The Camera's Influence

Evaluating media influence from the 1960 debates to today

USH.C.6.3.C "Evaluate the continuing role of television and other mass media regarding their influence over the 1960 Nixon-Kennedy debates."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details showing how television could shape viewers' impressions, circle two limits on claims about its influence, and number one comparison between media in 1960 and today.

What Did the Camera Change?

1. On September 26, 1960, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon met in the first televised U.S. presidential debate. Viewers could hear their positions, but they could also watch their faces, posture, and responses. Kennedy appeared at ease before the cameras; Nixon, recovering from illness, appeared tired. Television made these visual impressions available to a national audience at the same time. A viewer might judge confidence from a candidate's appearance even when that appearance says little about a policy. The broadcast did not replace political argument, but it added a visual layer to how people assessed the candidates.

2. That first debate also reached radio listeners, who heard words and tone without seeing either candidate. A popular story says radio listeners favored Nixon while television viewers favored Kennedy. The evidence behind that neat split is too weak to treat it as a proven result. Voters already held party loyalties, and later debates, campaign events, and news coverage also influenced the election. Historians therefore cannot measure exactly how many votes the televised images changed. Still, the debate showed campaigns that performance on camera could matter alongside arguments. An influence can be significant without being the sole cause of an outcome.

3. Today, television networks still carry debates, while news sites and social media circulate short clips afterward. A full broadcast lets viewers compare answers in context; a selected clip may highlight a pause or facial expression while leaving out the rest of an answer. Such choices can steer attention, but viewers can also seek the longer recording and compare reports. The 1960 debate helps explain why campaigns prepare candidates for both substance and presentation. It does not prove that every striking image changes votes. To evaluate media influence, ask what an audience saw, what was left out, and what evidence connects an impression to a decision.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could television have changed a viewer's judgment of Kennedy or Nixon in a way radio could not? Why might that judgment be limited?

2. Why should you question the claim that radio listeners favored Nixon while television viewers favored Kennedy?

3. Someone claims that televised images decided the 1960 election. What in the passage makes that conclusion too strong?

4. How can a short clip shape impressions differently from a full debate broadcast? What does this suggest about evaluating media influence today?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a modern debate clip shows a candidate pausing before an answer, while the full recording includes the complete answer. In four sentences, evaluate how the clip could influence viewers, how the full recording might change their judgment, and why the clip alone cannot prove votes changed.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.6.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details showing how television could shape viewers' impressions, circle two limits on claims about its influence, and number one comparison between media in 1960 and today. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could television have changed a viewer's judgment of Kennedy or Nixon in a way radio could not? Why might that judgment be limited?	**Television showed their appearance and responses, which could affect a viewer's sense of confidence. Appearance reveals little about a candidate's policies.**
2	Why should you question the claim that radio listeners favored Nixon while television viewers favored Kennedy?	**The passage says the evidence for that split is too weak to establish it as a proven result.**
3	Someone claims that televised images decided the 1960 election. What in the passage makes that conclusion too strong?	**Historians cannot measure exactly how many votes the images changed, and party loyalties, later debates, campaign events, and news coverage also influenced voters.**
4	How can a short clip shape impressions differently from a full debate broadcast? What does this suggest about evaluating media influence today?	**A clip can emphasize a pause or expression while omitting an answer's context. Viewers should compare it with the longer recording before judging its influence.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A short clip could make the pause look like uncertainty and draw attention away from the candidate's ideas. The full recording might show a detailed answer that changes how viewers interpret the pause. Different viewers could still respond differently because they bring prior views to the debate. Without evidence connecting the clip to voting decisions, we cannot claim that it changed votes.

Accept supported explanations that distinguish a possible influence on impressions from proof of changed votes. For the marking job, accept any two relevant visual details, two stated limits, and the comparison between a full broadcast and clips shared through newer media.