



Lesson Plan

Hillary Clinton's Record, Through the Looking Glass

SUMMARY

Sometimes advertising is easy. Flash up a picture of Osama bin Laden and you've got viewers who are ready to be angry. Flash a picture of Osama bin Laden next to a picture of Hillary Clinton and you've got...well, you've got an ad sponsored by John Spencer, a 2006 Republican senatorial candidate from New York. Spencer's ad stated that Sen. Clinton opposed the USA Patriot Act and controversial National Security Agency wiretaps, which the ad claims were vital in stopping a terrorist plot to blow up airliners going from Britain to the United States in 2006. Students will use Clinton's actual voting record to assess the accuracy of Spencer's claims.

OBJECTIVES

In this activity students will:

- Assess how images and words in a political ad deliver its message and stir emotions.
- Generate questions surrounding claims made in the ad.
- Research information that supports or refutes claims made in the ad.
- Review the information gathered and assess the credibility of the ad.

BACKGROUND

Sen. Hillary Clinton, a Democrat representing the state of New York, ran against Republican John Spencer in her successful re-election bid in November 2006. Spencer had very low name recognition and was heavily outspent by Clinton. However, he tried to attract some attention through a small amount of television advertising. In this ad, titled "Tie Hands," Spencer claimed that Clinton "opposes the Patriot Act," the legislation passed shortly after 9/11 that gave additional powers to law enforcement authorities in an effort to thwart terrorists. Spencer also said that controversial National Security Agency wiretaps of suspected terrorists, which he says Clinton opposed, were "vital" to stopping a terrorist plot to blow up airliners going from Britain to the United States. As students will discover while analyzing this ad, Clinton actually voted for the Patriot Act, both in its original form and its reauthorization. In addition, they will discover that her views on warrantless wiretaps are not completely negative. Finally, they will discover there is no evidence that NSA wiretaps had anything to do with stopping the terror plot, which was thwarted for the most part by British law enforcement in August 2006.

MATERIALS

1. Spencer ad, shown on computer or passed out as a storyboard.
http://www.factchecked.org/Downloads/Hillary%20Lesson%20Plan_Spencer%20Tie%20Hands%20Ad.wmv;
2. Senate voting record on USA Patriot Act original authorization.
http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=107&session=1&vote=00313
3. Senate voting record on USA Patriot Act reauthorization bill.
http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=109&session=2&vote=00029
4. Clinton statement on her vote for the USA Patriot Act.
<http://clinton.senate.gov/news/statements/details.cfm?id=249895>
5. Clinton statement from a speech on warrantless wiretaps.
<http://clinton.senate.gov/news/statements/details.cfm?id=257288>
6. Transcript from MSNBC interview of Frances Townsend on *Hardball with Chris Matthews*. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14345045/>
7. Transcript of statement by White House Press Secretary Tony Snow, 8/11/06.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060811-1.html>
8. Transcript of Bush remarks in Green Bay, Wisc., 8/10/06.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060810-3.html>
9. "Don't be Fooled" guide to avoiding deception.
<http://www.factchecked.org/ToolsOfTheTrade.aspx>

PROCEDURE

Before class, determine how many packets of material you will need for small groups of 3 to 5 students each, and make packets of the supporting materials. If you will be passing out a storyboard of the ad, make enough copies for each group. Pass out the storyboard by itself.

In the full class, ask students some general questions:

- Do you believe what you see and hear in TV commercials advertising political candidates? How about commercials for various consumer products? (*To the teacher: It might be worth pushing students on this question. They will often initially answer "no." So ask them some simple questions about commonly advertised products. They'll be surprised how much advertising they accept uncritically.*)
- Do politicians tell the truth?
- What do you know about Hillary Clinton? Do you know where she stands on various issues?

Now explain to the class that they will be examining some claims made about Hillary Clinton in her last election campaign, along with evidence that may support or contradict those claims. Explain that they should apply the five steps we have outlined in "Don't Be Fooled: A Process for Avoiding Deception." Have them refer to their handout on this. Specifically, they should:

- **Keep an open mind.** Don't fall into the trap of thinking a claim is correct just because it fits your biases.

- **Ask the right questions.** Look for the conclusion of the argument and then ask yourself what reasons you are being given for accepting that conclusion. Examine each factual claim and ask what evidence would prove it right or wrong. Then ask whether the premises logically support the conclusions.
- **Cross-check.** Look for more than one source of evidence before making up your mind.
- **Consider the source.** Think about which sources of information are most trustworthy.
- **Weigh the evidence.** Do the facts support the ad's message?

EXERCISES

Exercise #1 – Keeping an open mind, asking the right questions

To the teacher: Emphasize to students the need to keep an open mind in their research and analysis. People tend to accept any information that supports what they already believe and reject information that conflicts with those beliefs. Students need to make an effort to listen to all sides to avoid accepting inaccurate information as truth.

Have students review the John Spencer ad on Hillary Clinton or review the storyboard linked under “Materials.” Organize students into small groups to discuss the following:

- Identify and list the claims made against Sen. Clinton in this ad.
- Why might people believe or disbelieve these claims?
- How are images and words used together to make the main points in this ad?
- What emotions are being targeted in this ad? How do the images elicit these emotions?
- What conclusions might viewers make about Hillary Clinton from viewing this ad?

Exercise # 2 – Asking the right questions

To the teacher: Point out to students that to be good analytical thinkers, they need to ask questions. It is important to know who is making the statements and the sources of their information. It is also good to ask how – or even whether – the information presented can be proved or disproved. How precise is the language used? Is it based on fact or opinion?

Have students review the claims made in the ad and brainstorm to develop questions on how they'd examine the information presented. Students can use the 5 Ws & H method (Who, What, When, Where, Why, & How) or any other. Things to think about:

- The sponsor of the ad
- The sources of information presented in the ad
- Sen. Clinton's voting record on the USA Patriot Act
- Reasons for her vote
- The connection between the National Security wiretaps and the British investigation to stop terrorists from using American airliners headed for New York
- Vague words or unclear statements made in the ad

Exercise #3 – Cross-checking / Consider the source

To the teacher: It's important that students review several sources when verifying information. When political ads make statements as fact, these should be verified through different, preferably neutral sources. Two or three reliable sources independently reporting the same fact is a good indication the information is accurate. If two sources report different information, then more investigation will likely be needed.

Have students begin their cross-checking by looking for evidence that addresses the questions they've asked in Exercise #2. (It's possible not all their questions will be answered since this was a brainstorming activity. Students can prioritize their list of questions if necessary.) Have students check the following from the materials list above:

- The U.S. Senate Web site on the roll call vote for both the authorization and reauthorization of the USA Patriot Act.
- Sen. Clinton's statement on her reasons for her vote on the USA Patriot Act and statements from a speech on warrantless wiretaps.
- Statements by White House terrorism advisor Francis Townsend, White House Press Secretary Tony Snow and President Bush.

Have students answer the following questions:

- Where does this information come from? How credible do you think it is? Why?
- How do the sources of this information compare with the sources of information in the ad?
- How does the information from these sources compare with the statements made in the ad?

Exercise #4 – Weighing the evidence

To the teacher: Help students understand what all the evidence means. They need to evaluate the credibility of the sources of information presented and the difference between random anecdotes and real scientific data based on credible studies. They also need to examine "cause and effect" relationships to make sure the effects are credibly related to the causes. If your class has completed the FactCheckED.org lesson plan on fallacies, you might have noticed that the ad contains one fallacy and three different booby traps for the inattentive. The claim about wiretapping and the foiling of a British terrorist plot commits the false-cause fallacy. The ad also suppresses evidence (about Sen. Clinton's voting record), appeals to inappropriate authority (by failing to source its claims, the ad effectively asks you to take its word for it, but, as Clinton's opponent is obviously not a disinterested source, we should generally not just accept his unsupported word), and is vague ("wiretaps were vital" without any explanation of how they were vital).

Have students meet in their groups to review what they have found and discuss the following questions:

- How credible is the evidence you have gathered?
- Is it strong enough to either support or refute the statements and information presented in the ad? Explain.
- Take each claim made in the ad (from Exercise #1) and compare it with the evidence you gathered on Sen. Clinton's voting record on the USA Patriot Act, her

statement on warrantless wiretaps, and the connections between the National Security wiretaps and the British investigation of the terrorist plot to use American airliners headed for New York. What conclusions can you make from this comparison?

- If your class has completed the FactCheckED.org lesson plan on various types of fallacies, analyze whether any of them are present in the ad. Was there relevant evidence that was suppressed? Does the ad provide adequate evidence for thinking that there is a real causal connection between warrantless wiretaps and the capture of terrorists? Does the ad rely upon any vague words or phrases?
- Which do you feel is more believable – the information in the ad or the evidence you have gathered? Why?
- What conclusions can you make about the John Spencer ad on Sen. Clinton?

After students have made their assessment of the Spencer ad, have them go to the FactCheck.org link that analyzes the ad at <http://www.factcheck.org/article416.html>.

Hold a debriefing session with the following questions:

- How close was your analysis of the John Spencer ad against Hillary Clinton?
- What did you learn from the FactCheck analysis that you didn't know?
- Why do you think political parties produce ads such as Spencer's?
- What aspects of the Spencer ad should raise a "red flag" to people who view it?
- What could the Spencer committee have done to create a more effective and credible ad?

OPTIONAL EXERCISES

Optional Exercise # 1

Have students conduct a survey in your school on negative ads for political candidates. Brainstorm some of the issues surrounding negative ads with a small group, issues such as their effectiveness, people's preference for them, need for regulation of ads, etc. Students should then develop a survey of questions (no more than 10) for the school or their class. To make tabulating and summarizing easy, the questions should be "yes" or "no." A preference spectrum can also be used (strongly agree – agree – disagree – strongly disagree). Students should tabulate the responses using charts or graphs to illustrate the results and write a brief summary of the survey and its findings.

For information on negative advertising, students can go to http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/election/jan-june00/negative_2-22.html. For information on how to construct a survey, go to http://www.ehow.com/how_16596_write-survey-questionnaire.html.

Optional Exercise # 2

Have students examine the debate over the USA Patriot Act. Some questions to start with:

- What is the act intended to do and how does it do it?
- What are the concerns regarding privacy and the civil rights of religion and free speech related to this law?

Then have students write a letter to the editor or an Op/Ed piece for a newspaper on whether the act is a necessary part of life after September 11 or whether it oversteps the boundaries of privacy and free expression. Or students could share their opinions about the act by creating a poster, bumper sticker, political cartoon, poem or song. Encourage students to share their work by presenting or displaying it in the classroom or school.

CORRELATION TO NATIONAL STANDARDS

For a more detailed version of these standards, please click here:

<http://factchecked.org/Downloads/LessonPlans/HillaryVoting/teacher.handout.hillary.nationalstandards.pdf>.

National Social Studies Standards

VI. Power, Authority, and Governance Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance:

IX. Global Connections Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence:

X. Civic Ideals and Practices Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic:

The Essential Skills for Social Studies

Acquiring Information

A. Reading Skills

1. Comprehension
2. Vocabulary

B. Study Skills

1. Find Information
2. Arrange Information in Usable Forms

C. Reference & Information-Search Skills

2. Special References
3. Maps, Globes, Graphics

D. Technical Skills Unique to Electronic Devices

1. Computer

Organizing & Using Information

A. Thinking Skills

1. Classify Information
2. Interpret Information
3. Analyze Information
4. Summarize Information
5. Synthesize Information
6. Evaluate Information

B. Decision-Making Skills

C. Metacognitive Skills

Interpersonal Relationships & Social Participation

- A. *Personal Skills*
- C. *Social and Political Participation Skills*

Democratic Beliefs and Values

- A. Rights of the Individual**
- B. Freedoms of the Individual**
- C. Responsibilities of the Individual**
- D. Beliefs Concerning Societal Conditions and Governmental Responsibilities**

National Mathematics Standards

Data Analysis and Probability Standard

Formulate questions that can be addressed with data and collect, organize, and display relevant data to answer them

Process Standards

Connections Standard

National Education Technology Standards

Profiles for Technology Literate Students

Performance Indicators

- 2. Make informed choices among technology systems, resources, and services
- 7. Routinely and efficiently use online information resources to meet needs for collaboration, research, publication, communication, and productivity
- 8. Select and apply technology tools for research, information analysis, problem solving, and decision making in content learning

Information Literacy Standards

Information Literacy

Standard 1 accesses information efficiently and effectively.

Standard 2 evaluates information critically and competently.

Standard 3 uses information accurately and creatively.

Social Responsibility

Standard 7 recognizes the importance of information to a democratic society.

Standard 8 practices ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology.

Standard 9 participates effectively in groups to pursue and generate information.

English Language Arts Standards

Standard 1 Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment.

Standard 3 Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.

Standard 5 Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 6 Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique and discuss print and non-print texts.

Standard 7 Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

Standard 8 - Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Standard 12 Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Timmons has been a social studies teacher for more than 30 years in Portland, Oregon, and now resides in Washington and Montana. He is executive director of the Constitution Project, which produces educational materials and workshops on the U.S. Constitution. He is also a freelance curriculum writer and educational consultant for various PBS programs and other education publications including two NEP Issues Today Wall Maps on Russia and the Middle East. He is a member of the board of directors of the Oregon Council for the Social Studies and has served on committees for the National Council for the Social Studies.