

LESSON 7

Mass Media and Government

LESSON ASSIGNMENTS

Pay very close attention when watching the video program. Review the video objectives and be prepared to record possible answers, in abbreviated form, as you view the video. The titles and numbers of the textbook chapters may differ from the video program. Keep in mind that the video program examines contemporary examples to illustrate your government in action. An attempt is made to show how you can participate in the political arena and bring about changes in the political process.

Video:

“Mass Media and Government,” from the series. *Voices in Democracy: United States Government.*

Activities:

One or more activities may be assigned to this lesson. Refer to your syllabus.

OVERVIEW

This lesson examines the role of the media in politics. The special constitutional protections which the press have received are examined. Particularly, the lesson traces the Supreme Court’s rulings on prior restraint and libel. We also examine the tension between freedom of the press and other societal concerns such as national security, fair trials, and criminal justice. The symbiotic, yet adversarial relationship between the press and government, the accusations that the media are biased and that the government manipulates the press are also explored.

LESSON GOAL

Discuss the interdependent relationship between media and government in the United States’ democracy and explain the issue of personal responsibility in discerning the truth.

VIDEO OBJECTIVES

The following objectives are designed to assist you in identifying the most significant aspects of the video segment of this lesson. You should take succinct notes while viewing the video.

1. Discuss the role of a free press in the United States’ democracy.
2. Describe the changes in how the media cover wartime activities, and discuss how government and media have manipulated war news.
3. Discuss the important relationship between the press and the president, including citing the use of trial balloons, spins, and backgrounders.
4. Explain the responsibility of the reader/viewer in discerning the truth.

WEB ACTIVITIES

These activities are not required unless your teacher assigns them. They are offered as suggestions to help you learn more about the material presented in this lesson.

Visit the Ecola's newsstand Web page at <http://www.newsdirectory.com/>. Browse through the newspaper selections.

Find one site for a newspaper in your state and print off its homepage information.

Evaluate the paper for its coverage of political news, using the following criteria:

- How many stories on its front-page/homepage deal with politics?
- Do they have links to other news stories in the paper?
- If so, approximately how many news stories were about politics and government and how many stories were about international affairs or world politics?
- Do they have a search feature in which you can find political news?
- If so, do you have to pay to copy the articles or are they available at no charge?

Next, find one of the following national newspapers: *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Los Angeles Times*, or *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Evaluate this paper based on the above criteria.

Compare the coverage of this national newspaper with the newspaper from your state.

NOTE: A final step could be to compare the ease of access/use and the depth/breadth of coverage of these Internet sites with their traditional counterparts (actual newspaper, television, radio).

PRACTICE TEST

After watching the video and reviewing the objectives, you should be able to complete the following Practice Test. When you have completed the Practice Test, turn to the Answer Key to score your answers.

MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Select the single best answer.

1. The first president to effectively use television was...
 - A. Franklin Roosevelt
 - B. Dwight Eisenhower
 - C. John Kennedy
 - D. Richard Nixon
2. The mass media found covering the Gulf War very frustrating because of the way the...
 - A. public reacted to the news
 - B. military conducted the operation
 - C. pentagon managed the news
 - D. Congress appropriated funds for media coverage
3. One way the president personally attempts to persuade Congress and the American people to support the administration's agenda is to...
 - A. recruit Cabinet members from Congress
 - B. send his staff to the people
 - C. hold news conferences
 - D. hold special dinners at the White House
4. A fact or theory that is given to a reporter to print in order to determine its popularity is called a...
 - A. trial balloon
 - B. spin
 - C. backgrounder
 - D. all of the above
5. A free press provides an independent...
 - A. source of research for lobbyists
 - B. check on the people and institutions of government
 - C. contributor to developing public policy
 - D. interpreter of judicial policy

ESSAY/PROBLEM QUESTIONS

6. Explain the role that the media play during wartime. Do you think this role has been abused? Why or why not?
7. Does the public need to know all about the personal lives of public officials, especially the president? Why or why not?
8. What is the role of the press secretary? According to Martin Fitzwater, why is it a difficult job?

ANSWER KEY

The following provides the answers and references for the practice test questions. Objectives are referenced using the following abbreviations: V=Video Objectives.

1. C Ref: V 1 (Video)
2. C Ref: V 2 (Video)
3. C Ref: V 3 (Video)
4. A Ref: V 3 (Video)
5. B Ref: V 4 (Video)
6. Ref: V 2 (Video)
7. Ref: V 3 (Video)
8. Ref: V 3 (Video)