



Elections Resources from PBS

Elementary Lesson Plans

The Campaign Trail

The Democracy Project: All Aboard

<http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/educators/allaboard.html>

Brainstorm ways to raise support for members of a political party and their platform and create slogans, songs and speeches. Map campaign stops on a “whistle stop” tour, estimate arrival and departure times and distance between stops, and then validate the estimations.

Political Cartoons

Big Apple History: Smart Art

http://pbskids.org/bigapplehistory/parentsteachers/business_lesson4.html

Examine and practice the art of political cartoon-making by focusing on how and why cartoons are so effective in making a political point. Students explore the role of political cartoons in New York City in the 1870s and today.

Political Parties

The Democracy Project: Donkeys, Elephants, and Voters Oh My!

<http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/educators/donkeys.html>

Learn about politics from “grassroots” to a national convention through the creation of a new political party and the development of the convention’s national platform.

The President/Congress

Arthur: If I Were President

http://pbskids.org/arthur/parentsteachers/activities/acts/if_president.html?cat=creative

Make a class book about what your students’ priorities and actions would be if they were president.

The Democracy Project: Budget Making

<http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/educators/budget.html>

Introduce students to budgets, expenses and savings; learn about government services and basic expenses; and create pie charts representing government spending priorities.

The Democracy Project: Dear Presidential Diary

<http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/educators/presdiary.html>

Develop five first-person diary entries exploring a typical day in the life of the President as well as the duties and privileges of the presidency.

The Democracy Project: Graphically Speaking

<http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/educators/graphically.html>

Explore the relationship between congressional representation and state population by graphing current statistics and taking a historical look at the Constitution.

The Democracy Project: Painting Presidential Portraits

<http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/educators/presportraits.html>

Research historical information about U.S. presidents, redesign U.S. paper currency to recognize six U.S. presidents and describe their significant accomplishments, and take a poll to see which past president is most popular.

The Democracy Project: The Perfect President

<http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/educators/perfectpresident.html>

Identify the legal requirements, previous experiences, and personality traits that equip someone to be a successful president. Write a job description and newspaper article to advertise the job. Evaluate how selected past presidents measure up to the criteria generated by students.

Voting

The Democracy Project: To Vote or Not to Vote

<http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/educators/tovote.html>

Examine the history of voting rights in America, explore the current-day problem of low voter turnout, and create community surveys to pinpoint causes of low voter turnout and propose solutions to increase vote participation.

The Democracy Project: Why Vote?

<http://www.pbs.org/democracy/kids/educators/whyvote.html>

Learn about the important public services that government provides, and by extension, the importance of voting in local, state and federal elections. Create a public awareness campaign to encourage adults in your community to vote.

Secondary Lesson Plans

Campaign Finance

By the People: Campaign Finance Simulation

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan4.html

Role play politicians and special interest groups in a simulation of how the two groups interact with one another. Analyze the decision-making relationships between direct democracy, interest, and the influence of money in modern American politics.

NOW: Campaign Finance Reform

<http://www.pbs.org/now/classroom/campaignfinance.html>

Examine finances used in political campaigns, and review internal documents to determine if wealthy contributors “buy” government influence. Assess the pros and cons of campaign finance reform, and devise realistic plans for achieving reform.

The Campaign Trail

NewsHour Extra: A Race to Watch: Campaign 2008, the Role of Technology and the Internet

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/politics/vote2008_internet.html

Explore the role of technology and the Internet in political campaigning in the 21st century and determine the effectiveness of a specific presidential candidate’s use of technology as a campaign tool.

NewsHour Extra: Covering the Campaign Trail: Technological Progress or Temporary Chaos?

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/media/campaign_trail.html

Examine the methods used today for covering political campaigns, compare and contrast the technologies used today and those of the past and evaluate the effectiveness and merits of current methods of coverage.

By the People: Identifying Major Issues

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan2.html

Analyze major issues in the current presidential campaign, identify individuals or groups affected by each issue and compare candidates’ political stances.

By the People: Presidential Campaign Policy

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan3.html

Understand the importance of viable policy positions in a campaign and brief statements on the issues from candidates. Identify the role of major issues in a presidential election by holding a mock campaign staff meeting.

By the People: Presidential Campaign Stop

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan9.html

Plan a campaign stop in Anytown, USA, a mid-size fictional city. Select where the candidate will appear and with whom, how to handle the media, and what the candidate will say during the visit to best reach that city's potential voters.

The Electoral College

By the People: Is the Electoral College Out of Date?

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan13.html

Learn about the issues that led to the creation of the Electoral College and formulate and defend a position regarding the future of the system. As a class, convene a "constitutional convention" to propose amendments and create a feasible system of electing the president.

NewsHour Extra: The Electoral College

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/Vote2004/electoral_college.html

Define, analyze and debate the pros and cons of the Electoral College system.

The Issues

FRONTLINE: Al Qaeda's New Front

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/front/lesson.html>

Investigate the new front in the war on terror as Muslims relocate in European countries. Explore the issues related to balancing ethnic tolerance with national security from various perspectives, and describe the role the U.S. government is playing.

FRONTLINE: Key Constitutional Issues of the Abortion Debate

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/clinic/lesson.html>

Explain the balance of power that is at the heart of our federalist system. Using the question of the legality of abortions as a springboard, evaluate which level of government, state or national, should have authority over social and legal issues.

NewsHour Extra: Analyzing U.S. Policy in Iraq

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/world/iraq_strategy2_01-07.html

Compare President Bush's U.S. strategy in Iraq with ideas suggested by the Baker-Hamilton Commission, evaluate the suggestions made by these experts and work in groups to create your own policy.

NewsHour Extra: The Big Picture: Economic Security in the Country and Your Community

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/economics/jan-june08/bigpicture_economy.html

Formulate questions and concerns related to local economic issues, conduct research about these questions and concerns, and create posters that include facts, reasons, and examples to support conclusions drawn about the economic security of one's local community.

NewsHour Extra: Debating Immigration Reform

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/immigration_reform.html

Learn about current legislation related to immigration reform, and create a role play that illustrates a specific point of view on immigration. Compose a letter to your senator describing your views about immigration reform.

NewsHour Extra: Exploring Alternative Energy Sources

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/science/alternative_energy.html

Calculate the cost of heating homes and fueling cars in light of rising energy costs. Investigate alternative renewable and non-renewable energy sources that can be used to decrease America's dependency on fossil fuels.

NewsHour Extra: The Uninsured in America

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/health/uninsured/>

Understand the multiple problems faced by those without health insurance. Consider who the uninsured are, why they do not have insurance, the government programs available to them and possible solutions to the problem.

NOW: Foreign War and Domestic Freedom: A Delicate Balancing Act

<http://www.pbs.org/now/classroom/civilliberties.html>

Review the concept of Civil Liberties and examine examples in American history in which rights were restricted. Investigate key arguments between those who seek to restrict liberties and those who do not.

NOW: Global Warming

<http://www.pbs.org/now/classroom/globalwarming.html>

Explore different perspectives in the global warming debate, take a position on global climate change and support this viewpoint with reasons, facts, and examples, and create a project that supports this point of view.

Political Advertising

By the People: Analyzing Political Ads

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan12.html

Study the persuasive techniques utilized in political commercials and the effects they have on viewers. Enhance knowledge of media literacy and videography terms and create political commercials for fictitious candidates.

NewsHour Extra: Political Commercials: Leading or Misleading Voters?

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/Vote2004/political_commercials.html

Analyze commercials and identify logical fallacies. Then use a storyboard template to create original commercials for fictitious candidates, using the techniques and fallacies studied earlier in the lesson.

Political Humor

NewsHour Extra: Analyzing Election Cartoons

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/Vote2004/political_cartoons.html

Identify symbols and caricature in political cartoons and how they portray a message, opinion or point of view. Compare cartoons with editorials. Select a current political cartoon and create an original cartoon in response to its message.

NOW: Political Analysis through Satire

<http://www.pbs.org/now/classroom/satire.html>

Take a serious look at a funny subject to better understand how political satire is used during elections.

Polling

The First Measured Century: The History and Use of Sampling Methods

<http://www.pbs.org/fmc/lessons/lesson4.htm>

Learn about sampling by tracing improvements in sampling procedures over the twentieth century.

NewsHour Extra: How the Media Uses Polling Data in Presidential Election Coverage

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/media/polls_long.html

Explore the field of journalism and discover reasons for including polling data in media coverage of presidential elections. Research and analyze recent examples of the use of polling data in journalism.

P.O.V.: What Do People Want from Politicians?

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/lastmanstanding/for.html>

Describe the role of media reporting and polling data in the outcome of elections and develop skills to analyze and evaluate media information in order to make an informed decision at the polls.

The President/Congress

By the People: The President: Politician in Chief

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan5.html

Examine the formal and informal powers of the President as well as the political skills required to win a presidential election. Assess the personal qualities needed to win office and carry out the powers of the Presidency. Develop criteria for comparing candidates and apply them to the current presidential hopefuls.

Ken Burns American Stories: The Congress: The Evolution of Congress

<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/congress/educators/>

Learn about the evolution of Congress from 1800 to the mid-1970s and the prominent congressmen who both characterized and produced changes in the national legislature.

NewsHour Extra: Analyzing the Candidates in the 2008 Presidential Election

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/politics/vote2008_candidates.html

Outline the steps a candidate must take to be elected to the presidency. Create a profile of one candidate, including his/her qualifications and point of view on various topics, and monitor the candidate's progress and success in campaigning.

NewsHour Extra: The Structure of Congress

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/politics/congress.html>

Learn about the structure of Congress and its legislative process. Explore the roles played by the Democratic and Republican parties, congressional leaders, committees and other groups to which members of Congress belong, as well as the formal process of lawmaking and differences between the House and Senate.

Primaries/Caucuses

NewsHour Extra: The Presidential Nominating System

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/history/primaries_12-19.html

Learn about the system of primaries and caucuses by which candidates for U.S. President are nominated by their parties.

Washington Week: Election 101

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/washingtonweek/educators/election.html>

Review the system of primaries and caucuses leading up to the nominating conventions and consider the benefits and drawbacks of the two-party system.

Speeches and Debates

By the People: Persuasion and Political Debate

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan11.html

Explore the role of rhetorical strategies in developing persuasive messages within political campaigns or speeches and the difficulties in trying to advance arguments in the face of partisan opposition.

By the People: Writing a Political Speech

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan10.html

Examine the process of researching, writing, and presenting an effective and convincing political speech to various political groups. Research political party platforms and write, present, and assess speeches based on these platforms.

NewsHour Extra: The Presidential Debates

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/debates_short.html

Investigate media coverage of Presidential debates, and discuss how viewers are influenced by factors beyond the issues being debated. Explore techniques that can help viewers focus on what the candidates say rather than how they look and act.

NewsHour Extra: Holding an In-Class Presidential Debate

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/Vote2004/debates.html>

Research the history and view examples of Presidential debates. Explore and practice formal debating skills and techniques of persuasion, and then apply them to look for failed logic in classmates' mock debates.

Voting

By the People: Get It on the Ballot

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan1.html

Research referenda and ballot initiatives in local elections, design a locally-oriented proposal to put on the ballot, compose a petition and gather signatures.

By the People: Voting Rights: What Age Is Too Young?

http://www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan14.html

Gain an appreciation for citizen participation in politics by reviewing past movements to extend the right of suffrage. Write effective and persuasive letters to leaders concerning a fictitious amendment to lower the voting age.

NewsHour Extra: Analyzing Free and Fair Elections

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/world/nigeria_elections.html

Examine the qualities of a "free and fair" election, compare them to the U.S. Department of State criteria and evaluate the 2007 elections in Nigeria to determine if they are free and fair.

NewsHour Extra: Bringing Out the Vote

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/socialstudies/Vote2004/bovote.html>

Acquire information about voter turnout, analyze why Americans don't vote, and promote citizen activism by creating community publicity about the presidential election.

NOW: Voting

<http://www.pbs.org/now/classroom/democracy.html>

Examine the government's influence in everyday life, analyze a report focusing on a democracy reform effort and predict the impact. Strategize a way to overcome a perceived obstacle to voter participation locally, develop an action plan and implement it.

P.O.V.: Creating Video Public Service Announcements

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/election/edu/index.html>

Identify ways increased voter participation could impact the issues of concern to their communities and write, shoot, and edit a 10-30 second public service announcement to encouraging voting age peers to vote.

Elementary Interactives

American Experience: Wayback: Presidents: The Secret History

<http://pbskids.org/wayback/prez/index.html>

Hit a fictitious campaign trail to check out historic and unusual campaign memorabilia from American presidential campaigns, and explore a dossier of little-known "presidential secrets."

The Democracy Project: President for a Day

<http://pbskids.org/democracy/presforaday/index.html>

Explore the job requirements for the U.S. Presidency, identify the different people the President might meet with in an average day and experience the President's typical agenda with this online interactive activity.

The Democracy Project: Inside the Voting Booth

<http://pbskids.org/democracy/vote/index.html>

Consider why it is important to vote, examine times in U.S. election history when one vote made a difference in an election's outcome, learn several historical facts about voting and vote in a mock issues survey.

News Flash Five

<http://pbskids.org/newsflashfive/>

Get weekly updates on election-related stories in both audio and text formats.

Secondary Interactives

American Dream Idea Generator

<http://americanpublicmedia.publicradio.org/engage08/americandream/>

Your Economy Idea Generator

<http://americanpublicmedia.publicradio.org/engage08/economy/>

Collaborate with other citizens and voters to identify critical issues in the 2008 election and share solutions for addressing them. Current versions of this widget focus on preserving the American dream and improving the faltering U.S. economy. Three additional versions will be rolled out in coming months. This interactive platform, produced by American Public Media, is downloadable and embeddable.

Capitol News Connection: Ask Your Lawmaker

<http://www.askyourlawmaker.org/>

Pose policy questions to members of Congress, including those currently running for president, and/or vote on questions submitted by other users. CNC's award-winning journalists on Capitol Hill will track down politicians to make sure the most popular – and the best – questions get answered. Students and teachers can also download the tool and post it on their own Web pages or blogs.

NewsHour/NPR: 2008 Election Map

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2008/primaries/states/>

Track results from primaries, caucuses and the general election and read analysis from the NewsHour and NPR. The interactive map is available as a widget that students and teachers can download and post on their own Web pages or blogs.

NewsHour/WBUR: Election 2008 Vote by Issue Quiz

<http://www.votebyissue.org/election2008/>

Learn about important issues in the 2008 campaign and where the candidates stand on these issues. Quiz questions focus on quotes from all of the candidates that have been collected from the campaigns or culled from public speeches, interviews or statements. The quiz is available as a widget that students and teachers can download and post on their own Web pages or blogs.

Select-a-Candidate

<http://americanpublicmedia.publicradio.org/engage08/selectacandidate/>

Discover which of the presidential candidates is most closely aligned with your personal views and opinions regarding critical issues in the current campaign. This survey tool, produced by American Public Media, is available as a widget that students and teachers can download and embed.

You Decide

<http://www.kqed.org/w/youdecide/>

Explore both sides of important issues in the 2008 election, put critical thinking skills to work, and discuss the pros and cons with others. The first version of this devil's advocate activity, created by KQED, asks whether the U.S. should adopt a single-payer, universal health care plan. Future versions focused on other issues will roll out in coming months.