

Media Literacy and the 2020 Presidential Election

What an unprecedented point in our history! The COVID-19 pandemic, the school shutdowns and the most polarized election in modern history. What a time to be an educator!

Free Resources for this Moment

[Project Look Sharp](#) can help you to help your students with free media literacy resources and approaches related to the elections that will work with either online or face-to-face or instruction.

Why Media Literacy Right Now?

We are experiencing what some have called a post-truth age where reason gives way to passion, facts defer to identities, and everything becomes political. According to the World Health Organization the pandemic has “been accompanied by a massive ‘infodemic’ - an over-abundance of information – some accurate and some not – that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it.” Media literacy can prepare our students to navigate this new world of conflicting truths, to learn to reason well, to ask the right questions and to reflect on their own thinking.

Rx for an Infodemic

In their 2017 study, *Educating for Democracy in a Partisan Age*, Kahne and Boyer identified 3 components of media literacy initiatives that helped high school students to successfully assess truth claim in the media:

- Analyzing and evaluating diverse perspectives in the media
- Taking a stand and backing it with evidence
- Reflecting on their own thinking – particularly their biases

Project Look Sharp’s [lessons](#) and [approach](#) has students practice these skills and develop habits of thinking for authentic citizenship.

Presidential Campaign Lessons for Your Subject and Level

Our materials give you the classroom ready resources you need to teach both core subject area content and habits of questioning. While the bulk of our Presidential Elections lessons are geared towards [high school social studies](#) (139 lessons), [media arts](#) (119), and [ELA](#) (39), we have 21 lessons [for middle school](#) and a few that connect standards in [STEM](#) and [health](#) to presidential elections.

From a Biden ad decoded in the lesson [Confirmation Bias, Coronavirus, and the 2020 Presidential Campaign](#).



How might your own confirmation biases influence how you assess the credibility of this political ad?

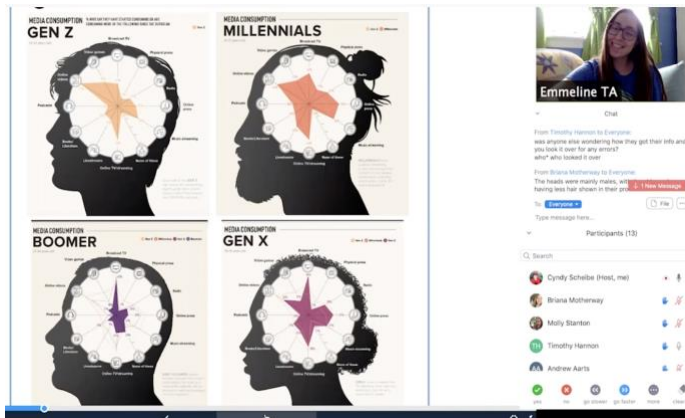
Developing Your Own Lessons

We provide these free resources because we know that you do not have the time to create all your own media literacy lessons. But when viral events push you to craft your own media decoding lessons consider these free resources:

- [Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Messages](#).
- Project Look Sharp's [Do It Yourself Guide](#) to lesson creation.

Leading Media Decoding Lessons

The [Project Look Sharp](#) website includes many [professional development resources](#) to support educators in leading [Constructivist Media Decoding](#) activities. This include short annotated [demonstration videos](#) such as this 5 minute video illustrating a high school class decoding an [anti-Jefferson political cartoon](#) from the presidential campaign of 1800.



Media Decoding through Online Instruction

Project Look Sharp has recently added a new guide for using our lessons through [online learning](#) as well as short demonstration videos for [synchronous](#) and [asynchronous](#) media decoding. Those ideas are explored in our recent article in *Social Education*: [Rx for an Infodemic: Media Decoding, COVID-19 and Online Teaching](#)

Dealing With Our Own Biases

One of the challenges in teaching about the 2020 presidential elections is the polarized nature of U.S. public opinion. This includes our own often heartfelt passions about current politics. While it is impossible, and not even desirable, for us to be unbiased about current politics, we can teach in a way that asks our students to think rigorously, independently and critically. Constructivist Media Decoding provides a pedagogy and methodology that facilitates authentic evidence-based academic inquiry, dialogue and questioning on the part of our students that will lead them towards more complex truths about challenging topics.

2020 Election Lessons and Resources

While we encourage educators to integrate media decoding throughout the curriculum in an ongoing way and not just about viral topics, we know that this fall’s election will provide a rich opportunity for critical media analysis. We have already published the following 2020 elections related lessons. We will alert our [email list](#) to new lessons as we post them.

[Confirmation Bias, Coronavirus and the 2020 Presidential Campaign](#)

In this media literacy activity students analyze the credibility of a controversial pro-Biden political ad attacking President Trump on his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, a tweet in response by Trump War Room, and an article from the fact-checking website Politifact about the controversy. Students then analyze their own confirmation bias as they reflect on how they evaluate the credibility of sources on political issues.

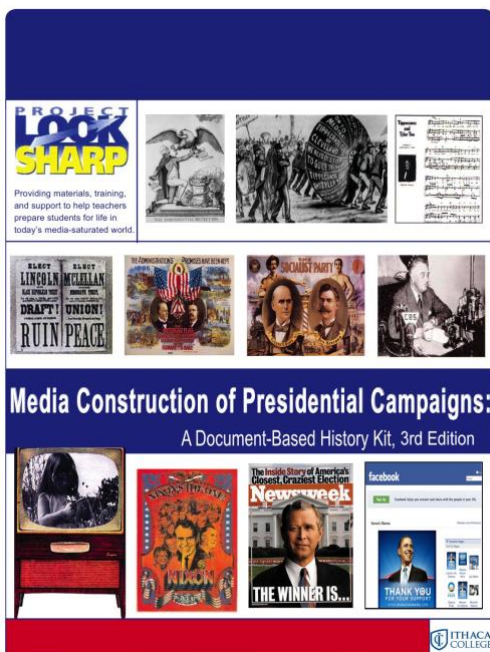
[Social Media and Elections: What’s the Connection?](#)

In this media literacy activity students analyze online charts and text for messages about the impact of social media on U.S. elections and political discourse.

[Presidential Photo-Op and Political Protest: Who’s Telling the Story?](#)

In this media literacy activity students analyze and compare a short video produced by the White House and a longer news report by MSNBC on President Trump’s photo-op in front of St. John’s Episcopal Church on June 1, 2020 during nationwide protests against police brutality and racism.

Also, please see the 14 lessons about Donald Trump and the [2016 presidential election](#) and over 150 lessons in our kit [Media Construction of Presidential Campaigns](#).



New lessons coming soon:

Political Polarization in 2020

– Decoding of excerpts from the Democratic and Republican National Conventions.

“Racist Lies” or “Controversial Statements”

- Journalism struggles with an “unorthodox” president.

Media, Politics and the Supreme Court

- Covering the confirmation process

We are always interested in [hearing from you](#) about your needs and our offerings.