

CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

It's Party Time!



Objective:

Students will use their knowledge of political parties and descriptive terms to analyze the actions of current political leaders.

Estimated class time: 1 - 2 hours

- Have students read the “It’s Party Time!” handout.
- Ask students to use the Internet and find information about the Republican and Democratic parties to fill in the handout. Then have them use the Internet or other sources to research one other political party of their choice. Have the students use the chart on the handout to describe that party’s history and values.
- Discuss students’ findings for the major parties. What are the similarities and differences in what they believe is important? If possible, invite local representatives of the two parties to class to explain the views of their party.
- Discuss the other parties students chose to research. How many of these had they heard of before? How many are represented locally?
- For homework, ask students to read the government section of a newspaper and find an article about a Democrat or a Republican. Students should bring the article to class and be prepared to give an example of an action the person in the article took, or comments the person made that demonstrates his/her political affiliation.



It's Party Time!

In the presidential election of 2000 over 140 people announced their candidacy for President of the United States of America. This group of candidates represented at least 23 different political parties, most from the popular and powerful political parties, Republican and Democratic. The people in these organizations share in the effort to get laws passed, to support candidates that support their issues, and to organize elections at the local level where we vote.

To learn about the differences between the two major parties, research them using the web site addresses provided in the chart below. List a brief history and the important values or principles of the Republicans and the Democrats in the appropriate columns. In the third column, research one other political party and write there about its history and values.

The Republican Party	The Democratic Party	The _____ Party
<p>Republican Party web site http://www.rnc.org/</p>	<p>Democratic Party web site http://www.democrats.org/hq/history/index.html</p>	<p>Research other political parties at this web site: http://www.vote-smart.org/organizations/POLITICAL_PARTIES/</p>

CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

Campaign Brochure



Objective:

Each student will design a campaign brochure targeted at young adult voters for one candidate in an upcoming election.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- Have students learn about the candidates running for public office in their community. Collect information from campaign headquarters, web sites, newspaper articles, etc.
- Have each student choose one of the candidates. The next task is to collect a variety of information about the candidate. Possibilities include:
 - photos of the candidate and his/her family
 - background information on the candidate (where born, current address, education, job experience)
 - relevant experience related to the position the candidate is running for (community organizing, board membership, other elected office, how long in office, etc.)
 - candidate's positions on a variety of issues (voting records)
- Students can collect the information on their candidates through any of the following:
 - newspaper articles
 - existing campaign literature
 - a candidate's web site
 - interviews with campaign workers and/or the candidate
 - e-mail or letter to the candidate
- After the appropriate information is gathered, have students design campaign brochures for their chosen candidate, targeted at voters from the ages of 18-25. Consider what issues might be of most interest to young adult voters. Examine brochures from current or past elections to determine effective marketing elements. To maintain nonpartisanship, it may be a good idea to include information on brochures stating that Kids Voting USA students also have completed a brochure for the opponent.



Microsoft Word has a "brochure" format under "publications" that would be especially suitable for students' use.

- Check on the school's guidelines for posting the brochures. They could be put up in the classroom, a school hallway, or (with candidates' permission) in a public space. Students could also send their brochures to the candidate and invite the candidate to use it during his/her campaign. Another option would be for students to create a web site with their brochures.



CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

Campaign Issue



Objective:

Each student will write a paper describing several candidates' positions on a selected campaign issue.

Estimated class time: 2 hours

- Have students read the newspapers and watch local television news to determine the issues of central concern in an upcoming local election. They could also contact campaign offices to get candidates' views on which issues are of greatest concern.
- Each student should choose one issue to address. This should be an issue the student cares about and/or one that is relevant for youth generally. The next task is to collect information on this issue from a variety of sources (books, newspapers, journals, web sites). Is this issue of concern in other communities in the U.S.? What is the history of this issue? Students could work individually, in pair, or in small groups on researching an issue.
- Next, have the students research candidates' positions on the issue. Each student can focus on just the candidates running for one elected position. They can find out the candidates' positions from news articles, web sites, campaign literature, contacting the candidate's campaign office, or interviewing the candidate in person or via e-mail.
- Students should then develop their own position on the issue under study. Which candidate's views are most aligned with their own?
- Have students write a paper summarizing their research. Each student should include the following:
 - a) an overview of the issue locally, nationally and historically
 - b) a summary of several candidates' views on this issue
 - c) the student's position on the issue with a rationale for why s/he has chosen this perspective
 - d) actions the student could take to influence candidates' views on this issue

CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE



Advocacy

Letter to the Editor

Objective:

Students will write letters to the editor of a local newspaper about the candidates of their choice.

Estimated class time: 2 hours

- Students will need to learn about the candidates running for local public office and decide which candidate they wish to support. (See “Campaign Brochure” activity on p. 36 for specific suggestions about learning about the candidates.)
- Have students write individual letters in support of their chosen candidate to send to a local newspaper. In addition to the community’s daily paper(s), consider other publication outlets such as the high school paper, local college paper, alternative newspapers, and community organization newsletters, as well as national news magazines and news shows (such as National Public Radio’s Morning Edition). Students may have greater odds of getting their letters published in smaller publications. Have several students send their letters to the same newspaper. It is likely that at least one will be chosen for publication.
- Encourage students to consider the following guidelines in developing their letters:
 1. Be direct - The letter should be short and focus on one or two main points (such as asking for others to support the candidate or highlighting the candidate’s position on a key issue).
 2. Be timely - The chances of publication will increase if students refer to a recent article, editorial or letter in the newspaper they are sending their letters to. Be sure to reference the title, author, and date of any article referenced.
 3. Check the format - Students should examine other letters to the editor from the newspaper and develop their letters in a similar style in terms of length, number of paragraphs, etc.
 4. Be professional - Have students address the letter to the editor by his/her name. Students should type their letters, proofread them before mailing, and make sure they have included contact information (student’s name, address, phone number and e-mail).
- In addition to the student proofreading his/her letter, have students review a peer’s letter and make sure that you, as the teacher, read all letters before they are mailed.



Many excellent ideas on advocacy letter writing can be found in Just add consciousness: A guide to social activism, published by Oxfam America and Campus Outreach Opportunity League, 2000. This publication is available on the web at the following address: <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/>





CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE



**Direct,
Advocacy**

Campaign Volunteer

Objective:

Students volunteer their time working in the campaign office of a candidate of their choice.

Estimated class time: 1 - 2 hours



This activity might be most suitable for an after school club or as an extra credit option for a social studies class. It is important that students have full choice over which candidate they work for and that the teacher or school does not promote one candidate or one political party over another.

- After researching the different candidates and deciding on who students want to support, have them contact the different campaign offices to find out what hours and opportunities there are for high school volunteers.
- Here are some of the possible activities a student might help a campaign with:
 - distributing campaign flyers
 - putting up posters
 - register voters
 - updating campaign records on the computer
 - writing press releases or speeches
 - researching an election issue
 - researching opponent's views on an election issue
 - handing out buttons or bumper stickers
 - answering phones
 - opening or sending campaign mail
 - designing or improving the candidate's web page
- Students can also consider their strengths and talents and propose additional activities that would contribute to the candidate's campaign. For example, a student with photography skills might take photos at a public rally or a student with computer skills could help create a campaign web site.
- If students are engaging in volunteer work for extra class credit, make sure to have them keep track of the hours they spend and have someone on the campaign staff sign off on a letter or timesheet developed by the teacher.



- Have students who volunteered time working on a campaign reflect in writing on the campaign process. Are volunteers an important part of this effort? Why? Why do people volunteer for campaign work? What kinds of "rewards" do they receive? How might campaigns work if there were few or no volunteers?

CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE



Advocacy

Election Newsletter

Objective:

Students develop, publish, and distribute a print or web site newsletter that includes information about each candidate running for office and their positions on key issues.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Have students collect information about the candidates running for office in the upcoming election. (See “Campaign Brochure” activity on p. 36 for specific information about collecting this information.)
- Have students use a desktop publishing program to create a professional newsletter on the candidates, their qualifications, and their positions on key issues. Candidates could be invited to contribute a brief statement for the publication as well.
- Students could work on the newsletter contents in small groups according to each candidate or by task (collecting information, writing a draft, proofreading, overseeing the printing, distributing, etc.).
- Place the following in a prominent spot in the newsletter:
 “This newsletter was written by students from _____ High School. If any of the information in this publication was useful to you as you decided who to vote for, please let us know. You can send your feedback to us at (include an e-mail address or the school address with a contact name).”
- After the newsletter information has been assembled, have students contact several copy businesses in the community to see who will give them the best rates on getting the newsletter printed. Another option is to create the newsletter on a web site. Students could also produce the newsletter in Spanish.



Students could also sell ads to local businesses for the newsletter. The funds generated could help offset the publishing costs or contribute to funding the “Candidate’s Night” activity on p. 42.

- Ask students to brainstorm the best locations for newsletter distribution. Who do they most want the information to reach? Would there likely be different types of people who would pick up the newsletter from a laundromat, a grocery store, or the public library? Consider sending the newsletter home with elementary and middle school students as part of their Kids Voting USA activities.



- A few weeks after the election, discuss as a class: Did the newsletter make a difference? What types of feedback were received from voters in the community?



CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE



In the Spotlight

Objective:

Students plan and participate in a presentation for public access or local television highlighting candidates for public office.

Advocacy

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Have several students contact local TV stations to find out what the options are in your community for creating and airing a short television presentation. Does the community have a public access television station? Would local TV stations be open to airing a student-made video? Would they come to the high school to film a debate between two or three candidates?



If the school or district has a news channel, this is another viable option. Work with the school's video/TV production crew or class to plan and carry out this project.

- Answers to the questions above will help determine the project students undertake. Assuming that a local TV station will come out to the high school to film an exchange between students and two candidates for an elected position, the following ideas should prove useful.



- Brainstorm options for the format of this event. Will students interview the candidates separately or together about their positions on key issues? Will students moderate a debate between the candidates? Will students listen to brief campaign speeches and then ask questions of each candidate? These are just a few of many possibilities; discuss the pros and cons of each of these formats in terms of candidates' interest in participating and the potential impact on voters watching the program.
- After the class votes on the format for the presentation, have several students contact the candidates and the TV station to make sure that all are agreeable and interested in participating in this event at a specified time and day. Send follow up letters confirming the details to both candidates and the TV station.
- Have students prepare for the event through careful planning using a storyboard format. Will the classroom be a suitable location or should students reserve the auditorium? If students will be asking questions of the candidates, prepare several questions in advance.



If the class is interested, students can publicize the time and date the TV show will be aired. They could put up posters in the school and include the information in the school newspaper and a parent newsletter.

CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE



Candidates' Night

Objective:

Advocacy

Students organize a Candidates' Night at the high school.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Begin planning the Candidates' Night several months in advance of the event. For a November election planning should begin soon after school starts in the fall. Many of the prior activities on pp. 25 - 29 will be useful preparation for this event. For example, students could create a display of their campaign brochures or they could distribute copies of their election newsletter.



Variations of this activity include having students volunteer at an established candidates' night or co-sponsoring the event with the League of Women Voters. Another option would be to design the candidates' night around issues of concern to youth.

- Have students contact all of the local candidates individually to see if they can attend the event. A successful Candidates' Night should have most of the local candidates in attendance. It is also possible that some state-level candidates would be willing to come. Make sure that candidates know that you will be inviting parents, neighbors and other adult community members to attend the event; this will likely increase their interest in participating.
- A student planning committee (or one class) should develop a general plan for the event. Will candidates take turns speaking from a podium in the auditorium or will they be assigned to different classrooms at varied times for those attending to visit as they choose? The planning committee can decide which of the following work groups are needed for the event:
 - publicity - get the word out to community members about the event. This could be a large committee to handle designing flyers, posters, news articles, public service announcements and so forth as well as distributing flyers or putting up posters around the community.
 - candidates' liaison - keep in touch with each candidate to ensure their participation, obtain campaign literature for the information table and fulfill any requests they may have for the event.
 - facilities - make sure there are microphones, chairs, etc. in the appropriate locations.
 - information tables - collect written information and set up staffing for a table to distribute campaign literature for all the candidates (include those who could not attend in person as well).



- voter registration – gather the appropriate forms and information and set up staffing for a table to register voters.
 - program – design and print a program to be handed out to those who attend as they enter the school. Include a map of the school if candidates are going to be located in different classrooms.
 - refreshments – provide simple refreshments (e.g. cookies and cider) for those in attendance.
 - follow-up – write thank you letters to the candidates after the Candidates’ Night
- Consider inviting parents and other community partners to assist with this event through one or more of the work groups.

- At the Candidates’ Night, students should make sure that all tables are staffed, that some students are assigned to be greeters/program distributors, and that each candidate has a student assistant to help with any last minute needs.



- Follow-up activities could include writing news articles about the event for the school newspaper or local papers. Also, students could develop and distribute a short evaluation form for those in attendance to complete before they leave the Candidates’ Night. (Provide examples or instructions for students on how to design an effective evaluation.) This feedback should be helpful in planning similar events in the future.