

The Road to the White House

Topic: Presidential campaigns and elections

Grades: 4-6

Time Required: 1-2 class periods

Goals/Rationale: by exploring the primary sources in the Campaign Button module, students will gather information about the key people in the 1960 election and identify the steps one takes in running for presidential office.

Essential Question: How does a presidential candidate campaign for the presidency?

Objectives

Students will:

- analyze multiple primary sources
- identify the key steps in the presidential campaign process
- identify the candidates in 1960 and describe impressions of their performance in the campaign

Connections to Curricula (Standards)

National History Standards

K-4 Historical Analysis and Interpretation; Standards 3, 4

National Standards for Civics And Government

K-4, Standard 5: What are the roles of the citizen in American democracy?

Historical Background and Context

The “Kennedy for President” button is one of the iconic symbols of John F. Kennedy’s 1960 presidential campaign. It is one of several primary sources featured in the Campaign Button module. All are presented within the context of a virtual campaign office.

Highlights include television “programs” featuring speeches by JFK, a campaign spot and interview with Mrs. Kennedy, excerpts of televised presidential debates, and the Kennedy jingle. Campaign placards, bumper stickers, posters, buttons and pins, memos, a letter from a sixth-grader to the candidate, and Frank Sinatra’s “High Hopes” 45 rpm record are featured as well. All provide students with a sense of the spirit and energy of the 1960 campaign. For more historical background, refer to the “Campaign of 1960” essay in the “JFK/JFK in History” section of the Library’s website.

In this activity, students explore the terminology of the campaign for the presidency. They next explore, individually or as a whole class, the primary sources in the campaign office and make the “trip” with JFK from the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, CA to the 1960 presidential election on November 8th. They “travel” around a game board answering questions posed on each square with information gleaned from the primary sources featured in the virtual campaign office.

Materials

- Campaign Button Module/ Internet Access
- *Campaigning for the Presidency: Definition Key*
- *Word Challenge! JFK's Path to the Presidency*
- *Road to the White House Game Board*

Preparation

Print each word below in large letters on its own 8 ½" x 11" piece of paper. Post these words in your room in sequential order reflecting the path to the presidency.

1. Candidate
2. Primary
3. Convention
4. Nomination
5. Campaign
6. Debate
7. Election
8. Inauguration

Photocopy one *Word Challenge!* handout for each student

Photocopy one *Road to the White House Game Board* for each student

Procedure

1. Begin by asking students to look closely at the “Kennedy for President” campaign button. Why might JFK’s campaign have selected this design? What might they have intended to communicate to American voters? What does the design communicate to the students today?
2. Next, introduce students to the terms involved in a presidential campaign and election. Ask students to look at the words around the room: “Can anyone figure out what these posters are about? What are all of these words about?”

Prompts if needed: “Are any of these words familiar to you? If you used one of these words in a conversation, what topic might you be talking about?”

If students haven’t already done so, point out that these posters all have to do with becoming president of the United States.

3. Web of ideas: The President. Draw a circle on the board and write the word, “president” in the center. Ask students “Tell me anything you know about being the president.” Write student answers on strands of a “web” around the circle. Words and phrases might include: lives in the White House; meets with world leaders; elected every four years; commander-in-chief; decides to go to war; gives speeches; decisions affect everyone in the country.

4. Campaign Talk. Ask students to consider the words posted around the room. *Adapt these suggestions as necessary for your group.* “If you think you know what a word means, or want to take a guess, stand underneath that word – without talking.” Invite students to get out of their seats and quietly stand under a poster. Explain the directions: “Let’s assume each of you is running for president of the United States. These words are key to your becoming president. Let’s see if you can answer two questions: a. What does your word mean? B. What does your word have to do with becoming president?”

Allow students 1 minute to come up with answers. If there is more than one person under a word, invite students to talk to everyone in that “word group” and see if they can come to agreement about the meaning of the word and its relevance to the presidency. Point out that some words may have more than one meaning.

Go around the room, asking a student representative from each group to offer a definition: “You want to be President. What does this word have to do with you getting elected?”

Ask students to explain how they came up with their answers. Then discuss the correct answer, drawing from the glossary handout. If any words aren’t chosen, invite students to look the words up in a dictionary or reference book.

5. *Word Challenge!: JFK’s Path to the Presidency.* Introduce John F. Kennedy and inform them that learning these words will help them play a board game based on an online exhibit they will see. Explain that John F. Kennedy, a senator from Massachusetts, ran for president in 1960 and won the election.

Have students work in pairs. Distribute a copy of the *Word Challenge!* handout to each student and review the directions. “First you’ll use the special words on the page to fill in the blank of each stage of JFK’s path to the presidency. Then you’ll figure out the order in which JFK accomplished each of these stages on his way to becoming president. Number the squares 1-8.

Debrief the activity by going around the room and ask students to tell which word square comes next and read the description of JFK’s experience.

6. Introduce students to the JFK campaign office in the Campaign Button module. Show them JFK’s speech announcing his candidacy (program #1 on the television set).
7. Distribute a *Game Board* to each student. Introduce the *Game Board*, and explain that, as they explore the Campaign Button module, they will be making the trip to the 1960 Democratic National Convention and then on to the November 8th election. Assign either as homework or explore as a whole group activity. Have them record their answers on the *Game Board*. The final question may be

answered with students' previous knowledge or by clicking on January 20, 1961 in the White House Diary.

On a separate piece of paper, have students jot down what evidence helped them answer the question for each square of the Game Board.

8. Evaluation. Review students' answers and have them cite their evidence. Ask them to write a summary of the "trip" and comment on what portion was most memorable for them and why.

Campaigning for the Presidency: Definition Key

Candidate – a person who is formally “in the running” for a particular position or award. You might be a candidate for student council, or a candidate for team captain, or a candidate to win a music award. If you want to run for president, you have to formally announce your candidacy so that people know you are running.

Primary – this means “first”. Sometimes elementary school is called primary school because it comes first. Primary colors (red, yellow, blue) are the first colors from which all other colors come. Before the presidential election, mini-elections (first elections) are held in each state to help political parties decide which of their candidates has the best chance of winning the national election. These mini-elections are called “state primaries.” If a candidate wins most of the state primaries, he or she stands a good chance of getting his or her party’s nomination for president.

Convention – a big meeting of people who belong to the same group or share a similar interest. There are teachers’ conventions, gardeners’ conventions, and dog owners’ conventions, for example. This is the big meeting where the Democrats pick one candidate to run for president and decide on the platform, or ideas, that the party stands for. The Republican party will hold their own national convention to choose the Republican candidate for president.

Nomination – the naming of a candidate for election. When someone is running for president, he or she needs to be chosen by his or her party as the best of all candidates: the one they want to name (nominate) as their choice for president. A candidate wins his or her party’s nomination at the national convention.

Campaign – a series of organized, planned actions taken by a candidate to help him or her get elected. In a campaign for president, for example, he or she may “hit the campaign trail ” and travel to different towns and cities, make speeches, talk to voters, run advertisements on TV, etc. All of this costs a lot of money, so they need to do a lot of fundraising to keep their campaign going!

Debate – to debate is to discuss opposing viewpoints. The presidential debates are formal discussions among presidential candidates. Before the presidential election, candidates participate in a series of televised debates and answer a lot of tough questions so that voters can hear how their viewpoints differ from one another on all sorts of issues: education, the military, the environment, taxes, the death penalty, etc.

Election – to elect is to choose. You can elect to have chocolate ice cream rather than vanilla, or elect to stay home rather than go out to the movies. American citizens elect a president by voting. Presidential elections happen every four years. Election Day is the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

Popular Vote – the popular vote is the final number of votes cast for each candidate by the people.

Electoral Vote – the electoral vote is the number of votes cast for each candidate for president and vice president by the Electoral College, a group of people chosen by the political party's candidates for president and vice president. These representatives meet in their respective state capitals to cast their votes.

Inauguration – the start of something. The presidential inauguration is a formal ceremony where the president is sworn in and officially starts his or her job. This is held on January 20th, two-and-a-half months after the presidential election. At the inauguration ceremony, held on the steps of the Capitol, the president recites an oath: "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Word Challenge!

JFK's Path to the Presidency

Part 1: Word Challenge! Read the information in each square. Fill in the blank with the word that best describes this step on JFK's path to the presidency. Hint: Use the underlined words as your main clue!

Words: campaign, inauguration, debate, candidate, convention, nomination, election, primary

Part 2: Path to the Presidency. In what order did JFK take each step on the path to the presidency? Number the squares in order: 1-8.

<p>JFK wins this important <u>mini-election</u> in West Virginia on May 10, 1960. Many people there don't want JFK to be president because he is Catholic. He convinces people that they should not vote against him because of his religion.</p> <p>Word: _____ What number? _____</p>	<p>John F. Kennedy announces that <u>he is running for president</u> on January 2, 1960 at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. At 42, he is the youngest person to run for president.</p> <p>Word: _____ What number? _____</p>
<p>On January 20, 1961, <u>JFK is sworn in as President of the United States</u>. It's a freezing cold day. In his acceptance speech, JFK says these famous words: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."</p> <p>Word: _____ What number? _____</p>	<p>On September 26, 1960, JFK and his Republican opponent, Richard M. Nixon, go on TV <u>to discuss their opposing viewpoints</u>. This is the first time two presidential candidates have this kind of discussion on TV.</p> <p>Word: _____ What number? _____</p>
<p>During September and October, JFK <u>travels around the country, making speeches and telling people why they should vote for him</u>.</p> <p>Word: _____ What number? _____</p>	<p>On July 13, 1960, Democrats <u>name John F. Kennedy as their presidential candidate at the Democratic National Convention</u>.</p> <p>Word: _____ What number? _____</p>
<p>In July 1960, <u>thousands of Democrats meet in Los Angeles to choose a candidate for president</u>.</p> <p>Word: _____ What number? _____</p>	<p>On November 8, 1960, <u>people all over the country turn out to vote for president</u>.</p> <p>Word: _____ What number? _____</p>

Word Challenge!
JFK's Path to the Presidency
Answer Sheet

Part 1: Word Challenge! Read the information in each square. Fill in the blank with the word that best describes this step on JFK's path to the presidency. Hint: Use the underlined words as your main clue!

Part 2: Path to the Presidency. In what order did JFK take each step on the path to the presidency? Number the squares in order: 1-8.

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<p>JFK wins this important <u>mini-election</u> in West Virginia on May 10, 1960. Many people there don't want JFK to be president because he is Catholic. He convinces people that they should not vote against him because of his religion.</p> <p>Word: <i>primary</i> What number? 2</p>	<p>John F. Kennedy announces that <u>he is running for president</u> on January 2, 1960 at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. At 42, he is the youngest person to run for president.</p> <p>Word: <i>candidate</i> What number? 1</p>
<p>On January 11, 1961, <u>JFK is sworn in as President of the United States</u>. It's a freezing cold day. In his acceptance speech, JFK says these famous words: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."</p> <p>Word: <i>inauguration</i> What number? 8</p>	<p>On September 26, 1960, JFK and his Republican opponent, Richard M. Nixon, go on TV <u>to discuss their opposing viewpoints</u>. This is the first time two presidential candidates have this kind of discussion on TV.</p> <p>Word: <i>debates</i> What number? 6</p>
<p>During September and October, JFK <u>travels around the country, making speeches and telling people why they should vote for him</u>.</p> <p>Word: <i>campaign</i> What number? 5</p>	<p>On July 13, 1960, Democrats <u>name JFK as their presidential candidate at the Democratic National Convention</u>.</p> <p>Word: <i>nomination</i> What number? 4</p>
<p>In July 1960, <u>thousands of Democrats meet in Los Angeles to choose a candidate for president</u>.</p> <p>Word: <i>convention</i> What number? 3</p>	<p>On November 8, 1960, <u>people all over the country turn out to vote for president</u>.</p> <p>Word: <i>election</i> What number? 7</p>

Sample Game Board answers and evidence for the answer:

Q. In what city was the 1960 Democratic National Convention?

A. Los Angeles, CA

Sources: Donkey Coaster, Convention Ticket

Q. Who ran for Vice President with John F. Kennedy?

A. Lyndon B. Johnson

Sources: *Leadership for the 60s* pin (pin table); *Johnson for Vice President* poster on the back wall of the office

Q. Listen to JFK's DNC Acceptance Speech and complete this sentence to find the theme of his campaign.

A. "And we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier..." (Television program #3)

Source: JFK's DNC acceptance speech (television program #3)

Q. What office equipment do you see that is not often used today?

A. A typewriter

Source: Campaign Office desktop

Q. Circle your favorite button.

A. [open-ended]

Q. Make a campaign button for JFK in this box. What symbol will you use? Why?

A. [open-ended]

Q. Who were the candidates in the 1960 presidential debates?

A. Republican: Richard M. Nixon; Democrat: John F. Kennedy

Sources: campaign buttons; television – jingle, debates, speeches

Q. Click on the typewriter to find a file with a memo from Clark M. Clifford. Circle the candidate he thought won the first televised debate.

A. John F. Kennedy

Source: Clark Clifford memo to JFK

Q. What do you notice about Nixon?

A. open-ended

Source: debate excerpts (television program #9, #10)

Q. What do you notice about Kennedy?

A. open-ended

Source: Television programs -- campaign ads, speeches, and debate excerpts #9, #10

Q. How can you tell it was a close election?

A. The popular votes were: JFK – 34, 227,096; Nixon – 34,108,546

The Electoral College votes were: JFK – 303; Nixon – 219

Source: "Election Results: 1960" Map

Q. What was the date of John F. Kennedy's Inauguration?

A. January 20, 1961

Source: student's previous knowledge; White House Diary page 1