Mass Media and Public Opinion

Introducing the Chapter

In this chapter, students will learn about how American public opinion is formed, how it is measured, and the influence that the mass media has on public opinion.

Make It Relevant

You Can Make a Difference

Have the class develop, produce, and distribute a newsletter about a current issue of national importance. The newsletter should aspire to the standards of good journalism—being informative and objective, and presenting all sides of the issue. Assign groups specific tasks, such as researching, editing, designing, and producing the newsletter. Have the class distribute copies of their newsletter at appropriate community locations and events.

Constitutional Principles

Emphasize the following basic principles as students read Chapter 8. Have the class respond to the questions, and then ask volunteers to explain why the sharing of public opinion is a vital part of a democracy.

- Popular Sovereignty Why is public opinion important to the National Government and those who run it?
- Limited Government How does the mass media serve as a check on the National Government?
- Judicial Review Why is it critical that the court system review government policies on mass media and the dissemination of public opinion?

Close Up Corner

The following resources are available only from the Close Up Foundation to support the concepts discussed in Chapter 8 “Mass Media and Public Opinion”:

- Perspectives: Readings on Contemporary American Government
- Words of Ages: Witnessing U.S. History Through Literature
- Profiles of Freedom: A Living Bill of Rights

Close Up Online

To keep up-to-date on Close Up news and activities, visit Close Up Online at www.closeup.org

Close Up Foundation
44 Canal Center Plaza
Alexandria, VA 22314-1592
800-765-3131
To Omit the Chapter

If you wish to skip Chapter 8, ask students to read the Chapter in Brief and assign the Guide to the Essentials before continuing to another chapter. You may also want to assign the Chapter 8 Test in the Chapter Test booklet. Then specific portions of Chapter 8 may be assigned to students needing reinforcement of key terms and concepts.

To Preview the Chapter

To introduce students to key terms and concepts in each section, have them read the Chapter in Brief. You may also assign the Reading Strategy activities on pp. 209, 216, and 224 of this book.

To Review the Chapter

When students have completed Chapter 8, you might want to assign the Guide to the Essentials or the Guided Reading and Review worksheets on pp. 26, 28, and 30 of the Unit 2 booklet.

To Cover the Chapter Quickly

To cover the material in Chapter 8 quickly, use the following activity. Focus Ask: In the months before a presidential election, how do you know which candidate is leading? Discuss the function of opinion polls with the class, including how they might influence a candidate’s actions. Then discuss the functions of the mass media in providing information to the public and carrying politicians’ messages. Instruct Ask: In the months before a presidential election, how do you know which candidate is leading? Discuss the function of opinion polls with the class, including how they might influence a candidate’s actions. Then discuss the functions of the mass media in providing information to the public and carrying politicians’ messages. Close/Reteach Have students suggest which medium might be seen as the most important tool for political candidates, and which might be the most important for informing the public about politics. Ask students to share their opinions with the class.

SECTION 1
The Formation of Public Opinion (pp. 208–213)

★ Public opinion refers to the attitudes of a significant number of people on matters of government and politics.
★ Family and education are two of the most important factors in shaping public opinion.
★ Additional factors that shape public opinion include peer groups, opinion leaders, historic events, and mass media.

SECTION 2
Measuring Public Opinion (pp. 215–221)

★ Public opinion can be determined to some extent through elections, interest groups, the media, and personal contacts.
★ The best way to measure public opinion is through opinion polls.
★ The complex process of scientific polling results in the most reliable poll data.
★ Although it is important to measure public opinion, public opinion is only one of many factors that shape public policy.

SECTION 3
The Mass Media (pp. 223–230)

★ The American public gets information on public issues through several forms of mass media, especially through television.
★ The media influence American politics by helping to set the public agenda and by playing a central role in electoral politics.
★ The influence of the media is limited, in part because many people use mass media as sources of entertainment rather than information.

Chapter 8 in Brief

You Can Make a Difference

ONE TEENAGER WHO has already made a place for herself in the media world is Jessica Johnson. While still in high school, she began to host a weekly radio show on station WFKX in Jackson, Tennessee. The show gave local young people a chance to talk about issues and to highlight community activists. Two years later, Jessica became one of the “Point of View Journalists” (POV-J), a network of young writers working as reporters for the new Oxygen cable network and Web site.

Keep It Current

Internet Update

Use the Prentice Hall School Web site and the Keep It Current CD-ROM to find quick data updates. Keep It Current CD-ROM includes government-related projects by unit. Students complete each project using current information that they obtain by linking to the Prentice Hall School Web site from the CD-ROM.

Pressed for Time?

To Omit the Chapter

If you wish to skip Chapter 8, ask students to read the Chapter in Brief and assign the Guide to the Essentials before continuing to another chapter. You may also want to assign the Chapter 8 Test in the Chapter Test booklet. Then specific portions of Chapter 8 may be assigned to students needing reinforcement of key terms and concepts.

To Preview the Chapter

To introduce students to key terms and concepts in each section, have them read the Chapter in Brief. You may also assign the Reading Strategy activities on pp. 209, 216, and 224 of this book.

To Review the Chapter

When students have completed Chapter 8, you might want to assign the Guide to the Essentials or the Guided Reading and Review worksheets on pp. 26, 28, and 30 of the Unit 2 booklet.

To Cover the Chapter Quickly

To cover the material in Chapter 8 quickly, use the following activity. Focus Ask: In the months before a presidential election, how do you know which candidate is leading? Discuss the function of opinion polls with the class, including how they might influence a candidate’s actions. Then discuss the functions of the mass media in providing information to the public and carrying politicians’ messages. Instruct Ask: In the months before a presidential election, how do you know which candidate is leading? Discuss the function of opinion polls with the class, including how they might influence a candidate’s actions. Then discuss the functions of the mass media in providing information to the public and carrying politicians’ messages. Close/Reteach Have students suggest which medium might be seen as the most important tool for political candidates, and which might be the most important for informing the public about politics. Ask students to share their opinions with the class.