

THE CAMPAIGN GAME

Civics / AP Government Simulation

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students participate in a competitive congressional campaign simulation in a politically divided district. Working in campaign teams, students develop issue positions, messaging, advertisements, speeches, social media strategy, and ethical responses to opposition research. The project emphasizes how elections are influenced by persuasion, media, technology, and ethical decision-making rather than policy alone.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Analyze voter behavior and party identification
 - Develop issue-based and image-based campaign messaging
 - Evaluate the role of media and social platforms in elections
 - Apply ethical reasoning to campaign strategy
 - Understand how perception influences democratic outcomes
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SCENARIO

A long-serving member of Congress has announced retirement, creating an open-seat election. The district voter registration is:

- 30% Democrat
- 29% Republican
- 41% Independent

Your goal is to **win a plurality** by energizing your base while persuading independent voters.

CANDIDATES

Candidate A – Republican

- Attorney (former prosecutor / defense attorney)
- Emphasizes fiscal responsibility, public safety, national defense
- Strength: trust, legal experience
- Vulnerability: first-time candidate

Candidate B – Democrat

- Former teacher, current state legislator
 - Emphasizes education, healthcare access, social programs
 - Strength: legislative experience, grassroots appeal
 - Vulnerability: perceived government expansion
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STUDENT TASKS

1. ISSUE PRIORITIZATION

Identify and rank **8–10 issues**.

Explain which issues appeal to:

- Party base
- Independent voters
- Crossover voters

2. CAMPAIGN SPEECH

- 2–3 minutes
- Must include: opening hook, issue contrast, call to action

3. CAMPAIGN AD

- 30–60 seconds (script or storyboard)
- Emotional appeal required
- Identify target audience

4. SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

Create a coordinated plan using **at least three platforms**.

Required:

- 5 mock posts (text + image/video description)
- 1 rapid-response post
- 1 contrast or negative post (ethical framing required)

5. ETHICS SCENARIO

Your campaign discovers old photos of your opponent using marijuana in college.

Decide:

- Will you use the information?
- How?
- Why or why not?

Written justification required.

EXTENSION OPTION (HIGHLY ENGAGING)

STUDENT-FILMED COMMERCIAL

Instead of a storyboard, students may:

- Film a 30–60 second campaign commercial
- Use phones or school devices
- Include disclaimer language
- Emphasize persuasion, not production quality

Optional class viewing and discussion.

TEACHER GUIDE

Time Frame

- 3–5 class periods
- Can be shortened or expanded

Group Roles (Suggested)

- Campaign Manager
- Policy Director
- Media & Social Media Director
- Ethics Officer
- Speechwriter / Designer

Classroom Management Tips

- Require written justification for all strategic choices
 - Emphasize persuasion over personal beliefs
 - Monitor ethical discussions carefully
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ANSWER EXEMPLARS (ABBREVIATED)

Issue Strategy (Strong)

“We prioritized education and economic opportunity to appeal to independents while maintaining our base through tax policy.”

Ethics Decision (Strong)

“We chose not to use the photos because the information was unrelated to public service and risked undermining democratic trust.”

Reflection (Strong)

“Perception mattered more than policy because voters responded more strongly to emotional messaging than detailed proposals.”

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- Issue strategy worksheet
- Campaign speech
- Ad or video
- Ethics justification
- Reflection paragraph