

Activity - Campaign Ads

Overview

In this activity, students delve into a study of the purpose, anatomy and effectiveness of campaign advertisements. Students will learn about some of the features of campaign ads and view several examples to see these features in practice. Finally, students will learn how to put their own campaign ad together and as a class view and discuss the effectiveness of the ads.

Objectives

- ▶ Students will recognize the features and techniques used in campaign ads.
- ▶ Students will use their newfound understanding to create their own imaginary campaign ad.
- ▶ Students will learn some of the technical vocabulary and skills necessary to make their own videos.

Background

Campaign advertising is the use of **paid media** (newspapers, radio, television, etc.) to influence the decisions made by the voting public. These ads are designed by the party's political consultants and campaign staff.

Often, campaign ads take the form of attack ads, which serve to villainize the other candidates running in the same race. It will generally criticize an opponent's political platform, usually by pointing out faults and contrasting them against the party's own platform.

Television campaign ads tend to be short, to the point, and employ many sophisticated audio and visual techniques that television viewers find very reminiscent of product advertising.

Preparation and Materials

- ▶ Accumulate as many campaign ads as possible, current and historical. Many are available on websites such as YouTube.
- ▶ Photocopy 'Detecting Ad Campaign Techniques' for your students.
- ▶ Photocopy 'Planning Your Campaign Ad' for your students.
- ▶ Arrange with the Technology class for use of video cameras and computers with software for editing (e.g. iMovie)

Timeframes

This activity should take between **90-120 minutes**, depending if you allow class time for the video shooting and production.

Activity

Part 1

1. Begin a discussion with your students about advertising:
 - What do they think of the ads that are on TV?
 - Do the ads make the students want the product?
 - What are students' favourite ads? What makes them so great?
 - Are advertisements 'objective'?

By the end of the discussion, students should realize that:

- a) Ads are completely biased and subjective
 - b) Ads exist for the purpose of selling a product
 - c) Ads are *paid for*.
2. If possible, play a few ads for students that illustrate these points.
 3. Now ask them about campaign ads. Are there any differences between product advertising and campaign advertising? Allow a discussion to develop.
 4. Explain that campaign ads are considered 'paid media', paid for by the candidate and his party to promote his agenda (getting elected). Often, just like product advertising, they ads revolve around a 'slogan'. Explain that a slogan is a catchy phrase to persuade people to vote for a particular candidate. Can students think of any product ad slogans? Campaign ad slogans?

For example:

Barack Obama, 2008: "Yes we can."

Bill Clinton, 1992: "Don't stop thinking about tomorrow."

Ross Perot, 1992: "Ross for Boss."

George W. Bush 2000: "Real plans for real people."

Ralph Nader, 2000: "Government of, by, and for the people...not the monied interests."

Abraham Lincoln, 1864: "Don't swap horses in midstream."

Stephen Harper 2008: "Stand up for Canada."

Pierre Trudeau, 1967: "The just society."

Stephane Dion 2008: "The Green shift."

Gordon Campbell, 2009: "Keep B.C. strong."

Carole James, 2009: "Leadership. For everyone."

Jane Sterk, 2009: "A better plan for British Columbia."

5. Ask students what they think of the slogans and whether they understand what they mean.
6. Ask students in what ways they feel the campaign ads may be biased from their recent experience of seeing federal ads in 2008. Take notes on the board.
7. Distribute the worksheet '**Detecting Campaign Ad Techniques**' and go over these techniques with students. Can they think of any other examples besides the ones given?
8. Announce to students that you will play several ad campaigns (it is your choice if they are current provincial ads or historical ads to illustrate your point). Ask your students to work through this worksheet in pairs and jot down notes in boxes where they feel the ads use certain techniques.
9. Take up answers as a class, or ask students these leading questions:
 - a) Does the candidate appear in the ad? If so, what is he or she doing?
 - b) Do any other people appear in the ad with the candidate? If so what is their role in the ad?
 - c) What did you learn about the candidate's stand on issues?
 - d) Did the candidate try to influence your opinion of his or her opponent? If so, in what way?
 - e) Was music or sound effects important to the overall impression of the ad?
 - f) Was the setting important to the overall impression of the ad?
 - g) Does the ad use any special slogans to get the candidate's message across?
 - h) What group of people did the makers of this ad want to appeal to? For example, was this ad aimed at all voters, younger voters, women, senior citizens?
 - i) What impression did you have of the candidate from viewing this ad?
 - j) Do you think this is the impression the candidate wanted you to have? Explain.

Part 2

10. Ask students to get in groups of two or three. Inform students they will be making their own campaign videos, putting themselves in the role of a candidate. Secretly assign each group one of the ad techniques from their '**Detecting Ad Campaign Techniques**' worksheet, and tell students they will use that technique as the focal point of their videos.

11. Distribute the '**Planning Your Campaign Ad**' worksheet and work through its contents with students.

Describe some of the basic video shots for use, perhaps writing them on the board:

ESTABLISHING/WIDE SHOT (WS): Usually a long shot (perhaps of a high angle) of the setting that puts the viewer in the right frame of mind, e.g.: An ad about a candidate might show his/her living room, office, campaign headquarters.

MEDIUM SHOT (MS): Find something within the establishing shot to shoot in a medium distance. This provides a natural and logical sense of motion into the setting, e.g. the candidate talking to a supporter, playing with his dog.

CLOSE-UP (CU): Find something within the medium shot to focus on and fill the frame, e.g. fingers on a keyboard, a supporter from the neck up with a big smile on his face, a baby giggling.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP (ECU): Same as a close-up except that the subject fills even more of the shot. Often used to portray something negative in campaign ads. Foreheads and chins on faces are cut out and only the focal point of action is shown with little perspective. These shots can show the tension on an opponent's face, for example.

PANS (PAN): Can move from top to bottom, up to down, left to right (but not usually right to left). Pans must have a clear, steady start and finish.

VOICE OVER (VO): Audio of a person speaking over a video clip that may or may not contain other sounds.

12. Share with your students the example written on the first page of the '**Planning Your Campaign Ad**' sheet. Recommend that they plan their campaign ad out in full on this sheet, including drawings if they feel it is helpful.

13. Allow time for planning and filming. Arrange for video camera use with the technology department. If necessary, enlist the help of a tech class or teacher or any video clubs that may exist at the school to help edit the videos together.

14. Once the videos are completed, arrange for a class viewing and see if students can guess off of their campaign techniques sheet which technique each video has used. Did they seem sincere?

Critical Reflection Questions

- ▶ How important do you believe advertising is in political campaigns?
- ▶ How do you think campaigns have changed since the advent of television advertising?
- ▶ What do you think an election would be like without any political advertising? Would voters have a chance to learn about the candidates?
- ▶ How has your opinion of campaign ads changed now that you've made one of your own?

Evaluation and Assessment

Students can be evaluated on class participation, pair work and the quality of the video they produce and whether they properly utilized their technique.

Extension Activities

In class:

- ▶ Ask students to create an entire ad campaign around their imaginary candidates. Have them make posters, hand bills and draft a mission statement using the existing party web sites as a guide.

School-wide:

- ▶ Screen ads in other classes to see if students can detect particular techniques.
- ▶ Work with the technology teacher to ensure that any students assisting your class get proper extra credit.

Home and Community Connections

- ▶ If possible, make a DVD of the videos or transfer them onto files to send to students. Encourage them to watch the videos with parents and describe the techniques being used.

WORKSHEET

PLANNING YOUR CAMPAIGN AD

Your commercial must be 30 seconds in length. Under the “video” column, record any visuals you plan to use for your ad. Under the “audio” column, describe all audio sounds heard with full detail.

For Example:

VIDEO	AUDIO
1. (WS) Candidate playing with his dog in the yard.	Low volume cheerful music (throughout)
2. (MS) The dog and the candidate wrestling over a chew toy.	(VO) Candidate: “See, I’m just like you.”
3. (CU) Candidate’s dirty face, laughing.	(VO) Candidate: “I play with my dog. I get dirty.”
4. (ECU) Dog fighting for toy.	(VO) Candidate: “But unlike some of the other candidate’s vying for the leadership of this province...”
5. (MS) Dog snags the toy and runs away. (CU) Candidate smiles at the camera.	Candidate: “...I’ll give you what you want.”
6. (MS) Candidate crouching, arm around his happy dog.	Candidate: “Elect Don Chesterson and you’ll get what you want.” Dog: Barks.

Title: _____

Student names: _____

Slogan: _____

VIDEO	AUDIO

WORKSHEET

DETECTING CAMPAIGN AD TECHNIQUES

The following general techniques are used in campaign ads to attempt to persuade voters.

How many are you familiar with? How many do you notice?

		Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Appealing to Fears and Prejudices	Often indirect, these appeals play upon our worst fears.			
Bandwagon	“Everyone else is doing it...” Often indicated by adoring crowd shots rallying around the candidate.			
Card Stacking	Making the viewer believe he/she has no other choice.			
Fancy Figures	Using facts, statistics and percentages to give the illusion that there is a more factual basis behind his/her credibility.			
Flattery/Insincerity	Compliments designed to get the audience on the side of the speaker.			
Glittering Generality	Highly general, abstract statements that can't really be proven.			
Image Transfer	To have the history, qualities and appeal of the image in their proximity transfer onto him or herself.			
Loaded Words	For example: “terrorism.” These words have either a positive or negative connotation and are intended to trigger an emotional response from the audience.			

Name Calling/Negativity	When candidates deliberately mock each other in ads.			
Plain Folks	The average person appearing in commercials to present the “common person’s” perspective.			
Presenting inferences as facts/unsupported claims	Cleverly stating opinions and conclusions in a factual matter to sound more authoritative or convincing.			
Quoting out of Context	Removing quotes from the proper context to skew the meaning in favor of the candidate.			
Repetition	Using a phrase, image or motif repeatedly.			
Rumour Mongering	Unsubstantiated or innuendo about a candidate. Most often the rumour is suggested, not stated directly and derives from a particular incident.			
The Warm and Fuzzy “Image”	Politicians wearing sweater vests, playing with their dogs or playing with babies to convey an image that they are just like you.			
Word Magic	Selling themselves through catchy phrasing and slogans that stick in the minds of the voters.			