

TEACHER GUIDE

2000 DOC. #2: Biographical Films

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Biographical films of presidential candidates have become a standard part of all national party conventions in recent decades. These films mix information and images from the personal history of the nominee with the larger campaign themes that campaign managers seek to associate with their candidate. These short films are very carefully produced because advisors realize that millions of television viewers will likely get their first in-depth view of the nominee through this medium.

The first clip is from George W. Bush’s film shown at the Republican convention prior to his appearance. It is entitled “The Sky’s the Limit.” The second clip is from the film shown prior to Al Gore’s acceptance. It is narrated by Gore’s wife, Tipper.

As you watch these clips think about the form (music, images, voice-overs, etc.) as well as the messages.

> **Play** the video clip, 2000 doc. #2a.

SEE NOTE →

QUESTION	What messages are given about George W. Bush in this film clip?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	He is a leader with a vision for America.
EVIDENCE	Bush quote, “You have to know where you want to lead,” and “American Dream”; romantic image of U.S. desert West; title: “The Sky’s the Limit”
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Bush is a pioneer, a cowboy.
EVIDENCE	Bush is driving a pickup truck in a Western desert landscape describing Midland, Texas (his home town) as “on the edge” and Midland people in the ‘50s as “daring entrepreneurial pioneers”; Midland’s slogan: “The Sky’s the Limit”
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Bush is a common working man.
EVIDENCE	opening images on tractor and in a truck with his dog; old home movie images; informal language with a Texas accent; Barbara Bush quote, “the kids all were the same, they all went to public school”

2000 DOC. #2a



Republican Convention Bush Biographical Film

Video Clip
2 min. 30 sec.

NOTE

If students do not address some of the categories below you can identify the message for them and probe for illustrations in the document through questions such as: “How did the film present George Bush as a visionary leader?” or “What are the messages portrayed by the use of a Western backdrop?”

SUGGESTED ANSWER	Bush is a caring family man.
EVIDENCE	shown with his dog in a truck, sitting with wife Laura talking about marriage, mother telling touching story about "that caring little boy"
QUESTION	How does the film describe the U.S. in the '50s and '60s when George W. Bush grew up?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	The film shows these as ideal times, at least in Midland, Texas.
EVIDENCE	quote: "It was the kinda life most Americans feel is slipping away, safer kids everywhere, baseball, barbeques, football games after church," with faded home movie images of kids raising the flag and playing baseball

> **Play the video clip, 2000 doc. #2b.**

QUESTION	What messages are given about Al Gore in the film clip?
SUGGESTED ANSWER	He has great respect for women.
EVIDENCE	Tipper's role as narrator; focus on women in Gore's life; Tipper's statement that Gore has a "lasting respect for women and their views"
SUGGESTED ANSWER	He is an everyday guy.
EVIDENCE	snapshots and home movies with Tipper's description: "we also had a lot of fun, riding on his motorcycle, going to concerts, going to the beach, just falling in love"
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Gore has great integrity.
EVIDENCE	story about Al choosing to enlist and go to Vietnam despite his opposition to the war, uplifting music

2000 DOC. #2b



Democratic Convention Gore Biographical Film

Video Clip
2 min.

QUESTION **How does the Gore film present the 1960s?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER According to the depiction in the film, the late '60s were a time of change and crisis.

EVIDENCE Tipper's quote "an exciting time of great change and controversy" with images of Martin Luther King, Jr., police violence, the Beatles, and a *Newsweek* cover of an astronaut

QUESTION **Who made these films and for what purpose? Are they accurate portrayals of the candidates?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The films were made by professional filmmakers who were employed by the respective campaigns to highlight the good qualities of their candidate and his campaign themes.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Why might the Gore and Bush films present such different views of the 1960s?

What groups might be targeted by each of these films?

Discuss how biographies relate to job qualifications to be President.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

"Commoner"
"Family Man"
"Hero"

Reaching Voters (film biography)

- Consider the print biography of Martin Van Buren in 1840 doc. #5, and Bill Clinton's "Journey" TV commercial in 1992 doc. #1. Compare and contrast the form and effectiveness of the biographies of candidates Van Buren and Clinton with those of George W. Bush and Al Gore.
- Consider the 1952 doc. #3 television commercial, "Eisenhower Answers America" and compare the image that Eisenhower is trying to project with the image attempts made by Bush and Gore.