

2.2 Lesson Plan: Identifying Genres & Persuasion in Political Discourse

Overview

Students learn about six different genres. Students find examples of these genres within the 2008 presidential campaign Web sites and explain how different parts of the sites represent different genres. Students identify how persuasive appeals are used within each genre. Finally, students write a blog entry that captures the key ideas they learned.

Key Skills

NCSS Civic Ideas and Practices Expectations: Identify, seek, describe, and evaluate multiple points of view surrounding issues – noting the strengths, weaknesses, and the consequences associated with holding each position

McREL Language Arts Standards: Understand the use of stereotypes and biases in visual media (e.g., distorted representations of society; imagery and stereotyping in advertising; elements of stereotypes such as physical characteristics, manner of speech, beliefs and attitudes; use prewriting strategies to plan written work (e.g., use graphic organizers, story maps, and webs; group related ideas; take notes; brainstorm ideas; organize information according to type and purpose of writing)

ISTE NETS Standards : 4a: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making: identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation; **3a:** Research and Information Fluency: plan strategies to guide inquiry; **3b:** Research and Information Fluency: locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media.

Grades 7–12

Time Estimate One to two 45-minute periods, or one period plus homework

Required Resources Computers with Internet access

Preparation

Prior to teaching this lesson, bookmark all of the Web sites used in the lesson on each computer in your classroom, or upload all links to an online bookmarking tool such as del.icio.us (del.icio.us). Preview all of the Web sites used in the lesson to make certain that they are appropriate for your students. Make copies of **Worksheet 2.2** for all students.

Procedure

- 1. Introduction:** Where do we get information? Have a short class discussion about how we receive media messages about the presidential campaigns and candidates. **Ask:**
 - Where do you get news about the presidential campaign?
 - What are other ways you might receive messages about the campaign?
 - How do your parents get information and news about the campaign?
- 2. Make sense of political genres.** Pass out **Worksheet 2.2**, and go over the six different genres. Ask students to provide examples of television shows or specific content for each genre.
- 3. Understand persuasive appeals.** Explain that the following persuasive appeals are based on Aristotle's three forms of rhetoric – the art of speaking and writing effectively. This definition is broadened to include media texts as rhetorical messages. In order to be an effective message-maker, one must understand these three forms and how they make messages more persuasive.
- 4. Compare and contrast.** In pairs, have students visit the 2008 presidential candidates' Web sites (www.johnmccain.com and www.barackobama.com). Ask students to complete Worksheet 2.2 by finding examples of each of the different genres, explaining why each example fits within that genre and identifying the persuasive appeals used.
- 5. Share and discuss.** In small groups or as a whole class, have students share and discuss their findings. **Discuss:**
 - Which genres were represented on the candidates' sites? Which ones were missing? Why do you think this is the case?
 - Did certain messages fit more than one genre? Provide specific examples from the sites. What are the benefits of a message fitting more than one genre? What are the drawbacks?
 - What are some of the patterns in the stylistic techniques of each genre? Do some genres use certain techniques more or less than others?
 - What are some of the patterns in the persuasive appeals of each genre? Do some genres rely on certain types of appeals more than others?
 - What percentage of each type of persuasive appeal do you believe falls into each genre?
- 6. BLOG THIS!** At the end of class or for homework, ask students to share their best examples of various genres on their blogs by linking to or embedding each example and explaining how persuasive appeals are used. Then, ask students to respond to each other's posts.

Assessment

Use students' performance answering questions on Worksheet 2.2 and their blog posts as indicators that they can successfully read and navigate a Web site to find information and understand the various genres and persuasive techniques. Students' responses to other's postings can be used to assess their collaboration and communication skills.

Worksheet 2.2 Identifying Genre & Persuasion in Political Discourse

Instructions: Visit each presidential candidate's Web site— www.johnmccain.com and www.barackobama.com—and explore the sections of the site. Look for examples of each of the six genres, then identify the persuasive appeals used. On a separate sheet, make a chart like the one below to describe the examples you find at each Web site and then explain the patterns that you find on your political blog.

Presidential candidates use a wide range of media genres in their political discourse. A genre is a category of media message that often follows certain stylistic techniques. Different types of political messages use different persuasive appeals.

There are six genres of political discourse in the media:

- **News:** Event-driven stories that answer the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, and why)
- **Advertisement:** Promotions for people, products, services or ideas
- **Opinion:** Reactions and interpretations
- **Advocacy:** Proposals for action that promote a particular point of view or course of action
- **Entertainment:** Stories focused on pleasure, fun and amusement
- **Research:** Evidence, information or fact-focused studies, polls, and statistics

There are three **persuasive appeals** that come from Aristotle's classical rhetoric:

- **Ethos:** Appeals to authority. This type of appeal is focused on the credibility, authority, authenticity, trustworthiness, and character of the speaker.
- **Pathos:** Appeals to emotion. This type of appeal focuses on techniques that generate strong emotions and feelings among the audience.
- **Logos:** Appeals to logic. This type of appeal focuses on information, facts, figures and claims that support the message.

Presidential Candidate	Find Examples of Each Genre	Identify the Persuasive Appeal
John McCain's Web site	News: Advertisement: Opinion: Advocacy: Entertainment: Research:	
Barack Obama's Web site	News: Advertisement: Opinion: Advocacy: Entertainment: Research:	

