

THE GREAT DEBATES™

POWERED BY THE MUSEUM OF BROADCAST COMMUNICATIONS

CURRICULUM & TOOLS

9TH-12TH GRADE



PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS
LINCOLN, KENNEDY AND TODAY - 150 YEARS OF MEDIA BIAS



PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS: IS RANCOROUS COVERAGE NEW? THE INFLUENCE OF 150 YEARS OF MEDIA

This high-school lesson plan has been developed to help students improve media literacy by demonstrating that bias in the media is not just an issue in today's political discourse, but instead is a long-standing practice in the country's history, particularly when the country is faced with great cultural change. Students will learn that even 150 years ago, the media was often not presenting unbiased coverage of candidates. They will examine the real life case studies of:

- The campaign of Abraham Lincoln's campaign, who was pilloried for an anti-slavery stance in the 1859-1860 election campaign season.
- The campaign of John F. Kennedy's campaign, who was attacked for his religion, Roman Catholicism, as critics felt he would not be an independent president but rather, a puppet of the pope.
- And finally, the current presidential campaign, unfolding during a pandemic as well as contentious partisan cultural wars.

Students will discuss the differences between positive and negative coverage. They will brainstorm ideas about the purpose of news media showing a candidate in a positive or negative light. Then, through examining the coverage from specific time periods, students will determine the purpose of biased coverage, its negative impacts, and how biased news coverage can be turned into objective news coverage.

Students will examine the tone of news coverage from a variety of media outlets, from newspaper coverage of Lincoln's run for office to today's dedicated broadcast coverage from the left and the right. The accompanying written or oral assignment for this lesson will encourage students to draw their own conclusions regarding bias in media, and make a decision as to whether media should be objective or whether biased coverage has merit.

They will be able to review coverage clips through the online materials available at the Great Debate pages from the Museum of Broadcast Communications website and teachers will receive support from the museum's weekly updates in the Great Debates newsletter.

SUMMARY

This module presents how media influences public opinion by demonstrating the long history of bias in political media coverage. Students will be taken back to the campaigns of Lincoln and John F. Kennedy to discover why bias is utilized to sway public opinion. Students will be encouraged to draw their own conclusions as to why media bias has a place in journalism, and how it affects the process of voting.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Teacher

- Access To website
- Computer/projector

Student

- Pens/pencils
- Worksheets
- Access to website, Student computers or ipads
- Assignment handouts
- Word-processing program or PowerPoint to complete assessment

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn to recognize what constitutes bias in media by verbally stating how they recognize bias in a primary source.
- Students will be able to explain what the purpose is for biased reporting by explaining at least one motivation behind a biased article, given various articles in class.
- Students will be able to describe the dangers of bias in journalism, given articles in class, and do homework that explains the dangers of bias.
- Students will be able to understand what constitutes unbiased coverage by analyzing critical media coverage in a news article and or broadcast clip.
- Students will also develop media literacy skills by identifying at least one way to improve articles they read to change them into unbiased stories.

Teacher	Student	Minutes
Teacher introduces students to the essential question of the lesson: “What is the purpose of bias in the media, and what are the dangers of biased journalism?”	Students listening.	3 Minutes
Share the handout on the difference between positive and negative coverage. Read each definition and discuss with students how they can use these concepts to recognize bias. Ask students why they think news reporters would want to portray certain candidates in positive or negative lights. Use the Questions for Discussion to guide conversations.	Students following along, discussing as a class.	10 Minutes

Teacher	Student	Minutes
Pass out the worksheet titled: Lincoln, Kennedy, and Today. Project articles covering Lincoln's campaign on the board and read them out loud to the students.	Students listening, following along on the projector screen.	10 Minutes
Fill out the Lincoln section of the worksheet as a class. Prompt students to answer questions and guide them to correct answers as needed.	Students fill out worksheets as a classroom.	10 Minutes
Instruct students, using laptop or tablets, to work in partners or groups or alone (if preferred), and to read or watch coverage on JFK's presidential campaign. Instruct them to fill out the JFK sections of their worksheets.	Students pair up or get into groups with their laptop computers or tablets. They watch news coverage of JFK's campaign and fill out the second section of their worksheets on media bias in history.	10 Minutes
Once students finish working on the JFK section of their worksheets, instruct them to work on their own to fill out the third section of their worksheets on bias in media coverage today. Have students answer the final question as well.	Students work on their own to fill out Section 3 and the final question on their in-class worksheets	10 Minutes

Teacher	Student	Minutes
<p>(5-10 minutes before class ends)</p> <p>Homework explanation. Share the assignment sheets and explain the homework assignment. Students may use their in-class worksheets as a reference. (See table below)</p>	<p>Take assignment sheets, write down homework.</p>	<p>3 minutes</p>
<p>Day 2: Students hand in their papers or present on their findings from the homework.</p>	<p>Students presenting, handing in homework and worksheets.</p>	<p>3-5 minutes per presentation</p>

ASSESSMENTS

Students can choose one project from below...

Write a three-paragraph paper	The first paragraph explains why bias is such a long-standing journalistic strategy, The second paragraph answers the question: What makes bias so detrimental to the electoral process, and if the effects are so negative, why does it still happen? Third paragraph is their opinion on whether news should be completely objective or continue as it is.
Prepare a 3-5 minute oral report	For the oral report, the student will prepare and present three PowerPoint (or Google Slides) slides to present. The first slide explains why bias is such a long-standing journalistic strategy. The second slide answers the question: What makes bias so detrimental to the electoral process, and if the effects are so negative, why does it still happen? In the third slide, students give their opinion on whether news should be completely objective or continue as it is.
Worksheet	The worksheet to be completed in class will be turned in with the paper or oral report, and will demonstrate the students' understanding of the material.

ADAPTATIONS OR ACCOMMODATIONS NEEDED

Learners	Adaptations/Accommodations
Highly Proficient	These students will have the chance to work both with other students and on their own to help others and to demonstrate their individual knowledge. The differentiated assignment also helps highly proficient learners demonstrate their knowledge and thinking skills.
ELL	These students have the option to work in partners in order to get help with the assignment. Difficult language can be deciphered using the internet if needed. Teacher will have to ensure difficult wording in older primary sources is explained.
Struggling Learners	Same as ELL

RESOURCES

Please use **GreatDebates.org** as a reference for coverage clips and the full debate.

Additional websites:

Ad Fonts Media — nonprofit and nonpolitical site which rates media bias.

KENNEDY —

<http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2021078,00.html>

<https://www.cnn.com/2016/02/29/politics/jfk-nixon-debate/index.html>

<https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/TNC/TNC-172/TNC-172>

NIU digital library —

<https://digital.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-lincoln:38269>

Library of Congress —

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/mal.4500025/?sp=2&r=-0.681,0.116,2.361,1.329,0>

News Literacy Project —

<https://newslit.org/>

<https://newslit.org/get-smart/news-lit-tip-primary-purpose/>

American University —

<https://answers.library.american.edu/faq/282165>

Stony Brook University's Center for News Literacy —

<https://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org/resources/>

THE GREAT DEBATES LINCOLN, KENNEDY AND TODAY HOMEWORK

Name: _____ Class Period: _____

Due Date: _____

CHOOSE ONE ASSIGNMENT TO COMPLETE BY TOMORROW. YOU MAY USE YOUR IN-CLASS WORKSHEETS TO HELP YOU WITH THIS ASSIGNMENT. PLEASE REMEMBER YOU MUST TURN IN YOUR WORKSHEET WHEN YOU TURN IN THIS ASSIGNMENT.

Option 1

WRITE 3 PARAGRAPHS EXPLAINING WHY BIAS EXISTS, AND IF YOUR THOUGHTS ON IF IT SHOULD EXIST. IF YOU CHOOSE THIS OPTION, YOU MUST TURN IN 3 PARAGRAPHS (EITHER TYPED ON A WORD PROCESSOR OR HAND WRITTEN) IN WHICH YOU ANSWER THE FOLLOWING THREE QUESTIONS:

Paragraph 1: Why has media bias lasted so long? What is it about positive or negative coverage that makes it such a long-standing journalistic tradition?

Paragraph 2: Is bias harmful to the American electoral process? And if it is harmful, why does it still happen?

Paragraph 3: Give your opinion on whether you think news should continue to be biased, or whether you think it should strive for more objectivity.

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Option 2

PRESENT A 3 SLIDE PRESENTATION USING POWERPOINT OR GOOGLE SLIDES ON WHY BIAS EXISTS, AND YOUR THOUGHTS ON IF IT SHOULD EXIST. IF YOU CHOOSE THIS OPTION, YOU MUST PRESENT 3 SLIDES USING EITHER POWERPOINT OR GOOGLE SLIDES. YOUR SLIDES SHOULD PROVIDE AN OUTLINE OF YOUR THOUGHTS. YOU WILL PRESENT THEM ORALLY TO THE CLASS.

Slide 1: Why has media bias lasted so long? What is it about positive or negative coverage that makes it such a long-standing journalistic tradition?

Slide 2: Is bias harmful to the American electoral process? And if it is harmful, why does it still happen?

Slide 3: Give your opinion on whether you think news should continue to be biased, or whether you think it should strive for more objectivity.

THE GREAT DEBATES LINCOLN, KENNEDY AND TODAY WORKSHEET

SIFTING THROUGH 150 YEARS OF BIASED REPORTING

Section 1: To be completed as a class.

COVERAGE OF LINCOLN. SOURCE 1:

Is this an example of positive or negative coverage?

What words or phrases led you to your answer?

What is a reason the reporter would want to portray Lincoln in this way?

List one way you would improve this article or newscast:

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COVERAGE OF LINCOLN. SOURCE 2:

Is this an example of positive or negative coverage?

What words or phrases led you to your answer?

What is a reason the reporter would want to portray Lincoln in this way?

List one way you would improve this article or newscast:

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Section 2: To be completed with a partner.

COVERAGE OF KENNEDY. SOURCE 1:

Is this an example of positive or negative coverage?

What words or phrases led you to your answer?

What is a reason the reporter (or newscaster) would want to portray Kennedy in this way?

List one way you would improve this article or newscast:

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Section 2: To be completed with a partner.

COVERAGE OF KENNEDY. SOURCE 2:

Is this an example of positive or negative coverage?

What words or phrases led you to your answer?

What is a reason the reporter (or newscaster) would want to portray Kennedy in this way?

List one way you would improve this article or newscast:

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Section 3: To be completed on your own.

COVERAGE TODAY. SOURCE 1:

Is this an example of positive or negative coverage?

What words or phrases led you to your answer?

What is a reason the reporter (or newscaster) would want to portray this candidate in this way?

List one way you would improve this article or newscast:

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Is this an example of positive or negative coverage?

What words or phrases led you to your answer?

What is a reason the reporter (or newscaster) would want to portray this candidate in this way?

List one way you would improve this article or newscast:

FINAL QUESTION: To be completed on your own

Answer today's essential question in AT LEAST ONE full sentence: What is the purpose of bias in the media, and what are the dangers of biased journalism?