



## **What the Founders could not have Known**

Curriculum Unit 12.03.04, published September 2012

by Adam J. Canning

### **Introduction**

---

"Kennedy did not have to run the risk of having his ideas and his words shortened and adulterated by a correspondent. This was the television era, not only in campaigning, but in holding the presidency." This quote by Time Magazine Journalist Huge Sidey displays how the media and the position of the presidency are ever changing. This unit will look at how the media has progressively changed the office of the presidency. The unit will first show how the position of the president developed by covering why the colonies wanted to break away from England and the drafting and signing of the Declaration of Independence. It will then transition to the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and the lack of an executive. We will then move on to how the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation shaped the Constitutional Convention and the Framers' ideas of the office of the presidency and the fears they had when writing the United States Constitution. After surveying the origins and history of the presidency this unit will move on to how the use of media has changed the position. This unit will dive into three different historical presidential campaigns and how media in these three elections changed the office.

### **Rationale**

---

If a stranger were to ask one of my students if the president of the United States could do whatever he wished in regards to running the government, their answer would surely be yes. This unit will outline the powers of the president and present to students the fact that the president is not all powerful and must have many acts approved. I have been teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade civics and economics for four years at Fred D. Thompson Middle school which is located in Richmond, Virginia. Thompson is an inner-city school with a 97% African American population and is recognized by the federal government as a Title I school based on the poverty rating. Over the years as a civics teacher, it seems that my students have struggled to grasp the concepts of what exactly a president is and what that position has the power to do. In attempts to rejuvenate my love for teaching I decided on applying for this program. Keeping my students in mind I applied for the seminar on The American Presidency so I could develop a curriculum unit that would finally allow for my students to link the primary documents that led to the creation of the executive branch with the powers that the president has. When it

comes to my students choosing who they believe is a good president or a bad president, they often say what they hear from their parents, family, community, or the television. For the most part, my students seem to have very conservative view points but often believe they are liberal because that is what is normal in their community. If a stranger were to ask my students why they believe a person is a good or bad president, or whom they would vote for in an upcoming presidential election, they often will revert to one of following two answers: "I don't know," or they will answer with something they heard from a peer, adult or media source. As a teacher, I do not try to steer my students toward a specific political party, but I am trying to create informed citizens who will participate in the election process when they come of age.

My students have shown deficiency in building on previous knowledge to connect with new information. I can relate to my students' inability to connect new and old topics because of the experiences that I had in middle and high school. I struggled with connecting the concepts from lessons my teachers taught because I was either too easily distracted to grasp the concepts or my teachers did not relate the information in a way that was easy to decipher. I am creating this unit in an attempt to alleviate the stressfulness for me and my students of having to re-teach the same concept three times for my students to conceptualize it. I am also creating this unit for my students. I often achieved a C in even my favorite subjects like government and history. I look back now at my teachers in the past and wish they were able to help me connect the dots so I would enjoy the content, have more invested in it, and achieve a higher grade.

One of the most difficult things for my students to understand is why primary documents such as The Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and the United States Constitution are all related. After my students are taught the earlier primary documents, such as the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation, they are left wondering what makes these documents relevant to the current government (the United States Constitution) if we do not use them anymore. Students often disregard the documents after being taught.

The first part of this unit will take a look at how the primary documents that we study were all built off of one another and answer the problems left by the preceding document. This unit will teach students that our government under the United States Constitution has a system of checks and balances. The reasoning for checks and balances will be learned by analyzing the British monarchy and the Articles of Confederation for they were the governing powers of this country but they lacked a balance of power.

After examining the United States Constitution, students will get a closer look at the struggle the Framers had with creating the executive branch, and how they took careful steps to avoid an absolute executive. This will end the students' false sense that the president can do what he wants. This unit will allow students to see what different jobs the president fulfills as the executive of the national government. The second part of the unit will take a look at how media shapes the perception of presidential candidates. The students I teach can often let you know if they like or dislike a president or a presidential candidate, but when asked why they feel that way they often do not have a justifiable answer. This unit will address three presidential elections in which students will observe the growth of different types of media and how the winning candidate utilized those means. My students will learn how to evaluate the early forms of campaigning and will grow just as the forms of campaigning did with the development of the media. Students will learn how to separate fact from opinion, detect bias, evaluate the source, and identify whether something is propaganda. This approach will allow for students to grow as critical thinkers by starting off with the more basic forms of media before moving on to the next form of media. After studying these political debates, students will have witnessed the transformation of media and how it allowed political parties to flourish keeping in mind the original intent of the Framers of the constitution.

## Background

---

### The Declaration of Independence

Creating a strong presidency was not the original intent of the newly independent states following the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. After breaking away from a monarchy the colonists were fearful of the idea of an individual having an excess of executive power. In order to achieve independence, the colonies would have to engage in war.

With a war on the forefront of their minds, the members of the Continental Congress knew they had to have a governing power. Sidney Milkis and Michael Nelson note that the states "jealous of their independence and reluctant to substitute even a homegrown central government for the British government they had just rejected, surrendered power grudgingly <sup>1</sup> ." With the states reluctant to surrender power, what was created was a centrally weak government that had an inherently anemic legislative branch called the Continental Congress. The powers that were granted to this branch, such as declaring war, entering alliances, and raising a military, worked well enough during the revolutionary war to force the British to surrender. The real problems of the Articles of Confederation arose following the war.

### Articles of Confederation

After the surrender of the English, the flaws of the Articles of Confederation started to reveal themselves. All the powers that were given to Congress in the Articles were not supported with sufficient means to enforce them. As time passed, the inability of the central government to collect taxes put the United State's credibility in jeopardy due to their inability to pay back their war debt.

The citizens of the newly independent states were also becoming increasingly uneasy about the fact they had not received their compensation to fight in the war and were forced into debt. Uneasiness grew to action across the country where there was an uprising of disgruntled citizens. The incident that worried the country the most happened in western Massachusetts where a "mob of farmers... saddled with taxes and debts and unable to persuade the state legislature to ease credit, closed down courts and stopped sheriffs' auctions in order to prevent foreclosure orders from being issued and executed against their lands." <sup>2</sup> This incident was given the title of Shays Rebellion for the leader Daniel Shay.

Following the war, the states that once fought side by side with one another grew increasingly greedy in terms of their own economic fortune. The states almost seem to work against one another following the war; for example, "some states with port cities... placed taxes on goods imported from overseas by merchants in neighboring states." <sup>3</sup> Milkis and Nelson also describe the states' economic issues, "(f)ew benefited, and many suffered, from the protectionist walls that individual states had built around their economies." <sup>4</sup> The failures of the Articles began to pile up with Congress's inability to collect taxes, inability to stop mobs and rioting within the states, and incapacity to mediate between inter-state relations. These shortcomings collectively forced Congress to schedule a conference to discuss revision the Articles of Confederation.

### The United States Constitution: Creation of the Executive

The meeting that took place to amend the Articles of Confederation was later given the title Constitutional Convention. The meeting that began as a plan to amend the articles, ended up with the state delegates

deciding to create a new governing document, which would be known as the United States Constitution. This document encompassed two branches that the former document did not: the executive and judicial branches.

### *Election/term length/members*

At the Constitutional Convention, the conversation that took the most energy and time was the legislative branch, in particular how legislative apportionment would be addressed. Even though the legislative branch was the most taxing at the convention, the most notorious topic came when deciding on the structure of the executive branch. While it was commonly agreed after seeing the shortcomings of the Articles that there was a need for an executive, there was not much agreement beyond that as far as the branch was concerned. Some of the disagreements included: how many executives would lead, how long they would lead, and who would choose them.

The first argument over the number of executives showed evidence of some resonating fears the elder members of the convention had over the return to a monarchy. On June 1 during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the convention, Pennsylvania delegate James Wilson motioned on the floor that the executive should be a single person. This motion was argued by some as being the birth of a king and was replaced with a notion of an executive with a committee of three members. Milkis and Nelson note that the delegates "feared monarchy, but they also realized how much the national government had suffered under the Articles of Confederation from the diffuseness of executive responsibility...and regarded a single executive as more likely than a committee to respond quickly and effectively to riot and discord." <sup>5</sup> After thoroughly arguing, the convention voted in favor of a single executive. This brought the convention to their next issue of how this single executive would be selected into office.

The process of selecting the president has brought controversy even in modern elections because of the way the Framers of the Constitution decided the position was to be filled. At first, the idea was presented in the Virginia Plan to have the executive branch selected by Congress. The legislative selection was voted on and passed many different times, but it left delegates uneasy. The delegates argued if the president was selected by the legislature it would "significantly curtail the extent to which the president could act as an independent bulwark - a truly separate branch in a system of checks and balances - against the encroachment and aggrandizement of legislative authority." <sup>6</sup> In other words, the president would not have autonomy from Congress. This resulted in a standstill until the convention reconvened, and the resulting proposal is what Americans see today in the Electoral College. The selection of the president would be determined by a majority vote of the electors, who would be chosen by the states using the methods that each state adopted. Every state would receive a number of electoral votes equal to its representation in Congress. Once this was decided, all that was left to be determined was the length of a presidential term and the eligibility for re-election.

After determining the term length and the membership of the presidency the constitution Framers wrote Article II: section 1 of the constitution which states, "The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. He shall hold his Office during the Term of four Years, and, together with the Vice President, chosen for the same Term, be elected." <sup>7</sup>

What we as readers can see is that the Framers were in two different mindsets during the writing of the Constitution, so when it came to granting power the Framers did so keeping in mind the two forms of government that had previously governed them: the Articles of Confederation and the King of England. Some of the powers of the president are written in clear language or as enumerated powers, while others are left

vague and open for interpretation so as to not limit the power of the president. With these two angles of approaching executive power it shows that the delegates took into consideration the tribulations the colonies suffered with a king, as well as the inherently frail government when an executive power is not present.

### *Warnings of political parties and rhetoric*

A majority of the Framers of the Constitution were fearful of the development of political parties even though they did not address this fear by adding a section of the Constitution forbidding political parties. "The Framers considered political parties to be self-serving factions that cultivated dissent and were ultimately detrimental to good government." <sup>8</sup> George Washington understood the "presidency was a nonpartisan office...and like most of the Framers of the constitution, he disapproved of 'factions' and did not regard himself as the leader of any political party." <sup>9</sup> Like Washington, Thomas Jefferson was quoted in Kathleen Jamieson's *Packaging the Presidency* as stating, "if I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all." <sup>10</sup> The Framers envisioned a leader who would stay out of the way of the common grief of the people and the legislation that leader George Washington portrayed.

Along with the Framers' apprehensions towards factions, they were equally weary of a rhetorical leader. The Framers feared "that mass oratory, whether crudely demagogic or highly inspirational, would undermine the rational and enlightened self-interest of the citizenry which their system was designed to foster and on which it was thought to depend for its stability." <sup>11</sup> The Framers believed that a rhetorical leader would be more worried about the people and less about constitutional authority and legislation. Although the Framers and Jefferson did not intend on parties or a leader to petition the people, the development seemed to be inevitable. Once the presidents and parties found their power based in public opinion more than constitutional authority, the role of the media became central, since the media was the direct link to the public.

### **Media in presidential elections**

A student today often seems to assume one source of the media as being the truth and uses that to shape his or her "opinion" of a presidential candidate or the president. What Americans see in presidential campaigning and elections was not the original intent of the Framers; the use of media as a tool was absent from the campaigning realm up until the 1824 election. The development of political parties and the growth of presidential rhetoric gave rise to the use of media in presidential elections.

### *1828 election: press deployments*

The 1824 presidential election was made up of five candidates John Quincy Adams, John Calhoun, Williams Crawford, Andrew Jackson, and Henry Clay. Because of their political positions three of these men (Adams, Calhoun, Crawford) were able to employ the press to promote their presidency, while the other two men were at a disadvantage because of their inability to endorse themselves within the press. Paul Starr argues that this is where "political parties assumed a more structured form...though not fought on a party basis, [this election] foreshadowed the development [of political parties]." <sup>12</sup> Jackson managed to win the popular vote in the 1824 election, but he did not have the means to campaign like Adams did for the electoral vote and subsequently lost the presidency. Although Jackson lost the 1824 presidential election, he used the model that Adams created and established his own source of media for the upcoming election by creating newspapers across the country for his own campaigning basis.

During the 1828 election, Jackson pursued a style of campaigning more in line with modern day elections.

Jackson employed propaganda strategies by distributing handbills, a small printed sheet to be distributed for advertising by hand, across the Union. The handbills portrayed Jackson in a general's uniform or wearing the clothes of a Tennessee farmer with a hickory can in his hand. While on the same handbill Jackson's supporters portrayed opponent John Quincy Adams as "driving off with a horsewhip a crippled old soldier who dared to speak to him, to ask an alms." <sup>13</sup> In response to Jackson's handbills, Adams deployed a set of handbills known as the "coffin handbills" accusing Jackson of "executing six soldiers, one of them a Baptist minister who deserted after the Battle of New Orleans." <sup>14</sup> These handbill exchanges would continue back and forth, yet the organization of Jackson's campaign would prevail.

Andrew Jackson's campaign organizers during this election set the foundation for those campaigns to follow. Jamieson states that,

in addition to planning meetings and devising and distributing campaign materials to newspapers and voters, Jackson's organizer created a precursor of the Democratic and Republican National Committees by establishing a Washington-based central correspondence committee. These organizers also collected funds, compiled list of voters, and made arrangements for printing ballots. They founded newspapers, increasing in number as the campaign progressed; they issued pamphlets, broadsides and biographies.<sup>15</sup>

The 1828 election was the beginning of what the Framers feared when it came to political parties and presidential rhetoric.

#### *1960 presidential race: rise of television*

When historians look at the use of media in presidential elections, the most common election mentioned is the 1960 presidential election of John F. Kennedy v. Richard Nixon. No longer could a candidate win simply by distributing advertisements; presidential candidates at this point were in the national spotlight. This election became famous because it required many Americans to determine whether the issues the media presented were important to them or not. The election was also the first election to have two presidents debate on live television.

#### *The Television era*

The first nationally televised presidential debates attracted an audience of roughly 60% of the adult voting population. During these debates Kennedy had the edge because of his experience in front of the camera. Just as Jackson had been able to revolutionize the way presidents campaigned 100 years earlier, Kennedy was able to use knowledge in media to dominate the evolving media sphere. Liette Gidlow states, "the often repeated story, which is in fact true, is that polls taken after the first debate showed that most people who listened to it on the radio felt that Nixon had won, while most who watched it on television declared Kennedy the victor."<sup>16</sup> The idea was argued that it was because Kennedy appeared younger, healthy and was better looking than Nixon. During the election Nixon had opted not to shave, and to wear makeup to give color to his pale skin. Like Andrew Jackson had done after his 1824 defeat to Adams, Nixon learned the new form of campaigning and used it to his advantage. In 1968 when Nixon ran for president he declared himself "tanned, rested, and ready," and ended up winning the election.

#### *2008 presidential race: rise of social media*

The 2008 presidential election was the election that rewrote history for many different reasons. The first historical aspect of the election was the two members of Congress who ran against one another. The



Democratic Party elected Illinois junior senator Barack Obama. Obama was the first bi-racial candidate to get the nod in a national presidential election. The Republican Party nominated Arizona senior senator John McCain. Due to the relative newness of the election, there is not too much debate on the precedent of their issues. The main contribution to this election is the utilization of social media to attract and employ campaign messages.

### *Implementation of new media*

The use of social media by the candidates during the campaign led to an explosion of individuals turning to internet media for their latest updates. The presidential candidates both utilized these new forms of media, but it appears that the Obama administration had the distinct advantage. The sites that Democratic and Republican constituents flocked to for their instant media update during the 2008 elections included Myspace, Facebook, and YouTube. Bruce Gronbeck argues when comparing the two candidates that of those media followers when comparing the two candidates that Obama had five times the number of visits to his MySpace, seven times the number of visits to his Facebook page, and 15 times the number of mentions in the blogosphere (eg twitter).<sup>a17a</sup> During the election thousands of Facebook users would join virtual fan clubs for and against presidential candidates. During the campaign Obama referenced the site and alludes to the advantage he had over McCain when Obama jokingly stated, "for the past few weeks John McCain has been out on the campaign trail asking this question; Who is Barack Obama? I have to admit I was a little surprised by the question. The answer is right there on my Facebook page."<sup>a18a</sup> The use of social media offered the voters a much wider and more liberal way to access the election. Diana Owen believes that over time, audience members will be in a better position to tailor their election media experience to suit their needs as they become familiar with the plethora of offerings and how to best engage them.<sup>a19a</sup> In the United States today the citizen is becoming more and more independent from the social norms and the growing use of social media allows for the candidates to grow with and relate to this population like never before.

The 1960 elections allowed for citizens to get the feeling that the president was at their home sitting and talking to them through their television set. Now with social media, not only is the candidate at home talking with the citizen, but also the citizen can respond, have their own voices, become a part of the election, and be involved like never before in the campaign process.

### **Conclusion**

If you were to turn on the television 6 months prior to a presidential election and watch one hour of any basic cable channel programming, you would surely see a commercial supported by one of the candidates petitioning the people to vote against the other candidate. This was far from the mind set of those members of the constitutional convention. The framers created a governing document in a way they believed would work, keeping in mind their failed attempt at creating a government. Because of the history of failure in the United States with too much or too little executive power, at the convention the most disagreements surrounded the role and duties of the office of the presidency. At the end of the Constitutional Convention, most in attendance saw the position of president being carried out very similarly to the first Chief Executive, George Washington.

As the first president, Washington did not indulge in petty politics. Some of the framers' initial fears when creating the office of the presidency were of the creation political factions and rhetorical leaders. These fears became a reality in the years following Washington's presidency. At first, the factions grew as disagreement among presidential leaders and candidates, but as time grew so did these oppositions. During the 1828 elections the fears of the framers started to become a reality. In the 1928 election, Andrew Jackson put in

motion the early development of political parties and the first real effort at campaigning as a rhetorical leader. Jackson did this by appealing to the people and petitioning them for votes. As time went on, Jackson's strategies created the two party system that citizens know today. In today's presidential campaigns, in order to win the presidency the candidates and their teams research and attempt to have an edge by employing any new form of media available. For Jackson, this was handbills with political cartoons and messages. As technology evolved so did the types of strategies used in efforts of winning. These evolutions in technology came into use in the 1960 election between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Just as Jackson perfected the handbill, Kennedy did not invent the televised debate; he was just more prepared for it.

Now in presidential elections, we see the candidate that is savvier or able to use the media more efficiently often has the upper hand. Evidence of this can be seen in the 2008 election in which Barack Obama defeated John McCain. In this election, Obama's use of social media seemed to give him the upper hand in appealing to the people. In the early beginnings, the president was an individual that was viewed by the citizens as being above the common quarrels and bickering of the people. Today, the citizens' view of the position of the president is an individual that is not only running the country but also speaking directly to and for the people. The United States president can be seen or heard from at any moment in a citizen's day by just picking up a newspaper, turning on the radio or the television, or getting minute by minute updates on your home computer or smart phone. So the question that is left is what would the framers have done differently if they knew this is what would become of the president?

## Objectives

---

Upon completion of this unit the students will be able to interpret and understand primary documents such as the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and the United States Constitution. The students will be able to analyze political cartoons, political advertisements, pictures, and other graphic media sources. The student will be able to select and defend their ideas and positions through discussion and or debate. Also my student will be able to review information for accuracy by separating facts from opinions.

## Strategies

---

When my students hear anything having to do with government they start to shut down, become disinterested, and complain that it is boring and it has nothing to do with them. So I have to have a very hands-on approach to teaching these "boring" topics. Many of my students struggle with reading so sitting and reading line by line would guarantee many of my students would not pay attention. To get all the students on board I will have the students create their own visuals documents so they have a vested interest in the topic before actually learning about the primary documents. Students in my class are responsible for knowing how to interpret political cartoons. I have implemented an activity introducing an easy graphic organizer to help them interpret cartoons. Learning how to argue your point takes practice so the inner circle/ outer circle activity is a fun yet effective way for students to better their ability to debate.

Many of my students have a lot of energy so anything that has them up and moving gets them more invested



in the topic. The students will create their own campaign advertisements, commercials, and cartoons, for a presidential campaign. The students will create these by using the techniques they learned through previous lessons. Any time the students are able to be out of their seats they enjoy the activity that much more, so for learning and understanding political party differences the activity of walk to plank is an interactive way of showing the students how to explain why they believe something and learn about party platforms.

## Activities

---

### **Creating and Examining Primary Documents**

I will have the students become a part of the process by creating their own primary documents. The students will create their own Declaration of Independence; the students will be a little more passionate about creating their own because I will have handed out the "New," yet fake list of school rules and policies, which are extremely demanding and ridiculous. I will use these rules as fuel to have the students wanting to declare independence from the principle. The students will be put into groups of 3-5 to create their documents which will have guidelines on how to structure their document (the assignment will model the structure Declaration of Independence, so when it is time to learn the different parts of this document the students will already be familiar). After the groups have created their Declarations they will have to present their documents to the class and try to petition the other groups to sign. This strategy is an attempt at making the students more comfortable with the document when it is time to learn the actual Declaration of Independence. This strategy should also help the students remember the different sections of the document because of their vested interest in their own document.

### **Viewing Political Cartoons**

The students are mandated by the state to have the skills to analyze political cartoons, so for one of the activities I will teach the students how to interpret political cartoons. I will start the students off with some of the first presidential political cartoons from the 1826 election. I will employ a graphic organizer to help break down the cartoon. The graphic organizer has the acronym S.P.A.M, The S stands for Symbol; the graphic organizer asks the student "what symbols appear in the picture?" The P stands for People; asking the student "who are the people in the picture?" The A is for Action; "what action is occurring in the picture?" Lastly the M is Message; "what message is being conveyed by the picture"?

For this activity we will do the first couple political campaign cartoons as a class; so the students will get a feel of how to use the graphic organizer. Once they get an understanding of how to use the graphic organizer, the students will pair up and do two on their own and then compare their notes. After this activity the students will hopefully remember the acronym and employ this on the once daunting political cartoons.

### **Who do you think won?**

I will use two separate classes to test who they believe won the historic 1960 Nixon v. Kennedy presidential debate. Class 1 will: listen to the audio recording of the first televised debate and record notes on who they think won with a score card at the end. After scoring the debate I will poll the class to determine who they believe won the debate. The second class will view the televised version of the debate and receive the same score card on the different categories. I will have the class total their score cards and I will poll the class to see

whom they believe won. Once the results are in I will display who the other class believed won the debate. My goal is for the classes to pick two different winners. If there are two separate winners I will be able to drive home the idea that the way you receive your media can affect how you perceive information. I will then show a few different first hand sources that review how the debate turned out.

### **Lights, Camera, Campaign**

Many of my students are showmen/women, and they love portraying their talents whatever they maybe. After learning and viewing campaign messages, commercials, debates, flyers, and cartoons the students will be put to the task of creating their own. The students will be required to create some form of campaign propaganda using the examples viewed in class as models. This assignment will be fairly liberal in what the students choose to create but I will assist in creating a rubric on what they will be graded on. My goal here is for the students to be creative and help them have more connection with what campaigning really is.

### **Debate or Discussion: that is the question**

When it comes to having opinions, my students have them, lots of them. But when it comes to being able to argue or discuss their feelings or beliefs they often do not know how to effectively do so. This activity is a fun way of getting students involved in discussions and debating. This activity even gets the often quiet kids involved, which is great. The activity is called inner and outer circle debating. The desks have to be arranged in two even circles, one inner and one outer (hence the name). The students will be given two articles on any hot button media issues (as the teacher, use your discretion on the difficulty of the articles). You will position the students in either the inner or outer circles first and after the first article they switch (try to make sure you mix up the talkative students with the not so talkative or else one group will be painfully quiet). For each article give the students an allotted amount of time, in order to let the students read and take notes on what they agree with in the article and what they do not agree with. Before beginning the debate you are to issue an index card to each member of the outer circle assigning them a job to do during the first debate. These jobs can be something serious or something fun; I typically like to assign funny jobs. Examples include, the student is to write down how many times boys talk opposed to girls, a time keeper, a student to record who they think was not paying attention. You can make up whatever jobs you would like as long as you keep them on task while inner circle is debating. Once switch groups and group one finishes, switch groups and reassign outer circle jobs, and repeat the process. Once both groups have finished have students lead a discussion on the findings and outcomes of the activity. The first time you try and implement this activity it may take a while for the students to start debating but try and let it happen naturally.

### **That's a fact...or is it?**

This activity will force the students to start thinking about whether or not something that was said is a fact or is an opinion. The students will be placed into groups of 4-5 and will listen to or watch numerous campaign messages from past and present elections. For each one of the messages I will provide them with one statement to pay close attention to. Once the message is finished, the student amongst their groups will be asked to come up with whether or not the statement that I picked out was a fact or an opinion. The students will have to defend their ideas against an opposing group view point. If the choice of fact or opinion is unanimous amongst the class and is correct, move on to the next message. If its unanimous and wrong, choose a group to come up to debate with you why they believe they are correct. This activity is good for two reasons: 1. it allows for students to learn how to tell the difference between fact and opinion, and 2. it makes the students defend their ideas.

## Walk the Plank

This activity is good to see what political party the students have more in common with. I call this walk the plank because you can find how a party stands on an issue in their party platform, I have the students imagine that the platform is made of wood and each "plank" of wood is an issue. During this activity the classroom desk are pushed away and the room has two large pieces of tape in the middle about two feet apart separating the room in half. The class before this the student will receive a list of about 10 issues that can be found in two major parties platforms, they will be asked to write why they agree, disagree or are in between on the either liberal or conservative stance that I picked for each issue.

I will instruct the student on how this activity will go, if they agree with the issue and it's a liberal stance (they will know if it's liberal or conservative) they go to the left and if they disagree they go to the right. After I finish reading the issue the students pick the sides of the tape, I will ask 3-4 students each time why they chose their side, if a student is in the middle they will have to explain why first. After the middle heard both viewpoints they can pick a side or explain why they stayed in the middle.

## Lesson Plans

---

### Lesson One

The students will start this class by receiving the new school rules and policies (as mentioned earlier, these are not to be real). I will engage the student in a discussion on how they feel about the new rules; I will inform them there is something we can do in response to these new rules. The students will already be stationed in groups; I will give each group a rubric of what needs to be in the letter to the principle (mirroring the Declaration of Independence). In their groups the students will draft their letter to the principle, once they get a rough draft I will hand them the materials for their Declaration (as the teacher you can age the paper or have the students do it (tea bags work). Once the students have finished their final draft they will need to present their declaration to the class. After presenting the group will have to ask/ petition the class to sign their declaration (if you would like to add excitement you can make up consequences for signing/endorsing such a letter). Once all you classes have made their Declarations they can presented in the hallway or in the classroom for a visual reminder of what the Declaration of Independence was.

### Lesson Two

With a solid foundation built the students will learn about the Declaration of Independence. My students are not the biggest fans of note taking, but I love lecturing and giving notes, so I meet them half way with K-W-Ls. I will have the students set up in their notebooks three sections (Know, Want to know, and learned). A power point presentation about the Declaration of Independence will be set up with a section asking them what they already know about the document. As a class we will discuss what information student's volunteer. Next the presentation moves directly into asking the student to write down what the students would like to learn (if I don't answer their questions or we don't cover what they wanted to learn they can look it up for extra credit), this is followed by another discussion with the students presenting what they want to learn. Lastly the presentation will go into the information/notes they need to know for their state standards, these will be written in the learned section. Once we finish the notes we will return to the groups from the previous class and I will give back their documents and the true version of the Declaration of Independence. The students in

their group will be asked to compare and contrast the two documents. The student will see how similar their documents were to the Declaration of Independence and this should create a memory for long term recall.

### **Lesson Three**

This lesson will start the kids off by the students coming in and answering a warm up question asking "have you heard or seen any political advertising lately, if yes what were they? If no, what is a political advertisement? I will give the students around 3 minutes to answer on their own paper before asking for volunteers. After going over the answers the students should not only be familiar with what political advertisement is they will hopefully hear some decent examples. This warm up will have the students prepared enough for the days lesson on Political commercials. I will create a graphic organizer for the kids to use to map out the facts from opinions, determining the bias, identifying the issue in the commercials, and lastly what the goal of the commercial is. As a class we will take a look at three different years of elections, from the website <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/>, after looking over roughly 12 different 30-second to 1-minute commercials. After each one I will give the students a minute or two to write their thoughts down in their organizer. At the end we will go over as a class what we believe to be the facts v. opinions, the bias that were shown, and lastly issues and point the commercial was trying to drive home. Once the students turn in their graphic organizers, I will begin to introduce the student's campaign projects. At this point we will have already viewed political cartoons, the historic debate, and determined what the party platforms are.

## **Appendix 1**

---

Campaign videos/ speeches/ presidential debates can be found of youtube.com

Also a great site to find campaign commercials is <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/>

For presidential campaign political cartoons <http://www.indiana.edu/~libsalc/cartoons/>

## **State Standards**

---

### **Civics and Economics**

CE.1

The student will develop the social studies skills responsible citizenship requires, including the ability to

- a. examine and interpret primary and secondary source documents;
- b. create and explain maps, diagrams, tables, charts, graphs, and spreadsheets;
- c. analyze political cartoons, political advertisements, pictures, and other graphic media;
- d. distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information;
- e. review information for accuracy, separating fact from opinion;
- f. identify a problem, weigh the expected costs and benefits and possible consequences of proposed

- solutions, and recommend solutions, using a decision-making model;
- g. formulate an informed, carefully reasoned position on a community issue;
- h. select and defend positions in writing, discussion, and debate.

## CE.2

The student will demonstrate knowledge of the foundations of American constitutional government by

- a. explaining the fundamental principles of consent of the governed, limited government, rule of law, democracy, and representative government;
- b. explaining the significance of the charters of the Virginia Company of London, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights;

## CE.5

The student will demonstrate knowledge of the political process at the local, state, and national levels of government by

- a. describing the functions of political parties;
- b. comparing the similarities and differences of political parties;
- c. analyzing campaigns for elective office, with emphasis on the role of the media;
- d. examining the role of campaign contributions and costs;
- e. describing voter registration and participation;
- f. describing the role of the Electoral College in the election of the president and vice president;
- g. participating in simulated local, state, and/or national elections.

## CE.6

The student will demonstrate knowledge of the American constitutional government at the national level by

- a. describing the structure and powers of the national government;
- b. explaining the principle of separation of powers and the operation of checks and balances;
- c. explaining and/or simulating the lawmaking process;
- d. describing the roles and powers of the executive branch.

## CE.9

The student will demonstrate knowledge of how public policy is made at the local, state, and national levels of government by

- a. examining the impact of the media on public opinion and public policy;
- b. describing how individuals and interest groups influence public policy;

## Bibliography

---

Ceaser, James , Glen Thurow, Jeffrey Tulis, and Joseph Bessette. "The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency ." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1981): 158-171.

Denton, Robert E.. *The 2008 presidential campaign: a communication perspective*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

Gidlow, Liette . "The Great Debate: Kennedy, Nixon, and Television in the 1960 Race for the Presidency." The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

[www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/sixties/essays/great-debate-kennedy-6ixon-and-television-1960-race-for-presidency](http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/sixties/essays/great-debate-kennedy-6ixon-and-television-1960-race-for-presidency) (accessed July 16, 2012).

Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. *Packaging the presidency: a history and criticism of presidential campaign advertising*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Kernell, Samuel. *Going public: new strategies of presidential leadership*. 4th ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2007.

Milkis, Sidney M., and Michael Nelson. *The American presidency: origins and development, 1776-2007*. 5th ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2008.

Morris, Irwin L.. *The American presidency: an analytical approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Starr, Paul. *The creation of the media: political origins of modern communications*. New York: Basic Books, 2004.

Steffensmeier, Janet M., and Steven E. Schier. *The American elections of 2008*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

*The Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence*. Washington, DC: U.S. G.P.O. , 2009.

## End Notes

---

1. Milkis, Sidney M., and Michael Nelson. *The American presidency: origins and development, 1776-2007*. 5th ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2008.
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Morris, Irwin L.. *The American presidency: an analytical approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
7. *The Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence*. Washington, DC: U.S. G.P.O. , 2009.
8. Ibid.,1
9. Ibid.,1
10. Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. *Packaging the presidency: a history and criticism of presidential campaign advertising*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
11. Ceaser, James , Glen Thurow, Jeffrey Tulis, and Joseph Bessette. "The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency ." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*



*Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1981): 158-171.

12. Starr, Paul. *The creation of the media: political origins of modern communications*. New York: Basic Books, 2004.
13. *Ibid.*,9
14. *Ibid*
15. *Ibid*
16. Gidlow, Liette . "The Great Debate: Kennedy, Nixon, and Television in the 1960 Race for the Presidency." The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.  
[www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/sixties/essays/great-debate-kennedy-nixon-and-television-1960-race-for-presidency](http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/sixties/essays/great-debate-kennedy-nixon-and-television-1960-race-for-presidency)  
(accessed July 16, 2012).
17. Denton, Robert E.. *The 2008 presidential campaign: a communication perspective*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.
18. Steffensmeier, Janet M., and Steven E. Schier. *The American elections of 2008*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.
19. *Ibid*

---

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit [https://teachers.yale.edu/terms\\_of\\_use](https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use)