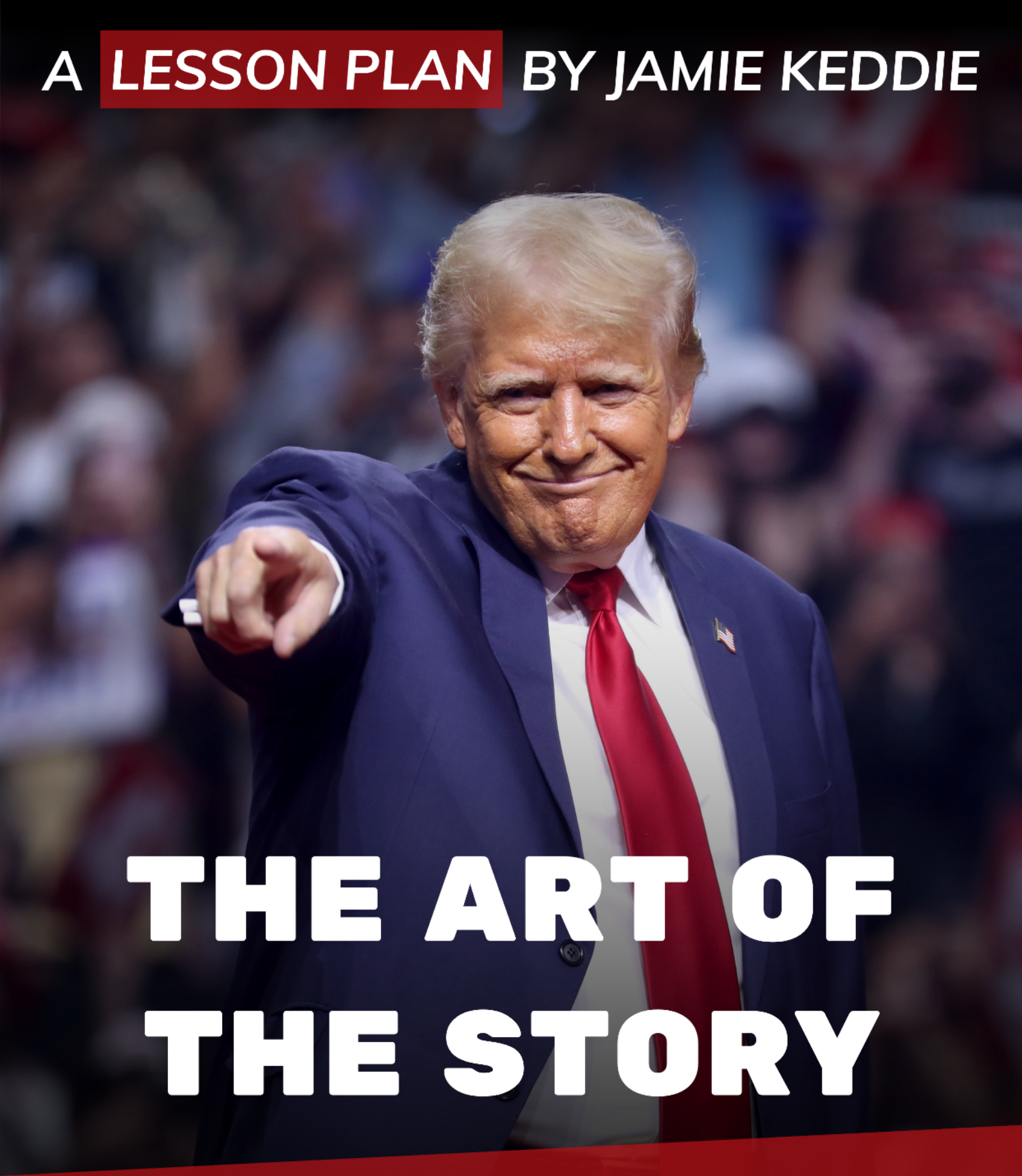
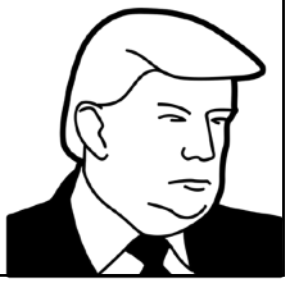
A LESSON PLAN BY JAMIE KEDDIE



THE ART OF THE STORY

How Donald Trump won the 2024 US election

THE ART OF THE STORY



Exploring the story that Donald Trump crafted to win the 2024 US presidential election

About this activity

.⚠️ **WARNING**: This lesson plan explores the narrative strategies used in Donald Trump's 2024 presidential campaign to identify key storytelling techniques. While the aim is to maintain neutrality, it is important to note that Donald Trump is a highly divisive figure both in the USA and globally. Please approach this material with sensitivity.

▶ **Language level**: B2 and above
▶ **Age of learner**: Upper primary; secondary; adults
▶ **Duration of activity**: 60 minutes
▶ **Tasks**: Video-based discussion
▶ **Topics**: Story structure; politics
▶ **Language and skills**: Developing visual literacy and critical thinking

For this activity, you will need the following:

- **Two videos** which are available on YouTube (see below)
- **A Canva slideshow** which contains all questions, media and more

Note: To access all Resources, scan or click on the QR code

The videos

This lesson plan makes use of two videos: the first is a trailer for the 2024 action thriller film *The Beekeeper*. The second is a 2024 campaign video for Donald J. Trump's U.S. presidential election, titled *Make America Great Again*. In the activity, students compare the two videos and identify the storytelling techniques they have in common.

Part one: What is a story?

1. Write the following quotation on the board or screen and ask students to speculate on the missing word or phrase:

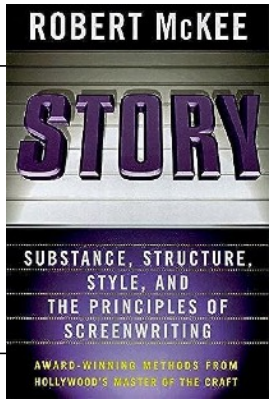
"_____ is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today."

Robert McKee

2. Listen to students' ideas (e.g. art, Instagram, X/Twitter, podcasting, fake news) and discuss their suggestions. Then, reveal the answer.

"**Storytelling** is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today."

This quotation is from Robert McKee, a renowned authority on screenwriting and narrative theory. It is taken from his influential book, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting.*



3. Ask students if they agree with the quotation, then brainstorm examples of ideas that have been introduced to the world through storytelling. Students might consider ideas from religion, mythology, politics, ideologies, social movements, advertising, film and literature.

4. What is a story anyway? Ask students this question, put them into groups and ask them to work together to write a definition. Then listen to their ideas.

Some possible ideas:

- Stories have characters, a setting, and a plot.
- A story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Things happen in a story – incidents and events.
- Stories involve change.
- Stories are descriptions of human experiences.
- A story has a moral or a lesson.
- A story is a journey with surprises along the way.
- A story has conflict or a problem that gets solved.
- Stories are meant to entertain or inform.
- Stories can teach us about the world or people.

5. Give students the following working definition which is attributed to Second City – the famous improvisational theatre company in Chicago – and ask them what they think.

> The Second City
>
> A story is a character in pursuit of a goal in the face of some challenge or obstacle.

Tip

For lower levels, you can reword this as: "A story is about a character trying to reach a goal while facing a problem or challenge."

6. In their groups, ask students to make a list of famous stories from film, theatre, literature or television that fit this definition. In each case, ask them to consider the character, their goal and the problem in their way.

Tip

Give students an example to get the ball rolling. For example:

In Romeo and Juliet, a young man and a young woman are in love. Their goal is to be together. But the problem is they come from rival families and their love is forbidden.

Alternatively, you can turn this into a game. Provide students with a character, goal, and challenge, and ask them to guess the story before inviting them to create their own examples.

Please note that this lesson plan has an accompanying Canva slideshow which will be useful for your teaching. See page two for information.

Part two: The videos

This part of the activity is a discussion in which students watch two videos and explore:

- The stories they tell in terms of the characters, goals and obstacles.
- Similarities between the two stories.
- Similar techniques the videos use to tell the stories.

Please note that this discussion may challenge students to think about things they have never considered before. Also, in order to express their ideas clearly, students may require specialist language – English words or phrases they don't know.

For this reason, you might want to allow students to express ideas in their first language and later look for English equivalents during the feedback stages.

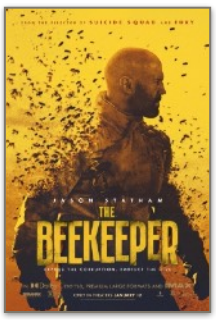
1. Tell students you are going to show them a trailer for an action film. Ask them to watch carefully and answer the following questions in as much detail as possible:

- Who is the character?
- What is his goal, and why does he want to achieve it?
- What is the obstacle in his way?
- Is this your sort of film? Why / why not?

⚠️ **WARNING:** The trailer includes a slightly gory scene where one of the bad guys is killed. Alert students to this in case they want to look away between 01:15 and 01:30.

2. Ask students to share their answers with each other and then with the rest of the class. Offer feedback as necessary (see answers below).

Who is the character?



- A typical tough guy played by Jason Statham.
- He was a special agent, known as a "beekeeper" but is now retired.
- He is now living a quiet life as an actual beekeeper.

What is his goal, and why does he want to achieve it?

- A friend of his was the victim of an internet scam. She lost all of her money and committed suicide because of it.
- Now, the Beekeeper wants to get revenge on the scammers, who are part of an organised criminal group.

What is the obstacle in his way?

- The criminal group is strong, powerful, and dangerous.
- The group knows about the Beekeeper's intentions and plans to kill him first.

3. Tell students you are going to show them a second video, related to a story they are probably familiar with. Again, ask them to watch carefully and answer the following questions in as much detail as possible:

- Who is the character and how is he portrayed?
- What are his goals?
- What obstacles does he face?

4. Ask students to share their answers with each other and then with the rest of the class. Offer feedback as necessary (see answers below).

Who is the character?

- Donald Trump, who was running for his second US presidency when the video was made.
- In the video, he is portrayed as strong, successful, courageous and determined. He is also portrayed as a man of integrity (i.e. honest and honourable).

What are his goals?

The video specifically mentions the following:

- To make America great again.
- To defend the freedom of the people.
- To deliver justice.
- To obliterate the deep state.

What obstacles does he face?

The video mentions the following:

- The FBI and the Department of Justice who fear him and want to take away his freedom – an abuse of their power according to the video.
- Those who seek to destroy America and silence Trump and the people.

5. Tell students you are going to play both videos again. This time they should watch carefully and make notes about the following:

- **Story similarities**: Can you identify any similarities between the two stories the videos tell?
- **Similar techniques**: Can you identify any similar techniques the videos use to tell their stories?

6. After playing both videos again, ask students to share their answers with each other and then with the rest of the class. Offer feedback as necessary (see answers on next page).

Story similarities

- **Good vs. Evil:** Both videos tell stories of a philosophical fight of right against wrong – good against evil.
- **Heroic Protagonists:** Both stories involve characters who are portrayed as strong, heroic men on a quest.
- **Underdog Conflict:** Both stories involve underdogs going against large, powerful groups. In the *Beekeeper* trailer, there are two onscreen text moments – one that says “Expose the corruption” and another that says “Fight the system.”

Similar techniques

- **Cinematic style**: Both videos look like films. You would expect this for a film trailer, but not so much for a political campaign video. They use sound, music, dramatic images, onscreen text and editing techniques to grab the audience's attention and create a strong emotional response.
- **Anticipation and suspense**: Both videos start with a series of intense shots, separated by fades to black, to build anticipation and suspense.
- **Changing Pace**: The pace of each video changes at different times. Some parts have short shots and fast music, making the pace feel quick and energetic. Other parts have long shots and slower music, making the pace feel slower
- **Camera shots**: Low angles make the heroes look larger than life. (It is interesting to note that while the film trailer makes the Beekeeper look invincible throughout, there are some shots in the campaign video which Trump appear more alone and vulnerable.)

Part three: Conclusion

End with the following questions:

- Why do you think Donald Trump’s 2024 campaign story appealed to so many voters?
- How did it compare with the story that Kamala Harris told during her election campaign?
- What can we learn from this?

For a discussion, please watch the video at the corresponding Resources page (see page two).