

Big Jim Thompson

The Campaign Style of Illinois's Longest Serving Governor



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Grade Levels: 9-12

Purpose: This lesson gives students an opportunity to interact with our James R. Thompson Oral History collection. Thompson was the longest serving governor in Illinois history, and it wasn't accidental; the people voted for him, and in his first election he won by the largest margin in Illinois history. "Big Jim" used his big personality and recognizable height to his advantage in his four races for governor in the 70s and 80s, and the interviews in this collection will give students the opportunity to consider the calculated moves that politicians make in regards to their persona and political decisions. This lesson helps students to become informed voters and thoughtful citizens.

Objectives: Upon completing the activities presented in this Resource Guide, students will:

- Analyze political statements to discern what helps certain political candidates stand out in comparison to others.
- Use oral histories to consider the impact that political figures' campaign choices can have on voters and other politicians.

Materials: Internet access, Headphones, Audio equipment for listening to interview clips, printed copies of the hand-outs associated with this lesson.

Illinois State Learning Standards:

Early High School:

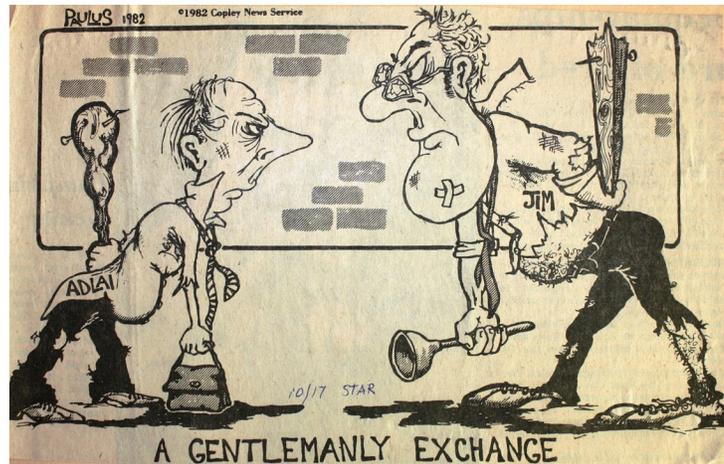
SS.14.D.4— Analyze roles and influences of individuals, groups and media in shaping current debates on state and national policies.

SS.18.B.4—Analyze various forms of institutions (e.g., educational, military, charitable, governmental).

SS.16.A.4a—Analyze and report historical events to determine cause-and-effect relationships.

Late High School:

SS.14.C.5—Analyze the consequences of participation and non-participation in the electoral process (e.g., women’s suffrage, voter registration, effects of media).



Early High School:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1:

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6:

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

Late High School:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1:

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6:

Evaluate authors’ differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors’ claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Background Information:

James R. Thompson was first elected to the office of governor in 1975, and began his governorship in January 1976. He was elected for a two year term in a sweeping victory over Michael Howlett. He was elected for a second, four year term in a win over Mike Bakalis in 1978, followed by two elections more narrowly beating out Adlai E. Stevenson III in 1982 and 1986. During his time as governor, he implemented the Build Illinois program, spent time cultivating foreign relationships, and was known for his ability to relate to the voters.

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library has undertaken an extensive Oral History project surrounding his administration. This collection is particularly useful for government classrooms, because of the extensive coverage of political and campaign issues, and will help students think critically about elections, political office, and voting.

Activity:

Inquiry: Does campaign style make or break a candidate for high office?

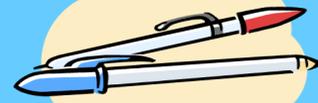
1. Ask the students to consider a recent or looming election, and think about why they favor one candidate over the others. Have them record a list of things that they thought about when deciding which candidate to back.
2. Listen to the provided audio excerpts that discuss the campaign style of “Big Jim.” Feel free to select some additional material to use during this section of the lesson from the “Additional Resources” section below.
3. As the students listen they should record what the interviewees said about Thompson’s positive and negative traits on the provided notetaker (p. 5).
4. After listening to the audio, take some time to view at least one Thompson ad and one Edgar ad and compare the two in discussion or by asking students to create a Venn Diagram on the two men.
5. Based on the evidence presented in the audio clips and video, the students should have a mini-debate on whether or not Thompson’s campaign style was appropriate for a man seeking high office. Use the questions below to foster discussion.

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the differences between Thompson’s campaign style and the campaign styles of other candidates? Why were the differences important?
2. Who was the best campaigner out of the group candidates? Why?
3. Who would you have voted for? Why?
4. Was Thompson’s campaign style appropriate for a candidate for high office? Why or why not?
5. What is more important in an election, the issues or the portrayal of the candidates? Why?

Additional Resources:

- Stevenson on ‘82 Election: <http://www.c-span.org/video/?123765-1/illinois-governor-race> (See especially 4:30)
- Dan Walker Campaign Ad ‘76: <http://www.fuzzymemories.tv/index.php?c=3578>
- Mike Bakalis Campaign Ad ‘78: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jnoxWRozvg>
- JRT v. AES on Utilities: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOr9AsmVCcU>



Tips and Suggestions:

- If you are short on time, have students write a short response on whether or not they would vote for the governor, and give evidence, rather than having a debate.
- Conduct a mock vote for each of the elections that Thompson ran in, and compare the stats to the actual election results.
- If you have enough time, consider showing the ads included in the “Additional Resources” section along with the ads in our collection. This way students will be able to see the ads of all the candidates that were played during the time period.

Interviews:



James R. Thompson: Governor from 1977-1991, and Illinois's longest serving governor. He won all four gubernatorial elections that he ran in.

Interview:

[Image and Pies](#) (3:05) **Transcript:** Coming Soon
[What People Want in a Politician](#) (1:49) **Transcript:** Coming Soon
[Advantages](#) (4:45) **Transcript:** Coming Soon
[Finding Guv](#) (3:25) **Transcript:** Coming Soon
[1976 Campaign Ad 1](#) (1:12)
[1976 Campaign Ad 2](#) (0:35)

David Gilbert: Gov. Jim Thompson's press secretary from 1975 to 1985, Gilbert has many stories to tell about Thompson's campaign and governing style.

Interview:

[Press Conference on a Horse](#) (2:24) **Transcript:** [Click here](#)
[Jug Anthony](#) (2:48) **Transcript:** [Click here](#)
[Big Jim at a Urinal](#) (1:03) **Transcript:** [Click here](#)
[Cubs vs. Cardinals](#) (3:46) **Transcript:** [Click here](#)



Michael Bakalis: As the democratic candidate, Michael Bakalis ran against Thompson in the governor's race of 1978. During his career he has worked in politics and education throughout the US. He is the founder, President, and CEO of American Quality Schools.

Interview:

[Thought Thompson was a Phony](#) (1:42) **Transcript:** [Click here](#)

Mike McCormick: A long-time personal assistant to Governor Jim Edgar, who also met and observed James R. Thompson during his time as governor.

Interview:

[Thompson as a Politician](#) (1:40) **Transcript:** [Click here](#)
[Edgar vs. Thompson Style](#) (1:08) **Transcript:** [Click here](#)



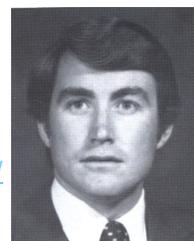
Adlai E. Stevenson III: As the Democratic candidate, Stevenson ran against Thompson in the 1982 and 1986 races for governor. In the much disputed '82 election, only a little bit over 5,000 votes separated the two candidates. Stevenson was a United States senator from 1970-1981.

Interview:

[A Wimp vs. A Tough Man for Tough Times](#) (1:17) **Transcript:** Coming Soon
[Winning Was the Only Thing That Counted](#) (0:49) **Transcript:** Coming Soon
[1982 Campaign Ad](#) (0:29)

Jim Edgar: Jim Edgar served as the Governor of Illinois from 1991 to 1999. Before reaching the pinnacle of Illinois government, he served as Secretary of State from 1981 to 1991 under Jim Thompson.

Video Clips: Watch clips of Edgar's campaign ads that are part of our collection:
<http://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/oralhistory/illinoisstatecraft/edgar/Pages/EdgarJim1990Ads.aspx>



Campaign Style Notetaker:

Who is being interviewed?	How is Thompson portrayed? How does he contrast with others?	Do you agree? Why or why not?