

Lesson 6: Campaign Communications



GUIDING QUESTIONS

- 1 How do political parties and candidates communicate to voters?
- 2 How can I evaluate campaign messages?

OVERVIEW

Political parties and candidates use a variety of communications to convince voters to choose them at the ballot box. Being an informed voter means critically examining these messages and advertisements.

In this lesson, students examine and analyze campaign communications or advertisements. In the *Consolidation* activity, students evaluate the effectiveness of each party or candidate's campaign strategy.

LEARNING GOALS

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; and,
- work collaboratively with peers to analyze and organize information.

Starter

1. As a class, brainstorm all the ways political parties and candidates communicate with voters during elections (e.g., advertising on TV, lawn signs, mailings/pamphlets, their website, social media, public events, door-to-door canvassing, news coverage, debates and town halls).
2. Through a class discussion, ask students to share any advertisements or messages they have seen from the political parties and candidates in the current election, including where they saw them.

Discussion prompts:

- Which messages have stuck with you and why?
- Which methods do you think are most effective in 2023 and why?

Activities

1. Review the three types of media: paid, earned and owned. Explain to students that candidates and political parties use all of these forms of media to communicate to 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 videos found on their website, YouTube channel or TikTok account. Encourage students to look at language, colour, images, music, tone and content.

As a class, investigate the advertisements/messages using the following guiding questions (also provided on Activity 6.1).

- a) **Describe the content:** What does it show? What is your immediate impression? How does it make you feel?
- b) **Identify the claim (or main message):** What claim is being made? Is it a factual statement that can be proven? Is it an opinion statement that is up to one's interpretation?

- c) **Examine the framing:** How do the language, images, colour, fonts and tone influence the message? Is the message misleading?
 - d) **Analyze the purpose:** What is the purpose of the message? Is it about the party's vision/strengths or is it an attack ad? Who is the target audience? How might different audiences interpret it?
3. Co-create criteria to evaluate campaign communications (Activity 6.1). Have students work in groups and then discuss as a class to establish the final criteria.

For example:

- Is the message clear and concise?
 - Is the message factual?
 - Are the images/visuals 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 in your school's electoral division. 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 connecting back to criteria. Encourage them to look at language, colour, images, music, tone and content.

TEACHER NOTE

- 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.
- 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.

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 both of the following questions:

- Evaluate the communications of each political party or candidate and rank them based on effectiveness. Explain the thinking behind your rankings and connect it back to the co-created criteria.
- Which party or candidate’s messaging is most appealing to you and why?

Extension Activity

Divide students into groups and ask them to track the communications of one particular political party across various communications. Students should collect the party’s communications 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
- 12 social media posts (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok)
- 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 criticizing their opponents?
- Which platform do you think is most effective and why?
- Which demographic groups does the party appear to be targeting with their communications? Do you think they use different platforms to target different audiences? 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.

ADAPTATIONS AND SUPPORTS

Individual Education Plans	<p>Modifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group students so that everyone participates within their comfort level. • Use simple vocabulary when describing political terms. • Replay videos frequently or provide access in advance. <p>Enrichment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to create their own additions to each party’s campaign – remembering to be in line with the party platform and campaign goals.
Language Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure subtitles are on during any videos and repeat them numerous times. • Give clear criteria and post key terms and definitions for student reference.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may be appropriate to show political ads from a country outside of North America as examples. Be sure that you understand the language and context. • Be selective in your choices of political ads so that students do not feel uncomfortable (e.g., Anti-immigration platform ads).
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use technology options if needed. Websites such as note.ly or padlet.com may be helpful.

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, 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, town halls, and debates.

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

