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Civics/US Government

Title: Informal Fallacies: how to recognize week and misleading arguments from politicians and media

Topic: Developing informed voters with critical thinking skills to take part in the democratic process.

Guiding Question

How do you recognize poor or misleading arguments, known as informal fallacies, made by politicians and news agencies via digital media?

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards Addressed in the Lesson

* SS.3.A.1.2: Utilize technology resources to gather information from primary and secondary sources.
* SS.7.C.2.10: Examine the impact of media, individuals, and interest groups on monitoring and influencing government.
* SS.7.C.2.11: Analyze media and political communications (bias, symbolism, propaganda).
* SS.912.C.2.13: Analyze various forms of political communication and evaluate for bias, factual accuracy, omission, and emotional appeal.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

What are your objectives for student learning in this lesson? What do you want students to learn?

* The student will be able to identify the more commonly used informal fallacies.
* The student will be able to identify intentionally misleading arguments.
* The student will be able to view digital media contents regarding the United States political process and discern between sound arguments from unsound arguments.
* The student will be able to generate original statements and arguments containing the informal fallacies
* The student will use digital media to display the aforementioned original product.

**LESSON CONTENT**

The democratic process relies entirely on the ability of political actors to convince the voting population that the actor’s point of view and their desired actions are in line with the will of the people. In order to do this the political actors (politicians, political activists, and news outlets) use arguments to build their case. All arguments are not created equal, some are sound and logical, others are unsound and unintentionally erroneous, and unfortunately some are purposefully misleading. When deconstruction an argument, the citizen must be able to identify the informal fallacies contained within the argument. Informal fallacies are flaws in reason contained within an argument that reduce the cogency of the argument. When an informed citizen goes to vote they can base their choices on careful consideration not manipulation from outside sources.

**STUDENT GROUPING:**

During the lecture the students will sit individually in rows, facing the smartboard in order to view PowerPoint and digital media examples. For the assessment activity the students will be divided into pairs, as predetermined by the teacher based on social and academic considerations. The pairing will allow for a collaborative environment for the students while allowing for full participation by both students.

**METHODS**

* Lecture- to implicitly teach the different informal fallacies in an orderly manner so that the student can assimilate the new information rapidly.
* Multimedia presentation- so that the student can see how the fallacies appear in the real world and to reinforce the lecture content.
* Collaborative learning- grouping the students in pairs to promote discussion about the content, aid each other in reciprocal learning, and to distribute the elements of a complicated assessment.
* Graphic organizers- to aid the student organize the new content.

**ACTIVITIES**

**Opening**

The class will begin following the established procedures. After the bell rings the students will be shown a PowerPoint slide with a statement that contains an obvious informal fallacy. The teacher will ask the students to think about the statement and after a few moments the teacher will ask what is wrong with the statement. The students will be call upon in order of volunteering. The teacher will wrap up the comments by identifying the informal fallacy and why it is wrong. The teacher will then explain the idea behind classifying informal fallacies and provide the students with a graphic organizer to help them keep track of the new information. After the graphic organizer is explained the teacher will begin the PowerPoint presentation. The PowerPoint will follow the following outline.

Fallacies of Relevance

* Appeal to Force- an argument made through coercion or threats of force to support position
* Appeal to Pity: an argument attempts to induce pity to sway opponents
  + Homeless clip <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2AYsg23Svg>
* Appeal to the people: where a proposition is claimed to be true or good solely because many people believe it to be so
* Argument against the person: attacking the arguer instead of the argument.
  + Sam Katz kicks kids in face <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8xi_YwMOQM>
* Accident: an exception to a generalization is ignored
* Straw Man: an argument based on misrepresentation of an opponent's position
  + Believe Obama 2008 http://tv.4president.us/
* Missing the point: an argument that may in itself be valid, but does not address the issue in question.
* Red Herring: is an argument, given in response to another argument, which does not address the original issue.

Fallacies of Weak Induction

* Appeal to unqualified authority: an argument that relies on the authority of an individual whose expertise dies not extent to the discussed topic.
  + Chuck Norris approved http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDUQW8LUMs8
* Appeal to ignorance: because it has not been proven false (true) or cannot be proven false (true).
* Hasty Generalization: basing a broad conclusion on a small sample.
  + Dukakis Willie Horton http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Io9KMSSEZ0Y
* Slippery Slope: asserting that a relatively small first step inevitably leads to a chain of related events culminating in some significant impact
  + Gun control http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-wQI58szGw&feature=relmfu
* Weak Analogy: argument by analogy in which the analogy is poorly suited
  + Monty python She’s a witch http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpMjakNhZTc

Fallacies of Causation

* Post Hoc: a faulty assumption that correlation between two variables implies that one causes the other.
  + Explained by the West Wing <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HL_vHDjG5Wk>
* Oversimplified Cause: it is assumed that there is one, simple cause of an outcome when in reality it may have been caused by a number of only jointly sufficient causes.
* False Cause- Improperly concluding that one thing is a cause of another.

Fallacies of Presumptions

* Begging the question: where the conclusion of an argument is implicitly or explicitly assumed in one of the premises
* Complex Question: someone asks a question that presupposes something that has not been proven or accepted by all the people involved. This fallacy is often used rhetorically, so that the question limits direct replies to those that serve the questioner's agenda.
  + Steven Colbert http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsoMIbXfA0g
* False Dichotomy-two alternative statements are held to be the only possible options, when in reality there are more.
  + Daisy <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zta34qFA60s&feature=fvst>
* Suppressed evidence: When an argument is sound until you find out that important information that would weaken the argument has been purposefully left out.

**Closing**

After the content has been disseminated, the class will be applauded for their good answers and active participation. The teacher will comment on how they had instinctually known when most of the fallacies were occurring and that now they know what to call them. They will be told that once they can identify weak arguments they can reduce the chance being manipulated by politicians and the media. As a citizen of the United States it is their duty to become well informed voters and the first step to this goal is to separate good information from bad. With a feeling of empowerment, the students will be given an opportunity to collaborate in groups of five. During this collaboration they will work together for ten minutes to identify and fill in missing information that should be on their graphic organizer.

Once the class has consolidated their information they will be given the Informal Fallacies Project handout. The teacher will then read over the instructions, answering questions as they arise. The teacher will then hand out the Grading rubric with the names of the pairs written on them.

**Important Questions to Ask**

There are several questions the student should answer for all of the fallacies.

What is wrong with the argument?

How is this fallacy trying to mislead me?

How does the fallacy weaken the argument?

If it were to be used purposefully, what are the speaker’s intentions (political, social)?

Is the statement or argument valid beyond the fallacy?

Has the media presentation I just viewed influenced my thinking on the topic?

**MATERIALS**

Digital Hardware – Smart board and computer used to display digital presentations.

Software and digital imagery- PowerPoint presentation used to consolidate content and present to students efficiently. YouTube was used to gain access to videos that would demonstrate the fallacy being discussed.

Printed handouts include: Informal Fallacies Project, Informal Fallacies Project Rubric, and Informal Fallacies graphic organizer.

**EVALUATION**

Informal evaluations, during lecture, will consist of question and answer, participation in discussions, and how thoroughly the student completes the graphic organizer. The informal evaluations will provide the teacher with hints on how to adjust pacing and when to clarify content. The formal evaluation will consist of an activity that will pair up students so that they can identify informal fallacies from media sources, and create examples of informal fallacies. The students will present their original informal fallacies in a digital format. This way the students can interact with digital media in the gathering of information and in its dissemination. The project should help the student improve their media literacy.

**RESOURCES**

**Definitions**

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/fallacy/#False%20Cause>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fallacies#CITEREFBunninYu2004>

**Video Clips**

Homeless clip http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2AYsg23Svg

Sam Katz kicks kids in face <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8xi_YwMOQM>

Believe Obama 2008 http://tv.4president.us/

Chuck Norris approved http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDUQW8LUMs8

Dukakis Willie Horton http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Io9KMSSEZ0Y

Gun control <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-wQI58szGw&feature=relmfu>

Monty python She’s a witch http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpMjakNhZTc

Explained by the West Wing http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HL\_vHDjG5Wk

Steven Colbert http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsoMIbXfA0g

Daisy http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zta34qFA60s&feature=fvst

**Informal Fallacies Organizer**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Informal Fallacy** | **Definition** | **Example** |
| Appeal to Force |  |  |
| Appeal to Pity |  |  |
| Appeal to the people |  |  |
| Argument against the person |  |  |
| Accident |  |  |
| Straw Man |  |  |
| Missing the point |  |  |
| Red Herring |  |  |
| Appeal to unqualified authority |  |  |
| Appeal to ignorance |  |  |
| Hasty Generalization |  |  |
| Slippery Slope |  |  |
| Weak Analogy |  |  |
| Post Hoc |  |  |
| Oversimplified Cause |  |  |
| False Cause |  |  |
| Begging the question |  |  |
| Complex Question |  |  |
| False Dichotomy |  |  |
| Suppressed evidence |  |  |

**Informal Fallacies Project**

The object of this project is to identify informal fallacies presented in the various forms of media and to produce original examples using digital resources.

Part 1- Identifing Informal Fallacies

With a partner, view magazines, television and radio, and online sources to locate good examples of informal fallacies. For each example identify the fallacy and type at least a paragraph long explanation of the source’s use of the fallacy, and be sure to include the original source so that it can be viewed at time of evaluation. For example, cut out or copy magazine or newspaper sources, print out web articles or ads, or post hyperlinks to online video/audio.

Part 2- Create examples of Informal Fallacies

With your partner you will construct examples of Informal Fallacies. Once constructed the fallacies need to be presented in a digital format. You can use, but are not limited to, PowerPoint presentations, recorded video spots, or audio ads.

Use the chart below to decide which ones you will use from each category. For parts 1 and 2 you can only use a fallacy once from each category. For example after finishing the category Fallacies of Relevance, you will have 3 examples for part 1 and 3 different examples for part 2. There will be 2 fallacies left unused from this category.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Fallacies of Relevance  (3 each) | Fallacies of Weak Induction  (2 each) | Fallacies of Causation  (1 each) | Fallacies of Presumptions  (2 each) |
| Appeal to Force  Appeal to Pity  Appeal to the people  Argument against the person  Accident  Straw Man  Missing the point  Red Herring | Appeal to unqualified authority  Appeal to ignorance  Hasty Generalization  Slippery Slope  Weak Analogy | Post Hoc  Oversimplified Cause  False Cause | Begging the question  Complex Question  False Dichotomy  Suppressed evidence |

Part 3- Be creative and have fun.

Informal Fallacies Project Rubric

Group Members:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Category | 50 points | 40 points | 30 points | 20 points | Score |
| Part 1 | 8 examples, each correctly identified with well thought out explanations of how the source represented the chosen fallacy. Grammatically correct and free of spelling errors. | 8 examples, each correctly identified. One paragraph, sufficient explanations of how the source represented the chosen fallacy. Very few grammatical or spelling errors. | 8 examples, some fallacies incorrectly identified. Used same fallacy twice. Short, often erroneous, explanations of how the source represented the chosen fallacy. Some grammar and spelling errors | Less than 8 examples, some fallacies incorrectly identified. Short, poor explanations of how the source represented the chosen fallacy. Many grammar and spelling errors |  |
| Part 2 | 8 original and well thought out use of fallacy. . No duplication of fallacies. Use of digital media with a high production quality. | 8 original uses of fallacies. No duplication of fallacies. Use of digital media with good production quality. | 8 unoriginal uses of fallacies. Some of the fallacies used twice. Digital media used but production quality low. | Less than 8 examples of fallacy. Examples lacked originality of effort. Digital media not used. |  |

Total Score:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_