

9 Ways to Teach about the Election



A Social Justice Approach



Campaigns and elections are ripe with opportunity to discuss government, the electoral process, civics and history as well as the myriad of specific issues that are important to the public during any particular year, whether it's a local or presidential election. The following ideas for teaching about the election focus on social justice issues. They provide suggested strategies and activities teachers can undertake with students in order to help them analyze issues of bias, discrimination, diversity, civil rights and justice. Be sure to discuss guidelines with students in advance to establish a safe and anti-bias learning environment.

1. CANDIDATES' POSITIONS

Study each of the candidates' positions and viewpoints on social justice issues such as voting rights, immigration reform, LGBTQ rights, gender inequities, school-to-prison pipeline, criminal justice reform, etc. Do this by looking at candidates' websites, analyzing their speeches, studying their voting record, learning about their positions on local, national and international issues and reflecting upon their high profile supporters. Students can:

- Write a paper comparing candidates on civil rights and social justice issues.
- Create a poster with candidates and their civil rights' positions.
- Create a PSA about a social justice issue from the perspective of a candidate.

2. DEMOGRAPHICS

Learn about and reflect upon the diversity of our country and gain insight into how people may or may not vote depending on who they are and what issues are important to them. Analyze voting patterns and demographic trends based on race, religion, socioeconomic status, LGBT, gender, etc. Look at the demographics of each state and consider the ways in which certain voters support certain candidates. Students can:

- Create a map infographic that illustrates the diversity in the country or a particular state.
- Create a poster that compares and contrasts different candidates and the demographic trends of their supporters.
- Conduct an election survey with classmates, friends and family members and gain insight into local demographic voting patterns.

3. MEDIA COVERAGE

Analyze the media coverage of the current election. Consider the extent to which certain candidates are covered more than others and how specific candidates are portrayed in the media, noticing any stereotypes and biases based on aspects of the candidates' identity. Students can:

- Do a content analysis of media coverage culminating in a poster or infographic.
- Analyze examples of biased and unbiased media coverage in a written paper.
- Create a social media campaign that illustrates biased media coverage of the election.

4. DEBATES

Watch the debates and reflect on the extent to which candidates discuss specific civil rights and social justice issues. Also, pay attention to how the candidates discuss bias, diversity and inclusiveness in their debate responses. Students can:

- Use our [Debate Watch Teaching Guide](#) to watch, discuss, analyze and write about the debates, especially focusing on issues of diversity, bias and social justice.
- During the debate, follow certain hashtags to see how the public audience is viewing the candidates, especially as they relate to social justice issues.
- Conduct a debate in class using relevant civil rights and social justice issues as main content.

5. VOTING RIGHTS

This election will be the first presidential election without a fully functioning Voting Rights Act in more than 50 years. Learn more about the history of the Voting Rights Act and modern day voting suppression and restrictions. Analyze laws in their own state as well as other states and the extent to which those laws expand or suppress people's right to vote. Read about what's happening with voting in the news, including the primary election in your state and other states, and how voters may be disenfranchised. In addition, understand what each candidate is saying about voting rights, whether they think it is a problem and their specific ideas for addressing it. Students can:

- Write a letter to their Congressperson with their views about voting rights in their state, as well as the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2015.
- Create a map or map infographic of the country, identifying which states have which voter restriction laws.
- Develop a social media campaign that advocates for reversing the voter suppression laws.

6. PARTY PLATFORMS

Learn more about the different political parties and each of their platforms relating to civil rights and social justice issues. In addition to the [Democratic](#) and [Republican](#) parties, research some of the other parties including the [Green](#), [Working Families](#), and [Libertarian](#) parties. Study the different parties' websites and list of issues in order to understand their platforms, identify what issues are important to them and gain clarity on their positions. Students can:

- Write a letter to the Chairperson of one of the parties asking them a question about a particular issue or asking them to add/change something in their party's platform.
- Design a new logo for the party that conveys their positions on social justice issues.
- Create a chart (poster or electronic) that compares the different party's positions on civil rights issues.

7. POLITICAL RHETORIC

Listen to and observe what the candidates and their surrogates are saying on the campaign trail and the extent to which their rhetoric is inclusive, expansive, stereotypical or biased. Pay attention to whether candidates explicitly talk about bias and injustice and what are their solutions for addressing it. Also consider any biased rhetoric in their speeches and interviews as well as whether they talk about expanding or contracting rights and liberties. Students can:

- Make a video about the political rhetoric using clips from various candidates.
- Write a position paper that supports a particular candidate because of their positive and inclusive rhetoric.
- Compile a list of quotes from different candidates that illustrate either biased/stereotypical or respectful/inclusive rhetoric and if inaccuracies are expressed, research and provide the facts.

8. ADVERTISEMENTS

Analyze campaign advertisements (TV, print, online, etc.) that the candidates promote and those put out by Political Action Committees (PACs or Super PACs) supporting candidates. Look at how the candidate portrays him or herself, what issues are addressed and the diversity of people portrayed (or not) in the ad. Students can:

- Conduct a content analysis of one or more candidates' advertisements.
- Create an original advertisement for a candidate in which civil rights are at the forefront.
- Create a scoring sheet that computes and highlights to what extent all of the candidates' advertisements include content on social justice issues (positive points) and to what extent their ads are exclusionary (i.e. only include white people) or are explicitly biased (negative points).

9. IDENTITY POLITICS

Consider the identity of the candidates (i.e. race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) and how that impacts what issues they talk about, what their positions are and what demographic groups are drawn to them. For example, do female candidates talk about issues of interest to women and gender inequities in our society? Analyze what other factors contribute to who they are and whether certain demographic groups are missing as candidates and why. Students can:

- Write a profile of a particular candidate, who the person is and an aspect of their identity that has shaped the issues that are most important to them
- Create a chart about demographic trends for certain candidates and analyze the extent to which it impacts who votes for them (i.e. do more Latino people support a Latino candidate?)
- Conduct a mock election poll in school with a list of candidates and determine demographic trends.