

Managing a Presidential Campaign: The 1960 Election

Topic: Presidential Campaigns and the 1960 Election

Grade Level: Elementary

Subject Area: History, Civics and Government

Time Required: 1-2 class periods

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

Goals/ Rationale

In a presidential election, a candidate uses a campaign to persuade voters to cast their votes in the candidate's favor. In this lesson, students will look at correspondence between John F. Kennedy and a sixth grader, as well as materials related to the 1960 presidential election from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library's website, to explore the elements of a successful political campaign.

Objectives

Students will be able to

- analyze a primary source.
- identify elements of a political campaign and demonstrate this by constructing a campaign poster, button, advertisement, song, or multimedia presentation.

Connections to Curriculum (Standards)

National Standards for Civics and Government,

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

Prior Knowledge and Skills

This lesson on presidential campaign materials can be used as a stand alone lesson or as part of a longer unit on government or elections. Although not necessary, students should have a general sense of the presidential election process prior to the start of this lesson.

Historical Background and Context

This lesson uses the 1960 presidential election as a lens to examine the elements of a presidential campaign. Like many elections, the 1960 election began with a number of viable candidates. The Republican Party, bolstered by the previous eight years in power under the Eisenhower administration, saw then-Vice President Richard M. Nixon battle New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller in the primaries. Nixon's early lead in the polls put an end to Rockefeller's campaign and solidified Nixon's spot for the Party's nomination. The Democrats, on the other hand, had more contenders. Senator John F. Kennedy announced his candidacy in January 1960 and faced opponent Senator Hubert Humphrey in several primary elections; influential Democrats Senator Lyndon Johnson, Adlai Stevenson, and Senator Stuart Symington were all

vying for the Party's nomination even though they had not announced their candidacies. Johnson and Stevenson finally announced their intentions in early July, one week prior to the Democratic National Convention, but at the Convention, Kennedy amassed the necessary votes to lock in the nomination. He then chose Lyndon Johnson to be his running mate and the two faced Richard Nixon and Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. in the general election. The 1960 election was one of the closest in United States history. Kennedy and Johnson received 34,226,731 popular votes (49.72%) compared to Nixon and Lodge's 34,108,157 votes (49.55%), making Kennedy and Johnson the winners by just 118,574 votes.

Materials

- Access to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library's website to explore the online exhibit *The President's Desk* (<http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/presidentsdesk/>)
- Student Packet
 - Letter from Walter Apley to John F. Kennedy
 - Letter from John F. Kennedy to Walter Apley
 - Worksheet
 - Blank Poster
- Art materials, computers, multimedia software (optional)

Procedure

1. Explain to the students that in 1960, Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy was running against Republican Richard M. Nixon in the election for President of the United States. (You may want to show students a picture of the two candidates or an image of a campaign poster. These are available on the JFK Library's website.) Both candidates tried to persuade Americans to vote for them. To do this, they created posters, slogans, buttons, television advertisements, and songs, and made public appearances and speeches, to let the voters know who they were, where they stood on important issues, and what they would do if they were elected president. This is called a political **campaign**.
2. Explain to students that sometimes candidates need help on their campaign. At one point during the campaign, John F. Kennedy received a letter from a young man about his campaign. Tell students they are going to read that letter.
3. Hand out the letter to John F. Kennedy from Walter Apley, a sixth grader in Salem, Oregon, dated February 1960, right after Kennedy announced his candidacy. Have students read the letter individually or as a whole. Prior to reading the letter, you might want to explain to students that at the beginning of the campaign there were a number of candidates who were running for their party's nomination.
4. After reading, discuss the content of the letter to assess reading comprehension. Ask students to consider what Apley meant by a straw vote? Students may need additional context to fully understand the letter. A **straw vote**, or a straw poll, is an unofficial vote to obtain an indication of the general trend of opinion on a particular issue or candidate.

The term comes from using a piece of straw to show which direction the wind was blowing. A straw vote reflects the wind of public opinion. A **primary** is an election before the general election where voters select a candidate to represent the political party in the upcoming general election. Students may also need background information on the candidates listed in the letter.

- Vice President Richard M. Nixon (Republican)
- Senator John F. Kennedy (Massachusetts, Democrat)
- Adlai Stevenson (Former Governor of Illinois and former Democratic Presidential candidate, Dem.)
- Senator Hubert Humphrey (Minnesota, Dem.)
- Senator Lyndon Johnson (Texas, Dem.)
- Governor Nelson Rockefeller (New York, Rep.)
- Senator Stuart Symington (Missouri, Dem. and Former Secretary of the Air Force)

5. Ask students the following questions about the letter:
 - a. What was the difference between the class's straw vote and the vote after the class conducted the campaign?
 - b. Which candidate had the most votes from Apley's sixth grade class in the final vote?
 - c. What did Apley do to get members of his class to vote for Kennedy?
6. Now have students read John F. Kennedy's response to Walter Apley's letter. After reading, ask students to consider the following:
 - a. What is the tone of the letter?
 - b. What can we learn about John F. Kennedy from his response?

[Additional context: Although John F. Kennedy did go to Oregon in April 1960, we do not know if he actually met Walter Apley. We know that Kennedy gave speeches in South Eugene, Milwaukie, North Clackamas, and Portland, Oregon, but the records do not indicate whether or not he spoke in Salem, Oregon.]

7. Explain to the students that Walter Apley campaigned for John F. Kennedy in his class. During a campaign political candidates try to convince the voters to vote for them. In his letter, Apley wrote that he created four posters to represent Kennedy to his class. This is what political candidates do. They use posters, buttons, television ads, public appearances, and speeches to tell voters about themselves, where they stand on important issues, and what they'll do in the job if they are elected.
8. Tell students they are going to think about what makes a campaign successful by looking at materials from John F. Kennedy's campaign. Direct students to explore the online exhibit the *President's Desk*, which can be found at the JFK Library's website at <http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/presidentsdesk/>.

9. On the *President's Desk*, there is a **Campaign Button** that opens up a module on the 1960 campaign. Ask students to look at the different posters, buttons, stickers, and audiovisual clips of advertisements, speeches and debates to think about how Kennedy's campaign presented Kennedy to the voters. This activity could also be conducted as a whole class with a student or the teacher guiding the class's exploration of the website.
10. Ask students to consider the following questions. (A hand out with these questions can be found in the student packet.)
 - a. What colors are featured in the campaign materials? Why do you think they were used?
 - b. What images and symbols are featured in the campaign materials? Why do you think they were used?
 - c. How do the campaign materials present John F. Kennedy?
 - d. Would you vote for John F. Kennedy based on these materials? Why or why not?
 - e. What changes would you make on these materials so that people would be more likely to vote for John F. Kennedy?
 - f. In your opinion, what things should be present in political campaign materials?
11. After students have explored the site on their own, have a class discussion about what they found and what elements of the campaign materials might appeal to voters.
12. Now that students have considered the elements of campaign materials, have students design their own campaign materials and apply what they have learned. You could ask them to create campaign materials for the 1960 election (Kennedy or Nixon) or select another national, state, or local election. Students could even create campaign materials to promote themselves in a hypothetical election. To conduct their campaign, students could create materials such as posters, slogans, advertisements, and/or songs. You might consider having students use multimedia presentation programs such as PowerPoint or GlogsterEDU (<http://edu.glogster.com/>) for their presentations.

Assessment

1. Assess students' answers to the questions on the handout.
2. Evaluate students' campaign materials for their use of effective elements that they identified in their exploration of the 1960 campaign materials.

Lesson Extension

Visit Elementary Curricular Resources for additional lesson plans related to the 1960 presidential election: one on the first televised debates and another on mapping election results.

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Education/Teachers/Curricular-Resources/Elementary-School-Curricular-Materials>

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Sixth grader Walter Apley worked hard to campaign for Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy during the 1960 Presidential election. Walter was assigned by his teacher to be John F. Kennedy's campaign manager in his sixth grade class's mock election, which meant that he was in charge of creating materials to promote Kennedy and win votes.

Political candidates need to convince voters to vote for them and they do this through a **campaign**. In a campaign, candidates create posters, buttons, and television and radio advertisements, as well as make public appearances and speeches, to let the voters know who they are, where they stand on important issues, and what they will do in the position they are running for.

Use the "Campaign Button" on the *President's Desk* exhibit (www.jfklibrary.org) to explore the different types of campaign materials that John F. Kennedy used in his campaign during the 1960 Presidential election in which he ran against Richard M. Nixon. As you look through the different posters, ads, and other materials, answer the questions below:

1. What colors are featured in the campaign materials? Why do you think they were used?

2. What images and symbols are featured in the campaign materials? Why do you think they were used?

3. How do the campaign materials present John F. Kennedy?

4. Would you vote for John F. Kennedy based on these materials? Why or why not?

5. What changes would you make on these materials so that people would be more likely to vote for John F. Kennedy?

6. In your opinion, what things should be present in political campaign materials?

RECEIVED Feb 14 1960

Salem Heights School
Salem, Oregon
February 29, 1960

Senator John Kennedy
% The Senate
Washington 6, D.C.

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

In view of the fact that the Presidential elections are being held this November, my sixth grade class decided to elect a President from the list of potential candidates.

The class first had a straw vote and the outcome was this:

Nixon	17
Stevenson	8
Kennedy	2
Humphrey	0
Johnson	0
Rockefeller	0
Symington	0

Our teacher, Mrs. Mendelson, asked for volunteers to head each candidate's campaign, and I volunteered to head yours. We all were allowed four posters.

Two weeks later we had the arguments on who was the best man for ~~president~~ President. After the arguments, we voted for a President.

Kennedy 12

Nixon 8

Stevenson 7

Humphrey 0

Johnson 0

Rockefeller 0

Symington 0

As you and Mr. Nixon were fairly close we decided to vote again between you two.

Kennedy 15

Nixon 12

Good luck in the primaries.

Your Salem Heights
Campaign Manager,
Walter T. Opley, Jr.

1 - OREGON/Gen. (Apley, Walter, Jr.)
1 - OREGON/Trip File (4/60)

COPY

April 7, 1960

Mr. Walter T. Apley, Jr.
Salem Heights School
Salem, Oregon

Dear Walt:

I want to thank you for your letter. I was pleased to see the results of your class's election, and I am grateful to you for your outstanding efforts in my behalf. Certainly my victory in the second vote demonstrated what an effective campaign manager you are, and I am both proud and fortunate to have had you representing me.

I tentatively plan to be in Salem on Sunday, April 24, for a Young Democrats reception. Should this materialize, I hope that I will have an opportunity to thank you personally for your impressive work.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

John F. Kennedy

JFK/jms

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Now that you have determined what is important for a campaign, it is time for you to campaign for a candidate. Use the space below to design a campaign poster, slogan, button, song, or television or radio advertisement.

