

MEDIA AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

SS.912.CG.2.11 Evaluate political communication for bias, factual accuracy, omission and emotional appeal.

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2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES

- Updated from SS.912.C.2.13
 - Changed from “~~Analyze various forms of~~ political communication and evaluate for bias, factual accuracy, omission, and emotional appeal.” to “Evaluate political communication for bias, factual accuracy, omission and emotional appeal.”
- Depth of Knowledge Changes within Benchmark
 - Changed from “Analyze” to “Evaluate”
- Addition of Benchmark Clarifications
 - Benchmark clarifications are an addition to the 2023-2024 high school civics and government benchmarks. Benchmark clarifications are listed in the lesson summary below.

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

1. Timeline of Media and Political Communication
2. Media and Political Communication and their Impact on Public Opinion
3. The Role of the Media in Election Campaigns

1. Timeline of Media and Political Communication

Media has evolved over time. When we speak of mass media, it can take many forms, but for our purposes, the focus will be on print, radio, television, and the internet. Information can be quickly accessed now more than ever, so looking at the impact of media in regards to the impact on public opinion and elections will be explored in the next two sections.

Print media, as it relates to political communication, historically begins with colonial newspapers relaying news and opinions of various groups in regard to the actions of Parliament. The most notable was the reactions to the Stamp Act of 1765. Throughout the Revolutionary War, the press was used to promote the idea of independence. After the Revolutionary War, print media became more of a mouthpiece for certain political parties and viewpoints. Some examples include *The Federalist Papers* and the Anti-Federalist Papers. Or newspapers favoring one political party over another: For example, Alexander Hamilton created the *New York Evening Post* as a voice for the Federalists. The *National Gazette* was considered one of the first Democratic-Republican newspapers with support from James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. The party press still exists today, with certain papers deemed as friendly to one party over the other.

In the 1920s and 1930s, radio made headway as a media to relay political communication. Warren G. Harding was the first President to regularly give speeches via the radio. Through the economic troubles of the Great Depression, President Hoover often used the radio to announce programs and plans for financial relief. However, the president most synonymous with the radio would be Franklin D. Roosevelt. His “fireside chats” were meant to reassure the country while gaining ground with his New Deal programs. Radio was still secondary to print media until the 1980s when the advent of Talk Radio stations put politics front and center with broadcasters such as Rush Limbaugh.

In the 1950s, the price of televisions decreased, making this type of media more accessible. Nightly news became a mainstay on all the major networks at the time, such as ABC, NBC, and CBS. For the first time, Americans could see political candidates and politics playing out in real-time. Television became the focus for advertising and elections, but also for politicians to plead their cases. Nixon’s “Checkers Speech” to quiet questions about a scandal was also seen as a way to humanize politicians. Televised debates and political ads were often used as ways to introduce candidates to the people. Much in the same way Roosevelt used radio to reassure the people, television became a source for presidents such as Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to comfort and encourage the nation in times of national emergencies.

The expansion of social media in the 2000s has decreased the role of the press in the traditional sense. More often, political communication is directly posted by elected officials via their social media platforms. President Obama is considered to be the first social media candidate. Most elected officials and other institutions of government have Twitter handles or YouTube channels, expanding upon CSPAN’s coverage of

Congress. The White House and the U.S. Supreme Court also have official social media accounts. Most of the traditional newspapers have adapted to the online world, but with social media, the idea of citizen journalism has taken hold. Anyone with a cell phone can record and post political messages, which in turn can be reposted by partisan accounts. The ability to sift through the message and the spin to “control” the message could be problematic with the advent of AI apps and deep fake posts.

2. Media and Political Communications and their Impact on Public Opinion

The public learns most of its information about government from the media. Scholars suggest that the media acts as a “black box” between the public and government. The image of the “black box” is fitting; individuals cannot see what is between them and what is on the other side. The public must trust the information that they receive through the media as they have no real means to verify it. The “black box” metaphor also works in reverse; government and political entities such as political parties, candidates, and interest groups know that the media is reporting on their activities. Being aware of the media’s presence shapes their behavior. Individuals on both sides of this relationship depend on the media to receive or transmit information. The information transmitted through the media and by government and other political institutions, such as interest groups, candidates, and political parties, is all understood as political communication.

In presenting information, media and political communication is often not balanced—information may be presented in a way that favors one perspective (“bias”), advocates a clear point of view or action (“propaganda”), or references or presents images to serve as information shortcuts (“symbolism”).

Bias may take multiple forms. One form of bias involves the information shared with the public. It is impossible for the media to report all information about which the public has no direct connection; thus, the media chooses what to report and how much information to share about that news item. Another form of media bias focuses on how information is presented to the public. For example, a media story on poverty may show members of a specific race, gender, age, or ethnic group as being impoverished, which may impact how the public reacts to news stories about poverty because public perceptions about poverty may be shaped by their opinions about the impoverished persons portrayed in the news story. Bias may also be demonstrated in the importance placed on a news item, such as placing a news story on the front page of a newspaper, or leading with that story on a televised news program. In political communication, bias can take the form of omission or slanted facts in an attempt to garner support for an individual or program. Very rarely are political events or issues black and white, and there are multiple sides and perspectives to examine. However, it is not uncommon for political communication to only show or discuss one side. All bias communication relies on appealing to the emotions of the reader/listener/watcher.

3. The Role of the Media in Election Campaigns

The media also play a key role in transmitting information sponsored by candidates, political parties, interest groups, and individuals during election campaigns. Political advertising focuses on influencing voting behavior, raising money, and motivating other political action. These organizations and individuals pay media outlets to advertise their messages. Campaign advertising gives candidates, interest groups, and political parties the opportunity to control their message.

Campaign commercials serve as useful tools for understanding candidate strategies. Information provided by commercials is shown through the substance of and the approach used to convey messages. For example, some candidates may emphasize their or their opponent’s policy positions, while other candidates will choose to focus on personal characteristics. These strategic decisions are critical because they create one key lens through which voters process campaign-related information. The information generated by campaigns and

disseminated through commercials impacts several election-related decisions: whether to register to vote, whether to vote, how to vote, and whether and how much time or money to donate to a campaign organization, political party, or interest group.

Most campaign-related advertising is available where there are the most consumers. There are far more television consumers than there are radio, Internet, newspaper or newsmagazine consumers. Thus, far more campaign-related advertising is found on television than in any other medium. Among non-television media, radio and the Internet are far more often used as campaign advertising outlets than are newspapers or news magazines. Social media, such as Facebook and X(Twitter), have grown in importance as campaign advertising media.

Televised campaign advertising spots were first aired in 1952. The cost and use of television advertising has grown exponentially since then resulting in shorter television spots. Critics argue that shorter advertisements contain less information and a greater emphasis on entertaining viewers, both of which compromise and bias the information found in these advertisements.

Lesson Summary

BENCHMARK		
SS.912.CG.2.11 Evaluate political communication for bias, factual accuracy, omission and emotional appeal.		
BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will compare the reporting on the same political event or issue from multiple perspectives. Students will identify various forms of propaganda (e.g., plain folks, glittering generalities, testimonial, fear, logical fallacies). Students will discuss the historical impact of political communication on the American political process and public opinion. Examples of political communication may include, but are not limited to; political cartoons, propaganda, campaign advertisements, political speeches, bumper stickers, blogs, press and social media. 		
FLORIDA CIVIC LITERACY EXAM COMPETENCY CONNECTION		
N/A		
OVERVIEW		
In this lesson, students will understand and evaluate the techniques and methods used in political communication.		
ESSENTIAL QUESTION		
What techniques and methods are used in political communication?		
GOVERNMENT CONTENT VOCABULARY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bandwagon, bias, card stacking, emotional appeal, factual accuracy, fear, glittering generalities, logical fallacies, media, name-calling, plain folks, omission, political communication, propaganda, symbolism, testimonial, transfer 		
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES		
Primary source analysis	Student investigation	Vocabulary in context
MATERIALS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media and Political Communication slides Five Simple Strategies To Sharpen Your Critical Thinking video (in slides; external link) Communication Techniques and Methods reading Examples of Political Communication activity sheet Media Bias Chart (optional; external link) Student digital devices 		
B.E.S.T. STANDARDS		

The grade in which this lesson is taught will determine the specific B.E.S.T. standards correlation.
Thematically, this lesson aligns to:

- ELA.R.3.2 Paraphrase and Summarize
- ELA.V.1.1 Academic Vocabulary

Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

DAY	ACTIVITY SEQUENCE
DAY 1	<p>Planning Note: <i>There is significant overlap of content with this benchmark and SS.912.CG.2.13 and you may want to consider combining the lessons into one unit.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin class by displaying the “Media and Political Communication” slides. 2. Go through the various headlines/media on slides 2-4 and have students determine if these are fact or fiction. The answers are in the speaker notes of each slide. 3. Generate discussion around the concepts of each of the slides. What things make them seem believable/unbelievable? Were there any that surprised you? Any that seemed obvious? 4. Explain to students that sometimes, being an engaged participant in civic life is difficult. We see conflicting media and political communication every day. So how do we, as consumers of civic information, rise above all the noise and find the truth within the information we’re receiving? 5. Bring up slide 5. Have students look at the two conflicting news articles/headlines. Ask students to compare the two different perspectives in these articles on the same issue. (One article states things are hopeless and nothing can be done, the other article gives an account of how to get ahead of the crisis) 6. Ask students to brainstorm and share out any strategies they know of for determining fact versus fiction and/or evaluating sources of communication. 7. Bring students’ attention to slide 6. Lead students to the understanding that part of our civic responsibilities entails evaluating the media and political communication/information we absorb every day. Help students understand that having more access to communication can be a good thing, but it also means that we need critical thinking skills when we see news, media, posts, political communication etc. 8. Watch the “Five Simple Strategies To Sharpen Your Critical Thinking” video linked on the bottom of slide 6. 9. Generate a discussion with your students around the importance of critical thinking skills. Ask them for their biggest takeaway from the video. 10. Inform students that in order to grow our critical thinking skills we need to learn more about the techniques and methods that the media and politicians use in their communication. This will help us discern fact from fiction and become better evaluators of information. 11. Pass out the “Communication Techniques and Methods” reading. 12. Have students read through and highlight important information in the reading and complete the questions/tasks. This could be done individually, whole group, or in pairs. 13. While students work, monitor the room for engagement and assist students when necessary. 14. At the end of the class period, bring the class back together and review the different techniques and methods, ensuring students understand the concepts of bias, factual accuracy, omission, emotional appeal, symbolism, and the various forms of propaganda. <p>Teacher Note: Use the answer key provided to help guide discussion.</p>
DAY 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have students take back out their “Communication Techniques and Methods” reading from yesterday.

2. Explain to students that now that they have a deeper understanding of the techniques and methods that politicians and media use in their communication, today they are going to put that knowledge into practice.
3. Pass out the “Examples of Political Communication” activity sheet.
4. Once again, project the “Media and Political Communication” slides starting with slide 7.
5. Go through each slide (7-11) and look at the example of political communication. Have students watch/view and then evaluate the example to determine what techniques and/or methods were used. Then, have students discuss what the possible goal was for the communication.
6. Students should record their findings in the boxes on their activity sheet.
Teacher Note: Encourage students to reference their “Media and Political Communication” reading to assist with specific methods and techniques. Use the answer key provided to help guide discussion.
7. Next explain to students that they will finish this activity by finding their own example using a current political event or issue.
8. Ensure students have access to a digital device.
9. Using their digital device, instruct them to research a variety of news websites and choose a political event or issue.
10. Once they have selected their event or issue, they need to find reporting from two different sources that offer different perspectives.
Teacher Note: To help students find sources from multiple sides of the political spectrum, you could project a “[Media Bias Chart](#)” for reference.
11. After comparing the reporting from two sources, they will record information related to the perspective, communication techniques and methods used, and potential impact on public opinion in the appropriate spots on their “Examples of Political Communication” activity sheet.
12. Finish class by having a select number of students share the examples that they evaluated.

Government Content Vocabulary

Word/Term	Definition
bandwagon	propaganda technique encouraging the viewer to like something or someone because everyone else does
bias	a preference, opinion or attitude that favors one way of thinking or feeling over another
card stacking	propaganda technique involving the use of showing one-sided information
emotional appeal	relying on emotional responses rather than logic to sway an audience
factual accuracy	details based in truth
fear	relying on panic or triggering tactics rather than logic to sway an audience
glittering generalities	propaganda technique using short phrases or words to promote positive feelings or emotions
logical fallacies	an argument that uses faulty or flawed reasoning that lead to unsupported conclusions
media	the plural form of the word “medium,” refers to various means of communication. For example, television, radio, newspapers and the Internet (web) are different types of media. The term can also be used to describe news organizations as a whole group.
name-calling	propaganda technique using negative words to associate with a product or person
plain folks	propaganda technique conveying that a candidate is a “regular” person, just like everyone else
omission	the act of purposely excluding or leaving out details
political communication	the use of media to convey messages or information related to government issues, campaigns or public offices
propaganda	the method of spreading ideas or information for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person
symbolism	the use of something to represent ideas or qualities
testimonial	propaganda technique involving the use of a celebrity or spokesperson to speak on behalf of a product or candidate
transfer	propaganda technique involving the use of symbols to convey a message or feeling

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
<p>Florida Department of Education: Florida Civic Literacy Exam Homepage</p> <p>Florida Department of Education’s Civic Literacy Reading List</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• N/A

ANSWER KEYS
<p>Sample Answers: Communication Techniques and Methods reading</p> <p>Sample Answers: Examples of Political Communication activity sheet</p>

SOURCES
<p>Images and videos for the “Media and Political Communication” slides are sourced within</p> <p>Media Bias Chart example from Ad Fontes Media: https://adfontesmedia.com/gallery/</p>