

Lesson Title: Hosting a Presidential Debate

Handout #7: Words Count ...

... especially when they illustrate the candidate's knowledge, character, or sense of humor.

Gerald Ford failed to understand the scope of the Iron Curtain in eastern Europe: "There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under a Ford administration." – Ford vs. Carter, 1976

Ronald Reagan coined a key statement for his subsequent campaign: "Ask yourself, are you better off now than you were four years ago?" – Reagan vs. Carter, 1980

Reagan's sense of humor about his advanced age charmed the country: "I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent's youth and inexperience." – Reagan vs. Mondale, 1984

Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Lloyd Bentsen attacked his Republican counterpart, Dan Quayle, as inexperienced:

Quayle: "I have as much experience as Jack Kennedy did when he sought the presidency."

Bentsen: "I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy." – 1988, Bentsen vs. Quayle

Rhetoric is a speech and debate term dating back to the ancient Greeks and Romans to describe language that is meant to have a persuasive effect on the audience but is often also viewed as lacking sincerity. What rhetoric and powerful words will you be looking for in the 2016 debates that will show strength of character and experience in each presidential candidate? What words may be used by the candidates as part of their rhetoric, that is, words used to gain attention and favor but may that not necessarily contribute to a meaningful debate of the issues? List examples:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____