

1 *The Selling of the President 1968*

2 Joe McGinniss

3 1988

4
5 Politics, in a sense, has always been a con game... Advertising, in many
6 ways, is a con game, too. Human beings do not need new automobiles every
7 third year; a color television set brings little enrichment of the human
8 experience; a higher or lower hemline no expansion of consciousness, no
9 increase in the capacity to love.

10
11 It is not surprising, then, that politicians and advertising men should have
12 discovered one another. And, once they recognized that the citizen did not
13 so much vote for a candidate as make a psychological purchase of him, not
14 surprising that they began to work together...

15
16 With the coming of television, and the knowledge of how it could be used to
17 seduce voters, the old political values disappeared. Something new, murky,
18 undefined started to rise from the mists. "In all countries," Marshall
19 McLuhan writes, "The party system has folded like the organization chart.
20 Policies and issues are useless for election purposes, since they are too
21 specialized and hot. The shaping of a candidate's image has taken the place
22 of discussing conflicting points of view."

23 ...
24 The television celebrity is a vessel. An inoffensive container in which
25 someone else's knowledge, insight, compassion, or wit can be presented.
26 And we respond like the child on Christmas morning who ignores the gift to
27 play with the wrapping paper.

28
29 Television seems particularly useful to the politician who can be charming
30 but lacks ideas. Print is for ideas. Newspapermen write not about people but
31 policies; the paragraphs can be slid around like blocks. Everyone is colored
32 gray. Columnists – and commentators in the more polysyllabic magazines –
33 concentrate on ideology. They do not care what a man sounds like; only how
34 he thinks. For the candidate who does not, such exposure can be
35 embarrassing. He needs another way to reach the people.

36
37 On television it matters less that he does not have ideas. His personality is
38 what the viewers want to share. He need be neither statesman nor crusader,
39 he must only show up on time...How well does he handle himself? Does he
40 mumble, does he twitch, does he make me laugh? Do I feel warm inside? ...

41
42 Style becomes substance. The medium is the message and the masseur gets
43 the votes...

44
45 [At the presidential debate in 1960] it was just Nixon and John Kennedy and
46 they sat down together in a television studio and a little red light began to
47 glow and Richard Nixon was finished. Television would be blamed...They
48 would say it was makeup and lighting, but Nixon's problem went deeper
49 than that...

philosophy

form of
communication

50
51 Harry Treleven, hired as creative director of advertising... immediately went
52 to work on the more serious of Nixon's personality problems... "He should
53 be presented in some kind of 'situation' rather than cold in a studio. The
54 situation should look unstaged even if it's not."...

55
56 In 1967, [Raymond Price, who became Nixon's speechwriter] began with the
57 assumption that, "The natural human use of reason is to support prejudice,
58 not to arrive at opinions." Which led to the conclusion that rational
59 arguments would "only be effective if we can get the people to make the
60 emotional leap, or what theologians call [the] 'leap of faith.'"...

61
62 "These tend to be more a gut reaction," Price wrote, "unarticulated, non-
63 analytical, a product of the particular chemistry between the voter and the
64 *image* of the candidate. *We have to be very clear on this point: that the*
65 *response is to the image, not to the man...* It's not what's *there* that counts,
66 it's what's projected – and carrying it one step further, it's not what he
67 projects but rather what the voter receives. It's not the man we have to
68 change, but rather the *received impression*. And this impression often
69 depends more on the medium and its use than it does on the candidate
70 himself."...

71
72 "The TV medium itself introduces an element of distortion, in terms of its
73 effect on the candidate and of the often subliminal ways in which the image
74 is received. And it inevitably is going to convey a partial image –thus ours is
75 the task of finding how to control its use so the part that gets across is the
76 part we want to have gotten across..."

77
78 "Voters are basically lazy, basically uninterested in making an *effort* to
79 understand what we're talking about..." Price wrote. "Reason requires a
80 high degree of discipline, of concentration; impression is easier..."

81
82 "[Nixon] has to come across as a person larger than life, the stuff of legend.
83 People are stirred by the legend...not by the man himself. It's the aura that
84 surrounds the charismatic figure more than it is the figure itself, that draws
85 the followers. Our task is to build that aura..."

86
87 "So let's not be afraid of television gimmicks... get the voters to like the guy
88 and the battle's two-thirds won."

89
90 It was as if they were building not a President but an Astrodome, where the
91 wind would never blow, the temperature never rise or fall, and the ball never
92 bounce erratically on the artificial grass.

93
94
95
96
97
98

unspoken, tacit

subconscious

Teacher's Guide

Name of Text: The Selling of the President 1968

Flesh Kincaid Level: 12.8

Question Composers: Phil Kaiser, John Linton, Tierney Cahill, Christine Hull, Regina Mann Name of Text:

Related Standards:

- NV State Social Studies, 2008 [9-12]:
 - C15.4
- Common Core History/Social Science Reading:
 - RH.1
 - RH.2
 - RH.4
 - RH.10
- Common Core History/Social Science Writing:
 - WHST.1
 - WHST.2
 - WHST.4
 - WHST.9
 - WHST.10
- Common Core Speaking and Listening:
 - SL.1a
 - SL.1b
 - SL.1c
 - SL.1d
 - SL.2
 - SL.4

Text Dependent Questions

Teacher Notes and Possible Textual Evidence
for Student Answers

<p>1. Referring to the first two paragraphs of the text, explain why the author says politics and advertising are con games.</p>	<p>Rationale: This question was asked so students realize that candidates are sold like products. It is also a fairly low DOK question to build confidence and it is easily found in the text.]</p> <p>Possible Answer: In lines 5-14, the author states that advertisers are trying to convince consumers to buy products they do not need and is suggesting that candidates are trying to convince voters to make a psychological purchase.</p>
<p>2. What does the author mean by “psychological purchase” in line 13?</p>	<p>Rationale: This question sets up the main points of the author’s argument.</p> <p>Possible Answer: The author argues that voters need to be emotionally invested. Possible line sites might be lines 16-17 and lines 21-22.</p>
<p>3. Why has the shaping of a candidate’s image taken the place of conflicting points of view?</p>	<p>Rationale: We are trying to bring to the student’s attention to how the medium of television is different than print and how it has shifted from message to image.</p> <p>Possible Answer: In lines 20-32 the author is suggesting that print is for ideas and television is for image. Students may also refer to 59-61 where the author suggests that voters are basically lazy and are no longer disciplined to reason and they are much more apt to be drawn to the more simple image provided by television.]</p>
<p>4. In lines 26-27, explain the analogy used by McGinnis.</p>	<p>Rationale: Our intent was to expose the analogy of the gift and the wrapping paper as part of a writer’s craft.</p> <p>Possible Answer: The gift is the idea and the wrapping paper represents the image.</p>
<p>5. In lines 62-70, what is the purpose of the italics? How does this support the author’s purpose?</p>	<p>Rationale: We are bringing attention to the detail of text, specifically having italicized text and the author’s intent in using italicized text.</p> <p>Possible Answer: In lines 64-65 the author is emphasizing his point by using italics to make sure this is shown as the most important idea.</p>

Text Dependent Questions

Teacher Notes and Possible Textual Evidence
for Student Answers

6. According to lines 45-54, how does the title of the article highlight what Nixon has to accomplish after the 1960 debate?

Rationale: The intent of this question is to focus on the difference between the Nixon of 1960 and the Nixon of 1968

Possible Answer: Nixon had to repackage his image so he could become more appealing to the voters.

7. In lines 72-76, what is being distorted and what is being controlled? What additional evidence in this document does the author give?

Rationale: The intent is that students should be able to infer from other parts of the document as to what is being distorted and what is being controlled.]

Possible Answer: In lines 39-42 and 48-54 and 62-65 these sections are all examples of how a candidate's perceived image is controlled and yet distorted at the same time because image is more important than reality.

8. In line 90-91, the author says that they're not building a President, but an Astrodome. What does he mean by that? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Rationale: The intent of this question is to explore the analogy of the Astrodome and the image of the President.

Possible Answer: The image created of the President is artificial, "where the wind never blows, the temperature never rises or falls, and the ball never bounces erratically on the artificial grass."

Writing Prompt:

In modern elections, image has become more important than policies and issues.

Defend this claim with at least three pieces of evidence (quotes or paraphrasing with line number citations) from the text. Make sure you use reasoning to describe why each piece of evidence supports this claim.

Checklist identifying key points that will assist in measuring student success and/or difficulty with the close reading and/or writing prompt:

- Lines 4-11, the author states that advertisements are trying to convince consumers to buy products. He also suggests that candidates are trying to convince voters to make a psychological purchase.
- Print is for ideas, television is for image. Style becomes substance.
- Lines 39-80, Voters are basically lazy...reason requires discipline, impression is easier.