



Foundations of U.S. History

[Home](#) [Schedule](#) [Collaboration](#) [Resources](#) [Lessons](#) [Explore Sources](#) [About](#)

Primary Source Activity: Johnson Campaign Advertisement, 1964

- [Download Advertisement \(.mov\)](#)

http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/video/daisy_long.mov

[*print this activity \(.pdf\)*](#)

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/pdf/JohnsonCan>

1. Overview

In this exercise, teachers will watch a television advertisement known as the *Daisy* ad. This 1964 advertisement, now one of the most famous political commercials of all time, was created by the advertising firm Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB) for President Lyndon Johnson, a Democrat, who was running for reelection against Senator Barry Goldwater, a Republican. The ad ran only once, on September 7, 1964, during NBC's "Monday Night Movie." Republicans protested, and the Johnson campaign pulled the ad, but the following night all three network news broadcasts showed the ad in its entirety.

Teachers watch and listen the first time the ad is played and answer the following questions:

- What do you notice about this political advertisement?
- What questions do you want to ask about this political advertisement?

After discussing these questions, teachers learn more about the historical context and draw conclusions about what message the ad is trying to convey and what it reveals about the political climate in 1964. After completing the activity, teachers discuss classroom applications.

2. Source Analysis

- Play the **advertisement** (http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/video/daisy_long.mov) (1 minute).
- After playing the ad, ask teachers to work in pairs and write down a list of key points, things they notice, and a list of questions to ask.

3. Group Discussion

Write three columns onto the whiteboard: Notice, Questions, and Historical Background.

Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- What did you first notice about the ad?
- What happens in this ad? How does it begin? How does it end?
- How does the girl in the ad appear? What might she symbolize?
- Is there music in the ad? How does it shape the message?
- There are several different voices in this ad—describe each one. How might these voices shape the message of the ad?
- What is missing from this advertisement? What can the advertisement tell us and what can it not tell us about this time period?
- What questions do you want to ask about the advertisement?
- What do you already know about this advertisement and about the time period in which it was created?

4. Historical Background

Present this historical background to enhance the group's knowledge of the time period, and as a basis for drawing conclusions in Step 5. Write the words in bold on the whiteboard, and use the rest of the text for guidance.

- **Nuclear Safety:** During the Republican primary, Goldwater's views on nuclear safety were first called into question. Goldwater's opponent, Nelson Rockefeller, sent a mass mailing to California Republican primary voters asking: "Who Do You Want in the Room with the H Bomb Button?" This allowed the Johnson campaign to attack Goldwater on this issue without significant risk of criticism by the voting public. The question of nuclear safety became the basis for the *Daisy* ad, but the ad did not introduce the issue.
- **Role of advertising:** Advertising was changing rapidly in this period. The Johnson campaign understood the importance of advertisements in attracting voters. They favored so-called "spot" advertising, the kind of short political ads familiar today, and hired one of the most innovative advertising teams in the U.S., DDB, to create these ads. Johnson spent close to 3 million dollars on advertising alone in the final months of the campaign, far surpassing Goldwater's expenditures. Goldwater purchased the more commonly used 30-minute blocks of television time. In these half-hour programs, Goldwater delivered calm, rational speeches and tried to counter Johnson's accusations. These lengthy programs, however, did not reach their target audience. They were more likely to attract viewers already committed to Goldwater and less likely to draw undecided voters or those leaning toward Johnson.

- **Goldwater:** Goldwater had a knack for making statements that helped his opponents depict him as a dangerous man. On May 24, 1964, Goldwater told a television interviewer that one strategy for winning the war in Vietnam might involve “defoliation of the forests by low-yield atomic weapons.” Statements like this went a long way toward convincing voters that Goldwater was too far from the mainstream. In his speech accepting the Republican presidential nomination, Goldwater famously asserted “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice, moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.”

5. Conclusions

Now play the [advertisement](#)

(http://chnm.gmu.edu/loudountah/activities/video/daisy_long.mov) a second time.

What message is the ad trying to convey? How does it convey this message?

What does it reveal about the political climate in 1964?

- **What happens in the ad?** The *Peace Little Girl* or *Daisy* ad opens with a wide angle shot of a young, blond, white girl standing in a field of flowers on a summer day. Birds chirp as she picks petals off of a daisy while looking down at the flower, and counts, “one, two, three, four, five, seven, six, six, eight, nine, nine. . .” As she repeats this last “nine,” a booming male voice begins a countdown familiar to every American in the Cold War era, “ten, nine, eight. . .” The girl looks up and off to her left as the camera zooms in to her face and to a close-up of her right eye. As the dark iris and pupil of her eye fill the screen, we see a nuclear explosion.
- **What does the ad imply?** The direct implication is that we are watching the explosion through the reflection in her eye; we are watching what she is watching and experiencing. The larger implication is that the American future is in immediate danger from the threat of nuclear weapons. As the advertisement shows close-ups of the explosion, Johnson’s voice narrates, making explicit the implied connection between America’s future and his leadership: “These are the stakes. To make a world in which all of God’s children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die.” The screen cuts to black, with these words written unequivocally in white letters, “Vote for President Johnson on November 3.” A male voice reads, “Vote for President Johnson on November 3. The stakes are too high for you to stay home.”
- **What is the ad’s message?** The advertisement is not subtle—it clearly contrasts the safety and future of America, the innocence of America’s children, with the danger of atomic weapons and by extension with the danger of Goldwater as a leader. The *Daisy* ad contrasts these ideas with Johnson’s authoritative claim that he values life and survival, and that the upcoming election is the time for Americans to choose between preserving the future and death. Without naming Goldwater, the advertisement clearly conveyed its strong central message: Goldwater was more likely than Johnson to use atomic weapons.
- **Other Johnson Advertisements.** This was one of a series of Johnson campaign ads questioning the future safety of America with Goldwater as President. At least three additional Johnson advertisements similarly equated Goldwater with nuclear danger. One shows a girl eating ice cream while a female announcer explains the dangers of radioactive poisoning from atomic bombs. It implies that Goldwater, if elected, would endanger the health and safety of

American children. A second ad follows a pregnant woman and her young daughter as they walk through a wooded area on a sunny day. The female voiceover praises the Kennedy-Johnson administration for its role in the Nuclear Test Ban treaty and promises that Johnson will not break this treaty (with the caveat, “for as long as all the other nations honor it”). The third shows a nuclear explosion while the male voiceover reads, “On October 24, 1963, Barry Goldwater said of the nuclear bomb, ‘Merely another weapon.’” The announcer repeats this phrase, questioning Goldwater, “Merely another weapon?” All three end with the dire warning, “Vote for President Johnson on November 3rd. The stakes are too high for you to stay home.”

- **The election.** Johnson’s advertising strategy only helped his campaign and Johnson won in a landslide. He earned 486 Electoral College votes to Goldwater’s 52, and won 61.1% of the popular vote to Goldwater’s 38.5%, a significant margin. In addition, post-election polls indicated that many people voted out of fear of Goldwater rather than in support of Johnson.

6. Classroom Applications

- Do you think this activity would work with your students?
- Could you use this strategy with other resources?
- Would you do anything differently in your classroom?

This activity is based on [History Matters \(http://historymatters.gmu.edu\)](http://historymatters.gmu.edu), [Making Sense of Advertisements, What else do you need to know? \(http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Ads/try.htm\)](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/Ads/try.htm)