

TEACHER GUIDE

2000 DOC. #11: *Saturday Night Live* Debate Skit

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

An image can be more decisive than reality in influencing votes in presidential elections. Gerald Ford was one of the most athletic of modern Presidents. He played all-state football in high school, and was an all-star on the two-time national championship University of Michigan football team. Yet Ford has suffered an enduring image as a klutz, partly due to several slips and stumbles that were captured by TV cameras and appeared on the nightly news. This image was irrevocably reinforced when Chevy Chase began appearing as Ford in humorous skits on the popular TV comedy show *Saturday Night Live*. Chase made a regular gag out of pretending to trip and hit his head, and thanks to the power of comedy TV to leave lasting impressions, President Ford continues to be remembered as our most uncoordinated President.

In 2004 a Pew Research Center poll found that 21% of 18-to-29 year olds said they regularly got information about presidential candidates and campaigns from comedy TV shows. Although these programs are not produced to serve as credible sources of information, their content may ultimately influence our nation's choice of President, particularly for young voters.

The next video you will see is an excerpt from a *Saturday Night Live* skit that aired just four days after the presidential debate between Bush and Gore that you just saw. As you watch this clip, think about what messages are being communicated about each of the candidates.

> **Play** the video clip.

QUESTION	What impressions did the skit give of Al Gore? What things in the skit gave you that impression?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Gore is arrogant.
EVIDENCE	he constantly interrupts both Bush and the moderator; he takes more than his fair share of the time; he repeats "lock box" too many times; he sneers at Bush, sighs and rolls his eyes; he states emphatically "THAT IS JUST WRONG" referring to Bush's Medicare policy
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Gore is a boring "policy wonk."
EVIDENCE	he goes on and on about the "lock box" with a detailed and elaborate plan; he gives way too much detail about Etta Munson's ailments
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Gore exaggerates things.
EVIDENCE	he says that under Bush's plan Etta Munson's house will be "burned to the ground"

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Saturday Night Live Debate Skit

Video Clip
Length: 4 min.

QUESTION **What impressions did the skit give of George W. Bush? What things in the skit gave you that impression?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Bush is ignorant.

EVIDENCE he seems unable to answer the questions that are asked; he mispronounces the word "inaccurate"

SUGGESTED ANSWER **Bush is not prepared to be President.**

EVIDENCE he looks away in disinterest as Gore discusses policy; he does not seem prepared to answer any of the questions

SUGGESTED ANSWER **Bush is primarily interested in Texas.**

EVIDENCE he says "don't mess with Texas!"

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What makes this skit so funny?

Do you think that the impressions left by a skit like this could influence a presidential election?

Why are young people so much more likely to get information about presidential candidates from comedy TV than older voters are?

SEE NOTE →

NOTE

A survey by the Pew Research Center in January 2004 showed a large difference across age groups in use of late night talk shows and comedy shows for learning about candidates and campaigns. Here is an excerpt from that report (see more complete chart on the Overview for the 2000 election).

Where Americans of Different Ages Learn about Candidates and Campaigns (percent reporting using each source)

Source: Pew Research Center, Jan 11, 2004

Media Source	Age Group		
	18-29	30-49	50+
Comedy TV shows	21	6	3
Late Night TV shows	13	7	8

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

**Attack
Media Bias**