Lights, Camera, Politics: Create Your Own Presidential Campaign Ad – Lesson Plan

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### ****Subjects****

Social studies, civics, government

### ****Estimated Time****

One 45-minute class period

### ****Grade Level****

7-12

### ****Objective****

Students will:

* Read public media article about presidential campaign commercials.
* View campaign ads and come to class prepared to discuss findings.
* Discuss selected ads and compare reactions.
* Access 2016 candidates’ websites, discuss current campaign ads and discuss the effectiveness of the different commercials.

### ****Introduction****

Presidential candidates running in the 2016 election have spent millions of dollars to create a series of biographical campaign ads along with ads that attack opponents. Events such as presidential debates will help candidates to shape new ads, but it will be up to the voters to decide if the ads will influence their decision in the election. Students will explore historical presidential campaign ads and then create their own TV ads.

### ****Warm Up Activity****

Although the cost and worth of television ads are questioned by some political scientists in the age of the Internet and social media, candidates have continued to spend big bucks on TV ads since 1952. Ask students if they’ve seen any TV ads so far in Election 2016. What ads have students seen online? While presidential candidates currently focus many of their ads in battleground states, they also sponsor national ads that run in all markets.

Historically, ads have been memorable for a variety of reasons, and they have often played a role in choosing the winner of the presidential election. There are two main types of ads – biographical ads that stress the positive aspects of a candidate, and attack ads that point out the failings of the candidate’s opponent. Show students the website **“**[**The Living Room Candidate.**](http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/)**”**Choose a few ads to watch together as a class and ask students if they are biographical or attack ads.

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### ****Main Activity****

1. For homework the night before, the students should read the following article about effective presidential campaign commercials:
[**Ten of the Most Effective Presidential Campaign Commercials Ever Made**](http://blogs.kqed.org/lowdown/2012/10/03/ten-of-the-best-presidential-campaign-commercials-of-all-time/)
2. They should watch all ten commercials for homework and should come to class with the two ads that they find most compelling – one biographical/positive ad and one attack/negative ad.
3. In class, students should revisit the campaign commercial page: [**Ten of the Most Effective Presidential Campaign Commercials Ever Made**](http://blogs.kqed.org/lowdown/2012/10/03/ten-of-the-best-presidential-campaign-commercials-of-all-time/) and watch the two ads that they selected again. As they watch the commercial, they should fill out the [**Presidential Historical Advertisement handout**](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/03/Presidential-campaign-ad-handout.pdf)**.**
4. As a class, students should come together and discuss the ads that they selected. Students who chose the same ads may compare their reactions to the commercials as well as whether they would have been persuaded to vote for the candidate. Students should also discuss the different impressions they gathered from positive vs. negative ads as well as which method they found most convincing. Also, they can talk about whether they think the candidates should focus on positive or negative ads.
5. After they have completed the worksheet, they should go to the PBS NewsHour website that will allow them to create their own campaign ads:
* [**PBS NewsHour AdLibs: Make Your Own Campaign Ad**](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/adlibs/)

**NOTE: While the website states 2012, it will work for the current 2016 election**.

* Once students have logged in using Facebook, they should create two ads – one biographical ad and one attack ad. Students may create the ads without hitting publish or share at the end. They should use their knowledge of historical ads to select visual images and messages that would be compelling, and they should be prepared to explain how their own ad was influenced by their favorite historical campaign commercials.

### ****Extension Activities****

1. Students may share the ads that they created with their peers during class, and the class can discuss which ads are the most persuasive.
2. They can visit the [**candidates’ websites**](http://www.politics1.com/p2016.htm) or go to [**YouTube**](https://www.youtube.com/)to look for 2016 campaign ads. Or students may Google “[candidate’s name] campaign commercials” to find advertisements.
* Students may also look for ads that are running in battleground states in order to see individual messages that are targeting specific states. They can see how the ads connect to the issues concerning voters in these states.

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