

**TEACHER GUIDE**

# 2004 DOC. #3: MoveOn.org “Child’s Pay” TV Commercial

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

U.S. politics in 1998 was gripped by President Bill Clinton’s sex scandal that led to impeachment hearings. Some citizens wanted to “move on” from the Lewinsky scandal to address what they perceived to be more pressing issues. They founded an online forum for democratic participation at [www.MoveOn.org](http://www.MoveOn.org). MoveOn.org was registered as a “527” organization. Under the new campaign finance laws “527” groups were allowed to receive campaign donations for a certain candidate as an independent political advocacy group. The popularity and success of MoveOn.org illustrated the potential for the Internet to become an influential forum in the political process.

MoveOn.org continued its liberal political advocacy even after the country moved on after the Clinton sex scandal. In October 2003, MoveOn.org launched its “Bush in 30 Seconds” political advertising contest, which invited the public to create and submit 30-second commercials critical of the Bush administration. They received over 1,000 entries and raised millions of dollars to purchase airtime to play the Overall Best Ad and People’s Choice Winner, “Child’s Pay,” during the 2004 Super Bowl. A week before the Super Bowl, CBS notified MoveOn.org that it would not air the winning commercial because of its policy against airing “controversial” issue ads. Despite hundreds of thousands of emails and phone calls requesting that CBS air the commercial, “Child’s Pay” ended up airing only on CNN during the Super Bowl.

> **Play** the video clip.

**QUESTION** | **What are the messages of this commercial? How are they communicated?**

**SUGGESTED ANSWER** | Children are going to suffer the consequences of Bush’s economic policies.

**EVIDENCE** | images of kids working as dish washers, housekeepers, garbage collectors, factory workers, grocery store cashiers; words at the end “Guess who’s going to pay off President Bush’s \$1 trillion deficit”; title of commercial replaces the word “play” with “pay”

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**MoveOn.org “Child’s Pay” TV Commercial**

**Video Clip**  
**Length: 30 sec.**

QUESTION **What emotions is the commercial trying to provoke and how does it do that?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The commercial may elicit anxiety or regret over loss of childhood innocence, concern for the welfare of future generations, and a sense of anger with the Bush administration for placing this burden on future generations.

EVIDENCE kids are shown in work settings that are inappropriate and even dangerous for them; expressions on kids' faces are serious and focused, not at all playful

QUESTION **What role does the audio track play in reinforcing the message?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The simple acoustic guitar without narration or dialogue helps focus the viewer on the dramatic images and the message. The sound of the guitar is clock-like, reinforcing the drudgery of the children's jobs. The folk guitar sound together with the dingy imagery evokes the plight of working people during hard times. The minor chord provokes a sad feeling.

**FURTHER QUESTIONS**

Should CBS have the right not to air commercials like these?

SEE NOTE →

Why might this commercial have been chosen as the winner of the contest?

Why might MoveOn.org have removed two citizen-produced commercials from its website that compared Bush to Hitler? Should it have removed those commercials?

SEE NOTE →

**CONNECTIONS**

(see thematic listing)

**Economic Issues**

**Attack**

**Reaching Voters**

Teach about other examples of citizen-produced media using an 1800 banner for Thomas Jefferson, 1800 Doc. #6

**NOTE**

With more than 135 million Super Bowl viewers, advertisers often reserve their most creative and well-produced commercials for this slot (Anderson). Thirty seconds of airtime during Super Bowl XXXV cost \$2.3 million (Nielsen Media Research).

**NOTE**

In early January, the Republican National Committee (RNC) discovered two commercials on the MoveOn.org website that compared Bush to Hitler. RNC Chairman Ed Gillespie denounced the ads, and MoveOn.org eventually issued a statement agreeing "that the two commercials in question were in poor taste" and should not have "slipped through our screening process." The commercials were removed from the website when the finalists were chosen.