

Celebrity or SELLebrity Endorsements?

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About this Lesson

Students will imagine themselves as a candidate for Student Council President and discover the role of celebrity endorsements in a campaign for the presidency. When their campaign manager suggests seeking out a celebrity to endorse their candidacy, students will be forced to decide whether or not that is a good idea. Once their campaign staffs decide to pursue the idea, students will need to identify which “stars” would best help their efforts. In doing so, students will learn that candidates need to appeal to various groups of voters, determine that appealing to one group of voters might come at the expense of another, identify many different ways candidates can campaign, and discover that celebrity endorsements are one way a candidate could reach targeted voters. Students will also read an analysis of endorsements, the history of celebrity involvement in presidential politics, and answer a series of reading comprehension and thinking questions designed to help deepen their thinking on this topical phenomenon.

Grade(s) Level

Middle School

Classroom Time

3 50 minute classes

Handouts

Campaign Brainstorm
Celebrity Endorsers
Cafeteria Poll
Endorsement Rap
Everybody Wants to Get Into the Act
Questions
Everybody Wants to Get Into the Act

Constitution Connections

Article II, Section 1

Background

When Oprah Winfrey endorsed Barack Obama's candidacy for President of the United States, a media frenzy ensued. But celebrity endorsements of presidential candidates are nothing new. Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford lent their support to Warren Harding and a popular young actor named Ronald Reagan endorsed Franklin D. Roosevelt. What remains unclear is just how much today's celebrity endorsements, joint appearances, and support affect voters' attitudes and their likelihood of voting for the star's chosen candidate. This lesson will allow students to explore some of the questions raised when the worlds of politicians and entertainers collide.

Objectives

Students will:

- Recognize celebrity endorsements as a means for a candidate to appeal to voters.
- Identify celebrities who appeal to different groups of voters.
- Determine various ways that a candidate can campaign and reach voters.
- Identify how appealing to one segment of the electorate might lead to losing support among other segments.
- Discover that celebrity endorsements are not new to presidential campaigns.

Standards

From the National Council for the Social Studies

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>

- **IV. Individual Development and Identity:** *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.*
- **V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions:** *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.*
- **VI: Power, Authority and Governance:** *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.*

Activity

Warm Up

- For homework, prior to this activity, students will be asked to write a paragraph about a celebrity they admire. What is it about this person they admire? They should arrive in class with the paragraph and a picture of the person. Tell them in advance that they will be asked to share them with the class.

Day 1

1. In groups of three to four, students should share their paragraphs about the celebrity they admire.
 - Have students place the photographs on their desks.
2. Students will then walk around the room and take a look at each of the celebrity images.
3. Discuss the idea of celebrity endorsements:
 - “Have any of these people tried to sell you anything?”
 - Challenge them to identify any celebrities who have appeared in advertisements for products.
 - Ideally, have some examples to share with the class, especially if they have difficulty coming up with any.
4. Define the word “endorsement” and ask students if they think they matter.
 - Are students more likely to purchase a brand of makeup or sneakers because celebrities say positive things about them?
5. Tell students that “today we are going to look at *political endorsements*.
 - Does who a celebrity supports affect which candidate people will vote for?”
 - Ask for a few immediate reactions to that question.
6. Distribute the pages *Campaign Brainstorm* and *Celebrity Endorsers* to the class.
 - Tell students they are going to pretend they are running for Student Council President and need to decide from which celebrities they want support.
7. Read the introduction on *Campaign Brainstorm* together and give students much of the balance of class to complete the assignment.
8. With five or ten minutes to go in class, have students share the names of the celebrity endorsers and record each of the names on the board or large sheet of paper.
9. Distribute *Cafeteria Poll* worksheet to be completed for homework.

Day 2

1. Ask students what new information they received from the *Cafeteria Poll*. Discuss:
 - Did your list of celebrities change? Why or why not?
2. Point to yesterday's list of celebrities and ask students how, if at all, this new information changes the celebrities they would like to bring to school.
3. Engage students in a conversation about how candidates need to appeal to specific groups of voters and how different celebrities appeal to different voters.
 - Go through the list of celebrities generated yesterday and identify the various groups to whom many of the celebrities would appeal.
4. Ask students if any of them share the concern that Delvina Jones raised. Discuss:
 - Why do candidates need to be careful about what celebrities they will have out there campaigning for them?
 - Before you bring in specific celebrities to appeal to the school's female soccer players or members of the Computer Club, what do you first need to determine?
5. Distribute the reading *Endorsement Rap* and read it together as a class.
6. Ask students if they think 50 Cent's endorsement of Hillary Clinton impacted the way anyone voted.
 - Who would have been more likely to vote for her?
 - Who might have been less likely to vote for her?
 - If you were her campaign manager, would you have been pleased or upset to read that he endorsed Senator Clinton?
7. Engage students in a conversation about how appealing to one segment of the electorate might lead to losing support among other segments.
8. Distribute the page *Everybody Wants to Get Into the Act Questions*, and ask students to use the balance of the class, or homework, to respond to the three questions.
9. When students finish the reading and questions, discuss them as a class.
 - The questions should be used as a springboard for an analysis of the historic role of celebrity endorsements and whether or not they make a difference.
 - Ask students to reflect on whether or not they would seek celebrity endorsements if they were a presidential candidate.

Assessment Options

1. Students write a letter to a celebrity of their choosing, urging him or her to endorse a particular presidential candidate, explaining the difference the endorsement can make in the election.
2. Students write and perform a 60-second campaign commercial. One of the students should play an actual celebrity, and students should craft a message with appeal to a specific demographic of the electorate.
3. Students bring in an article or video containing a celebrity's appearance with or on behalf of a candidate. Students should share the article or video clip with the class, explain who that celebrity's endorsement would appeal to, and assess the effectiveness of the endorsement.
4. Students conduct a school-wide poll to determine which celebrities' endorsements would have the greatest affect on students' opinions and votes.

Celebrity Endorsers

Name of Celebrity 1: _____

Why will that person help you?

Which voters will they help attract?

How could they best be used on the campaign?

Name of Celebrity 2: _____

Why will that person help you?

Which voters will they help attract?

How could they best be used on the campaign?

Cafeteria Poll

In the middle of the brainstorm, Sam Yu, your campaign pollster, races into the room with the results of the latest poll. “Things look pretty good,” he explains, “but there is still work for us to do.” Most students already know who they are going to vote for, but there are two groups of students who are undecided – players on the girls’ soccer team and members of the Computer Club.”

How, if at all, does this new information change the celebrities you would like to bring to school? Your school campaign rules allow for a maximum of two celebrities to help out each candidate.

At this point in the meeting your friend Delvina Jones jumps into the conversation. “I’m not sure bringing in these celebrities is such a good idea.” What concerns might she raise?

Endorsement Rap

Zack O'Malley Greenburg

excerpted from Forbes.com:

http://www.forbes.com/2007/12/21/rap-vote-endorsement-cz_zog_1221rapvote.html

December 21, 2007

Though the Iowa primaries are still weeks away, we already know how a few high-profile people are going to vote. Oprah Winfrey made headlines by declaring her support for Barack Obama, and Bill Clinton has been stumping for his wife, but some rather unlikely celebrity endorsements have begun to filter in as well. The indestructible Chuck Norris has declared his support for Mike Huckabee, über-con Pat Robertson announced that he is backing pro-choice Rudy Giuliani, and, in a strange twist, rapper 50 Cent is endorsing Hillary Clinton.

50 Cent, the notorious purveyor of all things gangster, recently appeared on the cover of *Rap-Up*. Inexplicably sporting a green Edmonton Oilers cap, the rapper announced his support for Clinton--a candidate who has gained perhaps as much infamy for her censorship campaigns as the rapper has for his glorification of violence and misogyny.

"I'd like to see Hillary Clinton be president," says 50, who ranks second on Forbes' Hip-Hop Cash Kings list. "It would be nice to see a woman be the actual president. ... I think she'd be a good president."

In Pictures: Endorsement Rap

50 Cent is also comfortable with the prospect of having Bill Clinton back in the White House. Electing Hillary "is a way for us to have Bill Clinton be president again, and he did a great job during his term," says 50. This announcement is something of a flip-flop, considering that 50 told *GQ* magazine in 2005 that he would have voted for George W. Bush in the 2004 election, had his status as a convicted felon not banned him from the booths. In the *Rap-Up* interview, 50 linked his change of heart to the President's handling of the Iraq war. "I actually go to war, when I go to war," says 50, noting that he drives around New York in the same bulletproof Hummers that the troops use in Iraq. "Bush just sends them to war."

50 Cent is one of a handful of hip-hop artists to throw his hat into the presidential endorsement ring, but endorsees beware. Although they can bring in votes from hard-to-reach younger demographics, endorsements from these celebrities can backfire.

Rapper/producer Timbaland, who has penned hits for the aforementioned 50, threw a fundraising party for Hillary Clinton at his Miami mansion last spring. Days later, when Clinton denounced radio personality Don Imus' comments toward the Rutgers women's basketball team as "small-minded bigotry and coarse sexism," Clinton was lambasted as a hypocrite for accepting donations raised by Timbaland, whose lyrics are often peppered with "bitch," "ho" and the like.

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Many of hip-hop's biggest names have yet to weigh in on the 2008 election. Diddy,

who donated \$2,000 to Al Sharpton's 2004 campaign, has been silent so far. Back in 2004, his Citizen Change voter-turnout organization pressed the public to vote with the slogan "Vote or

Die!" The initiative seems to have dissolved in the wake of the discovery that some of the campaign's most high-profile supporters, like Paris Hilton, weren't even registered to vote. The Web site is gone, and phoning the group's New York office yields a dial tone.

Other rappers simply subscribe to the "Anybody but Bush" school of thought, evidenced by their use of the president's name in derogatory comparisons. Los Angeles' The Game recently dissed 50 Cent by saying that the G-Unit leader is "doing to hip-hop what George Bush is doing to

America--killing it." Jay-Z slammed the president's handling of Hurricane Katrina in the song "Minority Report," rapping, "The commander-in-chief just flew by--did he stop? No ..." Eminem long ago announced plans to "ambush this Bush administration." And activist rapper Mos Def has hurled more than a few zingers at the president, most recently: "He got a policy for handling [black people] and trash," echoing Kanye West, who once commented that "George Bush doesn't care about black people."

West filmed a series of public service announcements this summer for "ED in '08," an initiative of Strong American Schools, which is backed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The self-titled Louis Vuitton Don isn't supporting any specific candidates--perhaps he read the Pew Research Center's report on celebrity endorsements, published in September. That study found that, while 4% of respondents would be more likely to vote for a Kanye-supported candidate, 15% would be less likely.

Still, rappers aren't necessarily the most caustic endorsers out there. Conservative talk show host Bill O'Reilly--a frequent basher of rappers and hip-hop music--tops Pew's list, turning off 21% of respondents.

Reading Comprehension and Thinking Questions

Answer each of the following questions on a separate sheet of paper. Use complete sentences.

1. What do the authors mean by “the Oprah effect”?
2. Why was the song “High Hopes” a successful tool in John F. Kennedy’s campaign?
3. Why did rapper 50 Cent support Hillary Clinton’s campaign?
4. Why did Mike Huckabee accept Chuck Norris’s support so enthusiastically?
5. Who is considered to be the first president to benefit from celebrity endorsements? When did he run for the White House (you are going to need to look this up)?
6. What president mentioned in the article had a future president endorse him? Who was that future president as well?
7. Do celebrity endorsements affect voters’ preferences? Provide enough supporting evidence to prove your response.
8. Why was Will.I.Am’s music video considered a success for Barack Obama’s campaign?
9. Who did Hillary Clinton supporter’s Barbra Streisand and Jon Bon Jovi appeal to?
10. What are other reasons why a celebrity might endorse a politician?

Everybody Wants to Get Into the Act

by David Marek, Michelle Ye Hee Lee, et al.

Source: <http://rfkin2008.wordpress.com/2008/02/10/do-celebrity-endorsements-matter/>
Posted February 10, 2008

In the 2008 race, it seems Everybody Is A Star (as Sly Stone once sang) and of course, every candidate *wants to be* a rock star. Hey, even Mike Huckabee is a decent bass player, always making a point to jam with the band at campaign events and he looks pretty cool onstage. Well, you know what they say - if you can't *be* a rock star, try *to be seen with* as many rock stars as possible. If you want to throw off the old Washington fuddy-duddy image, you need movie stars and TV stars to say you're hip. Even better, get them to endorse and campaign for you. But does star power really sway Americans at the polls? In our celebrity-obsessed society, "the Oprah effect" may just make a bigger difference this year than ever before. So here's a look at who's-endorsing-who in the Hollywood Who's-Who - and a fascinating glimpse backwards at celebrity political endorsements of years gone by. Incidentally, if you're old enough to remember Frank Sinatra singing "High Hopes" for Jack Kennedy's 1960 campaign, you're not *old* - you're *retro!* - and that's very cool nowadays. Bouffants and pillbox hats are making a comeback, too. So now your grandkids must think you're totally *groovy*, *baby*...especially if you have one of *these* up in the attic:) Don't let the label fool `ya - it's Sinatra doing the vocal on Kennedy's campaign theme song - not Kennedy, thankfully.

The Star-Spangled Banter

Monday night's "O'Reilly Factor" featured a video clip of 50 Cent in a brief in-car interview. When asked why he endorses Sen. Hillary Clinton, he replies: "I think she'll do a good job." The clip cuts to the end of the interview, and as the reporter steps out of the car and thanks "Mr. Cent" for the ride, 50 Cent adds: "I'm not sure America's ready to have a black president. I think they might kill him."

50 Cent later told MTV, "'I'd like to see Hillary Clinton be president. It would be nice to see a woman be the actual president and ... this is a way for us to have Bill Clinton be president again, as he did a great job during his term."

Although their endorsements stem from various reasons and issues, dozens of celebrities — from A-listers to D-listers — have publicly announced support for candidates for the 2008 primary election. Most recently, John Mayer joined 50 Cent on Clinton's campaign trail. Former Nirvana bassist Krist Novoselic, blues guitarist Jimmie Vaughan and folk singer Arlo Guthrie are Ron Paul supporters, and Usher, Ne-Yo and the Goo Goo Dolls are backing Sen. Barack Obama.

Musicians and actors are not the only ones voicing their support. Three of America's notorious action heroes — Rambo (Sylvester Stallone), the Terminator/Governator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and Walker, Texas Ranger (Chuck Norris) — endorse Sen. John McCain and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, respectively.

"Chuck Norris doesn't endorse. He tells America how it's going to be," Huckabee says in a "Chuck Norris-approved" campaign advertisement.

Stallone announced his endorsement for McCain on Fox News in January, expressing his appreciation of McCain's military service in the Vietnam War. And it's not hard to see why a

beefcake actor like Stallone would be drawn to the war veteran candidate, regardless of whether he agrees with McCain's views on Second Amendment rights.

“There’s something about matching the character with the script, and right now, the script that’s being written in reality is pretty brutal and pretty hard-edge, like a rough action film, and you need someone who’s been in that,” Stallone said in his interview.

Celebrity endorsements are nothing new. Former President Warren G. Harding is frequently considered to be the progenitor of the celebrity endorsement, running for president in 1920 with the support of silent movie stars Lillian Russell, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and Al Jolson.

Former President John F. Kennedy had the Rat Pack on his side in 1960, although he distanced himself from the group based on rumors that it had mob connections. And former President Franklin Delano Roosevelt even had the endorsement of a B-List movie star by the name of Ronald Reagan.

But with all of these presidential endorsements, the question still remains: Do celebrity endorsements affect voters’ preferences? Although data on the subject are sparse, Political Science Associate Professor David Jackson of Bowling Green State University has conducted the most research in the field.

In his studies, Jackson determined that celebrities’ political views are likely to strengthen the support of those who already were inclined towards that position, and also make unpopular views slightly more acceptable to those less inclined to agree.

However, translating these views into votes is less certain. “May we extrapolate this to vote choice? I’m not sure, but I think so, because the results are modest.” Jackson concluded in one study. Statistics from Super Tuesday showed that 56 percent of voters under the age 29 voted for Obama.

While there is no proven direct link between this result and celebrity endorsements, entertainers geared toward the younger generation — John Legend, Scarlett Johansson and Win Butler from the Arcade Fire — have sided with the Obama camp.

This trend was demonstrated when will.i.am released a music video that included an ensemble of famous entertainers, including Nick Cannon, Herbie Hancock and Adam Rodriguez of “CSI Miami,” among others, supporting Obama. The video, set to the senator’s “Yes We Can” New Hampshire speech, grabbed the attention of pundits, and it quickly spread to YouTube where it has garnered more than 4 million views since the week of Super Tuesday.

On the other side of the Democratic campaign, CNN polls from Super Tuesday showed that 59 percent of white women voted for Clinton, who was largely endorsed by veteran entertainers geared toward an older, whiter audience — Madonna, Jon Bon Jovi and Barbra Streisand.

Much of endorsement is about gaining popularity, and celebrity endorsement goes both ways: everybody wins. For some entertainers, passionate endorsement actually ignited their popularity — like Obama Girl and Taryn Southern from the “Hott 4 Hill” video on YouTube.

For other celebrities, endorsing a candidate helped promote their own popularity as well. For instance, Sacha Baron Cohen, playing his role as Borat Sagdiyev, spoke to Reuters last November in his characteristic broken English about the ‘08 race: “I cannot believe that it possible a woman can become Premier of U.S. and A . . . I personal would like the basketball player, Barack Obamas, to be Premier.”

While it is questionable whether celebrity endorsements are in fact effective, the 2008 primary’s popularity contest shows that a candidate can’t afford to be without them. Maybe if Gov. Mitt Romney gained more star power and had more than Pat Boone and Donny and Marie Osmond on his side, he would have made it past Super Tuesday.