

**TEACHER GUIDE**

# 1964 DOC. #2: “Daisy Girl” TV Commercial

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The early television commercials from the Eisenhower-Stevenson race appear to be clumsy and dated when judged from current standards. The Johnson campaign pioneered a more sophisticated use of the medium. The commercial you are about to see only aired once as a paid ad by the Democrats on September 7. It was so controversial that the Republicans filed a complaint with the Fair Campaign Practices Committee and demanded that it be removed immediately.

The voice you hear following the images and countdown is that of President Johnson.

> **Play** the video clip.

QUESTION	<b>What are the messages of this TV commercial? What is your evidence?</b>
SUGGESTED ANSWER	A Goldwater presidency could lead to nuclear war.
EVIDENCE	the mushroom cloud suggests fears of a Goldwater presidency based on statements he has made about his willingness to use nuclear weapons
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Johnson will keep the peace.
EVIDENCE	Johnson’s quote: “we must either love one another or we must die”

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**Johnson’s “Daisy Girl” TV commercial**

**Video Clip**  
LENGTH: 1 minute

**QUESTION** What does the final statement mean: “The stakes are too high for you to stay home”?

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** If you don’t vote for Johnson a Goldwater presidency could lead to the end of the world.

**EVIDENCE** Johnson’s quote: “These are the stakes. To make a world in which all God’s children can live, or go into the dark.” (Said just after the mushroom cloud has exploded.)

**QUESTION** Is this a positive, message-based commercial, or a negative attack-based commercial? How do you know?

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** It is a negative, attack-based commercial.

**EVIDENCE** Goldwater’s name is never mentioned, but it is clear from the context of the themes of the election that this is a statement about Goldwater’s willingness to use nuclear weapons; although Johnson gives a message about love, the central message is about fear and war

**FURTHER QUESTIONS**

What was it about this commercial that made it so controversial and effective?

The U.S. had troops in Vietnam at this time under President Johnson’s command. How was a wartime President able to turn himself into the peace candidate?

**ADDITIONAL INFO**

President Johnson saw how effective the “Daisy Girl” commercial was after the first airing and he ordered it withdrawn. But television news programs continued to air the commercial over and over, giving it far more publicity than the Democrats had paid for. It was estimated that 40 million people saw the commercial at some point during the campaign. This is an example of how television could extend the reach of a candidate’s message if its advertising was seen as shocking or newsworthy. To this day the “Daisy Girl” commercial remains one of the most controversial political commercials ever shown.

Republican party chairman Dean Burch said of the “Daisy Girl” commercial: “Instead of meeting Senator Goldwater face to face in a series of TV debates, like the great debates of 1960, Mr. Johnson is hiding behind a series of shocking television commercials” (Troy 218).

**CONNECTIONS**

(see thematic listing)

- Fear**
- Foreign Policy**
- Attack**
- Family Man**