

"Karl Rove -- The Architect" Teacher's Guide

April 2005

ABOUT THE FILM:

President George W. Bush called him "the architect" of his re-election victory and he has been the president's chief strategist from the beginning. But Karl Rove is much more than a political guru, he is the single most powerful policy advisor in the White House. FRONTLINE and *The Washington Post* join forces to trace the political history and modus operandi of the man who has been on the inside of every political and policy decision of the Bush administration, including the current battles on Social Security, taxes and tort reform. For Rove -- observers say -- enactment of the Bush agenda is a way to win the biggest prize of all: a permanent Republican majority.

A NOTE TO TEACHERS:

For classes in Social Studies, American Government, Current Events, Language Arts.
Grade level 9th-12th

The United States electorate was sharply divided in both the 2000 and 2004 elections of President George W. Bush. After his 2004 victory, however, President Bush announced his intention to use the "political capital" he gained to push for big policy changes, including Social Security reform, tort reform, tax reform and more. This teacher's guide invites students to consider both how political decisions and strategies develop and to evaluate the various means toward political ends.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

A list of questions for students to discuss before and immediately after viewing

FEATURED LESSON PLAN:

Social Security Reform: A Timely Political Issue

By informing themselves about and addressing this issue of national, local and personal importance, students will become "architects" of a political strategy. As they develop strategy, they will have to decide what information they will include and highlight and what information they will de-emphasize in order to persuade a particular target group.

Students will:

- Explore Social Security restructuring proposals
- Build a political strategy appropriate to the audience they are addressing
- Evaluate effectiveness and ethics in persuading others of their point of view

ADDITIONAL LESSON IDEAS:

Comparing Political Strategies: Machiavelli and Rousseau

Students will step back from current politics to learn about two political philosophers of the past. They will read about Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, completing the lesson by comparing the two thinkers, either through class debate or writing.

Letter to Karl Rove Evaluating His Strategy and Success

Students will use information from the documentary, additional research and their own discussions to evaluate Rove's goals and strategies, as shown in the film. By spotlighting the power of sentence structure, the goal of this exercise is to show students the potency of their own rhetoric.

Purchasing the Film

"Karl Rove: The Architect" can be purchased from **Shop PBS for Teachers**

[<http://teacher.shop.pbs.org/home/index.jsp>]. Also, teachers and students can watch the film streamed in its entirety on the **FRONTLINE** Web site

[<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/architect/>]

Credits

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Questions 1 through 3 are appropriate for discussing *before* students see the documentary.)

1. What do you know about Karl Rove?
2. What is Karl Rove's position in the government? How did he achieve his position?
3. What is the difference between *policy* and *political strategy*?
Note to teachers: "A **policy** is a plan of action for tackling political issues. It is often initiated by a political party in government and undergoes reforms and changes by interested actors (for example, opposition parties and lobby groups)." (Source: wikipedia.org)
A **strategy** is "a long-term plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal." (Source: wikipedia.org)
4. Based on what you learned in the documentary, what do you think is Karl Rove's area of expertise and experience?
5. What personal and professional qualities do you think are necessary for a *policymaker*? What personal and professional qualities do you think are necessary for a *political strategist*?
6. President Bush has given Karl Rove the new title of "White House deputy chief of staff in charge of coordinating domestic policy, economic policy, national security and homeland security"? What roles and/or powers does this title give Rove?
7. What information in the documentary most surprised you?
8. Which of Karl Rove's strengths does the documentary present? Who tells us about his strengths?
9. Which of Karl Rove's strategies were most successful in President Bush's election and re-election?
10. What problems do Karl Rove's strategies present? Who in the film discusses these problems?
11. Why do you think that the filmmakers felt that Karl Rove was important enough to have a documentary devoted to his life and work?
12. Did the documentary influence how you think decisions are made in the U.S. government? Explain.

FEATURED LESSON

Social Security Reform: A Timely Political Issue

By informing themselves about and addressing an issue of national, local and personal importance, students will become "architects" of a political strategy. As they develop strategy, they will have to decide what information they will include and highlight and what information they will de-emphasize in order to persuade a particular target group.

Lesson Objectives:

In this lesson, students will explore:

- Social Security restructuring proposals
- How "architects" of political strategy devise their plans
- How to be the "architect" of a political strategy plan for Social Security reform
- The ethical implications of creating political strategy

Materials Needed:

Internet Access

Discussion Questions

Student Handout: Essential Terms

Student Handout: Understanding Different Views of Social Security Reform

Student Handout: Devising Your Political Strategy

Time Needed:

- 10 minutes for students to look over the Discussion Questions and discuss the first three questions
- 60 minutes to watch the documentary
- 10-20 minutes for the Discussion Questions
- 60 minutes to consider and answer the questions on the student handout: "Understanding Different Views of Social Security Reform"
- 30-45 minutes (or more, depending on the project and time available) for groups to complete the "Devising Your Political Strategy" student handout
- 30-45 minutes for class discussion of political strategies students have devised
- 30 minutes for discussion of the ethical implications of their strategies

Procedure:

1. Discuss questions one, two and three from Discussion Questions. Make certain that students understand the difference between *making policy* and *developing political strategy*.
2. View the documentary.
3. Talk about the remaining Discussion Questions and review the "Essential Terms" handout with students.
4. Divide students into groups of three to four to work together on answering the questions on the "Understanding Different Views of Social Security Reform"

- handout. Tell them they need to know this information in order to become "architects" of a political strategy for social security reform.
5. Assign each group of three to four students to devise a political strategy for ONE of the target groups (Americans over age 50, Americans aged 25-49, African-Americans) on the "Devising Your Political Strategy" handout. Several student groups will work on each target group.
 6. Ask each of the student groups to make a short presentation to the whole class on the political strategy they have devised.
 7. Conduct a large group discussion based on their presentations about the ethical implications of the groups' strategies.
 8. *Optional Research Project:* Everyone acknowledges that the Social Security system needs some change and that the trust fund on which it depends will run out some time in the future. However, *when* it will run out and the best ideas for addressing the projected shortfall are the subjects of contentious debate. Interested students can begin research into the basic purpose and future of Social Security at <http://www.ssa.gov/pressoffice/basicfact.htm>

Method of Assessment:

Class discussion

Submission of handouts

STUDENT HANDOUT

Essential Terms

WHAT IS SOCIAL SECURITY?

The following pages on the Social Security Administration's Web site address:

Basic Facts About Social Security: <http://www.ssa.gov/pressoffice/basicfact.htm>

A Brief History of Social Security: <http://www.ssa.gov/history/hfaq.html>

TYPES OF RETIREMENT PLANS

Defined Benefit Plan: This employer-sponsored plan tells employees the exact benefit (usually a monthly amount) that they can expect to receive upon retiring. Investment risk and portfolio management are entirely under the control of the company. The amount that retiring employees receive is determined by factors such as how long they have worked and how much money they earned. **Both the amount contributed and the retirement benefit are fixed.**

Note: Social Security in its current form is a defined benefit plan. Workers pay a fixed percentage of payroll taxes and are told what their monthly social security benefit will be on retirement.

Defined Contribution Plan: Employers or individuals set aside a certain amount or percentage of money each year for the benefit of the employee or individual. There is no way to know how much the plan will ultimately give the person upon retiring. **The amount contributed is fixed, but the benefit is not.**

Note: Most proposals for changing Social Security are based on defined contribution plans.

You can read more about the **pros and cons of defined benefit and defined contribution plans** from :

The Department of Labor: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/retirement/typesofplans.htm>

About.com: http://retireplan.about.com/cs/retirement/a/aa_defined_a5.htm

PERSONAL VERSUS PRIVATE

What's the Difference Between a *Personal* Defined Contribution Plan and a *Private* Defined Contribution Plan?

Not much, it turns out, but boosters and critics of the plan think the choice of word is important. The following excerpt from the March 22, 2005 *New York Times* article, "It's 'Private' Vs. 'Personal' In Debate Over Bush Plan" highlights the importance of language in framing political strategy:

In the Social Security debate, one of the most ferocious struggles is over language, whether President Bush is proposing to create "personal" or "private" accounts in the program, whether he is really proposing the "privatization" of Social Security. Mr. Bush complained last week that " 'privatization' is a trick word," intended to "scare people." Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the Democratic leader, interrupted a news conference to correct a reporter who asked about "personal" accounts.

"It's 'privatization,' " Mr. Reid said, adding that "personal accounts" was "the Republican term."

STUDENT HANDOUT

Understanding Different Views of Social Security Reform: Background

Republicans and Democrats agree that there will be a problem with Social Security in the future, but they have different ideas about when the problem will occur and how large it is. Using the information you find in the Web sites below, complete the questions about President Bush's proposal to change Social Security and some of the counter-arguments.

PRESIDENT BUSH'S SOCIAL SECURITY PROPOSAL

www.strengtheningsocialsecurity.gov is a Web site that announces and promotes President Bush's proposal that will allow workers to **divert** some of their **Social Security payroll taxes** from Social Security into private or personal accounts.

Working either alone or with people in your group, read through each of these sections on the "Strengthening Social Security" Web site.

Social Security: Need for Action:

http://www.strengtheningsocialsecurity.gov/need_for_action.shtml

Strengthening Social Security Permanently:

<http://www.strengtheningsocialsecurity.gov/permanently.shtml>

Voluntary Personal Accounts:

http://www.strengtheningsocialsecurity.gov/voluntary_personal_accts.shtml

African-Americans and Social Security:

<http://www.ssa.gov/pressoffice/factsheets/africanamer.htm>

ALTERNATIVES TO PRESIDENT BUSH'S PROPOSAL

Several groups and individuals provide arguments against and alternatives to President Bush's proposal. Here are some examples among many:

The **AARP** is an organization that questions the need for the President Bush's proposal. This Web page articulates the AARP's criticism of the plan and describes its vision for retirement planning:

http://www.aarp.org/socialsecurity-about/Articles/frequently_asked_questions_about_social_security.html#position

Articles on the **Democratic Party** Web site characterize Bush's plan as:

A "gamble": <http://www.democrats.org/news/200503240003.html>

Bad for women: <http://www.democrats.org/wvc/weekinreview/200503010006.html>

Other Web sites characterize Bush's plan as **detrimental to African Americans**

[http://www.ncpssm.org/news/archive/vp_africanamericans/]

[<http://www.democrats.org/news/200503150001.html>]

Easy Fix For Social Security

This *San Francisco Chronicle* article explains how removing a cap on taxable earnings could eliminate the Social Security deficit and make the system equitable by ensuring that regardless of earnings, the same percentage of each person's income would be paid into the Social Security system:

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/03/25/BUGGRBUARF1.DTL>

STUDENT HANDOUT
Understanding Different Views of Social Security Reform: Questions

What does President Bush see as the problem for Social Security?

How does his plan propose to address the problem with the creation of private/personal accounts?

What, according to the AARP Web site, are the four pillars of retirement?

What are the AARP's misgivings about diverting some of individuals' Social Security to personal/private accounts?

What, according to the two Web sites noted, is the Democratic Party's view of President Bush's plan?

What, according to the Web sites noted, is the down side of President Bush's plan for African Americans in particular as opposed to for *all* Americans?

Explain the effects of the proposal to remove the \$90,000 cap on taxable earnings:
For the Social Security deficit

For wealthier Americans

STUDENT HANDOUT

Devising Your Political Strategy

Note to Students: You will be creating a persuasive strategy aimed at a particular target group (see below) to either support or oppose President Bush's Social Security proposal. As a political *strategist*, your goal is to convince the people in your target group that they should favor the *policy-maker's* proposal for change. As you develop your strategy, be sure to consider ethics. [See definitions below from dictionary.reference.com]

- A set of principles of right conduct
- A theory or a system of moral values: "An ethic of service is at war with a craving for gain" (Gregg Easterbrook)
- Study of the general nature of morals and of the specific moral choices to be made by a person; moral philosophy
- The rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession: *medical ethics*

Think about the following ethical considerations as you launch your political strategy campaign to inform and convince your target audience:

- Should you disclose all information to all segments of society, even if constituencies have different needs and priorities?
- Is omitting information acceptable, as long as you do not lie outright?
- Is an explicit appeal to different ethnic groups, religions, or interest groups acceptable even if the appeal might divide the groups from each other?
- Should you try, at all costs, to convince people of your proposal's validity? In other words, do the ends justify the means?

Instructions:

1. Using the information you learned as you explored the Web sites and completed the handout "Understanding Different Views of Social Security Reform," create a presentation for the group you have been assigned. Remember, you are a political *strategist* whose goal is to convince your target group that your proposal is good for them. You are *not* making policy.
2. Working with your group, create a cartoon, write a radio advertisement, make a video, write a political speech, or even come up with another idea -- as long as you are compellingly persuasive. Make your presentation to your class.
3. As your classmates are doing their presentations, take notes below, writing down which facts they include and whether or not you think they are convincing.
4. After the presentations are over, write a paragraph answering the "Ethical Considerations" questions below the chart.

The Intended Audience	The Strategy and the Supporting Facts
Americans age 50 and older	
Americans aged 25-49	
African-Americans	

Ethical Considerations:

Did any group omit information that you consider crucial?

Did the omission distort what you perceive as the accuracy of the presentation?

Is the omission ethical or not ethical?

ADDITIONAL LESSON IDEAS:

Comparing Political Strategies: Machiavelli and Rousseau

Students will step back from current politics to learn something about political philosophers of the past. They will read about Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, completing the lesson by individually writing comparisons or by setting up a class debate between proponents of Machiavelli and of Rousseau.

- Students can begin the Machiavelli search at:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prince
- Students can begin the Rousseau search at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Jacques_Rousseau#The_Social_Contract

Letter to Karl Rove or Editorial Evaluating His Strategy and Success

Students will use information from the documentary and from their discussions to evaluate the Rove goals and strategies shown in the film. By spotlighting the power of sentence structure, the goal of this exercise is to show students the potency of their own rhetoric.

Procedure:

- 1) Present students with the following independent clauses:
"Karl Rove succeeds."
"People question Karl Rove's methods."
- 2) Ask them to combine the two independent clauses into one sentence, making ONE of the clauses dependent or subordinate.
- 3) Point out the difference between:
A. "Although people question his methods, Karl Rove succeeds."
B. "Although Karl Rove succeeds, people question his methods."
- 4) Make sure that students recognize that the thought in the *independent* clause almost always appears more important than the thought in the *dependent* clause. So, example A above emphasizes the fact that Rove succeeds, while example B emphasizes those who question his methods.
- 5) Encourage students to use the power that the subordinate clause gives them as they write their letter or editorial.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Architect

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/architect/>

This companion Web site to the FRONTLINE film includes background on Karl Rove's life and career, a closer look at Rove's role in the Republican realignment in Texas and how it became the template for what he later would pull off at the national level, more on the tension between conservative and moderate Republicans over the party's future, and extended interviews with politicians, strategists and journalists.

Karl Rove - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Rove

This article provides background about Karl Rove and describes his political strategies over the past 30 years. The site includes many links.

New Yorker Profile: Karl Rove by Nicholas Lemann

http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/030512fa_fact3

This extensive profile of Karl Rove appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine in May 2003. The article describes Rove's rise from the College Republicans group through his career in political consulting.