

LESSON PLAN: ADMAKER, Obama vs. McCain, “Fundamentals” (2008)

The AdMaker is an interactive editing tool that students can use to create their own versions of historic presidential campaign commercials.

OBJECTIVE

By editing an ad from a past presidential campaign—in this instance, the 2008 Obama ad “Fundamentals”—students will gain a richer understanding of how political commercials persuade voters. In the process, they will develop their ability to evaluate a campaign ad’s effectiveness. Students will also have the opportunity to create a new ad using video, audio, and images.

OVERVIEW

Effective political ads use sounds and images to communicate information, advance an argument, and affect voters emotionally, all in a very short period of time—frequently just 30 seconds. Ad makers must therefore use all of the cinematic tools at their disposal (video, images, voiceovers, sound and visual effects, music, titles, and editing) to win voters’ hearts and minds. The process of editing historic ads or making new ads can be an engaging way to introduce students to the decisions that go into the creation of any piece of moving-image media, including films, television shows, and commercials, and the impact that each decision has on the finished product. This activity also gives students greater insight into the strategies employed by political ad-makers. In the process of editing their ads, students can develop their own criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the political ads they see on television and the Internet.

PREPARATION

Prior to beginning any AdMaker activity with your students, complete the “What Makes an Effective Ad?” lesson.

To use the AdMaker, you must have Flash 10 installed on your class’s computers. Flash 10 is available

for free. Contact your network administrator if you need Flash 10 installed on your class's computers. You must be connected to the Internet to use the AdMaker.

In order to save their ads, students will need to register with The Living Room Candidate. Registration takes only a few minutes. Museum of the Moving Image will not share or sell any information provided by you or your students.

BACKGROUND ON “FUNDAMENTALS”

The Obama ad “Fundamentals” is an example of a “backfire” ad, in which the words or images of a candidate are used against him. (You may wish to show your students other examples of “backfire” ads by visiting that section in the left-side menu bar on The Living Room Candidate home page.) Based on the premise that the camera, or the microphone, doesn't lie, these ads are effective because they work by self-incrimination.

On September 15, 2008, the day that Lehman Brothers collapsed, John McCain gave a speech in which he remarked, “The fundamentals of our economy are strong.” In “Fundamentals,” which was produced the same day, McCain's comment is taken out of context and intercut with images and text that evoke the economic crisis. Through this juxtaposition, “Fundamentals” suggests that McCain does not understand the depth of the economic crisis. The depiction of McCain as stuttering and confused can be taken as an indirect reference to the candidate's age, and the closing image of McCain standing with President George W. Bush links the candidate to the unpopular Bush administration.

“Fundamentals” takes McCain's words out of context. As students edit their ads, they may select audio and video that give McCain's comment a different context and, in the process, change the ad's argument and emotional impact.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

Review the 2008 presidential election with your students. Who were the candidates of the Republican and Democratic parties? What experience did they have before running for president? What were the major issues in the election? Who won the election?

You may wish to show your students the historical background and election results provided on The Living Room Candidate.

PROCEDURES

Assemble the class as a group, and open either of the AdMaker activities for Obama vs. McCain, “Fundamentals,” 2008. Take a few minutes to introduce the AdMaker to your students.

On the left side of the screen, students will see a video player. To the right of the video player is the asset window, which contains all of the video, images, and audio the Museum has provided for use in your students’ AdMaker projects. Students may also use the asset window to add transitions, titles, and effects.

Students will build their ads in the timeline, which is located beneath the video player. To add video, images, audio, effects, transitions, or titles, students should simply drag and drop the appropriate asset into the timeline. To edit an asset, title, or effect, students should click on it and use the asset editor to the right of the timeline.

AdMaker activities can be completed with the class assembled as a group, with students working in small groups at computers, or as independent student assignments.

ACTIVITY 1: Turn the Obama Ad “Fundamentals” into an Ad for McCain

Open “Turn this Obama Ad into an Ad for McCain.” The video clips that make up “Fundamentals” will load in the timeline. In the asset window, students will find additional video, images, audio clips, and music.

For this activity, students will produce a 30-second ad for McCain. Students should:

- Review the ad and the additional footage provided.
- Decide on one issue, theme, or idea on which to focus.
- Remove any video clips from the timeline that they do not want in their finished ads.
- Add, edit, and rearrange images and video footage to create 30-second ads.
- Complete their ads with voiceover, music, titles, effects, and/or transitions .

After students have finished, they should save their ads. Ask students to present their finished ads to the class. In their presentations, students should answer the following questions:

- What is the argument of the ad? How did you make this argument?
- How do you want viewers to feel as they watch your ad?
How did you try to elicit these emotional responses?
- Is the style of your ad similar to or different from “Fundamentals”? If it is similar, how is it similar?
If it is different, how is it different? Why did you make it similar or different?
- If you were a voter in the 2008 election, would you have been persuaded by this ad? Why or why not?

ACTIVITY 2: Make Your Own 2008 Campaign Ad

Open “Make Your Own 2008 Campaign Ad” in the AdMaker. Explain to students that this activity is more open-ended than Activity 1. For this activity, students will create a 30-second 2008 ad for a candidate of their choice.

In completing their ads, students will have access to the video clips used in the original ad, additional video and images related to the 2008 election, and additional audio. Students should:

- Review the video, images, and audio provided.
- Decide on one issue, theme, or idea on which to focus.
- Add, edit, and rearrange images and video footage to create 30-second ads.
- Complete their ads with voiceover, music, titles, effects, and/or transitions.

When they are finished, students should save their ads and present them to the class.

In their presentations, students should answer the following questions:

- What is the argument of the ad? How did you make this argument?
- How do you want voters to feel about Obama as they watch your ad? How did you try to elicit these emotional responses?
- How do you want voters to feel about McCain as they watch your ad? How did you try to elicit these emotional responses?
- Is the style of your ad similar to or different from “Fundamentals”? If it is similar, how is it similar? If it is different, how is it different? Explain the reasons for the choices you made.
- If you were a voter in the 2008 election, would you have been persuaded by this ad? Why or why not?

ASSESSMENT

In creating their ads, students should think about the choices they are making and the effect those choices might have on a viewer. They should consider the ad’s argument, as well as its tone and style. After making and evaluating their own ads, students should reflect on how their experience may affect the way they watch and evaluate other political commercials. For further information on evaluating ads, you may also consult the attached assessment rubric.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES/HOMEWORK

After completing their ads and receiving feedback, students may do follow-up research on the 2008 election and its political, social, and cultural context. Students should then refine and re-edit their AdMaker projects based upon this research.

For additional extension activities, complete the “What Makes an Effective Ad?” lesson or the AdMaker activities for Nixon vs. Humphrey, “Convention” (1968).

CURRICULUM STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Common Core English Language Arts: 7

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC:

	1	2	3	4
Emotion	Establishes no clear tone; it is difficult to determine how the maker of the ad wants viewers to feel.	Establishes a tone, either positive (such as inspirational or hopeful), negative, (such as frightening or sarcastic), or mixed (partly positive, partly negative) that can be identified, but its relationship to the argument is confused; it is somewhat clear how the maker wants viewers to feel.	Establishes a positive, negative, or mixed tone that somewhat reflects its argument; it is clear how the maker wants viewers to feel.	Establishes a strong positive, negative, or mixed tone that clearly advances its argument and the effect of that argument; it is clear how the maker wants viewers to feel; achieves the desired emotional effect.
Persuasion	Central issue is not identified; makes no argument; the point of view is unclear.	Central issue is partially defined; makes an argument; point of view is somewhat clear.	Central issue is clearly defined; makes an argument that is logical; point of view is clear.	Central issue is clearly defined, and the importance of this issue is demonstrated; makes an argument that convinces with logic and evidence; point of view is presented strongly.
Truth	Presents few or no factual claims.	Presents a limited number of general factual claims with minimal reference to sources.	Presents multiple general or specific factual claims with reference to at least one reliable source.	Presents multiple specific factual claims with clear references to multiple reliable sources.
Style	Use of images, sounds, and music does not communicate a political idea or create a dramatic effect (such as amusement or inspiration)	Use of images or sounds at least contributes to communicating a political idea or creating a dramatic effect.	Use of images, sounds, and music together communicates political ideas, organizes ideas into an argument, and creates a dramatic effect.	Use of moving and still images, sounds, music, editing, and transitions together succeeds in communicating political ideas, organizing complex arguments, and creating a powerful dramatic effect.