

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNING

Objectives/Goals for Students: After completion of this lesson the students will be able to explain the purpose of political campaigns and the changes in campaign styles over time, and will be able to describe the various functions of slogans in presidential politics.

Course and Grade Level: 3rd–5th Grade

Teacher Name: Thomas Bogucki

NCSS Standard(s) Covered: Chronological Thinking, Historical Comprehension, Historical Analysis, Eras (1787-1950s), other (see GenerationNation election guide for more ways to align.)

Resources Used:

Presidential campaign history reading; Timeline of presidential campaigns (website: www.americanhistory.si.edu/presidency)

Instructions

1. As a warm up, write the word “campaign” in large letters on the board. Ask your students to pronounce the word and define it. Is it a noun, a verb, or both? Using a comprehensive dictionary, have a student look up “campaign.” (It comes from the Italian word for “countryside” and was first used in reference to a military operation, with a general leading his troops on a “campaign” throughout the countryside.) Have your students speculate as to why we use the word “campaign” in popular politics today. How is a political campaign different from a military campaign? How is it the same? (10 min.)
2. After the warm up give the student reading about Presidential Campaign History. You can have the students read individually or pair students based on different levels, higher level with lower level. You can even have students highlight important information and discuss what they are reading with their partners. Have students answer text-based questions while they read:
 - ★ Define the following vocabulary words: campaign, candidate, dignity, “front porch” campaign, opponent, pamphlet, profound, slogan, unanimously, undignified, whistle-stop campaign.
 - ★ Which president did not campaign for the office? Why did candidates in the 1800s let their supporters and organizers represent them in presidential campaigns?
 - ★ When the students have completed their reading you can start a class discussion about the reading. Why did supporters encourage only certain people to vote for their candidate for much of the 19th century? Who was excluded from voting? Why? (20-30 min.)

MORE RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

Help your students to learn about government and history, find and analyze information, understand how informed, active citizens participate in democracy through elections and more. Find curriculum alignment guides, candidate and debate information, video, text, images, and more activities plus information about the student vote at www.GenerationNation.org/learn

3. Next, have the students look at the timeline at www.americanhistory.si.edu/presidency. You can do this with the whole class if you do not have tech available. Then have the students locate James Madison, William Henry Harrison, William McKinley, and Harry S. Truman on the time line. Create a chart with dates that shows the changes in campaign styles illustrated by these four presidents. Students may include images of these different styles. Then ask the following questions as the students as they work, you can do this with the whole class or have them answer the questions individually. Why do candidates use slogans? When Dwight (“Ike”) Eisenhower ran for president in 1952, his slogan was “I like Ike.” What makes a good slogan? Imagine that you or someone you know is running for president. What slogan would you use? With your whole class, write a list of slogans that you think are very effective. (20-30 min)
4. Finally, have your students create a colorful campaign poster for a presidential candidate. You may choose a president from history, or you may “nominate” your own favorite role model or individual, or nominate yourself. Include a catchy slogan. What beliefs, or “platform,” does your candidate stand for? Indicate these commitments on your poster.

Closure: To wrap up the lesson, you can show different campaigning slogans and ads from the current election and have the students create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast elections from whatever era you choose to the present. You can have the students choose or you can choose for them. (10 min.)

Tool for online venn diagrams: <https://www.glimfy.com/uses/venn-diagram-software-template/>

Assessment: The discussions, the poster activity, the timeline activity, and the closing assignment will allow you to gauge the students understanding of the material presented.

Adaptations for Exceptional Students:

You can group the students in teams composed of slower workers and faster workers, this will be done so that every student can help each other out to finish their work. Those who are ELL will group with students who can help translate the material.

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Student Reading: Presidential Campaign History



George Washington was the first and only president of the United States to be elected unanimously by the Electoral College. From then on, candidates have campaigned for the office of the presidency. In most presidential elections, there have been only 2 or 3 main candidates.

The style of presidential campaigning has changed over the course of United States history. Until the mid-nineteenth century, many people thought it was undignified for a candidate to campaign for himself. For example, James Madison’s supporters campaigned for him by writing letters to newspapers and pamphlets about his beliefs—and about why his opponent, Charles Pinckney, was a bad choice. Madison did not travel around the country telling people “Vote for me!”

Little by little, the style of campaigning changed. By 1840, when William Henry Harrison was running for president, his supporters staged events in many states to encourage voters to support their candidate. They developed two popular slogans to sum up Harrison’s appeal, so that people would remember him. One slogan was “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!” The other was “Log Cabin and Hard Cider.” People chanted slogans and wrote them on banners. Torchlight parades also became a popular way of demonstrating public enthusiasm for a political candidate.

By the middle of the 1800s, these parades became a highlight of every election. Hoping to inspire the public to get out and vote for their candidate, hundreds if not thousands of marchers in cities across the country walked through the streets carrying lighted torches on the evenings leading up to an election. During Harrison’s campaign, people sold all sorts of items, such as hats and plates, with pictures of log cabins on them, which supported Harrison’s election.

While the campaign organizers of a candidate created elaborate events and festivities, the men running for the office of the presidency did not necessarily participate, retaining the perceived dignity of the candidate. In the 1896 campaign, for example, William McKinley was an active candidate, speaking largely to crowds and voters brought to his home in Canton, Ohio, but unlike his opponent he did not travel throughout the country. McKinley’s style became known as the “front porch” campaign.

By the twentieth century, however, campaigning styles had changed. In 1948, when Harry S. Truman ran for his second term in office, he crisscrossed the country by train, giving speeches from the railway car to communities around the nation. Truman’s whistle-stop campaign proved very effective. Today, presidential candidates travel all over the United States, to meet voters, understand local issues, and build support for their election. They also rely on the power of television and other media to reach audiences directly. Television has had a profound impact on presidential campaigns.

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