



CLAUDE PEPPER LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

LESSON PLAN - POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

LA 9-12

Consider the following poem written by an anonymous poet:

Gossip

Anonymous

My name is gossip
I have no respect for justice.
I maim without killing.
I break hearts and ruin lives.

I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age.
The more I am quoted, the more I am believed.
I flourish at every level of society.
My victims are helpless.

They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name
and no face.

To track me down is impossible for you.
The harder you try, the more elusive I become.

I am nobody's friend.
Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.
I topple governments and wreck marriages.
I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartache and indigestion.

I spawn suspicion and generate grief.
I make innocent people cry in their pillows.
Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip.
Office gossip. Shop gossip. Party gossip. Telephone gossip.

I make headlines and headaches.
Before you repeat a story ask yourself, is it true?
Is it fair? Is it necessary? If not -- KEEP IT TO YOURSELF!
If you spend as much time praying as you do talking about others behind their backs,
You would be further ahead spiritually.

Background Information:

Claude Denson Pepper (1900 – 1989) served as both a Senator and a Congressman for the State of Florida. He was widely known as a champion of the elderly, poor, and otherwise disadvantaged. Pepper was considered a New Deal liberal, ascribing to the political and social ideals of FDR. As the country took a conservative turn with the death of FDR and Harry S. Truman’s presidency, Pepper found himself losing support in Florida. His 1950 senate race against George Smathers was one of the most famous elections in Florida history. Smathers, with help from big business, members of the medical profession (who feared Pepper’s alleged support of socialized medicine), and thirty-eight of the state’s newspapers, waged an intense smear campaign. Pepper was accused of many things during this campaign, including being a Communist.

Activity I:

At the back of this packet are a few pages from *The Red Record of Senator Claude Pepper*, a publication circulated during Pepper’s 1950 senatorial campaign. After looking through these pages, consider the questions below and jot your thoughts down in your journal or in the space provided. Be sure to relate your thoughts to specific things you read in the *Red Record*. Please give at least two examples for each of your answers.

1. What do you know about Claude Pepper after reading these excerpts?

2. Pick one page from the *Red Record* and describe the different techniques that are used to get the author’s point across.

3. Why do you think the author chose to put these particular pictures and clippings for this document?

Activity II:

Below is an excerpt of a speech supposedly given by George Smathers, Claude Pepper's opponent in the Florida Democratic Primary, and printed in *Time Magazine*. Smathers denied ever uttering these words:

Are you aware that Claude Pepper is known all over Washington as a shameless extrovert? Not only that, but this man is reliably reported to practice nepotism with his sister-in-law, and his sister was once a thespian in wicked New York. Worst of all, it is an established fact that Mr. Pepper, before his marriage, practiced celibacy!

1. What information shows the author's personal biases?
 - a. His use of the words "reliably," "thespian," and "celibacy"
 - b. His use of the words "shameless," "wicked," and "worst"
 - c. His use of the words "extrovert," "nepotism," and "marriage"
 - d. The author shows no personal bias

2. According to this article, what is one of the reasons why someone should be wary of Claude Pepper?
 - a. Claude Pepper has had many affairs.
 - b. Claude Pepper hires unreliable employees.
 - c. Claude Pepper has a relative who was involved in theater.
 - d. Claude Pepper has no people skills.

3. What does the author do to get his point across?
 - a. The author uses inflammatory language and name-calling.
 - b. The author clearly states his argument and his opponent's.
 - c. The author appeals to the reader's intellect.
 - d. The author cites historical documents.

4. Which statement *best* describes the author's attitude toward Claude Pepper?
 - a. The author would like Claude Pepper to be elected for another term.
 - b. The author is one of Claude Pepper's strongest allies.
 - c. The author disagrees with Claude Pepper's stance on Communism.
 - d. The author distrusts Claude Pepper and he is trying to convince his readers to distrust Pepper as well.

Activity III:

Now let's look at the campaign from another perspective. Below is the beginning portion of one of Pepper's first campaign speeches from the 1950 campaign. He gave this speech in St. Petersburg, FL. Note how he uses language in this speech, and pay special attention to the words in bold:

Good evening. I am glad to be here with you all in St. Petersburg tonight to discuss with you some of the issues of the senatorial campaign that is now being conducted in the State of Florida.

It's important that the people of our state know what those issues are and that they make up their minds about those issues because that is the way our democratic government operates.

*We talk about the issues the campaign and when election time comes we go into the voting booth with our Gods and our consciences and we **render** the best verdict we can.*

That's the form of government our forefathers wrote into the constitution and that's the form of government under which we've become the richest and most powerful nation on earth.

I stress this fact because there have been those in this present campaign who have sought to depart from these principles of government. They have sought to avoid discussion of the issues, to avoid presenting their ideas to voters.

*They have sought instead to inject into this campaign the **venoms** of prejudice and the distortions of passion. They have sought, by tampering with the truth and by a skillful and **malicious** job of false propaganda, to **divert** the attention of the people of this state from the matters which are of **vital** concern to us all.*

During this campaign I have sought, and I will continue to seek, to place before the people of my state my views on the important questions facing our country, questions which members of the United States Senate must face every day and which they must be prepared to answer.

*I have given the people of this state an account of my **stewardship** during the fourteen years I have been honored with their faith and trust and I have endeavored, and will continue to do so, to tell the people of this state frankly and honestly what I propose to do if I am entrusted with their continued faith.*

*That, as I see it, is the purpose of a campaign and I do not intend to **subvert** or weaken the democratic processes of our country by departing from that kind of campaign.*

I have sought constantly...and I am still seeking... to discover what views my opponent in this campaign holds upon questions which confront us, to discover and answer what he has to the problems facing the people of Florida.

Vocabulary Search:

1. Drawing from the context clues in Claude Pepper's speech and from other classroom resources, what do you think these words mean?
 - a. Render: _____
 - b. Venoms: _____

- c. Malicious: _____
- d. Divert:_____
- e. Vital:_____
- f. Stewardship:_____
- g. Subvert:_____

Multiple Choice Questions: Please circle the best answer.

1. What is the meaning of the phrase “they have sought to avoid” in last sentence of the fifth paragraph?
 - a. They have chosen to accept
 - b. They have tried to evade
 - c. They have requested to leave behind
 - d. They have wanted to deny

2. After reading this portion of Claude Pepper’s speech, with which statement below do you think he would most likely agree?
 - a. Political campaigns should only be about the personalities of the opponents.
 - b. When someone votes in America, they should do it publicly, and tell everyone their political views.
 - c. Political campaigns should be about issues, not about gossip and name-calling.
 - d. The political process is not as democratic as it should be.

3. According to Claude Pepper, he is a better choice for senator because:
 - a. He is honest, and working for the good of the people of Florida.
 - b. He is a Democrat
 - c. He is a better person than his opponent.
 - d. He is attempting to understand his opponent’s views.

Written Responses:

1. Based on the *Red Record* and these two speech excerpts, how is Pepper’s campaign approach different from his opponent’s? Give at least three examples.
