LESSON 8

GUIDING QUESTION

Why should I evaluate political party messages?

SUMMARY

During the election campaign, political parties communicate their vision and ideas to try to gain public support. As a voter, you need to examine these messages critically in order to find out which party or candidate best aligns with your views and priorities.

In this lesson, students investigate the provincial election process in Ontario and how election campaigns work. As a class and within groups, students dissect and analyze various political party communications or advertisements. After reviewing each group's work, students evaluate the strengths and limitations of each party's campaign strategy and evaluate which party or candidate they support and why.

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning to:

- determine how politics and elections affect our lives (Citizenship Education Framework – Structures);
- use the inquiry process to gather, interpret, and evaluate political party communications;
- work collaboratively with peers to research and organize information;
- examine a variety of media texts and assess their significance.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Below are some sample success criteria you can use or build upon. Co-creating success criteria with your class will allow students to have ownership over their learning and understand what successful learning looks like.

I CAN…

- explain how provincial elections work in Ontario and the role of political parties;
- work with my peers to conduct research;
- organize information;
- analyze media texts and explain their significance;
- evaluate and rank political party messages.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Grade 7	Overall Expectations	Specific Expectations
Writing	1. generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience;	**Research** 1.3 gather information to support ideas for writing, using a variety of strategies and a wide range of print and electronic resources **Classifying Ideas** 1.4 sort and classify ideas and information for their writing in a variety of ways that allow them to manipulate information and see different combinations and relationships in their data
Reading	1. read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning; 2. recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning;	**Demonstrating Understanding** 1.4 demonstrate understanding of increasingly complex texts by summarizing important ideas and citing a variety of details that support the main idea **Making Inferences/Interpreting Texts** 1.5 develop and explain interpretations of increasingly complex or difficult texts using stated and implied ideas from the texts to support their interpretations **Text Features** 2.3 identify a variety of text features and explain how they help communicate meaning
Media Literacy	1. demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts; 2. identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning; 4. reflect on and identify their strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts.	1.2 interpret increasingly complex or difficult media texts, using overt and implied messages as evidence for their interpretations **Responding to and Evaluating Texts** 1.3 evaluate the effectiveness of the presentation and treatment of ideas, information, themes, opinions, issues, and/or experiences in media texts 2.2 identify the conventions and techniques used in a variety of media forms and explain how they help convey meaning and influence or engage the audience **Metacognition** 4.1 identify what strategies they found most helpful in making sense of and creating media texts, and explain how these and other strategies can help them improve as media viewers/listeners/producers

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Media Literacy	1. demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts;	**Making Inferences/Interpreting Messages** 1.2 interpret increasingly complex or difficult media texts, using overt and implied messages as evidence for their interpretations **Responding to and Evaluating Texts** 1.3 evaluate the effectiveness of the presentation and treatment of ideas, information, themes, opinions, issues, and/or experiences in media texts
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MINDS ON

1. Ask students what they know about elections and campaigns. Give students a few minutes to fill out the K column in the KWL chart (Activity 8.1).

2. Invite students to share their thoughts and write down key words on the blackboard, chart paper or interactive whiteboard. Afterwards, ask students to write down what else they want to know about elections and campaigns in the W column on the KWL chart (Activity 8.1).

3. As a class, watch the 'Elections in Ontario' video to review how elections work in the province. You may want to watch more than once to review key concepts and terms.

4. Facilitate a discussion about elections using the questions and strategy below.
- What is the role of political parties during elections?
- What is the role of citizens during elections?
- What else do you want to know about elections and campaigns?

a) Give students a few minutes to reflect on their own responses.
b) Divide students into groups of three. Assign each group member one specific question to share their response.
c) Give groups time to discuss all three questions.
d) Conclude by having a class discussion on the three questions and make notes of what questions remain, and what they still want to know about elections and campaigns.

ACTION

1. Review the upcoming provincial election – including the date, major political parties, name of your electoral district and the candidates running for election.

2. Through a classroom discussion, invite students to share all the ways they think political parties and candidates try to communicate with voters in the lead up to the election (e.g., advertising, lawn signs, mailings/pamphlets, their website, social media, public events, door-to-door canvassing, media coverage, debate). Ask students if they have noticed any of these efforts for the current election.

3. Review examples of political party advertisements or social media messages for the current election campaign. You could use images from each party or party leader's Instagram account or video advertisements found on their website or YouTube channel. Encourage students to look at language, colour, images, music, tone and content. Write down comments to the guiding questions so that all students can see.

Guiding questions:
- What are the key messages the party is trying to get across?
- Is it an attack ad? Is the party focusing on their own ideas/platform or are they attacking another leader or political party?
- Who is the target audience of the party's communication piece or advertising?
- Is it effective communication? What makes it effective or ineffective?

Attack ad examples – 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign:
- Role Models, Hillary Clinton ad
- Corruption, Donald Trump ad

4. As a class, co-create criteria to evaluate political party advertising or communication. For example,
- Is the message clear and concise? Can you tell which candidate or party is being promoted?
- Are the images 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?

5. Divide students into groups and have them evaluate the communications of one of the political parties or candidates running in your school's electoral district. 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.

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. Encourage them to look at language, colour, images, music, tone and content.

Teacher Note: Annotation can be explicitly modeled in Step 3 or before the group work.

6. 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.

Alternative Activity
Divide students into groups and ask them to track the communications of one particular political party or candidate over the course of the campaign. Students should collect the party or candidate's communications/messages 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 period (i.e., one week, two weeks or the month).

For example:
- 3 video advertisements
- 10 social media posts (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram)
- 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 their own ideas or do they focus on another party's negatives?
- Which platform do you think is most effective and why?
- Which demographic groups does the party appear to be targeting with their communications? 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.

CONSOLIDATION

Have a brief closing discussion about elections and campaign communication, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions:
- Evaluate the communications of each political party or candidate and rank them based on effectiveness. Explain the reasons behind your rankings.
- Which party or candidate's vision or ideas do you most agree with?
- What is the role of citizens during elections?

At the end, have students write down what they learned about elections in Column L (Activity 8.1).

TEACHER TIPS

- Set up a classroom Twitter or Facebook account to help your students track social media posts.
- Be sure to show options from each party in each medium 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. Compare positive and negative toned ads from the same party.
- If finding local campaign material is difficult, you could use the provincial leaders' material instead.

LESSON 8: CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATIONS

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Type of Assessment	Lesson Area	Guiding Questions for Teachers
FOR LEARNING	MINDS ON	Are students using their prior knowledge of any type of election? (federal, school government, international)
AS LEARNING	ACTION	Can students identify positive vs. negative advertising? Do students understand how to annotate? Are they noticing key text features (e.g., word choice, bold, colours, fonts)?
OF LEARNING	ACTION CONSOLIDATION	Did students successfully annotate their media selection? Can students use a criteria for determining effectiveness? Are students able to explain why they ranked the communication strategies or campaigns in a particular way?

LEARNING FOR ALL

Individual Education Plans	**Modifications** • Group students so that everyone participates within their comfort level. • Use simple vocabulary when describing political terms. • Replay videos frequently or provide advanced access. **Enrichment** • Ask students to create their own additions to each party's campaign – remembering to be in line with the party platform and campaign goals.
English Language Learners	• 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	• 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 may not be appropriate). **Indigenous Focus** • Invite a local Indigenous leader into your class to explain how bands choose their local leaders.
Accessibility/Space	• Use technology options if needed. Websites such as note.ly or padlet.com may be helpful.

K	W	L
What do I **KNOW** about elections & campaigns?	What do I **WANT** to know about elections & campaigns?	What did I **LEARN** about elections & campaigns?