and why?
- Which demographic groups does the party appear to be targeting with their communications? Explain your reasons.

Afterwards, give students an opportunity to share their work with each other through a classroom presentation, 'Gallery Walk' or an alternative method.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

Elections are contests of leadership, ideas and persuasion, where interested groups and individuals campaign for our support and, ultimately, our vote.

It is the job of **political parties** and **candidates** to communicate their vision and ideas with voters in order to gain their support. A political platform is a series of declared values and proposed actions the party will take if elected.

Candidates and parties use a communications strategy that incorporates all three types of media (paid, earned, owned), as well as outreach activities and events to spread their message.

Paid media: Publicity that has been purchased to bring a message to an audience. Examples include, such as print, broadcast or social media advertising, or a direct mail campaign.

Owned media: Communications managed by an individual, group or organization through its own platforms, such as websites, blogs or social media channels.

Earned media: Media coverage or mentions reported by third parties such as news organizations, or shared through external social media channels or through word of mouth.

Campaign outreach also includes lawn signs, public events, door-to-door canvassing and town halls or debates.

As a voter, it is your job to gather, interpret and analyze campaign information, formulate conclusions and judgments, and make your voting decision.