Topic 4.9: Celebrities' Influence on Politics

Celebrities have considerable influence in today's media-dominated environment. Celebrities set trends in fashion, food, language, and lifestyles among other things, and people follow their leads.

Many youngsters, both pre-teens and teens, want to become famous when they grow up, defining fame as celebrity status. A research study showed that kids ages 6 to 17 are more likely to want to become a YouTube star, blogger, or vlogger than a doctor, nurse, athlete, teacher, or lawyer (Daily Mail, 2017).

So do celebrities impact how young people think about politics, political figures, or public policy debates?

During elections, celebrities might endorse a political candidate or issue in hopes that their fans will follow in their footsteps. Oprah Winfrey's endorsement of Barack Obama for President in 2008 has been cited as the most impactful celebrity endorsement in history (U.S. Election: What Impact Do Celebrity Endorsements Really Have? *The Conversation*, October 4, 2016).

Do celebrity endorsements make a real difference for voters? Researchers are undecided. In 2018, 65,000 people registered to vote in Tennessee after Taylor Swift (who had 180 million followers on Instagram) endorsed two Democratic Congressional candidates - one candidate won and the other lost. Swift's endorsement was followed by more than 212,000 new voter registrations across the country, mostly among those in the 18 to 24 age group. Perhaps what celebrities say has more impact on younger voters?

Can you think of some examples of celebrities who have shared their political views or endorsements on social media? Who are these celebrities? In what ways did they influence politics?

In these activities, you will analyze media endorsements by celebrities, and then develop a request (or pitch) to convince a celebrity to endorse your candidate for President in the next election.

Activity 1: Analyze Celebrity Endorsements in the Media

- Find an example of a celebrity endorsement of a political figure or a political issue.
  - The example can be any piece of media content (e.g., website, clip from a TV program or movie, a trailer from a video game, social media post, YouTube video, news article).
- Then, consider the following questions:
  - How did the celebrity use persuasive language and/or visuals to communicate their message?
  - How credible, accurate, reliable, and trustworthy was the celebrity's endorsement? How did you determine this?
  - What influence, if any, will the endorsement have on voters? Why do you think this?
  - Do you think the endorsement will encourage young people to think and/or act differently? Why or why not?
- Share the celebrity endorsement with peers, family members, and community members and survey them about their initial thoughts and reactions. Did this endorsement influence their thinking about the political candidate/issue in any way?
- **Present your findings** from your own analysis and your survey of others in the form of a video, podcast, or blog post.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Celebrities in the News](#) by Kathleen Boulton & Viviana Sebastiano

Activity 2: Request a Celebrity Endorsement for a Presidential Candidate

- Imagine that you are the campaign manager for a Presidential candidate for the next election and you have been tasked with requesting celebrity endorsements for the candidate.
    - Which celebrities would you ask?
    - What message would you want the celebrities to promote?
    - What would you want the celebrities to say in their endorsement?
    - How would you want the endorsement to happen (e.g., in a video game dance? A TikTok video? A news article? A magazine cover?)?
- **Write a letter or social media post** in which you ask a celebrity to endorse a presidential candidate for the next election.

Additional Resources

- [iHeartRadio's podcast "Why I'm Voting"](#)
- [The Taylor Swift effect: Nashville sounds off on singer's political endorsements](#)
- [From Sinatra to Taylor Swift: 100 Years of Celebrity Political Endorsements](#), *CBC Radio* (October 12, 2018)

Connecting to the eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Who Do You Think Are the Most Famous Americans?](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
  - Apply the knowledge of the meaning of leadership and the qualities of good leaders to evaluate political leaders in the community, state, and national levels. (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T4.7]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
  - Knowledge Constructor
    - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
    - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
    - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
  - Creative Communicator
    - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
    - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
    - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
  - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
  - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
  - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
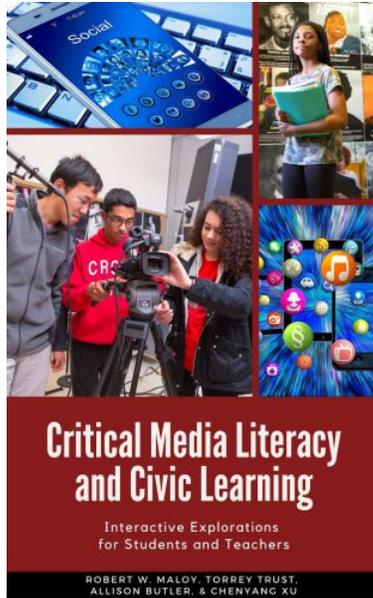
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