



## SELLING THE CANDIDATES

(45 minutes)

### OBJECTIVE

Students analyze candidates' television advertisements to identify techniques of persuasion and fallacies of logic.

### MATERIALS

If possible obtain *The Classics of Political TV Advertising* (video); *Selling The Candidates* handout

### GET READY

- ✓ If you do not have a collection of political TV commercials, have students tape some and bring them to class.
- ✓ Duplicate the *Selling The Candidates* handout for each student.

### INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ If possible screen and discuss the landmark 1964 ad by Lyndon Johnson (assailing Barry Goldwater) where a small girl counted petals on a daisy as a mushroom cloud appeared behind her. This is a classic example that appeals to emotion, convincing viewers to form an opinion by arousing fear.
- ✓ Give groups a few minutes to decide which techniques of persuasion were used in the ad, whether the commercial contained any of the logical fallacies, what they were, and why they matched examples on their handouts.
- ✓ Show several political commercials and have your students consider the items listed above for each ad.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *Which seemed to be the most prevalent fallacies? Techniques of persuasion? Why might these predominate in politics?*
- ★ *In political commercials, which of the techniques of persuasion seem best justified? Why*
- ★ *Why is media purchase, especially in the form of television commercials, so critical to candidates today?*

### MORE!

- ✓ Groups can find a product commercial which parallels the techniques and fallacies they discovered in a political commercial. (Example: the landmark 1964 advertisement by Lyndon Johnson and most mouthwash commercials. Both persuade with generalities, and sell to customers by arousing strong emotions.) The end product could be a poster.



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### TECHNIQUES OF PERSUASION

1. **Plain Folks:** emphasizes similarities with the average citizen. (“I was born in a two bedroom house and walked to school with my brother.”)
2. **Bandwagon:** encourages the listener to do something because it’s the popular thing to do. (“More and more of us want new blood in Washington, and we’re voting for Jones.”)
3. **Name Calling:** uses negative labels to stigmatize opponents. (“Michael Dukakis is a card-carrying liberal.”)
4. **Testimonial:** shows an endorsement by a famous and respected person. (“I’m voting for George Bush,” declared Ronald Reagan.)
5. **Glittering Generalities:** says little specifically, but conveys emotion. (“John Jones has made this nation a better place.”)
6. **Transfer:** uses symbolic images to enhance a candidate’s profile. (Visits to war memorials, scenes with heads of state from other countries, etc.)
7. **Card Stacking:** presents the evidence in a partial or slanted way. (“The average income of Americans has risen every year since the election of President Jones,” omitting the statistic that the income of all citizens except the top 20% has actually fallen.)
8. **Straw Man:** sets up an opponent’s weak argument so that it can be knocked down. (“They believe that a 12-year-old child should be able to sue her parents, and they are wrong.”)

### LOGICAL FALLACIES

1. **Hasty Generalization:** bases a conclusion on insufficient evidence, usually a fractional sampling. (“Somalians don’t want our help — look what they did to an American soldier.”)
2. **False Dilemma:** presents only two choices when there are a variety of possibilities. (“Choose Smith and you’ll get inflation; choose Jones and the budget will be balanced.”)
3. **Loaded Questions:** constructs biased questions with predetermined answers. (“When did you abandon your party’s platform on that issue, Senator Smith?”)
4. **False Cause:** insists on a causal relationship because one event preceded the other. (“As soon as Jones was elected, congressional corruption was revealed.”)
5. **Slippery Slope:** claims that one event will lead to an uncontrollable chain reaction. (“First they outlaw machine guns, and then they will take your hunting rifles.”)
6. **Appeal to Emotion:** summons fear, anger, or pity to secure agreement with an argument or position. (“If we don’t fight crime my way, your child won’t feel safe walking the streets.”)