

TEACHER GUIDE

1952 DOC. #3: "Eisenhower Answers America" TV Commercial

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

By the 1950s "whistle-stop" campaigning by train had been replaced with the new option to travel by air. In their efforts to reach every voter the candidates were becoming exhausted. Stevenson traveled 32,000 miles in the 1952 campaign, and Eisenhower traveled 50,000. The new medium of television provided an easier way to reach large numbers of voters.

The Madison Avenue advertising professional who had created the M&M slogan, "melts in your mouth, not in your hands" was hired to create a series of "spot ads" for Eisenhower. One day in September, just two months before the election, Eisenhower sat in an empty studio and recorded 40 commercials in a series entitled "Eisenhower Answers America." He was filmed without his glasses reading from giant cue cards. The "common folks" who appeared in the commercial asking Ike questions were tourists that the producers recruited outside of Radio City Music Hall. The completed commercials were programmed to run just before or after popular programs like *I Love Lucy* in order to get maximum exposure.

These commercials were the very first of what has become the primary means of communication for all presidential candidates ever since. Although they may appear somewhat awkward today, at the time they were the cutting edge of the new technology in presidential campaigns.

> **Encourage** students to watch and listen closely for the techniques used to persuade viewers to vote for Eisenhower.

> **Play** the video clip.

QUESTION	What messages does Eisenhower offer about the Democratic Party?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	The Democrats have caused high prices.
EVIDENCE	"What party put prices up?"
SUGGESTED ANSWER	High prices are a problem for everyone
EVIDENCE	"My Mamie gets after me about the high cost of living."

1952 DOC. #3



"Eisenhower Answers America" TV Commercial

Video Clip
LENGTH: 54 seconds

SUGGESTED ANSWER The Democrats have been in power too long; it is time to replace them.

EVIDENCE "With your vote we'll get rid of the people...too long in power."

QUESTION **What message is being conveyed about Eisenhower as a man? What is your evidence?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is plain-spoken, friendly, and open to talking with the voters.

EVIDENCE answers the questions of citizens rather than reporters; looks at the questioners and then at the camera; uses simple and familiar phrases like "Time for a change" and "Too big for their britches"

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is admired by others.

EVIDENCE questioners seem to be looking slightly upward as they ask him important questions and await his answers

QUESTION **What techniques are used to focus on Eisenhower?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER When Eisenhower speaks he is alone in the frame. There are no symbols or furniture to distract viewers. The upward gaze of the questioners causes one to look up to Eisenhower as well.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Why would commercials of a half minute or less be a campaign improvement over a half-hour program like the Checkers speech?

What is the connection between campaign financing and TV exposure?

ADDITIONAL INFO

The 40 spots cost about \$2 million to produce and air. Eisenhower and Stevenson both purchased radio ads as well as 30-minute blocks of time for speeches on the networks. These efforts sometimes backfired when voters were angry that their favorite program had been pre-empted for a political message. Eisenhower himself was not happy about making the TV commercials. During a break in filming he is said to have remarked, "To think that an old soldier should come to this..." (Troy 200).

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Economic Issues

"Family Man"

Reaching Voters (TV commercial)