

***Irresistible* Teacher's Notes** **B1** **B2**

As the race to the White House is about to resume after the pandemic episode, Jon Stewart's latest movie – released on 1 July in France – takes you behind the scenes to help you decipher a political campaign. Setting the movie in Wisconsin, and using (wry) humour, Stewart wants people to realise politics is sometimes more a matter of money and media than a matter of ideas. Rivalry, strategy and stereotypes are exposed.

The following activities will help the students get a glimpse of U.S. politics and get ready for the coming presidential elections (which may well be about money and media!).

We will provide a specific resource on this year's Presidential election in September, once the party conventions have finally been held.

Vocabulary and structures

- *politics: campaign, canvassing, run for, politics, politicians, candidate*
- *human relationships: rivalry, enemy, hate/hatred...*
- *film / movie: film director, the cast, actors...*
- *analysis/interpretation: suggest, imply, underline, stress, shed light on*
- *linkwords:*
 - *adding and developing ideas: what's more, thus, ie, ..*
 - *contrasting / opposition : while, whereas, though...*

Pronunciation

- American accent

Information about the film

- *Irresistible* tells the story of an election for a town mayor in rural Wisconsin, famously a “swing state”, which doesn't reliably vote either Democrat or Republican. When Democrat strategist Gary Zimmer (Steve Carrell) decides to help an unknown Marine become mayor, he brings his whole

Washington strategy team to town, and the Republicans soon match him with his nemesis, Faith Brewster (Rose Byrne). The campaign takes on a media profile and a budget far beyond a small-town election and truth and morals go out the window.

Listening, speaking, writing

- We suggest starting with a very quick brainstorm to check what the students know about politics in the U.S. and Jon Stewart. This is when additional information can be given about the American political life / parties...
- Then, a group work allowing each group to work on a different video is suggested. These 2 videos – the trailer and the featurette – are rather similar even though they offer a different perspective on the movie
- Finally, after exchanging and comparing their answers, the students will be led to think about the issue of politics in the U.S. as well as about the power of movies as a tool to help people think and question their environment and habits or beliefs

■ In the end, the students will choose their roles (politician, film critic, journalist) in order to voice their opinion on the movie.

Going Further

Jon Stewart said he was inspired, amongst others, by Frank Capra's tale of political corruption *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) starring James Stewart. It's a classic and well worth investigating.

Video transcripts

Group 1: Featurette

<https://youtu.be/vQEkhI3Tw6c>

Gary Zimmer: Jack could be the real deal. He's a cross between McArthur and elk jerky*. And one of those machines that test strength.

Faith Brewster: Whatever you say, nerd. It's good to see you.

Zimmer: Yeah.

Brewster: You look fat.

Voiceover: From writer director Jon Stewart.

Jon Stewart: I like being behind the camera more than in front of it. And cut. Because, when I wear make-up, I like to do it for fun.

Voiceover: Get ready for the most irresistible comedy event of the summer.

Zimmer: What do you think of that right there? Sorry, not you, Dot.

Voiceover: From Focus Features.

Jon Stewart: Why do we accept that this is the way the media and political parties spend money?

Newscaster: What do you think?

Jon Stewart: And who is really benefitting? Because it's not the average person.

Zimmer: Making it rain.

Jack Hastings: This seems a little crazy.

Jon Stewart: I would just like people to think about that. If they want to.

Zimmer: All you have is fear.

Brewster: Twenty bucks says that I do better with fear than you do with shame.

Voiceover: It's Carell versus Byrne.

Brewster: I'm gonna make a big deal of this. You're going to lose and you're gonna look like a giant...

Zimmer: Oh I hate her so much.

Rose Byrne: We have this incredible rivalry.

Steve Carrell: Yeah, we hate each other.

Diana Hastings: She's terrifying.

Zimmer: No worries. I am in politics. I'm already dead inside.

Voiceover: *Irresistible*

Zimmer: Quiet the cows, please, and if you could get some of them to face front. Oh my God.

Voiceover: Rated R. Written and directed by Jon Stewart. In theaters and on-demand June 26.

* a traditional speciality from Wisconsin, preserved elk meat

Group 2: The trailer

<https://youtu.be/0vhaAoSm1NY>

Gary Zimmer: Democrats are getting their ass kicked. We need to find some way to road test a more rural friendly message.

Jack Hastings: If you can test your principles in the bad times, then I guess the ain't principles, they're just hobbies.

Democrat: Nice.

Zimmer: John Wayne and a tractor have a baby and all you can say is "nice"?

Democrat: Oh my God, it's so nice.

Zimmer: Colonel Jack Hastings is our key back into the great, now swing, state of Wisconsin. He just doesn't know it yet.

Can I be completely honest with you? No bull.

Hastings: Be nice. My daughters here.

Zimmer: That was your daughter, with her arm up the cow?

Guys like me don't know how to talk to guys like you.

Do you have a bottle opener?

Guy in bar: No it's a twist off.

Zimmer: Yeah yeah yeah, I know.

Guy in bar: Maybe he does need a bottle opener.

Other guy in bar: Maybe use your...

Zimmer: But I would like to offer my services. Could we quiet to the cows please? To help you run for Mayor of Deerlaken. And if you can get some of them to face front. Oh my God.

I'm telling you guys, Jack could be the real deal. This little campaign of ours has got the attention of the national Republican Party.

Zimmer: Why are you here?

Faith Brewster: Because crushing the last piece of hope in your eyes really gets me off. It's good to see you.

Zimmer: Yeah.

Brewster: You look fat.

I'm gonna make a big deal of this.

Zimmer: It's on here boys, game on.

Brewster: Tons of press. Lots of money.

Hastings: This seems a bit crazy.

Zimmer: What you think of that right there?

No I don't... Not you Dot.

This is the A-Team

All you have is fear.

Brewster: 20 bucks says that I do better with fear that you do with shame.

The Democrat party can't win. They're getting desperate. This is really just another perfect example of the DC elite trying to dictate how we should live.

Zimmer: That's we. You are DC elite.

Brewster: No, I am from here. I'm from Deerlaken.

Zimmer: That's a lie, that's a lie.

Brewster: No.

Zimmer: What are you even doing?

Newscaster: Well as always a great and spirited discussion.

Voiceover: *Irresistible*. Written and directed by Jon Stewart in theaters and on demand June 26. Go to WatchIrresistible.com for more.

SOLUTIONS

These are examples of what students can say.

A. Before you start

1. Words like these may be expected (or given): Democratic party / Democrats // Republican Party / Republicans/ GOP (Grand Old Party, the nickname of the Republican Party)

Elections, campaign, run for...

If need be, you can add information about the parties.

You can find information here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PrvciTGpRI&t=14s>

2. It may be a satirical movie / it's bound to deal with/ denounce politics in a funny / light way

B.

GROUP 1 :

a. Wisconsin

b. **Job/ occupation** 2 political consultants running opposing campaigns for candidates to become Mayor of Deerlaken

Relationship they hate each other / they are rivals

c. **Name** Jon Stewart

Opinion on directing a movie likes being behind the camera

Opinion on politics Thinks too much money spent by the media and parties + wants people to think about this issue

d. interview of many people at the same time + caption : " the bastard children of Wisconsin " everyone is talking, nobody's listening

A maelstrom of sounds/ a real mess/ cacophony / racket → negative vision conveyed (bastard + noise / rude people)

e. *I am in politics, I'm already dead inside.*

I do better with fear than you do with shame → shame and fear as the main tenets of politics?

Go further...

Rural state, dairy products, famous for its cheese, badger = mascot/ emblem

GROUP 2: THE TRAILER

a. Wisconsin / Deerpark

b. **Job/ occupation** 2 political consultants running opposing campaigns for candidates to become Mayor of Deerpark

Relationship enemies / scathing remarks
“you’re fat”, “crushing the last piece of hope in your eyes”

c. Defined as a swing state

Type of people rural (cows, bars, in their work clothes...)

Vision given in the news

interview of many people at the same time
+ caption : the bastard children of Wisconsin

→ everyone is talking, nobody’s listening

A maelstrom of sounds/ a real mess/
cacophony / racket → negative vision
conveyed (bastard + noise / rude people)

d. **The consultants** “tons of press, lots of money” → alludes to the power / role of the media in elections / DC Elite (vs candidates close to the people)

The journalist “great and spirited discussion”:
highly ironical as she says so as the 2
politicians start arguing

Go further...

A swing state is one that doesn’t always vote for one party, it varies between Republican and Democrat. Parties spend more time campaigning in swing states because they think they have a better chance of gaining extra seats/points.

E. Food for thought

a. It suggests / implies that politics in the US is ruled by money and rivalry. It also underlines the role of the media in

politics and how they can make or destroy a campaign and thus help a candidate win.

b. It focuses on Wisconsin, a swing state, that’s why we are bound to understand that Wisconsin will have a key role in the presidential elections.

c. Because of the pandemic, the movie industry had to adapt and reinvent itself, that’s why they are offering more and more movies on demand so that people can stay at home, safely, and enjoy a movie. What’s more, this could be a good means to reach more people as you don’t have to go outside to enjoy a movie, it can be a last-minute decision! In fact, some people who are not used to going to the cinema can have access to the movie.

d. To a certain extent, watching a movie makes you see things differently. Indeed, you are sometimes led to see things from a different perspective, or even to discover things you didn’t know about. Furthermore, using humour to denounce some aspects of politics is a clever way to raise awareness. This is Jon Stewart’s aim.