

Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Consistency/Jay Heinrichs Interview

During this week’s audio lesson, we took a look at the first Presidential debate in the context of confirmation bias, highlighting how bias can sometimes cause a person to damage the very candidates and issues they claim to champion.

We also took a close look at how all of the critical thinking skills presented in these lessons are built on the human need for consistency and, more importantly, our discomfort with inconsistency. This manifests itself in multiple ways, including:

- The effectiveness in logic of proving your opponent’s argument ends in a logical contradiction
- The power accusations of hypocrisy have in political debate
- The hold confirmation bias has over our thinking, especially with regard to accepting information that is inconsistent with pre-existing beliefs

We also took a look at the debate in the context of media literacy, specifically the need for the media to highlight drama which might cause them to emphasize or over-emphasize stories (such as debate results and surveys) that indicate a tight race.

Finally, we were joined by Jay Heinrichs, author of the book *Thank You for Arguing*, who discussed the current Presidential race in the context of rhetoric and argumentation. Some of the insights Jay provided during this interview included:

- While masterful oratory has come down to us through history, for the most part political debate has been a mud-fight, with the ancient Greeks being legendary for heckling public speakers
- Historically, Democrats have tended to use carefully crafted word schemes vs. Republicans who have favored tropes, such as using one person or thing (like Joe the Plumber in the 2008 election) to represent a larger group or wider issue
- One-liners and “gotchas” that might get a laugh and make news after a debate are less long-lasting than the establishment of a trusting relationship with the audience (ethos)
- In our own lives, the establishment of an ethos connection with those you are trying to convince is more important than scoring points in an argument

Terminology

Important vocabulary terms used in this lesson include:

- Consistency
- Logical contradiction
- Schemes
- Tropes
- Chiasmus
- Synecdoche

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Goals

The goal of this lesson is to give students an understanding of:

- How confirmation bias can cause us to damage the candidates and causes we claim to champion
- How the technique of managing expectations can control the outcome of a political event (such as a Presidential debate)
- That the media might highlight stories that increase the drama of a political campaign, even in situations where an election might not represent a tight race
- How the human need for consistency (and hatred of inconsistency) manifests itself in logic and rhetoric, as well as in the hardening our own biases
- The use of different types of rhetorical devices (such as schemes and tropes) for different purposes and by different candidates/parties*
- The importance of defining an opponent (and yourself) during a political campaign*
- The importance of establishing an ethos connection with an audience*
- How the principles of rhetoric seen during an election campaign can be used by people in their daily lives*

Primary Resources

The following resources are available at the www.criticalvoter.com web site to support this lesson:

- **Critical Voter Podcast 011 – Consistency and Interview with Jay Heinrichs:** A 30 minute audio lesson that discussed how the need for consistency underlies all of the critical thinking skills and techniques we've been studying, followed by an interview with Jay Heinrichs, author of the book *Thank You for Arguing*
- **Quiz** – A short quiz designed to determine if someone has listened to and understood the podcast.
- **Blog Entries** – The Critical Voter blog contains multiple blog entries dealing with the issues covered in the podcast (look for entries the week of October 14, 2012). This week's blog also provides examples of how to analyze political arguments using Toulmin diagrams.

Additional Resources

Links to additional information can be found on the [Critical Voter Resources page](#).

* As discussed during the interview with Jay Heinrichs, author of *Thank You for Arguing*

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Suggested Activities

Activity	Notes on this activity
Have students listen to the podcast and answer the quiz questions to ensure they have listened to and understood the concepts covered in the lesson.	The podcast can be played in class or assigned as homework. The quiz is made up of four questions which were designed to be easily answerable by anyone who has listened to the podcast lesson in its entirety.
Ask each student to find an example of campaign material (such as a TV ad, e-mail, web site or debate statement) that tries to establish that an opponent is acting in an inconsistent manner	For each example, ask students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Articulate the inconsistency being stated or implied in the campaign material (such as a candidate saying one thing during the Primaries, but saying something else during the campaign)• Discuss whether an inconsistency being stated or implied is accurate or might be open to interpretation• In cases where inconsistency might be open to interpretation, discuss alternative explanations for seemingly inconsistent behavior (such as a candidate who promised one thing during the campaign, who had to do something else once elected because of changed circumstances)• Find parallels for these examples with inconsistencies students exhibit or live with in their own lives
Review the rhetorical devices being presented and discussed on Jay Heinrich's Figures of Speech blog. Select one figure of speech and one situation (political or otherwise) where that figure of speech is used to argue or persuade. (This can be done by individual students each selecting one figure/rhetorical device, or the class selecting one figure and example to discuss as a group.)	Students can also use the Critical Voter resources page to review other sources that provide material for studying argumentation and rhetorical devices, or perform their own research (using the Information Literacy techniques discussed in previous podcasts) to discover additional material applicable to this subject.