

## **THE CAMPAIGN: ISSUES AND STRATEGIES WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

### LESSON OBJECTIVE(S)

The student will be able to:

- Distinguish fact from opinion
- Discuss the influences of the media on public opinion
- Make predictions based on factual information

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Activity 1      Handouts 1A & 1B “Opinion/Facts”  
Newspapers

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Explain to students that newspapers can have an impact on an election through their editorials, political cartoons, Letters to the Editor, and endorsements.

News articles such as those in Lesson 1 present only facts and reporters are careful not to include their opinions in the stories they write. An editorial is a special column in the newspaper where it is proper to insert opinions. Editorial writers give the newspaper’s opinion or points or view on many different things, including election issues and candidates.

A political cartoon is also a statement of opinion. The cartoonist expresses a person’s opinion or the newspaper’s opinion on a certain issue by drawing instead of writing. Political cartoons use caricatures, symbols, and humor to portray certain ideas, groups, or countries in such a way as to get an emotional response from readers.

Newspapers also run Letters to the Editor to allow readers to give their opinions on community issues or events. Most newspapers will print your opinions if you put them in the form of a Letter to the Editor.

Right before an election editorials are often written in support of a particular candidate or issue. This is called an endorsement. Competing newspapers might endorse different candidates or take opposite stands on an issue.

### ACTIVITIES

#### Activity 1 – “How do Newspapers Inform and Influence Voters?”

Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the candidates to research. Have the students look through newspapers and find an editorial, a political cartoon, two opposing Letters to the Editor and an endorsement relating to the candidate. Students should use this information to complete Handout 1 and then compare their findings with students in the other groups who studied a different candidate. Follow-up activities could center on each of the four types of newspaper articles.

## **Political Cartoons**

Watch the political cartoons in your newspaper and collect as many caricatures of candidates as you can, or collect cartoons that deal with specific issues. Then draw a political cartoon expressing your own opinion about a particular candidate or issue. Show students a representative cartoon from the newspaper. Ask students to discuss this example. Draw other cartoons showing other views.

## **Editorials**

Choose an editorial from your newspaper. What portion of the editorial is fact? What portion is opinion? Do you agree or disagree with the opinion statements contained in the editorial? Did the editorial writers employ a propaganda technique in an attempt to sway readers in their opinion?

## **Letters to the Editor**

Survey the Letters to the Editor in your newspaper for several weeks. Which candidates or issues do local citizens most often write about? Do they most often write in support of, or in opposition to, the candidates or issues? Choose one of the letters to answer, either supporting or opposing the view it expresses. Mail your letter to the newspaper.

## **Endorsements**

How much of an impact does a newspaper's endorsements of a candidate have on the voters? Make a list of all the candidates endorsed by your local newspaper for various offices. Did the reasons given for the endorsements relate to the candidate's qualifications, image, the issues or all three? After the election, see how many of the endorsed candidates won.

Special interest groups and private citizens frequently endorse political candidates just as newspapers do. But these endorsements are not carried on the editorial page or newspapers; they are reported as news articles or run as ads. Find in your newspapers an article indicating a particular interest group's endorsement of a candidate or issue involved in the election. Read the article carefully and give an oral or written presentation on why you think this particular group of persons decided on their endorsement.

## Activity 2 – **“Who do You Think Will Win the Election?”**

Bases on a thorough analysis of media coverage, campaign spending, and poll results, have students predict who will win the election. Have students (in groups or individually) defend their predictions based on factual references.