

<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/>

The following is taken from Newt Gingrich's "Language: A Key Mechanism of Control" (1990)

OPTIMISTIC POSITIVE GOVERNING WORDS

Use the list below to help define your campaign and your vision of public service. These words can help give extra power to your message. In addition, these words help develop the positive side of the contrast you should create with your opponent, giving your community something to vote for!

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active(ly) • activist • building • candid(ly) • care(ing) • challenge(s) • change • children • choice/choose • citizen • commitment • common sense • compete • confident • conflict • control • courage • crusade • debate • dream • duty • eliminate good-time in prison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • empower(ment) • fair • family • freedom • hard work • help • humane • incentive • initiative • lead • learn • legacy • liberty • light • listen • mobilize • moral • movement • opportunity • passionate • peace • pioneer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • precious • premise • preserve • principle(d) • pristine • pro [issue]: flag, children, environment, reform • prosperity • protect • proud/pride • provide • reform • rights • share • strength • success • tough • truth • unique • vision • we / us / our
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CONTRASTING WORDS

Often we search hard for words to define our opponents. Sometimes we are hesitant to use contrast. Remember that creating a difference helps you. These are powerful words that can create a clear and easily understood contrast. Apply these to the opponent, their record, proposals and their party.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abuse of power • anti (issue): flag, family, child, jobs • betray • bizarre • bosses • bureaucracy • cheat • coercion • collapse(ing) • "compassion" is not enough • consequences • corrupt • corruption • criminal rights • crisis • cynicism • decay • deeper • destroy • destructive • devour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disgrace • endanger • excuses • failure (fail) • greed • hypocrisy • ideological • impose • incompetent • insecure • insensitive • intolerant • liberal • lie • limit(s) • machine • mandate(s) • obsolete • pathetic • patronage • permissive attitude • pessimistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • punish (poor...) • radical • red tape • self-serving • selfish • sensationalists • shallow • shame • sick • spend(ing) • stagnation • status quo • steal • taxes • they/them • threaten • traitors • unionized • urgent(cy) • waste • welfare
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EXTENSION ACTIVITIES/HOMEWORK

1. Imagine that you are running for president. Write a script for a thirty-second campaign commercial to get your views out to the public. Use at least two of the features of language discussed in class.
2. Choose one ad from 1960 and one ad from 2008. Watch the ads and then read the transcripts. Compare and contrast the use of language (both spoken and written) in the ads from different eras. What similarities do you notice? What differences?

1. Think about the following quotations:

"The idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal is the ultimate indignity to the democratic process."

– Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson, 1956

"Television is no gimmick, and nobody will ever be elected to major office again without presenting themselves well on it."

– Television producer and Nixon campaign consultant Roger Ailes, 1968

With which quotation do you agree more? In your answer, explain what kind of effect TV advertising has had on the American political process, voter opinion, and election results. How will the internet change the landscape of political campaigns?

2. Select two ads from either 1952 or 1956, and two ads from 2008. Describe the differences between television of the two eras, and how they are reflected in the candidate's presentations. What differences do you notice in the production choices, style, and overall effect of the commercials? What do these changes suggest about how the medium itself has evolved?

Choose one commercial to be used for an in-depth analysis. (A recommendation is Bill Clinton's 1996 ad "[Surgeon.](#)") In this part of the lesson, students will be acting merely as observers, describing neutrally what they see and hear. It is probably best to show the commercial several times, so that students can focus on different aspects each time.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is the setting of the ad? Is there one setting or many?
2. What props are featured?
3. How are people dressed?
4. Who are the "performers"—the candidate, or the "real" people? What kinds of people are in the ad? Consider age, race, and gender? What are they doing? How do they behave?
5. Where is the camera in relation to what is being filmed?
6. How has the ad been lit? Is it bright? Dark?
7. What colors are used?
8. What screen text do you see? For how long? Is the text small or large, color or black-and-white?
9. How have the images been edited together?
10. What music (if any) do you hear? What kind of music is it?
11. What other sounds do you hear—e.g. people speaking, sound effects, etc.?
12. Is there an audio voiceover? What type of voice is used? How does the voice sound? What is actually said?

After recording their observations, students should consider the reasons that various cinematic elements were chosen. The following questions can help them organize their thoughts:

1. What was the candidate's main purpose in this ad? What did he want you to feel after watching it?
2. Look back at the worksheet. Choose three things that you observed about the commercials. How did these elements or qualities strengthen the candidate's purpose and message?
3. At whom do you think this commercial was aimed? Support your answer with at least three reasons.

ASSESSMENT

Students should understand that a political commercial (or any commercial) is not a neutral or random form of communication. Its purpose is either to change the viewer's thinking in some way or to reinforce the viewer's belief in the candidate. The greater the viewer's awareness of the choices that went into the making of the ad, the better equipped he or she is to separate the image of the candidate from the issues.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES/HOMEWORK

Examine one commercial from the *The Living Room Candidate*, paying close attention to the following questions:

1. In your opinion, what makes an "effective" presidential campaign commercial? Based on your criteria, was the ad that you viewed effective? Explain why or why not, supporting your opinions with details.
2. Choose two other campaign commercials and analyze them using the worksheets and follow-up questions from class.
3. Choose a television commercial for any product. Analyze the commercial according to the same principles.