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Acknowledgements

This *Blueprint for Democracy: Youth Voter Engagement Curriculum* was built by many hands. We thank and acknowledge the people and organizations listed below for their invaluable contributions to this publication. (Titles and affiliations were current as of the publication date of the first edition.)

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**Field testers (teachers)**
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Gloria Nelson and Julie Thomsen, Operation Fresh Start, Madison, Wisconsin
Josset Gauley, Human Resources Development Council, Bozeman, Montana
Mark Berndt, Moreno Valley YouthBuild, Moreno Valley, California
Krista Batterson, YouthBuild LaPlata, Ignacio, Colorado
Kristine Cochrane, Career Alliance YouthBuild, Flint, Michigan
Katy Allen, The Work Group, Camden, New Jersey
Mario Grady, YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Kevin Higgins, Emerson Park Development Corporation, East St. Louis, Illinois
Tim Gallagher, YouthBuild Lowell, Massachusetts
Lee Brotherton, Operation Excel YouthBuild, St. Louis, Missouri
Chris Beattie, Project REBUILD, Inc., Canton, Ohio

And especially Eve Pranis, our talented educator, writer, and editor, who donated countless hours and gave her heart and soul to this project.

*Anne Wright, Tim Parsons, Terry Moran, and Bonnie Landi*
Civic Engagement Committee members, YouthBuild USA Affiliated Network
December 2010
Founded in 1990, YouthBuild USA is a national nonprofit organization that works to unleash the positive energy of low-income youth to rebuild and transform their communities and lives with a commitment to work, education, responsibility, and family.

In YouthBuild programs, low-income young people ages 16 to 24 work toward their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning job skills by building affordable housing for homeless and low-income people. YouthBuild places strong emphasis on leadership development, community service, and creating a positive mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other’s success.

As of January 2010, YouthBuild programs engage over 10,000 young adults in 45 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. Since 1994, more than 100,000 YouthBuild students have produced over 20,000 units of affordable, increasingly green housing.

YouthBuild programs are run by autonomous local nonprofit and public entities that build relationships with and derive funding and resources from state, federal, and local public agencies that have a stake in their success, as well as private foundations and corporations. Because the federal YouthBuild program is authorized under the Workforce Investment Act, the largest federal supporter of YouthBuild programs is the Department of Labor. Each year DOL publishes a solicitation of grant applications through which existing and start-up programs can compete for grants. In addition, the Corporation for National and Community Service provides grants as well as education awards in return for members’ community service. YouthBuild graduates may use these education awards to help with their post-secondary school tuition. Other agencies and private entities fund innovations and specific aspects of YouthBuild programs.

YouthBuild USA supports an expanding nationwide network of 273 local YouthBuild programs. In this role, YouthBuild USA orchestrates advocacy for public funding, guidance, and quality assurance in program implementation, leadership opportunities to youth and staff, research to understand impact and best practices, and grants and loans to YouthBuild USA affiliates.

YouthBuild USA leads the national YouthBuild movement and contributes to the broader youth- and community-development fields to diminish poverty in the United States and internationally.
When I turned 18, voting was definitely not on my list of new privileges. I didn’t care about the political process because the issues that politicians were talking about were issues that didn’t seem to directly affect me. I also felt, like many of my peers, that “my vote doesn’t count.” When you consider our electoral college and how we elect our president, an individual’s opinion may not amount to much. As we saw in the 2000 election, the popular vote does not guarantee the winner.

But we as a generation must come to the realization that our nation will soon be turned over to us for safekeeping. We must also realize that the longer we stay disconnected from the system, the longer youth issues will be ignored and devastating poverty will persist.

My generation has the potential to have a huge political impact on a local and national level, but because of various political realities we young people are left feeling disenfranchised and indifferent to the state of our country. This is something we can not allow. If young people become too disassociated from our political process, then our elected officials will continue to ignore our issues.
Because of this, YouthBuild staff and young people have developed this civic and voter engagement curriculum to assist my peers in becoming engaged on a local, state, and national level. By becoming engaged, we have the opportunity to see the political process at work. The curriculum is made up of activities that will allow young people to identify the issues facing our communities, brainstorm solutions to these problems, identify the proper elected bodies responsible for those problem areas, and take action with those bodies. This should allow young people to see the political process at work and instill in them the need for them to stay civically involved.

I graduated from YouthBuild Burlington (Vermont) in 1998 and have been working as a YouthBuild staff person for the last four years. What I see every year from all young adults is that if given the opportunity, they all have the potential to come up with solutions that will not band-aid an issue, but will actually solve it. It is time that we are given the opportunity to change, and save, the planet.

We must always remember that young people are not only the future, but are also the product of the environment that older generations provide. If youth are not thriving, then the system is broken and it needs to be fixed. Every generation should be better off than the ones that came before it. With tools like this Blueprint for Democracy curriculum, young people will be better equipped to stop this cycle of dysfunction and realize the truth in the old proverb “The sins of the father will be visited upon the children.”

Adonijah Hill
Burlington, Vermont
June 2005
As long as I can remember, my mother taught me that civil service and my role in it are extremely vital to the fabric of this great country. She went on to instill in me the belief that it is also my job—and a debt owed to the people of my community—to be that which they cannot be themselves. As a boy I could not understand this concept but as I have grown I am beginning to embrace my duty as a member of this great country which was founded on these truths.

This country has faced many hardships from its birth to now being the most powerful nation on earth. We as a nation have a critical role to play. It is our job as members of a society to take our place in history and vote. Furthermore, we have a personal responsibility to participate in the political process. It has become common for generations of Americans to complain about the insufficient efforts of their elected officials, yet they do nothing. This is an epidemic that far too many become a part of far too often.

I will, however, commend the efforts of all those involved in the 2008 election. People of diverse backgrounds came out in record numbers to vote in the historic election of our 45th president, Barack Obama. In this presidential election, the American people understood the importance and the validity of being a part of the political process.

__Nathaniel Almeida__

Kingston, New York
September 2010
Voice

What is an idea if you don't have a plan?  
What is taking action if you don't make a stance?  
What is trying if you don't take a chance?  
Nothing. You have a voice, let it be heard.

What is seeing things in your own perspective  
if you don't have a positive scope?  
What is trying to deal with life's problems  
if you don't know how to cope?  
What does wanting to become a leader mean  
if you just don't have hope?  
Nothing. You have a voice, let it be heard.

What are dreams if you don't have goals?  
What is being strong if you don't play the role?  
What does wanting to be positive means  
if you cannot feel it in your soul?  
Nothing. You have a voice, let it be heard.

What is coming together if we cannot rejoice?  
What is making a decision if you don't have a choice?  
What is changing a situation if you don't have a voice?  
Nothing. You have a voice, let it be heard.

What is trying to sail through life smoothly if you don't have a boat?  
What does passing the message mean if you don't send the note?  
What is a fair election if you do not get to vote?  
Nothing. You have a voice, let it be heard.

What does the day mean without the night?  
What does victory mean without the fight?  
What does freedom mean without the right?  
Nothing. You have a voice, let it be heard.

What is an enemy if you can't make a friend?  
What is starting a new beginning if you're stuck at the end?  
What does it mean to be successful if you can't harness the power within?  
Nothing.

You have a voice  
I have a voice  
We have a choice  
BE HEARD!

Written by Porschia Johnson,  
graduate of YouthBuild Gary (Indiana)  
and former member of the YouthBuild  
Young Leaders Council, © 2003
About the Curriculum

YouthBuild created the *Blueprint for Democracy: Youth Voter Engagement Curriculum* to spark young people’s involvement in our political process and encourage them to become informed participants in our democracy.

The activities in this curriculum ask teachers to start with students’ experiences, feelings, knowledge, and concerns. What issues matter to them? What would they like to change? What do they think they know—and what don’t they know—about how decisions are made in their communities and country? Where and how does voting fit in? The lessons build on this foundation and help students explore ways of bringing about the changes they want to see.

The purpose of this curriculum is to engage students and challenge them to form their own informed political views, based on their own personal beliefs, values, and research. Please remind students of this as you continue with this curriculum.

*To order more copies of this curriculum, visit the eStore at www.YouthBuild.org.*
Some tips to help you plan for implementing the curriculum:

- If you plan to use the entire curriculum in anticipation of an election, we recommend starting in August or early September. The curriculum should take about a month to complete if you spend an hour a day on it, five days a week.

- Use the estimated times listed for each activity (and each step within the activities) as rough guides; the time you spend on each one will depend on the size of your group, the extent of your discussions, and other factors. Out-of-class work is required in only a few activities and suggested as an option in several others.

- If you have students who haven’t yet registered to vote, check your state deadlines (www.declareyourself.com/voting_faq/state_by_state_info_2.html) and make sure that happens first. Go directly to Part 3, Activity 14. If you intend to conduct a get-out-the-vote campaign to turn out voters in an upcoming election, consult Appendix III.

- The curriculum contents listed on the following pages provide an overview of the entire curriculum. As you review the contents, you may find that the activities follow a logical sequence—in general, later activities build on earlier ones. However, many activities can stand alone or be used in combination. Prerequisites are noted at the beginning of each activity.

- If you plan to select just a subset of activities, think about the strengths and needs of your class. Find out what they already know about democracy, voting, and elections. If they exhibit reluctance to vote, explore the reasons behind it. Use this information and the Quick Picks listed after the curriculum contents to guide your activity choices. Also review Appendix VII to see how each activity aligns with national social studies and civics standards.

- Some activities, such as Activity 20, How Can I Check Out Local Candidates?, require advance preparation and out-of-class work, so it pays to take time early in your planning process to look over each activity you’re considering.
# Curriculum Contents

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What Do I Care About?</td>
<td>Participants identify societal problems and issues that concern and directly affect them.</td>
<td>65–75 min.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What Do I Know About These Issues?</td>
<td>Students dig into one or more issues that concern them.</td>
<td>35–40 min.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How Can We Tackle Issues We Care About?</td>
<td>Students brainstorm strategies for addressing and resolving concerns they’ve identified.</td>
<td>60–65 min.</td>
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## Part 2 – Democracy Revealed (page 17)

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<tr>
<td>4. How Does Government Affect My Life?</td>
<td>Students explore how laws and regulations enacted at local, state, and federal levels affect their daily lives.</td>
<td>45–50 min.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is a Democracy?</td>
<td>Students explore the concept and principles of democracy and its relationship to voting. Then they compare democracy as an ideal with democracy in practice.</td>
<td>55–70 min.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Power to the People (Directly or Indirectly?)</td>
<td>Students examine the differences between direct and indirect democratic practices and learn why government in the United States typically functions as an indirect democracy.</td>
<td>35–45 min.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Democracy vs. Dictatorship: What’s the Difference to Me?</td>
<td>Students learn about the differences between a democracy and a dictatorship and they recognize the opportunities for democratic participation they have in our society.</td>
<td>45 min.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Who Decides? How Do Things Change?</td>
<td>Students learn about local, state, and federal governmental structures and the roles of officials in elected and appointed positions. Next they explore the realities of social and political influence by talking with representatives of local groups that work on issues students care about.</td>
<td>60 min. +/- each day for 2 days</td>
<td>37</td>
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## Part 3 – To Vote or Not To Vote! (page 51)

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<tr>
<td>9. How Do People Gain, Lose, or Regain the Right to Vote?</td>
<td>Students learn that throughout history, voting laws in the United States have favored some groups over others. Students consider the implications of this history and examine issues that touch their lives.</td>
<td>25–60 min.</td>
<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Who Votes?</td>
<td>Students examine the voting rates of different demographic groups in the United States. They consider reasons for variations between groups and the implications this has for young people's concerns being represented.</td>
<td>45 min.</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Can Young People's Votes Make a Difference?</td>
<td>Students vote on some mock propositions and experience how voter turnout can influence election outcomes.</td>
<td>60–85 min.</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. What Do We Know About Young Voters?</td>
<td>Students learn what research says about the turnout of young people at the polls and about their concerns and views on voting in the United States.</td>
<td>45–50 min.</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Why Do Some of Us Choose Not to Vote?</td>
<td>Students explore why young people might not vote and then consider their own points of view.</td>
<td>50–70 min.</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. How Can I Register and Get More People Out to Vote?</td>
<td>Students engage in one or more of these options: registering to vote, planning to register other young voters, or planning and implementing a get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaign to increase young voter turnout.</td>
<td>varies</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
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## Part 4 – Pondering Parties, Candidates, and Elections (page 89)

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<tr>
<td>15. What Influences My Political Beliefs</td>
<td>Students reflect on the variety of factors that influence their attitudes, values, and beliefs about societal issues and political culture.</td>
<td>40–50 min.</td>
<td>91</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Political Positions: Where Do I Stand?</td>
<td>Students examine the spectrum of political positions from left to right and consider where their own opinions and beliefs fit in.</td>
<td>45–50 min.</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. A Tale of Two Countries</td>
<td>Students compare statistics from two fictional democratic countries that have different political and economic philosophies and policies. They explore their own values and consider the benefits and challenges of each system.</td>
<td>45+ min.</td>
<td>101</td>
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<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Political Parties: Where Do I Stand?</td>
<td>Students explore political party platforms and create their own. Then they examine distinctions between political parties and consider where their own beliefs and opinions fit in.</td>
<td>1.5+ hours</td>
<td>109</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Evaluating Candidates: How Do They Measure Up?</td>
<td>Students revisit issues they care about; identify current local, state, and national candidates; and prepare to critically evaluate them in preparation for an election.</td>
<td>55–60 min.</td>
<td>117</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. How Can I Check Out Local Candidates?</td>
<td>Students invite local candidates or elected officials to meet with them. They plan and carry out one of two options: working in teams to interview candidates or holding a classroom forum.</td>
<td>Varies over 2 weeks</td>
<td>123</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Where I Stand, Where the Candidates Stand</td>
<td>Students share their thoughts on a variety of issues facing the country and they explore what influences their peers’ points of view. In an election year, they compare their positions with those of selected candidates.</td>
<td>40+ min. (longer in election year)</td>
<td>127</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Know the Issues: Research and Debate</td>
<td>Students will research political issues in greater depth, form their own arguments, and hold debates.</td>
<td>30–45 min.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Money Talks: How Money Influences Elections</td>
<td>Students create a budget for a fictional political campaign and they uncover how campaigns are financed. Next, they explore what motivates donors and consider the implications of campaign contributions. They look at the money trail for local candidates and examine some alternative options for funding campaigns.</td>
<td>60–120 min.</td>
<td>147</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. The Election Process: Fair or Flawed?</td>
<td>Drawing from their own experiences or those of family and friends, students consider limitations of the voting and election process. They learn about efforts to make our elections more fair and democratic, and they consider the pros and cons of some election reform proposals.</td>
<td>60–65 min.</td>
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<td>25. Media Matters: Laying the Groundwork</td>
<td>Students brainstorm where they can find information about candidates, consider the reliability of different sources, and learn how much money is spent on political advertising.</td>
<td>30 min.</td>
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<td>26. Ad Explorers: Seeing Through the Sell</td>
<td>Students view political campaign ads, ponder the ads’ purposes and target audiences, and examine their own reactions.</td>
<td>40 min.</td>
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<td>27. Image Matters: Ad Savvy Sleuths</td>
<td>Students identify visual strategies and other techniques that people who create political ads use to set a tone, create an image, and persuade viewers to vote for a candidate or against an opponent.</td>
<td>55 min.</td>
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### Part 6 – Making Choices: Learning How To Vote (page 185)

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<td>28. Wrapping it Up: Presentations and Preferences</td>
<td>Students gather information and evaluate candidates for office (if they haven’t already done so). They use what they’ve uncovered to “introduce” their candidates to the class via presentations or a mock forum. Each student then documents which candidates he or she prefers.</td>
<td>35–70 min.</td>
<td>187</td>
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<td>29. How Do I Fill Out a Ballot and Vote?</td>
<td>Students fill out a sample ballot, participate in a mock election, and if appropriate, arrange to obtain an absentee ballot. They also learn where to vote and what to do if they encounter difficulty at their polling places.</td>
<td>40–50 min.</td>
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<td>VII. Alignments with National Social Studies Standards</td>
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Quick Picks

If you plan to select just a subset of activities, think about the strengths and needs of your class. Find out what they already know about democracy, voting, and elections. If they exhibit reluctance to vote, explore the reasons behind it. Use the information listed in the objectives column in the curriculum contents section and the Quick Picks listed below to guide your activity choices. Also review Appendix VII to see how each activity aligns with national social studies and civics standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If your students need to or are ready to . . .</th>
<th>Use these activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Identify issues that matter to them and brainstorm ways to address them</td>
<td>Activities 1, 2, and 3</td>
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<td>Learn more about the mechanics of voting</td>
<td>Activities 14, 28, and 29</td>
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<td>Link historical struggle for suffrage with eligibility to vote</td>
<td>Activity 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appreciate the potential impact of their one vote</td>
<td>Activities 9 and 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explore how youth voter turnout can affect elections</td>
<td>Activities 10, 11, and 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delve into reasons why they resist voting; explore feelings of cynicism and political disengagement</td>
<td>Activity 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about the concept of democracy</td>
<td>Activities 4, 5, 6, and 24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn more about our government structure</td>
<td>Activity 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflect on what they believe and develop a personal political stand or opinion</td>
<td>Activities 15, 16, and 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn more about our political parties and beliefs</td>
<td>Activity 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sort through conflicting claims about candidates, and decide who to vote for</td>
<td>Activities 19, 20, and 21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meet and interview candidates</td>
<td>Activity 20</td>
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<td>Get others out to vote (run a GOTV campaign)</td>
<td>Activity 14, Appendix III</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
An important reminder about restrictions on YouthBuild program time and resources

No nonprofit or public organization can use any resources in support of any political party or candidate or they risk losing their nonprofit status. According to federal law, they can lobby for legislation or causes, up to a certain percentage of their budgets. However, they may not use any public funds to support any cause or political issue. Therefore no YouthBuild student in a publicly supported program can use any paid program time to support any issue, and under no circumstances can YouthBuild students support any candidates during program time.
Part 1

Issues that Matter

Overview

In Part 1, students identify, prioritize, and research societal problems that concern or affect them directly. They consider approaches that they and others can take to address and try to resolve these issues.

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<td>Handout</td>
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<td>Handout</td>
<td>Making a Commitment</td>
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Activity 1

What Do I Care About?

Objective
Participants identify societal problems and issues that concern and directly affect them.

Time
65‒75 minutes

Materials
• Copies of Handout 1
• A pack of large sticky notes

1.
Give participants Handout 1 (The Declaration of Inter-Dependence, page 5). Explain that it is the first page of a longer document created by young people from YouthBuild programs across the country. Their goal was to identify their concerns so they could work on ways to tackle issues they care about. Have students read the page silently or read it aloud as a class.

Ask,
• What are your reactions to the declaration?
• Which ideas do you agree with? Disagree with?
• What else does it make you think about?

2.
Challenge students to think about issues or concerns that touch their own lives and matter to them. Encourage them to think beyond personal concerns (such as problems with friends) to broader social, economic, or political issues. Share some examples to spark their thinking (e.g., limited employment options for young people). Give students a few minutes to write on their own before having them share their thoughts in small groups.

Ask groups to list the issues or concerns they raise. Also ask them to discuss this question: What do you think are the biggest problems or concerns that young people face in our community? (Responses will likely overlap with the class list.) Monitor the discussions and intervene when necessary to keep groups on track and productive.

3.
Call the class back together. Ask each student to name one or two problems or issues he or she has identified as personally important. Next, distribute sticky notes and direct each student to write a short description of the problem or issue on a sticky note and then place it on the wall or board. Give the class a few minutes to scan the full set of notes on the wall. Leave the notes on the wall or board until the next class, or place them in a folder for safekeeping.

Objective
Participants identify societal problems and issues that concern and directly affect them.
Wrap up by asking students to try to envision, before the next class, what it would “look” like if one of the issues they selected were resolved to their satisfaction. How would their daily lives and communities be different? Ask them to jot down some short phrases or sentences to paint a picture (e.g., “I’d have a job I like that pays me enough to live on and to help my mother out.” “Minimum wage would be ten dollars an hour.”). When the class meets again, post these on the wall. Leave them up over time to prompt student thinking and have the class add to them as their ideas evolve.

**Option**

Students can compare their concerns with those selected as most important by other young people. Tell them that a survey conducted by Do Something, a nationwide youth network, identified the following as the top ten concerns of young people: drunk driving, depression and teen suicide, guns at school, improving schools and education, discrimination, violence in school, drugs, self-esteem, AIDS, and abuse at home.

Ask, *How do the issues you’ve identified compare with those on this list?* If the lists differ dramatically, ask, *What do you think explains the differences?*

**Option**

If it’s a big election year and you’d prefer to have students focus on key issues facing people in this country, consider sending them to the Public Agenda Web site, www.publicagenda.org. It features a dropdown menu listing categories of key issues (e.g., crime, poverty) along with related facts, research, and other resources. Students can identify items in this list that are personally important and learn more about them.
The Declaration of Inter-Dependence

This section is an excerpt from YouthBuild’s The Declaration of Inter-Dependence. The complete document lists specific ideas for working on the five issues listed on page 6.

To read or download the full declaration, go to www.YouthBuild.org/declaration.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

▪ All people are created equal and have a natural desire to fulfill their potential and take responsibility for the well-being of themselves and the people they love.

▪ People are most likely to fulfill their potential and become contributing members of society if they have food and shelter, a loving family and positive peer group, opportunities for learning, an organized community, protection from violence, and something to believe in.

▪ Poverty, neglect, abuse, and deprivation of all kinds can prevent people from reaching their potential and enjoying life.

▪ Most people who have fallen off the track, suffered losses, and made mistakes can recover. If given a chance, they can learn to cope with obstacles and care effectively for themselves, their families, and communities. They can gain the skills and attitudes to become strong, successful leaders who will help others overcome these obstacles.

▪ We need more effective and caring leaders in our communities all over the world.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
To enable all children and students to thrive, improvements need to be made in several arenas. Below are some examples of the policy proposals in the Declaration of Inter-Dependence. For the full version of proposals, please read or download the full declaration at www.youthbuild.org/declaration.

The public school system. The opportunity to be part of a school community in which people care about each other and learn positive values, leadership and life skills, academic and vocational skills, and where young people’s input is respected, should be a basic right for all children and youth. Students need small classes so that they can get individualized attention, the opportunity to participate in hands-on projects and community service in addition to a basic curriculum, high quality teachers who care about them, and affordable post-secondary options.

Family supports. When families struggle and many times fail to provide the most basic necessities of life such as food and shelter, young people are unable to focus on education and their future. In order to prevent this, parents need access to quality child care and after-school programs, information on how to access quality jobs at a living wage for themselves and their families, support groups and training for parenting, among other things.

Economic development in low-income communities. Not only do most families living in low-income communities lack the information and resources they need, but the community as a whole lacks resources that could support the families. Elected officials and policy makers should develop strategies for community economic development, including having quality and affordable housing available, policies that would promote homeownership among low-income people, promotion of local business that keep people’s money in the community, and adequate public transportation available in both urban and rural areas.

The justice system. Social programs that get young people off the street and engaged in meaningful activities are effective crime prevention as well as indirect supports to the school system. In addition, steps need to be taken to effectively monitor police to prevent the corruption, brutality, and discrimination some of our communities may experience by the police who are supposed to be there to protect us. There needs to be communication between the community, youth, and the police to solve problems together and eliminate any feelings of fear and mistrust from both ends. We also believe that people who have committed crimes and paid their dues should have a second chance for education, training, and employment. Also, there should not be inconsistencies of punishments within class or racial groups.

The environment. A disproportionately large number of health and environmental risks are cast upon peoples who live in low economic communities. These neglected and underserved communities are unjustly weighed down by environmental burdens, some of which include significant lack of green space, poisoned and inaccessible rivers, and exposure to an inordinate amount of industrial pollution which causes high asthma rates and mental health problems. To improve the environment, and create healthy sustainable communities, young leaders must hold elected officials accountable to address environmental issues locally, nationally, and globally. Some policies include eliminating brown fields and replacing them with more trees and green spaces, improving air and water quality in low income communities, using green building techniques for all new construction and rehabbed buildings, and having more farmers markets in low income communities to prevent food deserts.
Activity 2

What Do I Know About These Issues?

Objective
Students dig into one or more issues that concern them.

Prerequisite
Activity 1

Time
35–40 minutes; optional assignments vary

Materials
• Sticky notes from Activity 1
• Copies of Handout 2
Optional: Students can create their own versions of Handout 2 that have room to document student experiences over time.

1. Return the sticky notes to the wall or board if they are not still there. Challenge students to group notes that mention similar issues and then give each group a label. For example, students might group jobs don’t pay enough to live on and lack of jobs together under the category employment. Create as many categories as needed to contain all the sticky notes.

2. Ask each class member to choose a specific problem (e.g., jobs don’t pay enough) rather than a category of problems (e.g., employment) that he or she would like to know more about. Group students interested in the same issues or category. Alternatively, have the class prioritize the problems, vote on one to explore, and plan to do research together.

3. Have each student start a “KWHL” chart (Handout 2) on the problem he or she has identified as important, or create a class version on flipchart paper. Encourage group members to exchange ideas on the first two categories. Tell students they will continue to add information to the third and fourth columns over the next several class sessions and beyond.

K: What I know (or think I know) about the problem or issue. (This can include students’ experiences.)

W: What I want to know.

H: How I’ll try to get information.

L: What I’ve learned about the issue.

In Activity 20, students can use these charts as springboards for talking with candidates or elected officials.

In Activity 22, students will research these topics in more depth.

© 10-15 MINUTES

© 15 MINUTES

Blueprint for Democracy — Part I 7
**Optional Assignments:**

**Digging Deeper**

These research suggestions can inspire your group to become more informed about the issues they’ve earmarked. Students can document their research results on KWHL charts, report findings back to the class, and use what they uncover as springboards for fruitful class discussions. In all cases, remind students to think carefully about the reliability of their sources of information. (They’ll have a chance to explore media bias in Part V.)

**Classroom research.** If you have access to a library, computer lab, or other on-site resources, give students time to conduct focused research on the problems they have identified. (See Handout 22 for resources and Web sites. Also see Appendix V, Online Resources.)

**Daily detectives.** Assign students to pay attention in their daily lives to the issues and problems they identified in class. Direct them to see what they can find out—from different media sources, family and friends, adults with expertise in the area, and local political groups—about the causes of these problems, different points of view, people and groups working to resolve them, and solutions that have been put forth.

**Interviews.** Ask students to interview one or more older community members or people with expertise in areas related to the issues they identified. Have the class brainstorm possible interview questions. For instance:

- **What do you know about this issue and its history?**
- **What do you think is the cause of the problem?**
- **Whom does it most affect?**
- **What is your point of view about what should be done?**
- **What actions do you think students could take to bring about positive change?**
- **Which candidates or local officials do you think have good ideas for resolving this issue?**

These activities can stand alone, or they can serve as a prerequisite to Activity 22, in which students will research, debate, and write about the issues. Whether or not you choose to do Activity 22, students should begin thinking about the issues that interest and affect them early in the course.
**K W H L chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I <strong>K</strong>now</td>
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<tr>
<td>What I <strong>W</strong>ant to Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H</strong>ow I’ll Find Out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I <strong>L</strong>earned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Objective
Through deepening their understanding of democracy and American politics, students will be empowered not only to vote, but to work for change. They can bring issues that affect them to their communities and to lawmakers, believing not only that they can do so, but that it is their responsibility. Students will brainstorm and learn strategies for taking action on issues that matter to them.

Prerequisite
Activities 1 and 2

Time
60–65 minutes

Materials
Students’ KWHL charts
Appendix IV, A Beginner’s Guide to Mobilizing

1. Revisit the issues students examined in the last couple of activities. Ask small groups working on similar issues to ponder and discuss these questions:
   - How could we get from where we are to the visions you created?
   - What have you learned, or what do you imagine are some ways in which these issues you care about could be resolved?
   - What actions or changes do you think could positively influence your own life or the lives of your friends or families?

Share an example or two, such as “The government could raise the minimum wage,” or “Our neighborhood could send a petition to the chief of police to get the police to stop harassing us.” The article at the end of this activity can also be used as an example or a starting point for discussion.

© 15 MINUTES
2. Bring the class back together. Have groups share the actions or changes they came up with; list all ideas on flip-chart paper or a blackboard.

Challenge the group to put a “C” next to items that could be resolved by groups of citizens, a “B” next to those that could be addressed by businesses, an “SS” by those that social service organizations could help resolve, an “E” by those that could best be addressed by elected officials, and a “?” by ones they’re not sure of. (Students will likely come up with more than one mark for each item.)

① 20–25 MINUTES

Option
Students can review more of YouthBuild’s Declaration of Inter-Dependence to spur their thinking about what policies or programs might address specific types of problems. To read or download the full declaration, go to www.YouthBuild.org/declaration.

3. Ask the class to brainstorm and discuss ideas for action steps they might take to address some of the problems they identified. Here are some possibilities:

- Educate others (talk with friends or write a letter to the editor)
- Join a local or national organization addressing a specific issue
- Find out how others in the neighborhood are affected by the issue
- Engage in advocacy (write to elected officials or circulate a petition)
- Register to vote
- Run for office
- Organize a get-out-the-vote campaign

Students who are ready can complete the pledge in Handout 3.

① 15 MINUTES
4.
Explain the concept of civic engagement to students. Civic engagement is more than just voting! It is the ability and the desire to address problems in one’s community and country both individually and collectively.

Studies have shown that low-income youth are left out of civic-engagement campaigns, which are almost exclusively targeted at college-bound youth. In this way, low-income youth are largely excluded from the democratic process.

Through deepening their understanding of democracy and American politics, we hope that our students will be empowered not only to vote, but to work for change.

Explain that in future activities, the class will explore how they can use their votes to influence decisions that are made about problems they care about. In addition, beyond voting, encourage students to engage politically in their communities. (Direct interested students to Appendix IV, A Beginner’s Guide to Mobilizing.) If you plan to conduct Activity 19, tell students that they’ll have an opportunity to meet and share concerns with officials or candidates (or their staff representatives) before casting their votes. Conclude by asking students to add new thoughts, questions, and information to their KWHL charts.

Special note to teachers
You are strongly encouraged to engage students in local and state politics. For example, bring students to city council meetings, and involve them as much as possible in fundraising and advocating for YouthBuild or other related anti-poverty, community or justice work you or your staff are involved in. Note that students cannot engage in lobbying or advocacy activities on publicly funded YouthBuild time. See the reminder on page xviii.

YOUNG DEMOCRACY:
Youth Bill of Rights made official at Battleship ceremony

By Will Richmond
Herald News Staff Reporter
Posted Aug 06, 2009 @ 07:02 PM
Last update Aug 07, 2009 @ 09:28 AM

FALL RIVER — As the plumed pen fluttered in the breeze, an air of change came to the city as young people joined with officials to sign a Youth Bill of Rights.

Young people and city officials who collaborated on the bill signed it Thursday during a ceremony on the deck of the Battleship Massachusetts. It will be hung in the Fall River Room on the sixth floor of Government Center.

The first of its kind in the commonwealth and only the third to be written in the United States, the Youth Bill of Rights expresses the need to give youths a greater voice in the community and outlines the basic rights every young person deserves. The bill also focuses on five areas — education, environment, health, future and support — as keystones in ensuring young people are able to become effective members of the public.

The bill was developed during a four-month process. Youths worked together to develop the ideas and then consult with city leaders, including Mayor Robert Correia, City Councilor Linda Pereira and School Committee Vice Chairman Mark Costa. Correia, who has already committed to giving youths a spot on city boards and committees, said the work of involving young people doesn’t end with the signing.

"We can easily talk, but we must follow the rhetoric with action," Correia said. "This will put into effect the process to ensure the torch is passed on... and those after us will hold it even higher and brighter than we did."

He commended the youths for stepping up at an early age to aid in the city’s growth, saying "most people don’t realize they should be paying back their community until it’s too late."

The ceremony included personal accounts from youth speakers as they introduced the topics of the five articles contained in the bill.

Sarah Jeffries, who graduated from B.M.C. Durfee High School in June, graduate, called for a safe, affordable and quality education for all students. She talked about her struggle to stay in school until she was introduced to the Resiliency Preparatory School. At one time, Jeffries said, she skipped school more often than she attended, but now she will continue her education and look at a possible career in law.

"Education is a key part in improving our community," Jeffries said.

Matthew Nhém spoke about the need for caring adults and role models in the lives of youths. It’s a need he learned firsthand after becoming involved in gangs and being beaten up because he was wearing the wrong colors at a gathering. He said turned his life around after joining the Peaceful Coalition.

"I am what I am today because I found positive role models and positive people in my life," Nhém said.

It was stories like these that led City Council President Joseph Camara to call the youths who developed the Bill of Rights "heroes."

Jasiel Correia II, who was among the leaders of the group to develop the bill, called the signing "a victory for the community."

"This is a victory rooted in the idea that youths can make a difference," Jasiel Correia said.

I, ___________________________, pledge to make my voice heard and to take action to address the following problem:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

In order to work for positive change, I will:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Signature

Date
Overview

This section engages students in thinking about how government affects their daily lives. They explore the concept and principles of democracy and the conditions that help it thrive (or fail), and they learn that a democratic government can use different strategies for incorporating citizens’ voices and choices. Finally, the class explores who represents their interests at each level of government and how citizens can and do exert political and social influence to effect change.

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Activity 4

How Does Government Affect My Life?

Objective
Students explore how laws and regulations enacted at local, state, and federal levels affect their daily lives.

Prerequisite
None

Time
45–50 minutes

Materials
None

1. Tell students that every time they take a breath or brush their teeth, they are somehow affected by the government. Ask, Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not? Why should you care? Encourage discussion.

If it doesn't come up, explain that many laws or regulations are aimed at promoting or protecting citizens' health and safety. For instance, The Clean Air Act was designed to enable us to breathe relatively clean air. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations ensure effective and nontoxic ingredients in toothpaste. Local smoking bans are meant to protect air quality and health. Ask, Which of these laws or regulations do you think are reasonable, and why? Which are unreasonable, and why?

2. Place students in groups of three or four. Ask them to come up with at least six other ways in which local, state, and federal governments affect their lives. To prompt thinking, share an example. For instance, tell the class that minimum wage laws and the legal age for dropping out of school are set by federal and state legislators. (Spark further interest by letting them know that a number of states are trying to raise the age for compulsory school attendance to 17 or 18.)

3. Come back together; ask volunteers to share some of their group's examples and discuss these as a class.
4.

Ask, *In which of these areas do you think it’s important to have government involvement? Which areas do you think government should stay out of?* Allow time for discussion and then ask, *Which areas do you think you should have a say in?* In the discussion that follows, emphasize that our right to have a voice in our local, state, and national governments—and our responsibility to use that voice—is essential in a democracy. Otherwise, only a few people make these kinds of decisions for everyone.

Have your students read the poem “Voice” (page x) aloud and discuss its meaning and message. Tell them that in future classes they’ll explore how they can have a voice in things they care about.

③ 15–20 minutes

**Option**

You can extend this lesson by having students keep a weekly diary of their activities and then discuss new thoughts on how government influences their lives.
Activity 5

What is a Democracy?

**Objective**
Students explore the concept and principles of democracy and its relationship to voting. Then they compare democracy as an ideal to democracy in practice.

**Prerequisite**
None

**Time**
55–70 minutes

**Materials**
Handouts 5a and 5b

1. Ask, *What words or phrases come to mind when you hear the word democracy?* Accept all responses and write them on flipchart paper or the board. As a class, try to come up with a definition that incorporates students’ ideas.

Give each student **Handout 5a** (Thinking about Democracy) and have them complete it. Discuss the results using the Talking Stick Discussion Method (see Appendix I, Discussion Methods).

© 15–25 minutes

2. Give students this brief overview of the origins of democracy and help them make the link between democracy and voting: Tell them that the concept is hardly new. It emerged in ancient Greece where city-states were so small that citizens could participate directly in making decisions. The United States, on the other hand, has such a large population that our citizens elect decision makers to represent their interests (see Activity 6).

© 5–10 minutes

3. Ask, *What conditions do you think are important for a democracy to survive and thrive?* You may have to share examples to spark discussion. Do so by passing out **Handout 5b** (What Helps a Democracy Thrive and Survive?). Let students know that the sample conditions listed were laid out by the framers of our Constitution.

Take an example or two and ask students how they feel each ideal plays out in practice in the real world. (You may need to define some terms for them.) Then have them work in pairs to try to do the same for the other items.
The second page of Handout 5b (Instructor’s Notes) has a few examples of ways in which the practice of democracy can diverge from the ideal. Because the examples reflect contemporary election-related issues, you may want to share and explore some of these with your class. (This might well inspire new ideas from the group.)

Note: If the electoral college comes up in discussion, or if you want to introduce the concept and examine its pros and cons, take a look at this concise article “How Do We Elect the President” from The Change Agent, a publication focused on adult education for social justice. You can find the article at www.nelrc.org/changeagent/selectedArticles/article2vol18.htm. Also see Activity 24, The Election Process: Fair or Flawed?).

4.
Explain that the concepts on the handout are somewhat procedural. Ask, What else do you think helps a democracy thrive? What other roles do citizens have besides turning out to vote? Write students’ ideas on the board and have the class try to summarize them. If it doesn’t come up, explain that citizen participation—working together to resolve problems for the common good—is vital for healthy communities.

Also discuss the fact that democracies are always growing and evolving due, in large part, to citizen participation. Ask students to consider the concepts of fairness and justice. Ask, How have those ideas, and related laws and attitudes, changed throughout history? If students are stumped, bring up examples like civil rights for blacks or women’s right to vote. Ask, Who or what do you think was responsible for bringing those changes about?

Option: Historic Movements for Change
Have students learn a bit about historic movements for social change. Here are some good starting points:

- Eyes on the Prize (Part 6, Volume 1). The last 25 minutes of this film focuses on the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March for black voting rights. For more information on this segment of the video, visit www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/10_march.html#video. You may also find these videos at your local library.

- Not for Ourselves Alone. This is a video about the women’s suffrage movement. You can watch an introductory clip and order it at www.pbs.org/stantonanthony/index.html.

- Web resources for teaching about the civil rights movement (www.civilrightsteaching.org/?q=node/45). This site contains links to a host of resources.

- American Labor Studies Center (www.labor-studies.org). This site is a great resource for study materials on labor history.

- Heroes of American Labor (www.anchoreducation.com/images/Heroes.pdf). This 40-page instructional program uses biographical sketches to tell the story of the labor movement.
• **Pro-life Perspective**
  (www.prolifeperspective.com). *Pro-life Perspective* is the official broadcast of the National Right to Life Committee, providing current news on abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia through radio stations throughout the country and a communications blog.

• **Web resource on gun rights.** The National Rifle Association Institute for Legislative Action (http://www.nraila.org) is the “lobbying” arm of the National Rifle Association of America. ILA preserves the right of individuals to purchase, possess, and use firearms for legitimate purposes as guaranteed by the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Their Web site contains information on federal and state gun laws and other issues surrounding this topic.

**Optional assessments**
• Ask, *What have you learned today about the concept of democracy?* Use the Talking-Stick Discussion Method (see Appendix I, Discussion Methods) to organize the session.

• Challenge students to write a rap song or a radio spot to pitch the concept of democracy. The pitch must incorporate what the students have learned to date.
Thinking About Democracy

Compare your ideas with these statements about democracy. Next, mark an X in front of one or two of statements that you believe best represent what is important about a democracy. (There are no correct answers!) Be prepared to discuss why you chose certain statements.

DEMOCRACY is . . .

_____ a system in which people share in directing activities of a country; it is not controlled by a single class, select group, financial interest, or autocrat.

_____ the right and capacity of people—directly or through representatives—to control institutions for their own purposes.

_____ a type of representative government.

_____ the opposite of a dictatorship.

_____ rule by the majority (with minority rights guaranteed).

_____ the practice of legal, political, or social equality.

_____ government of the people, by the people, and for the people.
## What Helps a Democracy Thrive and Survive?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An ideal representative democracy has . . .</th>
<th>In practice, does it always work like this? What might conflict with these ideals?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>. . . a free press.</td>
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<td>. . . equal access to information and diverse points of view.</td>
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<td>. . . free and fair elections.</td>
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<td>. . . elections decided by majorities or at least pluralities (the largest share) of voters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>. . . legislative decisions made by elected officials who represent “the people.”</td>
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An ideal democracy has... In practice, does it always work like this? Below are examples that seem to conflict with these ideals.

<table>
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<th>In practice, does it always work like this? Below are examples that seem to conflict with these ideals.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... a free press.</td>
<td>We have a diversity of media sources from which to get information, and the Internet, which has emerged as a leading source for campaign news, has now surpassed all other media except television as an outlet for national and international news. Other media sources such as television, news reports, radio stations, and newspapers may not be able to provide as much of a variety of viewpoints because of concentration of ownership. Concentration of ownership, which puts great power in the hands of a few companies, tends to reduce the diversity of media voices and points of view. Corporations may exert pressure to promote the parent companies' and advertisers' political and financial interests. In doing so, they can have a big influence on how candidates and issues are perceived by the public. Furthermore, in 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court decided—in <em>Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission</em>—that corporate funding of independent political broadcasts in candidate elections cannot be limited under the First Amendment of our Constitution. One consequence of this Supreme Court ruling is that corporations can now spend unlimited sums of money to drive their candidate of choice into office. This also can have a big influence on how certain candidates and issues are portrayed by the public, as the candidate or party with more money can buy more media attention. (Source: <a href="http://people-press.org/report/479/internet-overtakes-newspapers-as-news-source">http://people-press.org/report/479/internet-overtakes-newspapers-as-news-source</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| ... equal access to information and diverse points of view. | The elections of 2000 and 2004 called this cornerstone of democracy into question. These are some concerns that have been raised:  
  - Voter fraud and flaws in vote counting  
  - Intimidation and suppression of voters, particularly minorities  
  - Disenfranchisement of felons, including those on probation and parole and those who have fully served sentences  
  - During the 2008 election, voters expressed concern about the validity of electronic voting machines, questioning whether these machines allow some votes to go uncounted. |
... elections decided by majorities or at least pluralities (the largest share) of voters.

This has generally been true in U.S. elections. However, four times since 1824 (most recently in the 2000 presidential election) someone was elected president who had gotten fewer popular votes—but more electoral votes—than an opponent.

... legislative decisions made by elected officials who represent “the people.”

The increasing cost of political campaigns may lead to candidates and officials being influenced by wealthy supporters or special-interest groups to back legislation favorable to those supporters.
Objective
Students examine the differences between direct and indirect democratic practices and learn why government in the United States typically functions as an indirect democracy.

Prerequisite
Activity 5

Time
35–45 minutes

Materials
Handout 6

1. Give each student Handout 6 (Two Types of Democracy). Have groups of three or four students read the three scenarios. Challenge each group to label each scenario according to which they think represents a direct (D) or indirect (I) democratic practice. Encourage groups to use their understanding of the words direct and indirect as clues. (Note: Situations A and C are examples of an indirect democratic practice; B is an example of a direct democracy in action.)

   10–15 minutes

2. Ask groups to report their conclusions to the class and explain their thinking. Ask, What do you think are the differences between direct and indirect democratic practices? Have the class use their responses to suggest definitions for each system. Discuss the definitions at the end of the handout.

As time allows, challenge students to identify additional examples of democratic practices in their school or program, community, state, or nation. Ask them whether the examples they offer represent direct or indirect democracy.

   15–20 minutes

3. Wrap up with these discussion questions:

   • What do you think are some advantages and disadvantages of direct and indirect democratic methods?
   • Are there certain situations where you think one approach makes more sense? Why?
   • Why do you think the U.S. government is an indirect democracy?

Students should understand that our founders thought a representative system would be less cumbersome in a country the size of the United States. (Imagine if we all had to vote on every detail and decision!) Explain that the founders were also concerned about rule by a majority “mob” that would be ill-informed on issues. (That might spark some discussion.) They feared that such a system would reduce the chance of finding compromise.

   10 minutes
Two Types of Democracy

Read and discuss the following three situations. Label each one as an example of either a direct (D) or indirect (I) democratic process. (See below for definitions.) Use your understanding of the meanings of “direct” and “indirect” to reach your conclusions. Be prepared to explain your choices to the class.

a) The parents in your community who have children attending public schools are too busy working to make all the decisions about how the school system is run. If they did this, they would have to vote almost every week about every issue—large or small—related to the school system. Instead, they elect school board officials to make these decisions for them.

b) In your state, there has been an ongoing debate about whether the driving age should be raised from 16 to 18 (largely because of the number of car accidents involving young drivers). The state decides to put the issue to a statewide referendum (definition below) and have all the citizens decide if the current law should be changed.

c) This month, Congress is going to vote on tax cuts. You cannot directly vote for or against the initiative, but as a constituent (definition below) you want your congressperson’s vote to reflect the way you feel about the issue. To be sure that happens, you write a letter to your congressperson explaining what you believe and how you would like him or her to vote.

DEFINITIONS

Direct (pure) democracy. A system of government in which political power is vested in the people. Each citizen has one vote and directly decides what laws will be passed. (Grolier Encyclopedia Americana, and Glossary of Political Economy Terms by Dr. Paul M. Johnson)

Indirect (representative) democracy. A system of government in which political power is vested in the people. However, control is exercised indirectly because the people elect government officials or delegates to a law-making group instead of voting directly for specific laws and issues. (Adapted from Glossary of Political Economy Terms by Dr. Paul M. Johnson)

Referendum. A voting process by which a state or local government allows registered voters to make a final decision about an issue or piece of legislation (law). A referendum is sometimes called a proposition or ballot initiative.

Constituent. A voting citizen who is represented by an elected government official. (You are your congressperson’s constituent.)
Activity 7

Democracy vs. Dictatorship: What’s the Difference to Me?

Objective
Students learn about the differences between a democracy and a dictatorship and they recognize the opportunities for democratic participation they have in our society.

Prerequisite
None

Time
15–20 minutes preparation
45+ minutes for activity

Materials
None

Preparation
See Step 1

1. A day or two before this lesson, assign a leader to take over the class who, unknown to the other students, will run a “dictatorship.” Tell the student that, as leader, he or she should make up class rules, projects, and unfair (yet safe) punishments for failing to toe the line. Share some specific examples such as the following:

- Assign selected students to be bodyguards.
- Assign very challenging assignments or homework.
- Assign specific students to clean the classroom and bathrooms.
- Make every student pay one dollar for protection.
- Make each student pay one dollar for celebrations in the leader’s honor.

The assigned leader should show the instructor what he or she has developed and discuss it before the class begins.

Note: To avoid classroom management problems, you can choose to play the dictator role yourself.

© 15‒20 minutes

2. Tell the class that they are about to be “taken over” by a student leader. Explain that you will not hear appeals to the decisions the leader makes. Do not reveal to the class that leader will make some unfair decisions that benefit only the leader. Over the course of one or more periods, the leader should play the assigned role.
3. Have students discuss their experience. Ask,
   - How did you feel about this type of leadership?
   - What do you think guided the leader’s actions?
   - Was the leader fair to everyone? Why or why not?
   - What would you call this type of leader if he or she were the head of a country’s government? (This type of authoritarian leader is typically called a dictator.)

Explain that the student played an oppressive dictator. A benevolent dictator, on the other hand, is an undemocratic ruler who claims to exercise his or her political power for the benefit of the people rather than exclusively for his or her own benefit.

4. Have students use the Think/Pair/Share strategy (see Appendix I, Discussion Methods) to discuss real-world examples of dictators and how they affect the people they govern. Also ask them to think about and discuss examples of adults in their lives who play authoritative roles (e.g. police, teachers, parents). Ask, What do you feel is fair and unfair about specific actions they take? What type of leadership approach would you prefer?

5. As a group, discuss why a leader elected by the class might be preferable to a dictator. Have the group discuss what policies and actions they think would contribute to a more democratic classroom. Urge them to think of examples they might have experienced in their class or program.

6. Ask students to compare and contrast the elements of a dictatorship (both oppressive and benevolent) and a democracy (in which we vote for those who represent us). Ask, What rights do people have in each system? What responsibilities do they have?

If you did not conduct Activity 5, ask, What do you think it takes to make a democracy work? Point out that democracies only work when people take the time to become informed, turn out to vote (and even run for office), and participate to improve their communities. Tell students that in the next set of activities, they’ll discover more about voting for those who represent our concerns and taking action to address issues we care about.

Option
Invite students to explore other systems of government, such as monarchies and theocracies, and to compare them with democracies.
Objective
Students learn about local, state, and federal governmental structures and the roles of officials in elected and appointed positions. Then they explore the realities of social and political influence by talking with representatives of local groups that work on issues students care about.

Prerequisite
Builds on issues identified in Part 1 of this curriculum.

Time
Part 1, about an hour
Part 2, an hour or more (can be done on subsequent day)

Materials
Handout 8, highlighter markers and a few sheets of flip-chart paper for each group

Preparation
Get Internet access or printed materials (see Phase 1, Step 2). Involve students in finding a speaker from a local group that works on an issue the class identified as important (see Phase 2, Step 2).

Activity 8
Who Decides? How Do Things Change?

Phase I: Exploring Who Has Power Over What Issues

1. Choose issues.
Tell students that government officials are generally expected to serve the people. The officials we elect have power to determine what actions the government does or doesn’t take on our behalf. Each elected and appointed official (at national, state, and local levels) has unique responsibilities that allow him or her to address constituents’ needs and concerns.

Have students recall the issues they identified in Activity 1 as being important to them. Explain that they’ll focus on these issues as they explore who has power to make changes.

2. Find out who makes which decisions.
Divide students into groups of three or four; give each group a copy of Handout 8 (Elected Officials: Job Descriptions). Have each group member read one section silently. Direct readers to highlight the titles of elected officials they think might have power to influence one of the issues they care about. They should use what they know about specific positions and look for clues on the handout. You may need to circulate and help students make these connections.
Tell group members to share the positions they highlighted and then choose one official from each of the three levels (national, state, and local). Give each group some flip-chart paper and this challenge. For each position:

- Find the name of person filling the position that represents you and your district.
- List that person’s area of authority and responsibilities.
- Write down one thing you might ask or say to that official about your concerns, if you had the chance.

Option
Have students try to find out how that person has been involved (in the community or through votes) with any of the issues they identified.

Note: Students can find voting records and other information from these Web sites: Project Vote Smart (www.vote-smart.org) and On the Issues (www.ontheissues.org). You might want to prepare in advance by obtaining and copying voting records from those sites, news articles highlighting actions of officials, and other resource materials.

Groups should post their charts around the room.

3. Find ways to take action.
Give the class a few minutes to review one another’s charts and ask questions about them. Next, ask, How can we find out which of our elected officials really can address these issues and what they could do? Invite the class to brainstorm some of the ways in which they could connect with and influence officials at different levels. Consider the following:

- Write letters (fax or e-mail only if to Washington, D.C.).
- Attend or set up a meeting with officials (see Activity 20).
- Start a petition.
- Support a campaign.
- Work with other groups trying to effect change.
- Use your vote as your voice.
- Run for office yourself!

Follow through on ideas that spark students’ interest.

© 30 minutes
Option: How Change Happens Within Local Government

Find out how decisions and changes are made within local government by inviting an elected official (e.g., city council member) or representative of a government agency to speak with the class. Here are some questions or topics students might want to explore:

- How are changes made within your branch of government?
- How do ideas become bills and how do bills become laws?
- What or who influences decision making in local government?
- How are budgeting and spending decisions made?
- What are the areas of control and responsibilities for different government officials? What steps do they go through to make changes? With whom do they work both within and outside of the government?
- What influence do citizens’ groups, nonprofit organizations, and lobbyists have on legislative decisions?
- What priority do the youth issues we care about receive in local government? How can we best bring the issues and our concerns to the attention of government officials?

Phase II: Exploring How Local Groups Work for Change

Assuming you’ve already scheduled a speaker (Step 2, below), you could complete this the same day. Better yet, give students time to digest phase I before exploring how individuals and groups outside of government work to bring about change.

1. **Ponder how people make change.**

Explain this to the class: Elected officials have distinct domains and job descriptions. However, influence over important issues and decisions doesn’t only happen at that level. Throughout history, social groups and movements have wielded great influence and effected important changes in the minds and understanding of the public and officials, in legislation, and even in the Constitution.

Ask, *Can you think of any historic examples of social movements that have brought about important changes?* Document students’ ideas. You may need to grease the wheels by sharing a broad visible effort such as the civil rights movement, abolition of slavery, right to bear arms, or women’s suffrage. Ask, *Can you think of examples of smaller changes in your community that resulted from actions of the public working with or without legislators?* You can share an example such as halting a construction project or getting a stop sign put up at a dangerous intersection, or refer to the articles on a YouthBuild graduate on pages 41 and 42.

10 minutes
2. **Find a local speaker.**

You and your class should already have selected an outside speaker from a citizens’ group or nonprofit organization that works to effect change on an issue that matters to students. Try to choose a speaker representing a project that pressures elected officials and uses other social change strategies: educating the public, changing public opinion, demonstrating, posing legal challenges, holding public hearings, and so on.

If you need help identifying a group or cause, try looking in the local phone book or newspaper for listings of local environmental groups, business groups, fair housing coalitions, tax policy organizations, community development corporations, or civil rights or antidiscrimination organizations. You can also ask local or state representatives to help identify people or groups who have advocated for social change.

© Time will vary.

3. **Hear the struggle and story.**

Prepare the guest speaker by explaining the point of the activity. Ask him or her to prepare a simplified yet compelling story (about 20 minutes long) of the group’s tactics and strategy for achieving its goal. This might be accompanied by a simple list or graphic.

After the guest speaks, allow time for open questions, answers, and discussion. Try to ensure that the discussion helps students understand the lines of power and influence that the person and his or her group are trying to use to effect change.

© 45 minutes

4. **Make connections.**

After the speaker leaves, encourage students to discuss what they heard. Guide the discussion with the following questions and add new ones appropriate to the speaker and issue addressed:

- **Do you think this group’s goals will be met?** What positive changes has it moved forward so far?
- **Were the group member's tactics and strategies clear?**
- **How do you think elected officials will respond to the attempt to influence this issue?**
- **How do you think the public will respond to the attempt to influence this issue?**
- **Could you imagine applying any of the strategies the group used to an issue you care about? How?**
- **Might you be inclined to participate in any of the group's activities? Why or why not?**

© 10-15 minutes

**RESOURCES**

*Civic Engagement and Community Action Sourcebook*

http://hub1.worlded.org/docs/vera/index1.htm

These online excerpts from the printed guide present tools to help readers examine their own beliefs about community, citizenship, and democracy; identify and analyze issues that concern them; and build skills and strategies to take informed action.

*How Laws Are Made*

http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/lawmaking

This overview for high school students is from Ben's Guide to U.S. Government for Kids.
Ely Flores remembers the day when, at 6 years old, he first saw gunshots fly in his neighborhood as rival gang members fired back and forth. Growing up in South Central Los Angeles, where gangs and drugs dominated, presented many obstacles to success. “My father left the family when I was young,” Flores says. “That left my mom very sad and pushed my older brother and me into gangs.”

Eventually, Flores was kicked out of his local high school because of gang involvement. He was committed to house arrest several times. With regard to education, Flores experienced a situation familiar to many Latinos. Fewer than six in 10 Latino students in the U.S. graduate from high schools on time with a traditional diploma, and more than two in five drop out, according to an Education Week study.

But after enrolling at La Causa YouthBuild in East Los Angeles – an alternative school supported in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – Flores envisioned a new future for himself.

La Causa is one of 29 schools belonging to YouthBuild USA's National Schools Initiative, which brings alternative high school models to low-income students who had previously been dropouts. The program helps these students earn a high school diploma and prepare for college or the workforce.

Teachers in YouthBuild schools show students – many of whom have been incarcerated or otherwise fell through the cracks – that they can succeed despite their troubled pasts. Students enjoy small class sizes and supportive learning environments as well as leadership development training and career counseling. Students gain construction skills through hands-on learning while taking high school courses. In some cases, they can also earn early college credits.

For many students, the YouthBuild model is transformative.

“These schools and programs are trying some very interesting new things and are on the cutting edge of education,” said Lissette Rodriguez, YouthBuild’s vice president for field services. “Most people agree that youths who have dropped out deserve a chance, but it is more challenging for them to believe that these young people can achieve at a high level and go on to graduate from college.”

YouthBuild leaders are already proving that students who were cast off in the past can succeed. In the 2006-2007 school year, roughly two out of three YouthBuild students either earned a high school diploma or received their general equivalency degree (GED). Four in 10 students were accepted into a college program.

Flores was an early YouthBuild success story, graduating from La Causa in 2005 with his high school diploma.

“Ely was always a leader. He was just using his leadership for the wrong things,” said Alejandro Covarrubias, who founded La Causa YouthBuild in 2002. “He needed to see a model for positive behavior.”

After some rocky periods and with the school’s help, Flores left his gang. Now 21, he is a young father, college student and student mentor for students. Flores developed a passion for community organizing through La Causa and now leads workshops for young people on leadership, youth empowerment and human rights.

Turnarounds like Flores' are not uncommon in the hundreds of schools nationally that use grants from the Gates Foundation to transform the traditional high school. While each grantee takes a slightly different route, the foundation is most interested in smaller schools with high expectations and high-quality teaching.

Former Gang Member Turns into Community Organizer

The YouthBuild program has always encouraged young people to take responsibility to make things go right in their communities. This story, from the Extra News of Chicago, Illinois (October 1, 2008), tells how a former YouthBuild student turned his life around for the better through community involvement and encouragement from his YouthBuild program.
Former Gang Member Turns into Community Organizer, continued

The Gates Foundation and its partners are acutely concerned with the historically poor high school graduation rates and college attendance rates for Latino students. Since 2000, the foundation has invested more than $1.9 billion in more than 1,800 schools across the country.

Flores says experiences like his prove that high schools with fresh approaches can change the course of students’ lives.

Flores wanted to show his newborn son a new way of life, but for years he was torn, feeling like leaving his gang would be the ultimate act of disloyalty.

“La Causa finally taught me what was really going on [with the gang],” Flores said. “And instead of just running with my friends, I began to tell myself that I could help my homies out by empowering them. I just realized there was something bigger in my life.”

Ely Flores harnesses the California sun

YouthBuild graduate and community organizer Ely Flores (featured in the article above) also received recognition in the YouthBuild Bulletin (Spring 2009) for his community organizing work.

Ely Flores, 2005 graduate and former leadership facilitator of the LA CAUSA YouthBuild program in Los Angeles, California, has come a long way over the past four years.

He has gone from high school dropout to community and youth activist, and now his new role is taking him to even greener pastures. As the new outreach coordinator for Grid Alternatives, of California, Ely is working to provide solar-panel systems to low-income families in the same northern and southern California communities he helped rebuild just a few years ago.

Through their Solar Affordable Housing program, Grid Alternatives has reduced family electric bills by about 75 percent. Over the next 30 years, the panel systems will prevent roughly 10,257 tons of greenhouse gas emissions—the equivalent of planting 14,315 trees.

Working directly with low-income families, elected city officials, contractors, and nonprofits, Ely is out and about in Los Angeles communities promoting Grid’s clean-energy and energy-efficient services. He plans to do big things at this wonderful organization.

For more information about Grid Alternatives, visit their Web site, www.gridalternatives.org.
The national government in the United States is known as the federal government. The three branches of the federal government—executive, legislative, and judicial—carry out governmental power and functions.

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH
The executive branch of the government is responsible for enforcing the laws of the United States. The president, vice president, department heads (cabinet members), and heads of independent agencies work together to carry out their individual responsibilities towards this end.

Elected officials
The president and vice president are elected as a team for four-year terms. The vice president becomes president if the president dies, resigns, or is removed due to impeachment.

Major roles and responsibilities of the president
With the approval of the Senate, the president appoints leaders who head all federal departments and agencies. These leaders report to the president. They are in charge of federal departments that oversee the following:

- Agriculture (the U.S. Food and Drug Administration [FDA] or the U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], for example)
- Commerce
- Defense
- Education
- Energy
- Health and human services
- Homeland security
- Housing and urban development
- Interior (Bureau of Land Management or the National Park Service, for example)
- Justice (the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the Drug Enforcement Administration, for example)
- Labor
- State (international relations)
- Transportation
- Treasury
- Veterans affairs

The president's appointees also head more than 60 agencies including:

- The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- United States Postal Service
- Amtrak (nationwide passenger rail network)
- Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)
The president also does the following:

- Through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), drafts budgets to fund the agencies mentioned above and submits the budgets to Congress for its review and action.
- Encourages Congress to develop laws and programs and to create new departments (such as Homeland Security) or discourages Congress from doing so.
- Signs or vetoes laws and budgets passed by Congress.
- Issues “executive orders” in areas not covered by existing laws.
- Nominates judges for all federal courts (requires approval of the Senate).

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH: CONGRESS

(House of Representatives and Senate)

Article I of the Constitution establishes the legislative (law-making) branch of the federal government. It consists of a bicameral (two-branch) Congress consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Elected officials

435 representatives in the House of Representatives. Other than the District of Columbia, all congressional districts have similar population totals and each district elects one representative to two-year terms.

100 senators in the Senate. Every state, regardless of population, has two senators elected to six-year terms by state voters.
Major roles and responsibilities of Congress

The U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate initiate bills that propose tax levels, budgets, and regulations in all areas of federal programs. If passed by both the House and Senate and approved by the president, the bills become federal law. Some of these laws define certain federal crimes or the range of punishments for federal crimes, determine taxation rules and regulations, or set the federal minimum wage.

- Reviews and makes changes to bills proposed by the president; sends these on to the president for approval or veto. This includes laws that:
  - Regulate interstate commerce and trade (including trade and commerce done via the Internet and trade with foreign nations).
  - Establish rules of naturalization (how individuals not born as U.S. citizens can become U.S. citizens).
  - Determine the scope and limits of copyrighted music or books.

- Declares war and raises and supports a military in response to requests from the president
- Overrides presidential vetoes of laws or budgets with two-thirds vote of both houses

Branch-specific duties

**House only:** Originates all bills for raising revenue; can impeach the president; selects the president if no candidate receives a majority of electoral college votes

**Senate only:** Approves treaties made by the president and federal judges as well as ambassadors and cabinet members nominated by the president; tries the president on impeachment charges and removes him or her from office if found guilty
THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

Article III of the Constitution established the judicial branch of government with the creation of the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the country and is vested with the judicial powers of the government. Their main responsibility is to decide arguments about the meaning of laws, how they are applied, and whether they violate the Constitution. The latter power is known as judicial review and provides a way for the judicial branch to use checks and balances on the legislative and executive branches.

Elected officials

No federal judges are elected.

All federal judges are nominated by the president, reviewed and approved or rejected by the Senate, and appointed by the president. In addition to the nine members of the U.S. Supreme Court, who make final decisions on contested issues, more than 800 federal judges serve in circuit and appeals courts in each region of the United States. Supreme Court Justices are appointed to lifetime terms.

Powers and responsibilities

The Supreme Court can review and declare null and void laws they believe are not allowed by the U.S. Constitution. (Some recent Supreme Court decisions addressed issues such as abortion, gun ownership, campaign financing, the Patriot Act, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the death penalty, criminal court procedures, voting rights, civil rights, search and seizure, and affirmative action provisions.)
STATE GOVERNMENT

A state government refers to the local government of a particular state within the United States. The structure of state governments is parallel to the federal system—all U.S. state governments have executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

The District of Columbia, however, is structured differently since it is a federal district distinct that houses the Government of the United States. It is governed by a mayor and city council and is commonly known as Washington D.C.

- All states have an executive branch that is headed by a governor.
- 49 of the 50 states have bicameral (i.e., two-house) legislatures (a general assembly and a senate); only Nebraska has a unicameral legislature.
- All states have a judicial branch, including trial and appellate courts.

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Governor. The governor is the highest elected official in a state and the state’s chief executive officer. The governor’s role is like that of a state’s “president.”

Lieutenant governor. The lieutenant governor acts like the state’s “vice president.”

Attorney general. The attorney general is the chief law enforcement officer of a state (in some states the attorney general is appointed by the governor).

State senators and representatives. These legislators are elected to represent specific districts.

Judges. Some states elect state judges; others require the governor to make nominations and the legislature to approve them.
RESPONSIBILITIES OF STATE GOVERNMENT

- Governors appoint department and agency heads. They are also ultimately responsible for executing policies in areas similar to those covered by the nation’s president (except international relations and the military). (See Roles and Responsibilities of the President on the first page of this handout.)

- Senators and representatives draft and pass laws that are not otherwise exclusive to the federal government. These relate to enforcement of state laws, education, economic development, land use, and more.

- States collect and distribute state taxes and administer funds provided by the federal government for highways, housing, welfare, health programs, and so on.

- States establish election districts and administer all election laws, including those for federal elections.

- State judges enforce state laws and interpret state constitutions.

(For a listing of most elected officials and candidates for federal, state, and some local governments, go to www.vote-smart.org or contact your secretary of state’s office.)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

COUNTIES

What counties are
The largest governmental units within a state. (These units are called parishes in Louisiana and boroughs in Alaska; Connecticut and Rhode Island don’t have county governments.)

What county governments do
- Build and maintain a system of county roads
- Protect public safety in the county with a sheriff’s department, courts, and jails
- Depending on the state, provide health and hospital services, parks and recreation facilities, water and pollution control services, job training, and education

Elected officials
(The rosters of elected officials vary by state)
- County commissioners or board members elected to serve specific districts; they supervise county employees and make decisions about county taxes
- A county executive, who is usually appointed by the county commission or board, is in charge of county services (like the mayor or president of a county)
- A county sheriff, who hires deputies and enforces county laws
- A district attorney, who brings charges against those accused of breaking laws
Elected Officials continued

- A county clerk, who records marriages and other records
- A recorder of deeds, who handles property rights and transfers

MUNICIPALITIES

What municipalities are
A municipality can be a city, town (typically less than 50,000 people), village (typically less than 10,000), or tribal government (on Indian reservations).

What municipal governments do
Municipal governments provide services that the counties may not provide, including schools, sewage treatment, fire and police protection, transportation and transit systems, parks and recreation facilities, and city planning services (zoning, urban renewal, building permits). May have local courts and a city attorney.

Key elected officials
(The roster of elected officials varies with size of community and state laws.)
- The mayor of a city or town is usually elected and often shares responsibility with a city council. The mayor’s powers include appointing city officials such as the police chief, vetoing bills, and administering the city’s budget.
- City councilors or aldermen represent specific districts or wards and shape local laws and regulations; the mayor may need to approve these.

- School board members are generally elected, but are sometimes appointed.
- Judges or district attorneys are mainly found in larger cities; they may be appointed rather than elected.
- Town meeting members in some New England towns help make decisions, but they are not elected. In this example of direct democracy, all residents who want to have a direct voice in local decisions meet to discuss issues and express opinions. They also vote on selected issues by voice, hand, or ballot.

Handout content adapted from Electing Our Government by Spencer Christian, 1996.
**OVERVIEW**

The class explores the history of voting rights in America, the voting rates of various demographic groups, and the impact that increased youth voting could have on issues and outcomes. Students examine what research says about young voters' turnout and their concerns and views on voting, and then they examine their own. Armed with new insights and information, students have several options: register to vote, get others registered, and launch a get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaign.

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Objective
Students learn that throughout history, voting laws in the United States have favored some groups over others. Students consider the implications of this history and examine issues that touch their lives.

Prerequisite
None

Time
25–60 minutes

Materials
Handout 9 (optional)

Preparation
If you have students who have been convicted of felonies, find out what your state’s laws say about voting rights for this population. (See the resource list in Step 3.) Use that information to adapt the directions in Step 1g.

1. The question of who is eligible to vote has changed throughout history. Use this exercise to help students visualize the changes and consider their impact. Read the following directions to the class. Have each student who fits a criterion stand and remain standing until all students who are eligible to vote under current voting laws are standing. Read the entire prompt even if the whole class is standing after you have read some of the directions.

a. If you are a white male over the age of 21 who owns land and is a citizen of the United States, stand up. (Pause while students stand and then continue reading.) In most states, when the Constitution was ratified in 1788, you white males who owned property were the only people with the right to vote.

b. If you are a white male over the age of 21 and a citizen of the United States, stand up. (Pause.) You gained the right to vote in the 1820s when owning land was no longer a requirement for voting.

c. If you are a black, Asian, or Latino male citizen over the age of 21, stand up. (Pause.) You were made a citizen after the Civil War in the year 1866 by the Fourteenth Amendment, and you gained the right to vote in 1870 when the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed.

Note: Point out that while the Fifteenth Amendment called for equal voting rights regardless of race, some states continued until the mid-1960s to use tactics such as literacy tests (unfairly scored) and poll taxes that prevented many nonwhites (and some poor whites) from voting. These practices were made illegal with passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.
d. If you are a woman of any race or ethnicity, over the age of 21, and a citizen of the United States, stand up now. (Pause.) You won the right to vote in 1920 with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

e. If you are a Native American over the age of 21, stand up. (Pause.) Native Americans were made citizens in 1940 by an act of Congress, but Native Americans in New Mexico and Arizona were not given the right to vote until 1947.

f. If you are between 18 and 21 and a citizen of the United States, stand up. (Pause.) You got the right to vote in 1971 when the Twenty-sixth Amendment lowered the voting age from 21 to 18.

g. If you have been convicted of a felony, sit back down. (Note: Adjust this statement according to your state’s laws.)

Tell the class to notice who is left standing. These people can vote! Chances are that anyone of voting age who is still seated is likely an immigrant who is not a U.S. citizen or someone who has been convicted of a felony. (Tell students that as of 2010, 48 states deny prisoners the right to vote and 34 states bar felons from voting while they are on parole; in 9 states, a felony conviction can result in a lifetime ban on voting, depending on the conviction.)

2. Discuss the exercise. Here are some questions to spark students’ thinking:

- What did this reveal to you about the history of voting rights in our country? About their current status?
- How might our country be different if, for instance, blacks, women, or people without property never got the right to vote? Or if they had always had the right to vote?
- What are your feelings about this history? About the current voting rights situation?
- Which, if any, restrictions touch your life or the lives of your friends or families?
- If there are any voting requirements or restrictions you would like to see changed, explain what you’d like to see happen.

You may want to explain that different groups weren’t simply granted the right to vote. In many cases, battles were fought and many determined and noble people died in the fight to be represented. Consider having students research this topic, or show one or both of the videos listed under “Historic battles for voting rights” at the end of this activity.

Note: This section of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Web site has an overview of federal voting rights laws, past and present: www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/intro/intro.htm.
3. This may well stir up some emotional and practical concerns. Help students identify topics to explore in more detail. Group students with similar interests, or do the exercises as a class. In either case, wrap up by discussing the findings, issues raised, or actions students would like to take. Consider the following:

**Loss of voting rights for felons.** Students might explore these types of questions:

- *Do these laws disenfranchise some groups more than others?* (Young black and Latino men in particular have been disenfranchised from voting at greater rates than other groups because of felony convictions.)
- *How can I restore my right to vote, if at all?*
- *What do I have to do or demonstrate?*
- *If I can’t, what is the state’s rationale for permanently disenfranchising those with felony convictions?*
- *What arguments would I use to try to influence lawmakers on this issue?*

Start by giving students a copy of **Handout 9** (Felony Voting Rights Chart, 2010). If students can get Internet access, send them to these Web pages; otherwise print some materials for them:

- **The Sentencing Project** ([www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org))
  Here you’ll find articles and updates on felony disenfranchisement.
- **Should Former Felons Be Allowed to Vote?** ([www.nationalmockelection.org/docs/curriculum_reform.lesson_5.pdf](http://www.nationalmockelection.org/docs/curriculum_reform.lesson_5.pdf))
  This lesson for high school students is from the *Teacher’s Guide to Election Reform*.
  Provides information about the movement to restore voting rights to former felons.
Non-citizen status. If you have students who are unable to vote because they are immigrants, urge them to explore other ways they can be involved in helping choose those who will represent us. After all, decisions made by elected officials affect everyone. Share some suggestions and encourage them to brainstorm others. For instance, they can learn about candidates and spread the word about ones they believe in by writing letters to the editor, talking with friends and family, or working on a campaign. Help them research what it takes to become a citizen. Also invite students to learn about misconceptions about immigrant voting rights from the Immigrant Voting Project: www.immigrantvoting.org/material/misconceptions.html.

Historic battles for voting rights. Consider having students view and discuss Part 6 of Volume I of the film *Eyes on the Prize*. Look for it on the Internet or at your library. The last 20 to 25 minutes focuses on the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery march for voting rights. There are also excellent documentaries on the battles for women’s suffrage. One is *Not for Ourselves Alone*, which is available through PBS home videos. You can order it online at www.pbs.org/stantonanthony/index.html.

© 35+ minutes
### Felony Voting Rights Chart, 2010

**X** = Not eligible to vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>PRISON</th>
<th>PROBATION</th>
<th>PAROLE</th>
<th>EX-FELONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (some crimes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (2nd Felony)</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X (5 years)</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X (2nd felony, 3 years)</td>
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<td>Massachusetts</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (some crimes)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
X = Not eligible to vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>PRISON</th>
<th>PROBATION</th>
<th>PAROLE</th>
<th>EX-FELONS</th>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (except first-time nonviolent offenders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Oregon</td>
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<td>Tennessee</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X (some crimes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Utah</td>
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<td>Vermont</td>
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<td>Virginia</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (except first-time nonviolent offenders)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law (http://www.brennancenter.org/content/section/category/voting_after_criminal_conviction)
Activity 10

Who Votes?

Objective
Students examine the voting rates of different demographic groups in the United States. They consider reasons for variations between groups and the implications this has for young people's concerns being represented.

Prerequisite
Activity 9

Time
1 hour

Materials
Handouts 10a and 10b

1. Pass out Handout 10a (Who Votes?). Ask students to identify the demographic categories they fall into and put corresponding checkmarks in front of each category. Next, have them complete the middle column by guessing what percentage of each group voted in the 2008 election. Finally, reveal the actual statistics by passing out Handout 10b (Who Votes? Statistics). Ask, How do your assumptions compare with the actual figures? What, if anything, surprised you, and why?

   ◦ 15 minutes

2. Place students in groups of three or four. Ask each group to work together to come up with some generalizations about the categories on the handout (e.g., age or income) and the voting rates of people in those categories. Have them brainstorm possible reasons for high and low group voting rates and jot down questions the exercise raised.

   ◦ 10 minutes
3. Get back together to discuss students’ observations and questions. Pose the following questions, as appropriate.

- **How do you think voting rates affect the way a group’s concerns are represented?** For instance, how might people in other subcategories vote on some of the issues you feel are important? (For example, consider voters over 65 who earn more than $75,000 and have college degrees.)

- **How well do you think the concerns of those with the highest voting rates match what you care about?**

- **How do you think elected officials or those running for election might use this information about different voting rates?**

Explain that the proportion of voters ages 18 to 24 increased dramatically from the 2000 election (32.3 percent) to the 2004 election (about 42 percent), and from the 2004 election to the 2008 election (about 48 percent). Ask,

- **Why do you think there was such an increase?**

- **What factors might have influenced young people to get out and vote in greater numbers?**

- **Do you think these percentages will rise, drop, or stay the same for the next presidential election? Explain your thinking.**

Explain that though the percentage of young voters in presidential elections has been on the rise, the percent of young voters in midterm elections (the national congressional general elections between presidential general elections) has consistently been around 20 percent in the past few elections. This is half of the percentage that voted in the 2008 presidential election. Ask,

- **Why do you think there has not been an increase in the youth vote during midterm elections?**

- **What factors do you think would influence young people to go out and vote in the midterm elections as well?**

- **How do the results of midterm elections affect our society?**

35 minutes
Put a check mark next to the groups you belong to. Then, make your best guess about what percentage of each group voted in the 2008 elections. Wait for your facilitator to reveal the actual percentages of each group that voted in the election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>WHAT PERCENTAGE VOTED? (2008)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your guess</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age**

- 18 to 24 years old
- 25 to 44 years old
- 45 to 64 years old
- 65 years and over

**Sex**

- Men
- Women

**Race**

- White (non-Hispanic)
- Black
- Asian and Pacific Islander
- Hispanic (of any race)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>WHAT PERCENTAGE VOTED? (2008)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your guess             Actual</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Educational attainment</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Ninth to twelfth grade, no diploma</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate or GED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or associate degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual family income</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $20,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 to $29,999</td>
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<td>$30,000 to $39,999</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>$100,000 and over</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The “actual” figures represent the percentage of the whole voting-age population in that category (not the percentage of those registered to vote in that category).

Adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau’s report *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008*.
Compare your guesses on Handout 10a with the actual statistics here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 24 years old</td>
<td>12,515,000</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 44 years old</td>
<td>42,366,000</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 64 years old</td>
<td>50,744,000</td>
<td>69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and over</td>
<td>25,250,000</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note:* The proportion of voters ages 18 to 24 increased dramatically from the 2004 election (41.9 percent) to the 2008 election (48.5 percent). The increase from 2000 to 2004 was even bigger (from 32.3 percent).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sex</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>60,729,000</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>70,415,000</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Race</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White (non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>100,042,000</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>16,133,000</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian and Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3,357,000</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic (of any race)</td>
<td>9,475,000</td>
<td>50.0</td>
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</table>

To put these specific numbers in perspective, consider these general 2008 statistics:

- **United States Population:** 225,499,000
- **United States Citizens:** 206,072,000
- **Citizens Registered to Vote:** 146,311,000
- **Citizens that Actually Voted:** 131,144,000

This number represents 63.6% of all U.S. citizens and 89.6% of all registered voters.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ninth to twelfth grade, no diploma</td>
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<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate or GED</td>
<td>35,866,000</td>
<td>55.0</td>
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<td>Some college or associate's degree</td>
<td>41,477,000</td>
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<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
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<td>Advanced degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual family income</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than $20,000</td>
<td>6,665,000</td>
<td>51.9</td>
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<td>Employment status (of those in the civilian labor force)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>86,073,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>4,642,000</td>
<td>54.7</td>
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Note: The “actual” figures represent the percentage of the whole voting-age population in that category (not the percentage of those registered to vote in that category).

Adapted from the U.S. Census Bureau’s report *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008*
# Objective

Students vote on some mock propositions and experience how voter turnout can influence election outcomes.

**Time**

60–85 minutes

**Prerequisite**

Activity 10 or review of statistics on Handout 10b

**Materials**

Handout 10b and Handout 11 or a similar ballot you create (See step 2)

---

**1.**

Tell students to imagine they live in a community that will conduct an election to resolve some controversial issues. Explain that in some states and communities laws allow for a direct election on particular issues. This is usually called a *proposition* or *referendum*, but may also be called a *ballot initiative, charter change, or amendment*. In most cases, the governing body of a state or community places such issues on the ballot; some state laws allow private citizens to place propositions on their ballot by gathering a prescribed number of signatures of registered voters. Direct elections are also held to approve school budgets in many communities.

5 minutes

**2.**

Have volunteers read aloud the propositions listed on Handout 11 (Proposition Ballot). Discuss questions students have so they understand the intent and possible impact on the community.

5–10 minutes

**Option**

Draft a custom ballot with your own choice of credible controversial issues. Consider topics such as new restrictions on immigrants or immigration, new minimum wage laws, increased college scholarships for low-income youth, higher sales taxes, public tax support for parochial schools, or changes in the rights of Native Americans.

**3.**

Explain that the number of class members voting will be a simulation of real voting rates from the 2008 elections. Have them look again at Handout 10b; it reports that in the 2008 presidential election only 48.5 percent of Americans ages 18 to 24 voted. This is just under half of this age group. Make sure they understand why less than half the class (two out of five students) will be allowed to vote. Allow the class to decide which students will be designated to vote as representatives of 18- to 24-year-olds in the mock election. Suggest that they give preference to those who have voted previously.

5–10 minutes

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*Blueprint for Democracy — Part 3*
**Option**

Rather than using age as the criterion, select another demographic group listed on Handout 10b. Examples include those without a high school diploma (40 percent voted), those earning less than $10,000 (49 percent voted), or Hispanics (50 percent voted). You could also research and use local voting data.

**4.**

As time allows, invite students to speak out or campaign for or against one or more of the proposition topics they’ll be voting on.

☑ 5‒10 minutes

**5.**

Conduct an election using either Handout 11 or your custom ballots. Point out on Handout 10b that 60 percent of people ages 25 to 44 and 70 percent of those age 65 and over voted in the 2008 presidential election. Explain that the program staff or teachers (typically over age 24) will represent the group that votes at a rate of 60 percent. Try to enlist a sufficient number of staff (or volunteers) to “outvote” the students.

Prepare some mock absentee ballots in advance. Explain to the students that they have been received from those over age 65 who weren’t able to come to the polls today. Point out that you have quite a few of these ballots because more than 70 percent of Americans over age 65 voted. To promote a vigorous discussion, you should manipulate the outcome so that popular positions of the class lose by a small margin.

☑ 5‒10 minutes

**6.**

Announce the results with as much fanfare as possible. Conduct the vote again with all members of the class participating.

☑ 10 minutes

**7.**

Debrief the students by discussing as many of these questions as time allows:

- **How did you feel about the initial outcome? Did the vote represent your point of view? If not, what could have shifted the outcome so your preferences came out on top?**

- **If you conducted a second vote ask, How did the outcomes change when everyone voted? What conclusions can you draw about voter participation?**

- **Why do you imagine young people vote at a lower rate than other age groups? What are the implications of this? Do you think that young people or other concerned citizens should address this? How might they do that?**

☑ 20 minutes
8. Conclude by directing each student to write down two changes in society that might result if more young people voted. If time allows, have each student share one of his or her ideas with the class.

© 5–10 minutes

Option: Math Challenge
If you want to reinforce math skills along with the importance of voting, ask students the following:

• What if the same percentage of voting 18- to 24-year-olds was the same as the percentage of people over 65 who voted in 2008?
• How many more young people would vote?
• What might change in our country as a result?

Give students the relevant figures from Handout 10b—the percentages voting in the 2008 election were 48.5 percent and 70.0 percent respectively. Then tell them that the U.S. Census Bureau’s estimate of the number of citizens ages 18 to 24 (as of November 2008) is 25,791,000. (The estimate of those 65 and older is 36,295,000.)

Help students do the math to determine the number of additional young voters if their age group voted at the same rate as seniors did in 2008:

\[
\begin{align*}
25,791,000 \times .485 &= 12,508,635 \\
&\text{(young voters if 48.5 percent voted)} \\
25,791,000 \times .70 &= 18,053,700 \\
&\text{(young voters if 70.0 percent voted)}
\end{align*}
\]

So if 18- to 24-year-olds voted at the 70.0 percent rate of those over 65, there would be 5,545,065 more young voters!

Tell students that the 2000 presidential election was decided by just 537 votes in one state, while the entire 2004 election was decided by around three million votes!

Note: You can also contact your board of elections for a report of percentages of young people who voted in your most recent local or state elections.

© 15 minutes
Question 1
Multiple complaints about disturbances have led some citizens to suggest that young people in this community need to be more strictly monitored and kept in check, especially on the weekends. Should a curfew, which would be monitored strictly and fairly by police and community officials, be instituted for young people under the age of 21, from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. on weekdays, and midnight to 7 a.m. on weekends? If approved, all young people found in public places or driving after these hours would be cited by the police and fined $50.

Yes _______  No ________

Question 2
Should we require probation and treatment programs in place of imprisonment for all first-time offenders arrested for possession, use, or transportation of controlled substances? This alternative to incarceration would not apply to those arrested for selling or manufacturing controlled substances. If this proposition is approved, all criminal charges would be dismissed after completion of treatment. (This is similar to Proposition 36, approved by California voters in the 2000 elections.)

Yes _______  No ________

Question 3
Studies have shown that more and more cancer patients are illegally self-medicating with marijuana to relieve pain. Do you think that marijuana for medical purposes should be made available by prescription to those who are terminally ill or who have been diagnosed with such diseases?

Yes _______  No ________
Question 4
Because of the increased threat of terrorism, should we authorize our police to arrest and indefinitely detain anyone who they believe could endanger public safety or who they suspect is associated with a terrorist organization? (This would represent an extension of some provisions of the Patriot Act.)

Yes _______  No ________

Question 5
Because of the cuts in federal and state aid to localities, our town’s budget will have a $4 million deficit next year. Unless we raise a lot of money, our local schools will have to fire teachers and cut some specialized classes like art and music, several firefighters and police officers will be laid off, and youth and elderly services will be cut. Should we authorize an increase in local property taxes to raise this money? It would cost each property owner about $400 a year in additional taxes.

Yes _______  No ________

Question 6
In order to identify, prosecute, and deport illegal immigrants, should we pass a law that would make failure to carry immigration documents a crime, and will give the police the right to detain anyone who they believe is in the country illegally? (This is similar to the Arizona Immigration Law passed in 2010.)

Yes _______  No ________
Activity 12

What Do We Know About Young Voters?

**Objective**
Students learn what research says about the turnout of young people at the polls and about their concerns and views on voting in the United States.

**Prerequisite**
None

**Time**
45–50 minutes

**Materials**
Handouts 12a and 12b, highlighters or markers.

1. Pass out copies of Handout 12a (Quiz: What’s the Scoop on Young Voters?); have students work alone or in pairs to complete it. Ask the class to use their experiences, knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs about young people and voting to guess the answer to each question.
   
   ① 10 minutes

2. Pass out copies of Handout 12b (The Scoop on Young Voters). As students read the handout, they should look for the correct answers to the quiz questions, underline or highlight them, and revise their responses accordingly. They should also write questions they have directly on the handout.
   
   ② 15 minutes

3. Discuss the results of this activity by asking the following types of questions:
   
   • Which findings made sense to you? Which surprised you?
   
   • What questions do you have about the information?
   
   • How do specific findings compare with your own experiences or points of view?
   
   • What message, if any, do you think these findings might send to politicians?
   
   • How do you think a politician might use the findings to try to reach young voters?

Choose research findings that grabbed students’ interest. Ask the class to speculate on the reasons behind the results, such as why young voters turned out in greater numbers for the 2008 election.

③ 15–20 minutes
4. Ask, Which information and statistics would be useful to someone who wants to inspire young people to get out and vote? Have students use markers to highlight relevant information.

Answer key for quiz:

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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>b</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>a</td>
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<td>d</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>c</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>d</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quiz: What’s the Scoop on Young Voters?

1. 18- to 24-year-olds comprise what percent of the total U.S. population?
   a. 5%    b. 10%    c. 17%    d. 26%

2. The Twenty-sixth Amendment, passed in 1971, gave which group the right to vote?
   a. women    b. Native Americans    c. young people ages 18 to 20

3. Which of the following is not a top concern among young voters?
   a. health care    b. crime    c. jobs    d. education

4. Was the percent of young voters in the 2008 election higher or lower than, or the same as, the percent in the 2004 elections?
   a. higher    b. lower    c. the same

5. Who is most effective at convincing young people to vote?
   a. parents    b. the president    c. other young people    d. young politicians

6. What percent of young people reported they would “definitely vote” in the 2008 general election?
   a. 59%    b. 23%    c. 17%    d. 73%

7. Approximately what percent of young people (18 to 24) voted in the 2008 election?
   a. 31%    b. 42%    c. 48%    d. 64%
8. Voting increased among which groups of people in the 2008 election?
   a. people under 30  
   b. women  
   c. racial minorities  
   d. all of the above

9. Which is the most important factor in persuading young people to vote:
   a. more information about candidates and their positions  
   b. drawing links between voting and issues they care about  
   c. better candidates  
   d. campaigns that are more focused on issues

10. Which is most effective at increasing voter turnout?
   a. phone canvassing  
   b. face-to-face canvassing  
   c. mailed flyers
The Scoop on Young Voters

1. In 1971, 18- to 20-year-olds won the right to vote with the ratification of the Twenty-sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

   Section 1: “The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.”

   Section 2: “Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

   • The Twenty-sixth Amendment stemmed from the expressed resentment of youth that they were old enough to serve in Vietnam but not old enough to have a say about the elected officials who sent them there1.

   • In 1971, the Twenty-sixth Amendment experienced the fastest ratification in history and granted the right to vote in all elections to 11.5 million 18- to 20-year-olds.

   • The 1972 election was the first presidential election in which 18-year-olds could vote and 55 percent of 18- to 24-year-old eligible voters cast ballots2.

2. How many young voters?*

   Below are estimates from November 20043 and 20084:

   Approximations were based on data from the United States Census Bureau (2004 and 2008).

   | Total number of U.S. citizens ages 18 to 24 | 24.9 million in 2004
   |                                            | 25.8 million in 2008
   | Actual total number of voters ages 18 to 24 | 11.6 million in 2004
   |                                            | 12.5 million in 2008
   | Percent of U.S. citizens, ages 18 to 24     | 12.6% in 2004
   |                                            | 12.5% in 2008
   | Percent of youth that voted, ages 18 to 24   | 9.3% in 2004
   |                                            | 9.5% in 2008
   | Percent of eligible voters 18 to 24 registered to vote | 57.6% in 2004
   |                                            | 58.5% in 2008
   | Percent of eligible voters 18 to 24 who voted | 46.7% in 2004
   |                                            | 48.5% in 2008
   | Percent of eligible voters of all ages who voted | 63.8% in 2004
   |                                            | 63.6% in 2008
3. Larger than the “baby boom” generation?
When all citizens under age 18 (73.3 million) come of voting age, they will be a larger generation than the “baby boomers” (71.8 million). (“Baby boomers” refers to the generation born between 1946 and 1964.)

4. What concerns young voters? 6, 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jobs and economy</td>
<td>1. Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. National security</td>
<td>2. Health care availability and affordability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. War in Iraq</td>
<td>3. Improving job market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Education</td>
<td>4. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Civil rights and liberties</td>
<td>5. Environment and global warming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Who can convince young people to vote?
Young adults see other young adults, other young politicians, and the president as the most convincing messengers to get them to vote. 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other young adults</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young politicians</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. What will convince young people to vote?
A majority of young people surveyed think that these are all “very” or “extremely” important. (These numbers reflect relative importance.) 9

- Drawing connections between issues that young people care about and voting: 51%
- More information about candidates and their stance on issues: 45%
- Better candidates: 26%
- More focus on the issues in campaigns: 37%
- In focus groups, young adults say that the best way to increase voter participation is to have candidates speak about the issues that concern young adults.

7. How did young people feel about voting in 2008? How did they vote?
- 3 out of 5 (73%) reported that they would “definitely be voting” in the 2008 presidential election. 10
- 48.5% of eligible young voters actually voted in the election. 11
- 66% of young voters voted for Barack Obama, and 31% voted for John McCain. 12
8. What’s the best way to persuade young people to vote?

2000 Study
Yale University conducted a voter mobilization experiment near college campuses. Youth Vote called and knocked on doors of people under the age of 30. The results:

- Phone canvassing increased turnout by 5 percent.
- Face-to-face canvassing increased turnout by an average of 8.5 percent.
- Face-to-face canvassing produces “spillover” effects (other adults in the households turned out to vote at a higher rate, too).

2001 Study
Yale University conducted an experiment to examine the effectiveness of face-to-face contacts as a means of increasing voter turnout. Canvassing campaigns were conducted by a coalition of groups affiliated with Youth Vote Coalition. The results:

- In five of six sites, actual contact with a canvasser increased turnout among all age groups by an average of 10.9 percent.
- Among voters 25 and under, face-to-face canvassing had slightly stronger effects.
- Face-to-face canvassing produced spillover effects.
- In five of the cities where face-to-face canvassing proved effective, voter turnout increased by 5.7 percent in households that were contacted by canvassers.

2002 Study
Yale University conducted a series of experiments to determine the extent to which various types of phone canvassing campaigns increased turnout of young voters. Several types of setups were evaluated. Here are some findings:

- Commercial phone banks reading conversational scripts (rather than quick ones) were most effective at increasing voter turnout.
- One commercial phone bank coached and supervised by enthusiastic Youth Vote Coalition staff performed quite well.
- Phone banks staffed by paid and unpaid volunteers were less effective, but also less expensive.
- Messages that focused on the historic fight for the right to vote, the importance of civic duty in the wake of September 11th, or the need to make young people a more powerful political voice, all performed equally well.
REFERENCES


2. Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning, Emily Kirby (www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/).


Activity 13

Why Do Some of Us Choose Not to Vote?

**Objective**
Students explore why young people might not vote and then consider their own points of view.

**Prerequisite**
None

**Time**
50–70 minutes

**Materials**
Handouts 13a, 13b, and 13c
One Nerf ball or Popsicle sticks (3 per student) if using suggested discussion method

1. Give students **Handout 13a** (Why Young People Might Not Vote). Tell them to work alone for this piece. Have them list reasons young people might give for not voting. Then have them put checkmarks by the reasons that they give or might give if they were eligible to vote.

   10 minutes

2. Pass out copies of **Handout 13b** (Reasons for Not Voting, 2008). Give small groups of students time to compare their reasoning with the research results from the 2008 election.

   10 minutes

3. Bring the class back together. Consider using one of these discussion methods: Fishbowl, Nerf Ball, or Popsicle Stick. (See details on these and other discussion methods in Appendix I.) Ask,
   - *What are the primary reasons young people (and those in other age groups) report for not voting?*
   - *How do these compare with your thinking?*
   - *Which reasons do you think make sense and which do you think are just excuses?*

   If it doesn't come up, suggest that some people might say they're too busy or they forgot to vote to cover up the fact that they are intimidated by the process or feel that they don't have enough information to make a decision. If students accept that theory, ask, *How could we help people overcome that barrier?*
Ask, **What additional reasons did you list, and why?** Young people often cite one or more of the three bulleted statements below. If these reasons come up, consider giving students time to dig a bit deeper.

- **My vote won’t make a difference.** If students feel that their vote won’t make a difference, conduct with them the mock election in Activity 11. Stress the disparity in voting of the different age groups and how that affects the outcomes in elections.

- **I don’t trust politicians.** If students mention that young people might not vote in large numbers because they distrust elected officials and don’t believe what they say, encourage them to explore the following questions using the Think/Pair/Share discussion strategy (see details in Appendix I).
  - Why don’t you trust them?
  - Whom in your life do you trust?
  - What qualities do they have that inspire your trust?
  - What qualities or behaviors would lead to your trusting an elected official?

- **I don’t trust the process.** Students may suggest that issues such as “bought” elections, voting machine fraud, or minority voter intimidation turn them off to voting. Encourage them to share their own experiences or those of people they know. Give them time to research selected issues and find out what’s being done nationally or locally to address them. Ask, **What would happen if large numbers of people responded by opting out of voting altogether?** (Also see Activity 24, The Election Process Fair or Flawed?)

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<th>15–35 minutes</th>
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**4.**

Have students pair up and then ask them to pick one or two reasons people give for not voting. Challenge them to develop a set of arguments for each one that might help someone overcome his or her resistance.

Ask each pair to join with another and discuss possible strategies for getting more young people to vote; have groups write these down and post them around the room. Save the results for the get-out-the-vote campaign discussed in Activity 14 and described in Appendix III.

<table>
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**Assignment: Why Do People Vote?**

Challenge students to interview five to ten people who do vote and find why each person votes. The class may want to choose additional information to gather, such as a person’s age, gender, or ethnicity. Back in class, students should pool, organize, and try to make sense of their findings.
# Why Young People Might Not Vote

In the left column, list reasons that friends of yours or other young people might give for not voting. In the other column, put a check next to the reasons that you also give (or would if you were old enough to vote).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why Young People Might Not Vote</th>
<th>Reasons I Might Give</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Reasons for Not Voting, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Not Voting</th>
<th>Total (All ages)</th>
<th>18–24 years</th>
<th>25–44 years</th>
<th>45–64 years</th>
<th>65 years and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illness or disability</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of town</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgot to vote</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too busy, conflicting schedule</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation problems</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not like candidates or campaign issues</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration problems</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad weather conditions</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient polling place</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know or refused</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Reasons for not voting by age, November 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau)
Activity 14

How Can I Register or Get More People Out to Vote?

Objective
Students engage in one or more of these options: registering to vote, planning to register other young voters, or planning and implementing a get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaign to increase young voter turnout.

Prerequisite
None (Activities 12 and 13 recommended)

Time
35 minutes in class for registration
20 minutes in class to plan to register others
4 or more months of intermittent work for a GOTV campaign

Materials
None

Registering to Vote
Voter registration should be an ongoing process for youth programs. Students who are at least 18 when they enter, or turn 18 during the program, should complete registration forms. If you have a significant number of unregistered voters, or if your students want to understand the process so they can register others, you may want to do this activity as a class.

1. Explain to students that in 49 states (all but North Dakota and the District of Columbia) and the District of Columbia, laws require registration before you can vote; the details of how to register vary by state.

As a class or in small groups, find out how the voter registration process works in your state. Your local elections office or secretary of state's Web site should provide details. (You can find links for each state at the national site, www.declareyourself.com/voting_faq/voting_faq_449.html.)

In person: In many states, you can also register or obtain a registration application from one of these sources:

- The department of motor vehicles
- A political community group (e.g., League of Women Voters)
- A town clerk's office or city hall
- State offices providing public assistance or identity cards
- Public libraries, post offices, unemployment offices, armed forces recruitment centers, high schools, colleges, or trade schools

Using an online mail-in form: In all states but New Hampshire and Wyoming, you can also register by downloading, completing, and mailing in the National Voter Registration form to the address provided. Send students to one of these sites for a mail-in form: Election Assistance Commission (www.eac.gov), Declare Yourself (www.declareyourself.com), Rock the Vote (www.rockthevote.com), or League of Women Voters (www.lwv.org).

10 minutes
2. 
Read the materials carefully and pull out issues that could affect first-time voters. In some states, for example, new voters need to bring proof of identity (e.g., a driver’s license) or resident status (e.g., a utility bill with the applicant’s name). (Also see Activity 9 for information on voting eligibility for those who have been convicted of felonies.)

While you’re accessing registration information, also find and post details on polling locations, early voting, absentee voting, and so on.

⑦ 15 minutes

3. 
If you didn’t already do so as part of Activity 9, determine which students are eligible to register and encourage each one to do so. Once all eligible voters have registered, ask, What are your thoughts on being a registered voter? Do you intend to exercise your right and responsibility by voting? Why or why not?

Also identify students who are ineligible for reasons other than being underage (e.g., immigrant status or felony conviction). They may want to get together to discuss their thoughts and feelings about the fairness of their situation, and consider options they have for taking action (see Activity 9).

⑦ 10 minutes

Registering Other Young People to Vote

The impetus for registering young voters might emerge from discussions linked to this curriculum. Consider setting a goal before a pending election of having each staff member and program participant or team, or the entire class, register a certain number of people to vote. Students should have a handle on registration procedures for your state (see above). Here are some of the questions the class should explore as it plans for this:

• Whom do we want to target (e.g., friends and relatives, kids who hang out downtown, people I play basketball with)?
• Where can we best reach them?
• What’s our method and “pitch”? What issues will we talk about to persuade people to register?
• What materials will we need? What happens once we’ve collected registrations?

Getting Out the Vote

If your students have accepted that voting is one means of effecting change in a democracy, they may be ready and willing to urge others to take the time to exercise this right. This is one of the best strategies for teaching young people how they can make a difference in elections — especially if there are local issues they care about. Whether a person is registered to vote makes very little difference unless he or she actually turns out at the polls! Your students can approach this at the personal level or as participants in a get-out-the-vote campaign.
a) Making it personal
Challenge the class to brainstorm ways to persuade friends, family, and others to turn out at the polls. Next, they should implement some of their ideas. Here are some of the questions they should ask:

- What issues really matter to us? Who else might be likely to support our positions?
- What argument would most convince me to get out and vote? Would that be likely to work with my friends or family? What other approaches would work best for specific people or groups? What other issues might they care about?
- How can we help people overcome their resistance to voting (for example, drive them to the polls, help them fill out an absentee ballot, or share what we know about the process and candidates)?

b) Organizing a Get-Out-the-Vote Campaign
This is an effective process for getting large numbers of people out to vote, but it is a major undertaking that requires several months from planning to implementation. Before deciding to take it on with your students, read Appendix III. It provides step-by-step details on how to plan and implement such a campaign.

Option: Create Public Service Announcements
Consider challenging students to develop public service announcements (PSAs) to encourage others in their communities to register and get out and vote. Let them know that PSAs are meant to be for all viewers or listeners; they should be nonpartisan. Ask the class to consider how to most effectively get their messages across via a video (for a television station) or audio spot (for a radio station). Encourage the group to draw from what they discovered in this curriculum to create their messages.
PART 4

Pondering Parties, Candidates, and Elections

OVERVIEW

Students explore what (or who) influences their opinions and beliefs about issues and political culture. They learn about political ideologies, examine the positions of various parties and candidates, and figure out where their own fit in. They also learn to ask critical questions about candidates and campaigns, and they connect directly with local officials or candidates by conducting interviews or hosting a forum. Finally, they explore money’s influence on elections and ponder what’s fair and what’s flawed in our electoral system.

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<td>The Election Process: Fair or Flawed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Handout</td>
<td>A Sampling of Complaints About the 2008 Election</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 15

What Influences My Political Beliefs?

Objective
Students reflect on the variety of factors that influence their attitudes, values, and beliefs about societal issues and political culture.

Time
40–50 minutes

Materials
None

Prerequisite
None

Share this with students before beginning this activity:
There are no right answers to the questions we will be confronting and discussing in this activity. We all have lots of influences on why we believe what we do. The important piece is to think about what each issue means for you so you can be sure to get the information you need to act or vote according to your beliefs about what is best for you and your community.

1. Explain that you’re going to write down some issues on the board. Designate one side of the room as “for” the issue, the other side of the room as “against” the issue, and the middle as “undecided.” You’ll then ask students to move themselves to one side of the room, the middle, or the other side depending on where they think they stand on each issue. For example:

The issue: Should it be legal to share (download) music files from the Internet without paying for them?

Directions: Ask students to stand on one side of the room if they think it should be legal, on the other side if they think it should be illegal, and somewhere in between if they have mixed views or if they’re unsure. Ask volunteers to explain why they placed themselves where they did.

Consider using some of these issues or creating your own:
- Should students in grades K–12 have to say the Pledge of Allegiance in class?
- Should law-abiding Americans be allowed to own guns, with minimal restrictions?
- Is immigration bad for our economy?
- Are abortions immoral?
- Should criminals convicted of felonies have the right to vote after they get out of prison?
- Should people on welfare be required to work in order to get benefits?
- Should the U.S. government provide health coverage to all citizens, even if they can’t afford to pay?
- Should minority groups receive special preferences for employment and college admissions?

📅 20 minutes
Ask students to look at each issue and then at the entire list. Ask,

- Why do you think you believe what you do?
- Were you born with those beliefs, values, and attitudes?
- Who or what do you think has influenced how your beliefs, values, and attitudes have developed?

As a class, generate a list of the different types of factors and people that “teach” these to us either subtly or overtly. You might suggest the factors if students don’t raise them: family, religious institutions, media, teachers, and friends. Also ask students whether and how they think our beliefs and attitudes can be shaped by specific “categories” we belong to, such as ethnicity, race, gender, age, religion, sexual preference, and socioeconomic class. Students may want to add some of these to the list.

10–15 minutes

3.
Ask students to think about which of the factors on the list have the strongest influence on their political beliefs. Put a star next to those that the class generally agrees on and discuss the nature of the influence. Ask, for instance,

- How do your beliefs and attitudes compare with those of your family members?
- Do you discuss ideas directly or “absorb” them just from being around them?
- In general, do your political beliefs and attitudes develop more passively (for instance, you take what people around you believe) or more actively (for instance, you gather information and ideas and try to form your own opinion)?

10–15 minutes
Activity 16

**Political Positions: Where Do I Stand?**

**Objective**
Students examine the spectrum of political positions from left to right and consider where their own opinions and beliefs fit in.

**Prerequisite**
Activity 15

**Time**
45–50 minutes

**Materials**
Handouts 16a and 16b

1. Tell students they’re about to delve into different political positions or ideologies. Explain that these are core belief systems about how society should work and about how power and resources should be allocated and used. (For instance, Should government ensure that everyone has a financial safety net or make people stand on their own two feet?) Draw a horizontal line on the board and write liberal under the left end of the continuum and conservative under the right end. Write moderate under the center point on the line. You can also put left-wing under the left half of the line and right-wing under the other side.

Ask, **What do you believe or know about liberal and conservative (or left-wing and right-wing) ways of thinking?** As students toss out and document ideas on the board, ask, **What are your sources of information?** Ask them to put a star (☆) by items that reflect opinions and a plus (+) by items that reflect information (facts). Document questions they have and use these as springboards for research and discussions. **Note:** Students may have limited knowledge of these terms, but it’s important to use their current conceptions as springboards and to revisit them (and perhaps revise them) at the end of the lesson.

2. 10 minutes

Share with students that the terms left wing and right wing, which originated in the late 1700s, referred to the seating arrangements in French Parliament. The wealthy nobles who supported the monarchy sat to the right of the speaker and the working class “reformers” sat to the left. After completing Step 3, ask, **How does our use of these terms today relate to their origins?**
2.
Pass out **Handout 16a** (My Opinions on Political Issues). Ask students to complete the handout according to the instructions.

Once students have finished, reveal that statements 1, 3, 6, 7, and 9 tend to represent a liberal position and statements 2, 4, 5, 8, and 10 tend to represent a conservative position. Ask, *Did any of these surprise you? If so, why? On the basis of these statements, what new thoughts about liberal and conservative ideologies would you add to our list?* Explain that students’ responses to the few examples in this exercise aren’t meant to indicate where class members fall on this spectrum, but it should spark their thinking. It also lays the groundwork for exploring how their opinions align with those of different parties and candidates.

*Note: In Activity 21 (Where I Stand, Where the Candidates Stand) students will consider their perspectives on a much wider range of issues and see how their positions align with those of candidates for various offices.*

3.
Next, pass out **Handout 16b** (Major U.S. Political Positions). Give students time to read it, or review it as a class. Help clarify terms, issues, and positions, when necessary. Explain that few people fall neatly into any one spot on the continuum and that we may lean to one side or the other on different issues. Ask students to use a marker to highlight ideas on the handout that make sense or “fit” with their beliefs. Discuss how the information compares with students’ ideas from Step 1. Ask, *Where might you place yourself on the graphic on Handout 16b?*

*Option: Role Play*
Once students have explored different political philosophies, list some issues they’ve identified as important or choose some current issues facing the nation (affordable housing, health care, minimum wage, or international relations, for example). Next, assign students different “roles” (for example, liberal or far-right) and have them try to discuss the issues from the point of view of someone with their assigned ideology.

*Option: Quiz*
Go to the interactive On the Issues Web site (www.ontheissues.org) and click on the Quizzes tab. Students can indicate their views on a range of issues and get a visual overview of how well they match with different political philosophies, party platforms, or candidates.
My Opinions on Political Issues

Put a “Y” next to a statement if you agree with it, an “N” if you disagree with it, and an “O” if you have mixed feelings, are unsure, or think it depends on other factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>My Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Wealthier people should pay a higher percentage of their income for taxes than lower income people pay.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Public schools should start each day with a prayer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The government should provide health coverage to all citizens who can’t afford to pay for it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We need to sharply decrease the number of immigrants coming to this country.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Businesses can regulate themselves; they don’t need to have environmental regulations or minimum wages set by the government.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The military should allow gays to serve openly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Legal immigrants should be eligible for welfare benefits.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. “Three strikes, you’re out” laws should be used to keep criminals behind bars.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Government should use tax dollars to subsidize housing, food costs, child care, and other services for poor people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. To reduce poverty, Americans need to return to the traditional values of hard work, self-discipline, and belief in God.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Major U.S. Political Positions (Ideologies)

**Left-wing**

- **Far left**
- **Progressive**
- **Liberal**
- **Moderate (Centrist)**

**Right-wing**

- **Conservative**
- **Far right**

### Some general tendencies of left and right thinking in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left of Center</th>
<th>Right of Center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believe that government needs to regulate businesses (e.g., minimum wage, safety, pollutant emissions, advertising claims).</td>
<td>Think the government should not regulate businesses; competition and self-interest will lead to self-regulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assert that government should enact policies that help distribute wealth and power so things are more equal.</td>
<td>Assert that economic power is the reward for hard work. Wealth and profits shouldn't be penalized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that government should not regulate personal beliefs or behaviors, such as sexuality, abortion, or who marries whom.</td>
<td>Believe that government should defend traditional morality by regulating what they deem “immoral” behaviors, such as homosexuality, abortion, or same-sex marriage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contend that government should fund or subsidize healthcare, childcare, housing, and education so everyone has an equal chance to succeed.</td>
<td>Believe that public tax revenues should not be the major source for helping those who have made poor decisions or had bad luck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that people’s civil rights must be protected from potential abuse of police power.</td>
<td>Believe that police power and harsh penalties are the best way to achieve order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that there should be a strong separation of church and state (e.g., religious symbols and prayer do not belong in public schools and offices).</td>
<td>Believe that core religious tenets should guide government policy and practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Be aware that anyone can have a diverse set of beliefs that draw from different positions. For instance, many people are conservative on economic issues (they don’t believe in taxing wealth, for example) but more liberal on social issues (they might support civil rights, for example).

**A SNAPSHOT OF POLITICAL POSITIONS**

Many strains of thought and beliefs exist within each of these general ideologies. This gives a quick overview of some points on the left-right political spectrum.

**LEFT OF CENTER**

**Liberals**
- In the United States, the Democratic party tends to be the party of liberal positions.
- Place a high importance on using government, its money, and its power to support social services and make opportunities and resources accessible to all.
- Advocate for sufficient tax revenues to fund social programs such as social security, welfare aid to families with children, subsidized housing, health care for Americans, and after school activities.
- Are committed to civil rights and liberties, including affirmative action, the right to privacy, and a woman’s right to choose to terminate a pregnancy.
- Support a “graduated” income tax, which means that the wealthy pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes than lower income people do.
- Usually advocate a foreign policy that favors diplomacy and international alliances over unilateral interventions.
- Tend to support increased gun control measures.
- Tend to oppose the death penalty.

**Progressives**
- Assert that our current system promotes inequality and injustice and that citizens, as well as politicians, need to work actively to change that.
- Hold similar positions as liberals, but tend to use different approaches to achieve goals. They advocate working with people and organizations on “grassroots” efforts, as well as with government institutions, to effect change.
- Believe that alternative economic institutions, such as cooperatives and consumer-, community-, state-, and worker-owned facilities, can eliminate the injustice and inequalities of a class-based society.
- Advocate establishing an organized working class that plays a central role in the struggle for a democratic workplace and meaningful work.
- Progressives might belong to the Democratic Party, the Green Party, or be registered as Independents.
The Far Left

- “Far left” is a broad term used to denote supporters of farther left-wing positions.
- Typically advocate for radical social changes in society such as major redistribution of wealth from corporations and the wealthy to wage earners, the poor, and the public (social service) sector.
- Typically support socialism (and in some cases, communism) as an ideal political or economic system for equitably meeting people’s needs.
- Often become leaders in anti-war and anti-globalization efforts because they see these as primarily serving capitalist interests.

CENTRIST

Moderate

- Moderate positions are considered the middle ground.
- Moderates often have liberal viewpoints on some issues and conservative viewpoints on others.
- Moderates often support compromises between liberal and conservative positions.
- Many Democrats and Republicans consider themselves to be moderates.

RIGHT OF CENTER

Conservatives

(In the United States, the Republican Party tends to be the party of conservative positions.)

- Have traditionally advocated for a large role for private businesses, a smaller national government (with fewer government services and less regulation of private business), and shifting responsibilities to state and local governments. (But more recently conservatives support increased use of national police powers to maintain security.)
- Tend to defend traditional structures and values (e.g., marriage as a prerequisite for sex).
- Believe that hard work and an entrepreneurial spirit, rather than handouts (e.g., welfare payments), will lead to success.
- Want to limit taxes on wealth and eliminate taxes on inherited wealth.
- Usually advocate for more military funding, spending, and intervention, and for more government restrictions on civil liberties when they judge our national security is threatened.
- Tend to support the death penalty, few restrictions on gun ownership, and strict limits on immigration.
Libertarians

- Often considered conservative because they believe in limited government control over business and economics.
- However, like liberals, Libertarians also believe that government has no business regulating personal morality that does no harm.

Christian Conservatives

- Often called the “religious right,” Christian conservatives have become an increasingly powerful force in the political arena and Republican party.
- On the basis of their biblical interpretation, they advocate stronger regulation or prohibition of abortion, oppose gay rights, and support teaching of “creationism” as an alternative to theory of evolution.
- Support the presence of religion in the public sphere, such as voluntary prayer in schools.
- Advocate reduced restrictions on government funding for religious charities and schools.
- Promote conservative Christian moral values, including sexual abstinence before marriage and the importance of the traditional nuclear family.

The Far Right

- “Far right” is a broad term used to denote supporters of farther right-wing conservatism and is made up of many groups.
- The Christian far right believe that Christian men are ordained by God to run society.
- The more extreme right wing includes those who believe that secret elites control the U.S. government and banks and should be routed out through armed militias or other extreme means.
- Some are “white supremacists” who believe in the superiority of Caucasian people.

INDEPENDENTS

“Independent” describes someone who doesn’t wish to identify with a major political party. Independents represent approximately one-third of voters. American citizens currently are almost equally divided among Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. There are, however, very few Independent members in elected positions because our electoral laws make it difficult for “third” parties to gain a foothold.
Activity 17

A Tale of Two Countries

Objective
Students compare statistics from two fictional democratic countries that have different political or economic philosophies and policies. They explore their own values and consider the benefits and challenges of each system.

Prerequisite
None (Activity 16 recommended)

Time
45+ minutes

Materials
Handout 17

This exercise is designed to spark students’ curiosity and make them aware that democracies can have different political or economic philosophies and policies. Among other things, these philosophies and policies influence how people’s needs are addressed, how goods and services are distributed, and how businesses function. These influences, in turn, have personal, social, and economic implications for people who live in a country. **Handout 17 (A Tale of Two Countries)** offers information and statistics on two fictional countries.

(Note: The Country A profile was based on the United States; Country B was based on Sweden.)

1. Instruct students to work in groups of three or four to review and compare the countries’ descriptions. Select two or more of the questions on the last page of the handout to guide group discussions.

   Explain that there are no right or wrong answers. Encourage students to mark up the text with questions, comments, and observations as they read it and reflect on the selected questions.

   ☑ 25 minutes

2. Come back together and have each group report on some of the highlights of its discussion or its responses to a specific question. Record major points on the board. Use these to prompt discussion of issues that spark students’ interest.

   ☑ 20 minutes+
A Tale of Two Countries

Countries A and B are both democracies. Each has its own political and economic approach that influences how people’s needs are addressed, how goods and services are distributed, and how businesses function. (The profiles of Countries A and B are based on actual countries.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY A</th>
<th>COUNTRY B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic beliefs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Basic beliefs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those in power here believe that most of people’s needs for goods and services—from healthcare to peanuts—should be met by privately owned businesses that compete with one another. (They believe that this free competition gives people more choices and lower prices.) Businesses are free to make most decisions about what prices to charge, how much to pay employees, when to lay off employees, and what protective environmental measures to implement—with minimal government regulation. Leaders believe that in this system, people are motivated to succeed and improve their situations through hard work, with a minimum of government handouts. Using tax dollars, the government funds some social services for needy populations.</td>
<td>Those in power here believe that most of people’s needs for goods and services should be met by privately owned businesses that compete with one another. They also believe that substantial regulations must be placed on businesses (particularly large ones) to protect the interests of workers, consumers, and small businesses. Leaders believe that the government and other institutions should provide (or subsidize) comprehensive social services for all to help reduce social and economic inequalities and to counteract the effects of life’s misfortunes such as poverty, illness, and unemployment. The government funds these social services using tax dollars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General social services</strong></td>
<td><strong>General social services</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Country A provides limited social service benefits (e.g., welfare payments, food stamps, health care) primarily to eligible low-income families with children, the disabled, and the elderly. Eligibility and benefits vary by region of the country.</td>
<td>- Country B provides comprehensive benefits (e.g., unemployment coverage, sick-pay, job-training, health care, childcare, paid family leave, and pensions) to all residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- People must work a set number of hours to receive welfare benefits; job training must typically take place during additional hours.</td>
<td>- People receiving benefits have strong incentives to work. These include job training and education, free childcare, and access to good-paying jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A government program helps low-income people with housing costs; it can only cover a small percentage of those who are eligible.</td>
<td>- Most people enjoy a very high standard of housing; over 20 percent of households receive a housing allowance or housing supplement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTRY A</td>
<td>COUNTRY B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Families</strong></td>
<td><strong>Families</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Subsidized childcare exists for some, but not all, low-income families. Otherwise, families need to buy childcare from private providers or rely on family members.</td>
<td>• The government subsidizes childcare for all working parents who need it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Employers decide whether employees get parental leave and how much they receive.</td>
<td>• The government covers parental leave from work for both mothers and fathers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 19 percent of children in this country live below the poverty level.</td>
<td>• If a parent needs time off for a sick child, he or she receives 80 percent of lost income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 13.2 percent of the population lives below the poverty level.</td>
<td>• Parents also get paid for up to five days/year to attend something at a child’s school or address other needs besides sickness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People who can afford health care buy private insurance; many employers subsidize employees’ insurance. The government subsidizes coverage for the poor and elderly. Nearly 16 percent of the population has no health coverage at all.</td>
<td>• The government provides one national health insurance program that covers all citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• As of 2007, about 15 percent of the population has no health insurance at all.</td>
<td>• Life expectancy at birth: 81.2 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Life expectancy at birth: 78.1 years.</td>
<td>• Infant mortality: 2.3 deaths per 1,000 live births.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Infant mortality: 6.2 deaths per 1,000 live births.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COUNTRY A</strong></td>
<td><strong>COUNTRY B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher education (college)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Higher education (college)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 13 of this country's universities are ranked among the top 20 higher education institutions in the world.</td>
<td>• Some of this country's universities are among the top 100 in the world; none are among the top 20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Percent of population 25 and over with a college degree: 27.4%.</td>
<td>• Percent of population 25 and over with a college degree: 30.5%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The government has some programs to subsidize the cost of undergraduate education for the poor and middle classes. The value of this support has dwindled in recent years while college costs have soared. The average cost of a higher education is $35,000 a year.</td>
<td>• The government covers the cost of tuition for graduate and undergraduate education. All students who need help to finance living expenses receive assistance from the government. Some universities are even tuition-free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment</strong></td>
<td><strong>Employment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unemployment rate is 10 percent; youth unemployment is 18.9 percent.</td>
<td>• Unemployment rate is 6.1 percent; youth unemployment is 26.9 percent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trade union membership is 12.3 percent.</td>
<td>• Trade union membership is 70 percent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The amount of paid leave varies tremendously; the typical starting point is one to two weeks.</td>
<td>• Everyone is entitled to 5 weeks paid annual leave after the 1st year of employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 6 months unemployment insurance (50 percent of last salary).</td>
<td>• Average years on same job: 12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People are required to be actively looking for work to continue getting benefits.</td>
<td>• 14 months unemployment insurance (80 percent of last salary).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To receive full benefits, people must be involved in government-sponsored educational and training programs to build skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In any business with more than 25 employees, employees have a right to be represented on board of directors and be consulted on decisions affecting employment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### COUNTRY A

#### Taxes
- Residents pay between 15 and 35 percent of their gross income in taxes.
- The poorest third of people pay 6.3 percent of the total taxes.
- There is a tax on inheritance, but no tax specifically on wealth (net worth).

#### Income and wealth
- The national income per capita (per person) is $46,970.
- The ratio of executive pay to the salaries of factory workers is 263 to 1.
- The gini coefficient of this country, a common measure of income inequality, is 45. (The lower the number, the greater the equality. A gini coefficient of 0 represents perfect equality. It is calculated by looking at the average difference between the income of those at the very top and those at the very bottom.)
- There are few limits on the amount of wealth that someone can accumulate.
- In 2008, 28.7 percent of single mothers here were poor.
- In 2008, 9.7 percent of people 65 and older were poor.

#### Crime
- There are over 60 gun-related homicides per year for every million people.
- 756 of every 100,000 people are in prison.

### COUNTRY B

#### Taxes
- Residents pay between 40 and 50 percent of their gross income in taxes.
- The poorest third of people pay 11 percent of the total taxes.
- There is a tax on wealth (net worth).

#### Income and wealth
- The national income per capita (per person) is $38,180.
- The ratio of executive pay to the salaries of factory workers is 19 to 1.
- The gini coefficient of this country is 23.
- High taxes tend to limit the amount of wealth that someone can accumulate.
- In the mid-2000s, less than 5 percent of single mothers here were poor.
- In 2003, the percent of elderly at risk of living in poverty was 14%.

#### Crime
- There are fewer than 10 gun-related homicides per year for every million people.
- 81 of every 100,000 people are in prison.
COUNTRY A | COUNTRY B
---|---
**Voter turnout**<br>• 64 percent of the voter-age population turned out for a recent major election.<br>• In most of the country, prisoners cannot vote. In some places, those on parole for felonies cannot vote; in others, former felons can never vote.<br>**Voter turnout**<br>• 87 percent of voter-aged population turned out for a recent major election.<br>• People in prison with felony convictions and those with previous convictions are allowed to vote.

**Diversity**<br>• Country A has a high degree of cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity.<br>**Diversity**<br>• Country B has a low degree of cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What questions do you have about Country A, Country B, or specific statistics? How could you find the answers?

2. Which country might you prefer to live in? Why did you pick it?

3. What do you think would be the greatest benefits of living in your selected country? What things would you like to see changed?

4. What do you think would be the benefits of living in the other country? What would have to change for you to want to live there? Which types of people might prefer this country to the one you chose, and why?

5. If you lived in the country that you didn't choose, would you be willing to work politically to try and change things there? What practices would you try to change? What might you do?

6. Why do you think some of the differences might exist between the two countries? How do you think a government's economic and political philosophy can influence people's daily lives?

7. Which actual current-day country do you think is best represented by Country A? Country B?
Activity 18

Political Parties: Where Do I Stand?

Objective
Students explore political party platforms and create their own. Then they examine distinctions between political parties and consider where their own beliefs and opinions fit in.

Prerequisite
None (Activity 16 recommended)

Time
1.5+ hours
(Consider breaking this into two activities.)

Materials
Handout 18

Preparation
Print out materials from Web sites as described in Step 2.

1.
Ask, Which political parties are you aware of? List students' responses on the board. They will, no doubt, suggest Democrats and Republicans, and possibly some third parties. If they don't name third parties, you may want to suggest some. Ask, What do you believe or know about each of these parties? What questions do you have? Under each label, write down students' responses and questions.

Explain that understanding different political parties and their platforms (positions on key issues) can help us decide whom to vote for. (In some states, declaring party affiliation or independent status is required when registering; see the sidebar on page 111 for more information.)

10‒15 minutes

2.
Explain that political parties are organized on national, state, and local levels. Before each presidential election, the parties hold national conventions to nominate candidates for president and vice president. Primary elections take place within political parties to determine (usually at the convention) who will appear on the party's ballot in the general election. Every party in their respective state determines the rules that govern their primaries. However, one can find certain rules that are common to many state parties. Consult the political parties in the state where you reside for specific set of rules.

At the national conventions, party platforms are formally approved: a set of principles, goals, and strategies for dealing with important issues facing the country. These give the voters an idea of what the parties and candidates stand for, what they think about important issues, and how they might address them. The platforms are broken into “planks” that address specific issues (for example, gun control or civil rights).

The Web sites listed below break down lengthy Democratic and Republican party platforms into accessible planks. Print out these over-
views of major party platforms. Assign students to read through them and ask them to:

1) Notice the kinds of issues addressed in platforms and the proposals for addressing them. (Explain that they will be asked to work together to create their own platforms.)

2) Highlight ideas in the platforms that make sense or “fit” with their beliefs.
Democratic Party Platform, 2008
www.democrats.org/a/party/platform.html
Republican Party Platform, 2008
www.gop.com/2008Platform

3. Break students into groups and have each group create a fictitious party name. Have them imagine they’re preparing for their own national conventions. Have group members come up with three or more issues they care about that they want their party to address in its platform. They should then figure out their positions on these issues and come up with some strategies they’ll use to address them. Remind students that individuals will have a variety of opinions and ideologies; the goal is to try to reach some consensus. They should then prepare a five-minute convention speech in which all members participate.

4. After each group presents its speech, discuss these questions with the class:
   - What did you learn about the party and its underlying beliefs?
   - Does the party seem to lean more to the left or the right?
   - What types of people might benefit from this party and want to join it?
   - Which planks do you agree with? Disagree with?
   - What questions do you have for party members?

5. Pass out Handout 8 (Major Political Parties). Give students time to read it, or review it as a class. Help clarify terms, issues, and positions, when necessary. Document students’ questions. (You can use these to spark further research and discussion.)

   Discuss how the information compares with students’ ideas from Step 1. You might also explore the overlap and agreement—not just the distinctions—among parties. At a basic level, for instance, they generally agree that capitalism is the best available economic system and they support the core ideas laid out in the constitution and bill of rights (e.g., rule of law, equality, and respect for human rights).

Finally, ask students to use a marker to highlight ideas on the handout that make sense or “fit” with their beliefs.

6. Ask,
   - Did anything surprise you? Explain your answer.
   - Did you find that your thinking aligned with different positions and parties on different issues?
   - Where, if anywhere, would you place yourself on the graphic on Handout 18?
If you have time, ask students to share their perspectives on some of the issues. Be sure to remind them that “intelligent people do not always agree” and that it is important to respect one another’s opinions.

Explain that now that the group has looked at the big picture, and their own beliefs and opinions, they’ll be better prepared to evaluate candidates running for office.

10 minutes

Option

Ask students to choose one political party to research by visiting party and nonpartisan Web sites (see Resources, below) or local party offices. They can interview staff members about the party’s platform, functions, candidates, and so on.

Resources

- These Web sites attempt to provide unbiased information on political parties:
  www.ontheissues.org
  www.vote-smart.org
  www.publicagenda.org
  www.purepolitics.com
  www.factcheck.org

- You’ll find descriptions of most third parties at this online Directory of U.S. Political Parties: www.politics1.com/parties.htm

- For more on the role and challenges of third parties in the United States, visit the Politics 101: Third Parties Web page: www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2004/politics101/politics101_thirdparties.html

- For a commentary on barriers third parties face, see www.america.gov/st/usg-english/2008April/20080423223737eafas0.6480067.html.

Note: Some of the Web sites listed above accept paid ads and may publish individual or published opinions that are partisan.

REMINDER:

No nonprofit or public organization can use any resources in support of any political party or candidate or they risk losing their nonprofit status. According to federal law, they can lobby for legislation or causes, up to a certain percentage of their budgets. However, they may not use any public funds to support any cause or political issue. Therefore no YouthBuild student in a publicly supported program can use any paid program time to support any issue, and under no circumstances can YouthBuild students support any candidates during program time.

Background information on party affiliation and voting

- State laws governing registration in political parties vary greatly. Check your state government’s Web site for more information. (For a list of links to state government Web sites, go to www.usa.gov/Agencies/State_and_Territories.shtml.)

- In some states, you must decide when you register whether to declare a party affiliation. During primary elections in these closed primary states, you must have enrolled in one of the parties to vote and help select the candidates representing your party in the general election. Open primary states allow voters to request a ballot of any of the parties participating in the primary election.

- In all general elections you can vote for any candidate running for office regardless of your party affiliation.
Political Parties in the United States: An Overview

MAJOR PARTIES
The Democratic and Republican parties are the two dominant political parties in the United States. Approximately two-thirds of voters report aligning with either one of these parties. It is not easy to describe the major political parties as distinct entities because their philosophies sometimes overlap. Below we have outlined some general distinctions between the two major parties.

Democratic Party
www.democrats.org
The Democratic Party tends to support:
• A combination of tax incentives and government regulation on businesses in order to balance economic growth with protection of workers and the environment.
• Social services supported by government funding.
• Stronger regulations designed to guarantee workplace safety, workers’ rights, and an increased minimum wage.
• A strong defense combined with strong alliances with other nations.
• Extending more and better quality health care to more Americans through governmental regulations, incentives, and direct support.
• Women’s rights to choose to have an abortion or give birth to a child.
• Fair international trade (free trade linked to standards that protect the environment and workers’ rights).
• Protecting civil liberties by limiting government actions that threaten individual privacy rights (for example, libraries keeping records on readers).
• Focusing more on crime prevention and rehabilitation of prisoners than on blanket harsh penalties (for example, “three strikes”) to deter crime.
• The right to organize unions.
• Using affirmative action to redress past discrimination and to ensure more equitable schooling and employment opportunities regardless of ethnicity or gender.
Republican Party
www.gop.com

The Republican Party tends to support the following:

• A reduction of taxes and fewer regulations on businesses and wealthy individuals in order to promote economic growth.
• A strong reliance on private charities and churches, and less on government programs, to provide social services.
• Allowing employee wages and working conditions to be established by companies competing in the marketplace rather than by government regulations or by unions.
• A strong defense with an emphasis on America’s right to act on its own (unilaterally), if necessary.
• Management of the healthcare system primarily through open competition and some incentives. (Support the role of private insurance industry.)
• Reliance on businesses to self-regulate emissions of pollutants; some incentives (e.g., tax breaks) that encourage businesses to promote cleaner air and water.
• Increased regulation or outlawing of abortions.
• Access to schooling and jobs based on merit alone, without regard to race or gender.
• Free international trade with minimal environmental or workplace standards.
THIRD (OR MINOR) PARTIES

U.S. politics is dominated by the two major parties. As a result, it is sometimes called a two-party, or bipartisan, system. In contrast, some parliamentary systems in other countries encourage multiple parties. Our electoral laws make it hard for “third” parties to gain a foothold. (For instance, many states have tough ballot access requirements; third parties on ballots are often barred from participating in debates.) Even so, there are dozens of third parties in the United States. These are some of the largest ones:

The Green Party (www.gp.org): The Green Party lists its ten key values as grassroots democracy, social justice and equal opportunity, ecological wisdom, non-violence, decentralization, community-based economics and social justice, feminism and gender-equity, respect for diversity, personal and global responsibility, future focus and sustainability. The party’s platforms are generally against corporate influence and control over government, media, and American society at large.

The Libertarian Party (www.lp.org). Libertarians want limited central government. They call for repealing personal and corporate income taxes, replacing most government-provided services with private and voluntary arrangements, and repealing regulations such as minimum wage and gun control laws.

The Constitution Party (www.constitution-party.net). This conservative party believes that our laws must reflect their “biblical origins.” It is “pro-life” and is opposed to rights for homosexuals, unchecked immigration, and welfare. It supports a strong national defense and little or no involvement in international organizations (e.g., the United Nations). Party members advocate for minimal government regulation and taxes, and a strict interpretation of the U.S. Constitution.

The Socialist Party (http://socialistparty-usa.org). The Socialist Party stands for the abolition of every form of domination and exploitation, whether based on social class, gender, race/ethnicity, age, education, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. They are committed to the transformation of capitalism through the creation of a democratic socialist society based on compassion, empathy, and respect as well as the development of new social structures.

The Tea Party is not really a political party. Rather, it is a fiscally conservative socio-political movement that emerged in the United States in 2009 through a series of locally and nationally coordinated protests. The protests were partially in response to several federal laws: the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and a series of healthcare reform bills. The name “Tea Party” is a reference to the Boston Tea Party of 1773. Tea Party protests have invoked themes, images, and slogans similar to those used during the pre-revolutionary period in American history.
Activity 19

Evaluating Candidates: How Do They Measure Up?

Objective
Students revisit issues they care about; identify current local, state, and national candidates; and prepare to critically evaluate the candidates in preparation for an election.

Prerequisite
Ideally, you will have completed some or all of Activities 1, 2, 3, 8, 15, and 16, or will work on them concurrently with this activity.

Time
55–60 minutes (plus ongoing evaluation)

Materials
Handout 19

1. Who’s running?
Review with the class what they’ve explored so far: issues that matter to them, the impact of voting, and political beliefs and parties. Explain that the next step is to look at who’s running in the upcoming election and how the candidates measure up. Ask,

- Are you aware of any candidates who are running this year for election or re-election at the local, state, or federal levels?
- How did you hear about them (ads, lawn signs, or conversations, for example)?
- What do you know about them?

Students may want to refer back to Handout 8 for a list of elected officials at each level.

Ask the class (or some volunteers) to round out their list of public officials by going to one of the following sources for a complete list of candidates for your area: Project Vote Smart (www.vote-smart.org), www.congress.org, your secretary of state’s office, or the local board of elections. (Some of these sites also link to details on candidates and their positions.) Tell the class they’ll refer to this list in this and other activities.

2. What qualities do we care about?
Ask, What characteristics or ideas would a candidate need to have in order to gain your vote? What do you think it’s important to know about candidates? Explain that these could be specific issues students care about, personal or political characteristics students think are important, or aspects of the candidate’s past record and experience. You might get these types of responses:

- “Do they really mean what they say?”
- “Do they support a higher minimum wage?”
- “Would they really make a difference?”
- “What party do they belong to?”
Document students’ responses on the board or flipchart paper and have them try to categorize the list as they see fit. Chances are that the majority of responses will fall into two large categories: personal qualities and positions on issues. Personal qualities include things like leadership experience, honesty, and personal warmth, or being a straight-shooter, family guy, collaborator, or someone who can take charge.

Ask, Which categories and questions are most important to you? Ask each student to write down five or more characteristics that fit that bill and to keep the list as they go through the next series of activities.

Explain that unless you are running for office yourself, you are probably not going to find a candidate who perfectly matches your positions. But it’s important to figure out what you most care about and find a candidate who comes closest to supporting those positions.

10 minutes

3. Tuning in to the issues.
Revisit some of the issues or concerns students identified in earlier activities as being important to them. If you did Activity 1, review the visions students created of what it would look like if issues that mattered to them were resolved to their satisfaction. Ask, What would you like to hear a candidate say about the issues you care about?

To identify current issues that are “hot” in the upcoming election, students can go to www.publicagenda.org, www.ontheissues.org, or candidate Web sites, or they can interview community members. They should ask, “How do these issues match up with things we care about?” If students’ issues aren’t represented, discuss what the class can do to try to bring their concerns to candidates (such as communicate with candidates via e-mail, letters, interviews, or forums; join an interest group that’s lobbying or exerting pressure on candidates). Encourage students to take action and follow through with their ideas.

10‒15 minutes

4. Learning about candidates.
As a class, consider the following list of activities that involve looking at campaigns and candidates. You may already have completed some of these as part of this curriculum (for example, visiting candidate or party Web sites) or will do so in upcoming activities. You may want to tackle others on your own.

- Visit Web sites of candidates, parties, and nonpartisan groups (see Appendix V, Online Resources).
- Evaluate campaign media such as ads and brochures (see Activities 26 and 27).
- Interview candidates (or their staff members) or attend a forum (see Activity 20).
- Contact campaign offices to ask about candidates’ positions on key issues.
- Interview people who support specific candidates and others who oppose them; find out the reasoning behind their choices.
- Watch and evaluate live or televised campaign debates (see this activity’s resources).
Explain to students that in preparation for the upcoming election you’ll ask them to reflect on their earlier experiences and findings; look more closely at campaign materials, events, and news media; and talk with people about issues and candidates.

5 minutes

5. Asking critical questions.
Pass out Handout 19 (Critical Questions to Ask About Candidates); together, discuss the meaning of each question and share some examples. Ask students to suggest other questions they think are important to ask; classmates can choose to add these to their handouts. Explain that students should use these questions as “lenses” through which to look at candidates and campaign media between now and the election.

15 minutes

6. Establishing candidate study groups.
Group students in pairs or teams. Once they have a bit of information about who’s running, each pair or team will select a candidate to focus on as they engage in activities listed in Step 4. In Activity 28 (Wrapping It Up: Presentations and Preferences), each group will be responsible for documenting its findings on a candidate in preparation for “introducing” him or her to the rest of the class via a presentation or mock forum.

5 minutes

Resources

Picking a Candidate
► www.smartvoter.org/voter/judgecan.html
This straightforward voter’s guide promotes critical questioning.

How to Watch a Debate
► www.lwvnj.org/ef/debates/watchingdebate.shtml
This is another good resource from The League of Women voters.

Fact Check
► www.factcheck.org
This site critiques major party and candidate campaign claims.

Other nonpartisan sources of information about candidates*
► www.vote-smart.org
► www.ontheissues.org

* Be aware that even “nonpartisan” sites may use some information provided by candidates.
## Critical Questions to Ask About Candidates and Campaigns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• How well does the candidate address the issues that I (and other young people) care about? What has he or she already done in support of those issues?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Does the candidate appear to take young people (and our issues) seriously? What’s the evidence?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Will the candidate address issues affecting our community and families?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What claims and promises does the candidate make?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Do these claims and promises seem like sweeping and superficial campaign promises? Or does the candidate share clear plans, useful facts, and explanations? Has the candidate kept promises in the past?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Does the candidate tend to answer questions directly or to change the subject and evade the issues?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Which individuals or special-interest groups have been the largest contributors to the candidate’s campaign? (Or who paid for this advertisement?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Comments</td>
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**The image**

- What “image” of himself or herself does the candidate try to project? How do you think that squares with reality?

- Does the candidate and campaign media seem more focused on evoking an emotional response or on offering real substance on issues?

- Does the campaign use slogans, buzzwords, or strong visual images? What’s their impact? What do they really mean?

- What other persuasive techniques do you notice?

- Which candidate seems more sincere? How did you judge sincerity?

- How are you influenced by candidates’ clothing, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues? What do you learn from them?

- Which personal qualities that you care about does this candidate seem to possess? Do they seem authentic? How can you tease out the reality from the image?
Activity 20

How Can I Check Out Local Candidates?

Objective
Students invite local candidates or elected officials to meet with them. The students plan and carry out one of two options: working in teams to interview their guests, or holding a classroom forum. These events will enable students to explore politicians’ roles, their positions on issues that matter to the students, and their abilities (and willingness) to influence those areas.

Prerequisite
None (Activity 8 recommended)

Time
About 2 hours of class time over several weeks for planning, preparation, and evaluation; plus 60 to 90 minutes to conduct a forum (less time for interviews).

Note: Instead of having students conduct a meeting, you can simply have them attend a forum scheduled by the League of Women Voters or other organization.

Materials
Depends on type of meeting (e.g., stationery for forum invitations)

Note: If an election is approaching, it makes sense to focus on candidates. During other periods, students can meet with selected elected officials.

1.
Choose a format.
Let students know they will have an opportunity to meet, question, and share their concerns with one or more of their local elected officials or candidates. Explain that officials should have a personal interest in meeting with the class—or having a staff member meet with them—because students are potential voters.

Give students two options for meeting with officials or candidates: a) going in teams to meet and interview selected people or b) inviting three to five people to attend a classroom forum. Discuss and document the pros and cons of each format. Try to reach a consensus. If you can’t, vote on it.

Note: Instead of having students conduct a forum, you can simply have them attend a forum scheduled by the League of Women Voters or other organization.

2.
Select candidates or officials.
Help students decide whom they’d like to interview or invite to the forum. (You can speed the selection by preparing a list of appropriate officials, candidates, or both.) They might choose people they researched in Activity 8 or learned about through local media or personal contacts. They can also identify people through political party Web sites, your secretary of state’s office, the local board of elections, or Web sites such as www.vote-smart.org and www.congress.org.
Encourage students to consider “long-shots” and have back-up options. Ask them to also consider whether a staff representative in place of the candidate or official, or an e-mail or phone interview in place of a personal meeting, would be acceptable alternatives.

3.
Create a timeline for tackling logistics.
The timeline should include the following actions:

- Phone or e-mail official(s) or candidate(s) to assess their interest and availability.
- Set a date, time, and place for meetings.
- Send out written letters of invitation (for a forum).
- Call to confirm attendance.
- Plan logistics and format (for a forum).
- Let the forum guests know the format of the event and expectations for their participation. (optional)
- Conduct the interviews or forum.
- Write thank-you notes to participants.
- Report back and evaluate the experience.

Post the timelines and task assignments in a visible area and do periodic progress checks. Consider allowing some class time, as appropriate, for students to work on tasks.

4.
Draft questions.
Engage students in drafting questions they can use in an interview or forum. They should use their concerns about issues they identified in earlier activities to help shape their questions.

If students did their homework in earlier activities, they’ll be able to ask informed questions that provoke thoughtful responses. Help the class word their questions so they require more than a simple “yes” or “no” response. Open-ended questions evoke more substantive responses and give students a better window into someone’s thinking and attitudes. Suggest that they focus on action questions, such as how someone proposes to address a particular problem.

Tell the class to prepare to carefully listen to speakers and jot down notes so they can ask related follow-up questions.

5.
Plan introductions.
Help students outline how they want to greet the interviewee(s) or guests and introduce themselves. Students should explain who they are, what they’ve been exploring that relates to the meeting, and what they hope to learn from the exchange. They should also include basics about themselves such as age, where they live, and the name of their program or school and their reasons for enrolling in it.
6. **Practice questions and introductions.**
Make time before the events for students to role-play being at an interview or forum. You or selected student volunteers can play the candidates or officials.

- 15–20 minutes

7. **Convene (or attend) the forum or conduct interviews.**

- 30–90 minutes

8. **Evaluate the experience.**
Discuss these types of questions, as appropriate:

- What are our reactions to the experience?
- What did we observe? What did it “tell” us?
- What surprised us or stood out, and why?
- Which of our questions, if any, are still unanswered?
- What follow-up questions do we have for our guests? (Give students time to ask these via e-mail, letters, or phone calls.)
- On the basis of what we saw and heard, how do we feel about the people with whom we engaged? What influenced this? Would we vote for one of the candidates? Why or why not?
- What would we tell others about the candidate(s)?

- Would we be willing to volunteer to work for or campaign on behalf of a candidate? Why or why not?
- What would we do differently next time we conduct a session like this?

- 15–30 minutes

**Option: Hold a Public Candidates’ Forum**
If your group is interested in holding a public candidates’ forum, visit this Web site: www.ctaconline.org/candidates.asp; it offers good advice on how to plan and run one. *(Please note that the URL as written above is correct, despite the misspelling of “candidates.”)*
Activity 21

Where I Stand, Where the Candidates Stand

**Objective**
Students share their thoughts on a variety of issues facing the country and they explore what influences their peers’ points of view. In an election year, they compare their positions with those of selected candidates. (Otherwise, they compare their views with party platforms.)

**Prerequisite**
None.

**Time**
40+ minutes (longer in election year)

**Materials**
Handouts 21a and 21b

1. Pass out **Handout 21a** (Hot Issues: Where I Stand) and explain that these are some of the issues facing the country. Give students time to review the survey and ask questions; you may need to define or explain some of the issues presented. Ask students to put a star next to two to five major categories they feel most strongly about. These should include issues they identified in earlier activities. Make a list of student-raised issues that aren’t represented on the survey.

   🔄 15 minutes

2. Challenge students to mark the degree to which they agree with the positions on the survey under the categories they starred. If they have time, they can also respond to other items that interest them. If students have no opinion or knowledge about an issue, they should mark “3” on the scale.

   🔄 10 minutes

3. Have groups of three students each share, compare, and discuss their responses. Challenge group members to find out what influences, beliefs, or experiences helped shape their partners’ stances on the issues.

   🔄 15 minutes

4. If you are approaching an election cycle, pass out **Handout 21b** (Hot Issues: Where the Candidates Stand). This enables students to document two candidates’ views on the issues they chose in Step 2. Have each small group of students select a candidate or a category of issues from the survey. Challenge the groups to search for information that will enable them to fill in candidates’ positions. The nonpartisan sources of information on candidates listed under Resources in Activity 19 are good starting points.

   🔄 1 class session
Note: In a non-election year, students can use **Handout 21b** to compare their views on issues with different party platforms. See **Handout 18** for an overview of political parties and links to related Web sites.

5. Have students, individually or in small groups, compare their survey responses with the candidates' positions. For each survey item they responded to, they should put a checkmark next to the response of the candidate (A or B) who most closely aligns with their response.

6. Use these questions to launch a class discussion of the survey outcomes:
   - Did anything surprise you? Explain your response.
   - Are some of the survey items more important to you than others? How might that affect your choice of candidates?
   - Did you fall clearly onto one candidate's side? If not, what new information could help you make a decision?
   - Which topics that you care about are missing from this survey? How could we find out where the candidates stand on those?
For each issue, mark the appropriate square under your desired response. Choose “Neutral” if you are unsure, or unfamiliar with the issue.

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<td>Give Medicare prescription drug coverage to seniors.</td>
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<td>Outlaw late-term abortions.</td>
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<td>Increase funding for pregnancy prevention, including contraceptives and contraceptive education.</td>
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Survey concept inspired in 2004 by www.PresidentMatch.com and provided online by AOL and CBS News.
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<tr>
<td>ISSUE OR POSITION</td>
<td>Candidate A</td>
<td>Candidate B</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HEALTH CARE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The government should regulate health insurance companies in order to make sure insurance is affordable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give Medicare prescription drug coverage to seniors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A public insurance option should be available to uninsured Americans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limit malpractice suits against doctors and insurers.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>REPRODUCTIVE ISSUES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Appoint judges who will outlaw abortions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outlaw late-term abortions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The federal health insurance law should be changed to allow payment for abortions that would save a mother’s life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase funding for sexual abstinence education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase funding for pregnancy prevention, including contraceptives and contraceptive education.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL SECURITY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Raise retirement age.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Privatize the federal Social Security program. (Decrease federal benefits; allow people to invest their income in financial markets.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preserve Social Security as it is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limit Social Security payments made to wealthy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISSUE OR POSITION</td>
<td>Candidate A</td>
<td>Candidate B</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TAXES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Raise taxes so we can improve social services for low-income people and prevent a huge budget deficit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer additional tax cuts for businesses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restore or increase estate taxes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t tax income for the wealthy at a higher percentage than for the lower and middle classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ENVIRONMENT</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevent oil drilling in wildlife preserves and wilderness areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allow companies that reduce pollution to sell “pollution credits” to firms that are big polluters (known as “cap and trade.”)</td>
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<td>Cut funding for research on alternative energy or fuel sources.</td>
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<td>Require automakers to produce cars with zero emissions of air pollutants.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote conservation of fuel by more careful use.</td>
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Activity 22

Know the Issues: Research and Debate

Objective
Students will research political issues in greater depth, form their own arguments, and hold debates.

Prerequisites
Activity 21
Activity 2 (encouraged)

Time
This activity may be done over a series of sessions, allowing students time to research the issues. If you don’t have time to run through the entire set of activities, we suggest running through the first activity (the discussion).

Materials
Will vary depending on computer access in the classroom
Handout 22

1. Discussion. Ask students to choose an issue from Activity 21 (Where I Stand, Where the Candidates Stand) or an issue or position of their choosing and come up with three arguments for and against it. (Students are encouraged to use their KWHL charts from Activity 2).

Students may draw from their own knowledge, but they should also research the topic on the Internet or at the library. This can be done as a class or in groups, depending on the availability of computers and a good Internet connection.

Have students discuss which arguments they think are strong or weak. Which are the most convincing or persuasive?

Students may choose arguments with which they agree. If they do so, take the position of someone on the other side—ask them to choose which counterargument they think would be most effective in changing your mind.

This will be a discussion of what factors shape our political opinions, and an overview of how to engage in political discussion and debate.

Remind the students that everybody’s opinions are valid, and that each of us forms our opinions based on individual values and experiences. Be careful not to impose your own opinions on the students.

2. Write. Now is the time for the students to put their opinions into words. Ask students to choose a topic that interests them, and, again, brainstorm and research arguments for and against the position. Then ask students to compose a persuasive essay, in which they outline the opposing position and refute that position with strong arguments and examples

This activity will vary in scope and duration depending on the writing level of the students.
3. **Debate.** Divide the class into two groups or a series of smaller groups. Assign each group an issue to debate, then assign each student a position on the issue. Explain to them that being able to defend an opinion with which they do not agree will make them better able to stand up for their own beliefs.

Give students time to review their issues and positions. Encourage them to brainstorm a list of talking points on their side, as well as to anticipate the arguments that those on the opposing side will make. Which of their arguments can they use in response to which arguments of the other team?

**Note:** If you will be asking students to conduct research, you may wish to explain the importance of reliable sources. A newspaper article with facts and figures may be a stronger form of evidence than the opinion of one’s neighbor; and the Web site for a particular topic or position written by its supporters or detractors may contain biased information. (Remind students that a newspaper’s editorial opinion is just that—an opinion—and not necessarily fact.) Encourage them to think critically about their sources of evidence.

Establish rules for the debate (for example, everyone should respectfully listen to everyone else). Alternate sides, making sure that each person from each team gets to speak. Encourage students to decide in advance which team members will make which points. Rather than choosing a winner, you might point out the strengths of the arguments on both sides.

4. **Discussion.** End the lesson with a class discussion. Ask, *How did you feel during the debate? What was it like to argue for a viewpoint that you did or did not believe in?* This might lead to a discussion of what factors influence our opinions. Remind students that everyone’s opinions are valid and should be respected.

© 30–45 minutes

**Resources**

Procon.org is a nonpartisan Web site intended to provide resources for critical thinking and to educate without bias. It includes pro and con information on an extensive range of topics. www.procon.org
WHERE TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE ISSUES?

The Internet can be a great source of information. If you do not have Internet access, visit your public library, which may have public computers on which you can get online.

Newspapers

Newspapers can be good sources of up-to-date information. You can get up-to-date information. Most newspapers have free online versions, where you can search for articles by topic. Understand that most newspapers have a liberal or conservative editorial stance; keep this in mind as you evaluate the information you find.

- The New York Post: www.nypost.com
- The Boston Globe: www.boston.com/bostonglobe/
- The Boston Herald: www.bostonherald.com/
- San Francisco Chronicle: http://www.sfgate.com/
- Chicago Tribune: http://www.chicagotribune.com
FOR THE BASICS

Google. You might try searching for your topic on a search engine like Google. This will yield a list of sites that may provide the basic idea of current arguments about the issue, and current actions being taken.

www.google.com

Political Information. Political Information is a search engine for politics, policy and political news. You can search by topic or news event, or follow the sites many valuable links about political and policy issues.

www.politicalinformation.com

Procon. Procon is a nonprofit educational Web site with lots of information and links on many different topics and positions. It is a good place to go to find out basic arguments about an issue, as well as links to reliable sources.

www.procon.org

ISSUE-BASED WEB SITES

An issue-specific Web site can also be a good source of information on a topic. But beware that many of these sites are created by people who either support or oppose an issue or an opinion, and so may either post untrue information or put together facts in a way meant to persuade others that their position is the correct one. Remember to think carefully about all the information you find. Who's writing it? What message might they hope to send? Do they have a special goal?

These Web sites can allow you to connect to others who have opinions like yours, and to join groups of people who are working on the issues. Below are just a few examples of issue-specific Web sites.

Gun control

The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence works to pass and enforce federal and state gun laws, regulations, and public policies through grassroots activism, electing...
public officials who support gun-ownership regulations, and increasing public awareness of gun violence.

www.bradycampaign.org

**The National Rifle Association** is an American nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that lists as its goals the protection of the Second Amendment of the United States Bill of Rights and the promotion of firearm ownership rights as well as marksmanship, firearm safety, and the protection of hunting and self-defense in the United States.

http://home.nra.org

**Reproductive rights**

**The National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League** has been the nation's leading advocate for privacy and a woman's right to choose.

www.prochoiceamerica.org

**National Right to Life** is a national antiabortion organization which works to promote legislation which regulates access to abortion.

www.nrlc.org

**Health care**

**The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation** is a private nonprofit foundation focusing on the major health care issues facing the United States as well as the country’s role in global health policy. They serve as a non-partisan source of facts, information, and analysis for policymakers, the media, the health care community, and the public.

www.kff.org

**Drug legalization**

**The Drug Policy Foundation** is an organization promoting policy alternatives to the drug war. The foundation attempts to advance policies that reduce the harms of both drug misuse and drug prohibition, and seek solutions that promote safety while supporting the power of individuals to have control over their own bodies and minds.

www.drugpolicy.org/homepage.cfm

**The Partnership for a Drug-Free America** is a nonprofit organization that unites parents, renowned scientists and communications professionals to help prevent drug use.

www.drugfree.org

**Immigration**

**The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights** is a national organization composed of local coalitions and immigrant, refugee, community, religious, civil rights and labor organizations and activists. It works to promote a just immigration and refugee policy in the United States and to defend and expand the rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status.

www.nnirr.org/index.php

**The American Immigration Control Foundation** is a nonprofit research and educational organization. Its primary goal is to inform Americans of the need for a stricter immigration policy based on the nation's interests and capacity to assimilate newcomers.

www.aicfoundation.com
Money Talks: How Money Influences Elections

Objective
Students create a budget for a fictional political campaign and they uncover how campaigns are financed. Next, they explore what motivates donors and consider the implications of campaign contributions. They look at the money trail for local candidates and examine some alternative options for funding campaigns.

Prerequisite
None

Time
1–2 hours (Consider breaking this activity into two sessions.)

Materials
Handouts 23a, 23b, and 23c

Campaign Costs
(Note: These first few steps set the stage for the rest of the activity, but if your time is tight, go directly to step 4.)

1.
Ask students to imagine they’re about to run for Congress (for which elections take place every two years in their district). To plan a campaign and budget, they’ll need to brainstorm what expenses they may incur. Ask, What’s one expense you’d have in running a campaign to reach potential voters? If necessary, prompt the class by sharing an example from Handout 23a. Continue brainstorming for a few minutes. As students share ideas, help them expand their thinking. For instance, ask, Have you considered the cost of producing a TV ad in addition to the cost of the airtime to run it?

2.
Pass out copies of Handout 23a (Campaign Expenses). Divide students into groups of two or three (a candidate and campaign manager or two). As a class, read the challenge described at the top of the handout.

Give students 10 to 15 minutes to complete the exercise. Circulate as they do so and get them to talk about their assumptions. For instance, You plan to spend a lot on radio spots. Why do you think that’s a good approach?

3.
Have groups post their plans and budgets around the room and give the class some time to note similarities and differences. Discuss which strategies seem more likely to reach more voters, or reach them more effectively. How would groups prioritize their list if they couldn’t raise enough money to cover everything? Compare total budgets. Ask, Which campaign do you think is more likely to be successful, and why?
4. Share these statistics with students:

- The cost of winning elections has skyrocketed. In 2008, winning candidates for the House of Representatives spent an average of $1,372,539 each (in 1976 the average candidate spent $87,000). In 2010, winning candidates for Senate seats spent an average of $8,531,267. By contrast, losing candidates spent on average $492,928 for House seats, and $4,130,078 for Senate seats. The most expensive Senate seat in 2008 cost $21 million! (Source: Congressional Research Service and Center for Responsive Politics.)

- According to the Federal Election Commission, the candidate who had raised the most money for House and Senate races won 95 percent and 91 percent of the time, respectively.

- The 2008 presidential election was the most expensive in history. Candidates raised more than $1 billion combined.

Note: Students should begin to understand that those who raise and donate funds typically have a passionate commitment to certain issues and to making a difference. In many cases, large donors—or large groups of small donors—want to directly influence the candidate, party, or election process.

6. Pass out Handout 23c (Special Interest Group Donors to Political Campaigns and Parties). Tell students that these are the types of groups that donate enormous amounts money—directly or indirectly—for election campaigns.

**Interest Groups 101**

Political Action Committees (PACs) are groups set up by businesses, labor unions, and special interest groups to channel financial contributions into political campaigns to elect or defeat candidates. “527” groups are similar in that they too are created to influence the election, appointment, or defeat of candidates, but they were developed to exploit a loophole: the amount they can contribute is unlimited. Examples of 527s in the 2004 elections were Swift Boat Veterans for Truth (anti-Kerry) and Moveon.org (anti-Bush), both of which raised large sums of money to sponsor attack ads.
As a class or in small groups, select special interest groups from the handout to focus on. Explore these questions: Why do you think each group donates to elections? What might they hope to get from doing so? Encourage students to think about the interests and concerns of each group. You may want to start by throwing out some current issues and asking which groups might have specific opinions on the issues, and what those might be. Here are some examples of issues linked to the handout:

- Healthcare costs
- Control of gun purchases
- Importing prescription drugs from Canada
- Prayer in public schools
- Campaign finance reform
- Workers’ wages
- Youth voting
- Price supports for milk
- Sex education in the schools

Note: 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations function strictly for educational or charitable purposes. They can engage in voter registration activities, but cannot donate to campaigns unless they have a separate 501(c)(4) arm.

Option: Role Play
Set up a role-play exercise in which some students play candidates and others represent the groups listed on Handout 23C. (You might also want to have some students play themselves or other individuals, such as senior citizens.) Stage meetings in which the candidates approach different special interest groups for donations. Ask your young actors to consider these questions:

- How might a candidate appeal to each person or group?
- What types of questions might the potential donor ask before making a decision?
- What types of requests might the donor make?

Implications
7.
As a class, discuss these questions about the implications of the way campaigns are financed:

- What effects do you think the high costs of political campaigns could have on the democratic process? (Possible answers: So much time goes into fundraising that candidates can't focus on the issues. A wealthy person is much more likely to have the resources to run for office. Wealthy individuals, corporations, and other interest groups may try to “buy” influence.)
- In general, do you think campaign contributions affect political decision making? Why or why not? If so, do you think this is positive or negative? Who might benefit and who might lose?
- What kinds of influence, if any, do you think small individual contributors can have? Large contributors? How might a union’s interests and influence differ from those of an oil company?
- What could middle- and low-income people do to make sure their voices are heard?
- What questions do you have?

© 10–15 minutes
Option: Media Influence

Explain to students that large media companies may make direct contributions to campaigns or parties, but many also indirectly influence elections and public opinion. They can do this by choosing commentators, hosts of talk and news shows, and styles of news coverage that subtly or overtly advocate for or against a candidate or party. Challenge students to note instances in their daily media diets that they think reflect a particular political bias.

8. Action Steps: Who Funds Your Representatives?

Invite students to find out how their state and local candidates are funding their campaigns. The class can contact party or campaign offices directly or go to the Federal Elections Commission Summary Reports or Open Secrets Web pages (see links under More Resources, at the end of this activity). Have students ponder these types of questions:

- Who are the top contributors to specific state representatives and senators? Are they individuals or interest groups?
- Why do you think some individuals care enough to give their personal money?
- What questions do you have about the contributors?
- What goals and interests do you think specific contributors have?
- What questions might you like to ask the candidate or elected official? (Follow through and ask the candidates or officials if you have the time!)

9. To Reform or Not to Reform?

Explain that critics of how political campaigns are financed contend that each time Congress has passed a new law to limit contributions from individuals or groups, contributors manage to find loopholes to get around it. Critics believe that big money is influencing and undermining our democratic process and that politicians are being “bought.” They think the system needs reforming.

However, not everyone thinks the system needs reforming. For instance, some people argue that limiting contributions (especially for things like election ads) limits our First Amendment right to free speech. Many argue that the rules we have requiring campaigns to reveal all funding sources are all we need. Consider having students debate the pros and cons of each perspective. They can visit this Web site to find fuel to support each stance: So You Wanna Know About Campaign Finance Reform? (www.soyouwanna.com/site/pros_cons/softmoney/softmoneyFULL.html).

You may wish to provide students a brief history of recent campaign finance reform:

Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2001 (McCain-Fiengold Bill). This bill eliminated all soft money donations (money given to national political party committees) and doubled the contribution limit of hard money (money given directly to candidates) from $1,000 to $2,000 per election cycle. In addition, the bill banned the use of corporate or union money to pay for “electioneering communications,” a term defined as broadcast advertising that identifies a federal candidate within 30
days of a primary or nominating convention, or within 60 days of a general election.

**Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission.** In January 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the McCain-Feingold Act of 2002 was in violation of corporations’ and unions’ First Amendment rights. Under the January 2010 ruling, corporations and unions are no longer barred from promoting the election of one candidate over another candidate. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens_United_v._Federal_Election_Commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens_United_v._Federal_Election_Commission))

Option: Campaign Finance Reform Proposals

People who support campaign finance reform support a variety of “fixes.” Share one or both of the following finance reform options currently on the table and have students conduct further research and debate the pros and cons of each. (If you want students to dig deeper into the history and status of campaign finance reform, visit the Web sites in this activity’s Resources section.)

**Public financing (clean money campaigns).** A growing number of states are looking at using public funds to finance state campaigns; some have already implemented this. Candidates voluntarily agree to become a part of the clean-money financing system and refuse all private contributions. This system is used in a small number of states including Maine, Arizona, Connecticut, North Carolina, New Mexico, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts. ([www.publicampaign.org](http://www.publicampaign.org))

**Matching funds.** Another form of public financing allows the candidates to raise funds from private donors, but provides matching funds for the first chunk of donations. For instance, the government might match the first $250 of every donation. A system like this is currently in place in the U.S. presidential primaries. In 2008, Barack Obama declined to accept public financing for his presidential campaign, anticipating that he would be able to raise much more money through private donations.

**Voting with Dollars.** The Voting with Dollars plan, based on a 2002 book written by Bruce Ackerman and Ian Ayres, would establish a system of modified public financing combined with an anonymous campaign contribution process. There are two central parts to the campaign finance model proposed by these two men. The first part includes a partial system of public funding called the “Patriot Program.” Under this program, all registered voters would be given a $50 publicly funded voucher (Patriot dollars) to donate to federal political campaigns. Of the Patriot dollars (for example, $50 per voter) given to voters to allocate, propose a limit of $25 going to presidential campaigns, $15 to Senate campaigns, and $10 to House campaigns. The second part includes a “secret donation booth.” Under the Patriot Program, private donations are legal but they would have to be anonymous and would not be allowed to trump the amount given in Patriot dollars. Any extra private donations given that are above the limit will be used to increase the amount of Patriot Dollars given for the next round. This system would pool voter money and force candidates to address issues of importance to a broad range of voters. For more information, see [www.boso.umd.edu/gvpt/lbr/subpages/reviews/ackerman-ayres904.htm](http://www.boso.umd.edu/gvpt/lbr/subpages/reviews/ackerman-ayres904.htm).
Discussion
Encourage students to brainstorm ideas for how campaigns could be financed.

Option: Elections and the Internet
Some people believe that the Internet has created a more level playing field for raising campaign funds because it reduces the costs of asking large numbers of people for small contributions. It also brings greater democratic participation focused on issues rather than on expectations of access.

Interest groups and parties across the political spectrum use the Web to raise funds, poll and persuade potential voters, attack opponents, and prompt dialog about specific issues. This strategy of using e-mail and Web sites was used successfully in 2004, first by the Howard Dean presidential campaign and then by Senator John Kerry and others. It was used even more successfully in the 2008 election. Volunteers used candidate Barack Obama’s campaign Web site to organize a thousand phone-banking events in the last week of the race—and 150,000 other campaign-related events over the course of the campaign. Supporters created more than 35,000 groups clumped by affinities like geographical proximity and shared pop-cultural interests. By the end of the campaign, myBarackObama.com chalked up some 1.5 million accounts.

Your students may want to conduct research on how the Internet factors into the election process, the pros and cons, and what the future might bring. Consider what the impact of social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube might have on an election. Also consider the commentary about the 2008 Obama and McCain campaigns and the Internet posted at www.washingtonian.com/blogarticles/people/capitallcomment/8815.html

Note: If this is an election year, ask students to explore the ways in which the Internet is being used as a fundraising tool. Have students visit candidate Web sites to see how much funding candidates are raising through the sites. Also have them check political action Web sites like www.moveon.org, which rely on donations.
More Resources

Federal Elections Commission: Summary Reports Page

From here, students can use a simple search form to find out who contributed to presidential and congressional candidates in their state. On an individual candidate's page, choose from two lists: “Individual contributions” or “Non-party (e.g., PACS).”

www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/srssea.shtml

Open Secrets

Students can put in a zip code to find out who’s giving to presidential and congressional candidates (and for many states, to local candidates) in their area.

www.opensecrets.org/states/index.asp

Teachable Moment: Supreme Court Rejects Limits on Corporate Spending in Elections

www.teachablemoment.org/high/corporatespending.html

This site features activities for teaching social responsibility. Content is frequently updated to reflect current events. This activity explores the First Amendment and the role of corporations in the United States.
Imagine you are running for Congress in a state with 500,000 registered voters. Your challenge is to use this handout to help you create a plan and budget for getting your name out and persuading registered voters in your state to vote for you. Make a list that shows what you’ll do and why. Next, total up your projected expenses.

### Fixed costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campaign office space</td>
<td>$1,000 a month</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff salaries</td>
<td>$15,000 a month</td>
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</tbody>
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### Costs of getting your name out and persuading voters (mainly via media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel (e.g., speeches, town meetings)</td>
<td>$1,000 per trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising letter</td>
<td>$1,500 to print and mail 5,000 letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone banks and hired operators for calling voters</td>
<td>$2,000 for 2,500 calls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawn signs</td>
<td>$4,000 for 5,000 signs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio ad (30 seconds)</td>
<td>$100 per time per station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV ad (30 seconds)</td>
<td>$500 per time per station ($5,000 for prime time spot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV ad production</td>
<td>$2,000 per ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper ad (running one time)</td>
<td>$5,000 for full page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bumper stickers</td>
<td>$700 for 5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web site (design, content, host)</td>
<td>$5,000 per year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHERE DOES CAMPAIGN MONEY COME FROM?

Candidates’ Pockets
Many candidates use their own funds for a portion of their expenses. There are no restrictions on how much a candidate can spend of his or her money.

Individuals
The vast majority of donations to campaigns come from individuals who give from $1 to $200 each. In 2008, a much smaller number of donors gave more than $200, yet donations over $1,000 constitute the majority of funds that candidates raise from individuals. (Source: Campaign Finance Institute.)

How would you explain these findings?

Research from the 2008 general election indicates that:

• Congressional candidates flocked to wealthy neighborhoods for donations.

• Large donors to political campaigns are “disproportionately wealthy, urban, highly educated, and employed in elite occupations.”

• Two out of three U.S. House campaign contributions came from somewhere outside the district that the congress person was elected to serve.

In an effort to limit the influence of wealthy individuals on election outcomes and policy, election reform laws restrict how much individuals can give to candidates and parties each year. However, many loopholes exist. For instance, people can donate large sums to parties and interest groups that, in turn, fund strategies like get-out-the-vote campaigns and issue ads. (An issue ad focuses on issues related to a candidate without directly advocating the election or defeat of the candidate. They are often used to attack an opponent.) In fact, in 2004, just 52 people—all of whom contributed at least $1 million—gave 44 percent of all money collected by one category of interest groups (called 527s). (Source: Campaign Finance Institute)
SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS
(Including political action committees and 527 groups)

In 1971, Congress passed an election reform act that prohibited corporations, unions, and single-issue groups (like the NRA and pro-choice groups) from contributing directly to elections. The goal was to prevent such groups from influencing election outcomes and policy. But they were still allowed to set up funds to raise money just for “party building.” Many of these interest groups have found loopholes so they can use their money for election expenses ranging from television issue ads to office computers.

However, in 2010, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* that corporate funding of independent political broadcasts in candidate elections cannot be limited under the First Amendment. The 5–4 landmark decision resulted from a dispute over whether the nonprofit corporation Citizens United could broadcast a film critical of Hillary Clinton, and whether the group could advertise the film in broadcast ads featuring Clinton’s image, in apparent violation of the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act.

THE GOVERNMENT
(Public financing)

Major party presidential candidates can receive relatively small government campaign subsidies. (The money comes from the Presidential Election Campaign fund, which taxpayers may contribute to by checking the appropriate box on their tax returns.) In exchange for public campaign financing, candidates must accept campaign spending limits. During the 2008 election campaign, Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama refused to accept the public funding; he wanted to raise much more money than those rules permit, believing he’d need it in order to win. (Some states have implemented such a system and others are considering it.) In response to this, Republican presidential candidate John McCain also refused public funding—even though he was in favor of it—in order to stay on the same campaign-financing level as the Obama campaign.
Special Interest Group Donors to Political Campaigns and Parties

Corporations
(such as drug and pharmaceutical companies)

Unions
(such as United Auto Workers)

Agricultural interest groups
(such as the dairy and meat-packing industries)

Professional groups
(such as the American Medical Association and civil servants)

Single-issue groups
(such as the National Rifle Association, the Sierra Club, or pro-choice groups)

Ideological groups
(such as the Christian Coalition)

Other interest groups
(such as the League of Independent Voters, which engages young people in the democratic process)
Activity 24

The Election Process: Fair or Flawed?

**Objective**

Drawing from their own experiences or those of family and friends, students consider limitations of the voting and election process. They learn about efforts to make our elections more fair and democratic, and they consider the pros and cons of some election reform proposals.

**Prerequisite**

None

**Time**

60–65 minutes

**Materials**

Handout 24

1. Write this statement on the board: *Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of a democracy.* Ask students, *What do you think this commonly repeated statement means? What do you think “free” and “fair” mean when used this way?* If you conducted Activity 9, remind students of the exercise and ask, *How has this concept been implemented differently over the history of voting in the United States?* After a brief discussion, move on to Step 2.

โน 5 minutes

2. Ask, *Do you think elections in this country today are free, fair, and democratic?* Give groups of students time to explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to this question. To prompt thinking and make the questions relevant, ask, *Have you or anyone you know had trouble registering or voting, or failed to vote because of some barrier, limitation, or belief about the process?* Consider sharing an example or two of voting complaints from Handout 24.

You may want to discuss the issue of voter suppression: keeping people who want to vote from doing so, often by devious means. For instance, before passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, some southern states required people to pass literacy tests; this was aimed at preventing many African Americans and poor whites from voting. A more recently reported example is giving people false information about where to vote.

Begin a class chart with these headings: *Strengths of Our Election Process and Problems with Our Election Process.* Ask representatives from each group to list examples that come up in their discussions.

cono 15 minutes
Note: If students have learned about the proportion of eligible voters who actually vote (Activity 10), consider discussing whether elections can truly be democratic when such a small number of citizens elect leaders. Ask, Why do you think so few citizens vote? What about voters in specific categories? If you had the power, what would you do to correct that?

3.
Ask groups to share highlights from their discussions with the rest of the class. Ask, How might the problems you identified affect your interest (or your friends’ or relatives’ interest) in voting in the future? Can you imagine any changes in the system that could make the process more appealing, fair, or democratic? Share some examples to grease the wheels. For instance, if election day were made a national holiday, working people would be more likely to take time to vote.

Note: If students raise any issues related to money spent on campaigns, the role of special interest groups, and so on, conduct Activity 23 (Money Speaks).

Continue the class chart started in Step 2 by adding these categories: Possible Solutions to Election Problems, Actual Proposals. Begin to fill in the first new column on the basis of the class discussion.

4.
Pass out Handout 24 (A Sampling of Complaints About the 2008 Election). Explain that it features actual voter complaints that were reported in 2008 to the nonpartisan Election Protection Coalition along with some complaints levied by liberal groups, conservative groups, or both.

Once students have read the handout, ask,
- How do these complaints compare with those you already listed?
- Did any of them surprise you? Why?
- Did some complaints seem more reasonable to you than others? Which ones, and why?

Add new issues to the class chart. For each one, come up with ideas for ways these might be addressed or resolved.

Explain that although a majority of voters may have no problems with the voting process, in a democracy it’s important to protect the integrity and fairness of the process and ensure that everyone has an equal chance to participate.

5.
Print the list of election reform recommendations from Common Cause (a liberal organization) and give each group a copy. (Go to www.commoncause.org and choose Election Reform from the Our Issues drop-down menu.) This section offers a good overview of key changes that have been suggested. As a class or in small groups, select a few issues or topics—from the class chart or the Common Cause list—that students would like to dig into further.
Note: Explain to students that although liberal and conservative groups share some of these ideas about election reform (e.g., improving voting machine technology), they differ in some areas, too. For instance, conservatives concerned about noncitizens voting would like to require potential voters to present evidence of their identity and citizenship before being given a ballot paper.

5 minutes

6.
Give students a chance to review some actual proposed election reforms. A good starting point is the election reform legislation database from the National Council of State Legislatures, which you can access at www.ncsl.org /programs/legman/elect/elections.cfm (click on Elections & Campaigns under the Legislatures & Elections tab). You or your students can search by state, topic area, or both. Topics range from voting rights for felons to Internet voting. Print some proposals to hand out to small groups or have them select proposals online.

Challenge each small group to look at a proposal, discuss the questions below, and prepare a short presentation for the rest of the class. They may want to conduct further online research to enhance their presentation.

• What is the proposed legislation?
• What problems do you think the proposed changes are in response to?
• Do you agree or disagree with the proposed legislation? Explain your thinking. How might you adapt it?

Who do you think would benefit from the proposed legislation? Who, if anyone, might lose?

Do you think the proposal would make the process more fair and democratic? Why or why not?

20+ minutes

7.
Explain that most of the proposed changes students examined are locally or state regulated. If students feel strongly about any piece of proposed legislation, they might want to contact senators and representatives from their state—via mail, e-mail, or phone—to urge them to support the legislation (or to propose legislation if it doesn’t exist). They may also want to find out what would need to happen for these proposed reforms to become laws.

Option: Internet Voting
Share the following with students:

All over the country, states are examining the voting methods they use and setting aside large amounts of money to upgrade voting technology. Much of this money is allocated for replacing old voting technology (e.g., paper and pencil ballots) with technology such as optical scanners or touch-screen computers. Rather than spend hundreds of millions of dollars on systems that are somewhat more precise but may need to be replaced every few years, some people recommend that each state invest in a Web-based system that enables citizens to cast their votes over the Internet. Ask, What do you think the pros and cons would be of such a system? Do you think it will make things more fair or democratic? Why or why not?
RESOURCES

Smithsonian Exhibit:
The Machinery of Democracy
This interactive online exhibit looks at the history of voting methods and machinery in the United States.
http://americanhistory.si.edu/vote

Election Reform Information Project
This nonpartisan, nonadvocacy Web site serves as a clearinghouse for election reform information.
www.electionline.org
A Sampling of Complaints About the 2008 Election

Note: These complaints below have been officially registered but not all have been verified as accurate.

Registration
- Voters were registered by the deadline but did not show up on the voter lists.
- Voters were confused about the location of the polling place in the area in which they were registered to vote.

Absentee ballots
- Absentee ballots did not arrive within the official deadlines, arrived far too late for the voters to use them, or simply never arrived.

Time and delays
- Working people could not take time out of their day to vote without being penalized.
- Broken voting machines caused delays.

Voter intimidation and suppression
- In some places, voters were asked to show identification even though the demand was illegal in that state.
- Voters received flyers with inaccurate messages (such as flyers indicating the wrong voting place).

Disenfranchisement for felony convictions
- Some voters who had felony convictions were unsure about their eligibility status.
- Some states deny felons the right to vote; others make it hard to restore that right.

Language barriers
- Some voting stations did not have ballots and voting materials in Spanish and other languages. That was in violation of the Voting Rights Act or state and local election laws.

Machines and ballots
- Some voters believed that machines or punch cards did not accurately record their choices in the presidential and other races or did not record their votes at all. (With electronic machines, there was no way to verify this because there was no paper trail.)
- Some voters believed that ballot boxes were tampered with and that their votes were not counted or tabulated.
Illegal Voting

• Noncitizens or illegal aliens voted when they were legally ineligible to do so.

• Eligible voters voted twice or more, some by registering as themselves in several districts and others by impersonating other voters.

• Nonexistent voters (deceased persons, for example) were registered and other people went to the polls in their names.

Lack of Support at the Polls

• Many poll workers and voters lacked good information about voting rights.

• Tens of thousands of voting places were physically inaccessible to disabled voters.

• Explanations and ballot instructions were unclear.

Electoral College Questioned

• Many people complain that our electoral college system of electing presidents is unfair and they would like to see it abolished. See the box, below, for an overview of this system.

The Electoral College 101

The electoral college is our country’s indirect system of electing the president and vice president. In a presidential election, each person’s vote is called a popular vote. A state’s popular votes are combined to select electors. (Each state has a different number of electors on the basis of its population.) In most states, the presidential candidate with the most popular votes wins all the state’s electors. (In Maine and Nebraska, the electors can be split based on the popular vote in districts.) The presidential candidate with the majority of electoral votes nationally is the winner.

Four times in U.S. history (most recently in the 2000 election), a candidate won an election after receiving fewer popular votes (but more electoral votes) than a challenger. This is one reason why some people want to change or abolish the electoral college system.

You can learn more about the electoral college system and examine its implications and pros and cons by visiting the U.S. National Archives Web site, www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/2008/.


Sources: People for the American Way (www.pfaw.org/issues/the-right-to-vote/people-for-memo-election-day-o8-voting-issues) and Our Vote Live (formerly available at http://2008.ourvotelive.org/responses.php)
OVERVIEW
Students discuss where they can find information about candidates and they consider the reliability of different sources. They think about the purposes and persuasive strategies used in print and electronic campaign ads and then put their critical eyes to work as they “deconstruct” some ads.

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Activity 25

Media Matters: Laying the Groundwork

Objective
Students brainstorm where they can find information about candidates, consider the reliability of different sources, and learn how much money is spent on political advertising.

Prerequisite
None

Time
30 minutes

Materials
None

1. Propose this dilemma to the class: You are registered to vote and an election is coming up. You don't know much about the candidates or how you are going to decide whom to vote for. Ask, What should you do? What first step might you take to find out about the candidates? Record students’ responses on the board or flipchart paper. (Students might mention talking to other people, looking at ads, and so on.)

If students mention specific media sources, list them. You may need to prompt them by asking whether anyone has noticed candidates or election issues featured in any form of mass media (television, for example) and have them share specific examples (such as an ad on MTV).

Students might also mention candidates’ brochures or flyers, billboards, bumper stickers, buttons, and yard signs.

In addition to obvious forms of mass media—radio, newspapers, and so on—make sure the Internet gets on the list. In 2008, a Pew Internet and American Life project survey found that for the first time in history, more than half of the voting age population used the Internet to get involved in the political process during an election year. A significant number of voters used the Internet as their primary source for getting information about candidates. Forty-five percent of Internet users went online to watch a video about the campaign. The Internet provided a means for individuals to share political information with each other; one in three internet users forwarded political content onto others.

Along with sharing information, many Americans used the Internet to share their own political opinions. Eighteen percent of Internet users shared political views on a blog or a social networking site like Facebook. The number of young people who did this was even greater. According to Pew, 83 percent of people 18 to 24 years old have a profile on a social networking site, and 66 percent of young people took part in some form of political activity on these sites in 2008.

10 minutes
2. Ask, Which sources of information do you think are most reliable for getting good information about candidates (for example, family, friends, the Internet, a newspaper article, a TV ad)? Which do you think are more likely to be biased? Why? Use students’ responses to launch a discussion about the reliability, fairness, accuracy, and usefulness of various sources of information. Ask, What might be the downside of relying on just one source?

In addition, considering the important role the Internet has taken on in recent years, ask students to compare and contrast the kind of information that can be found on the internet with that presented through older forms of media.

10 minutes

3. Explain that the group will have a chance to dig into different types of campaign media and analyze persuasive techniques used to influence voters. Tell them that campaigns and their supporters spend millions of dollars trying to package and sell candidates to groups of voters (including 18- to 24-year-olds) and to convince us that opponents are unqualified. Understanding the strategies they use is critical to helping us read between the lines. Ask volunteers to share examples they’ve noticed and describe their reactions to them.

10 minutes

Option: Digging into Media

Challenge each small group of students to peruse a variety of newspapers and magazines (including those found on the Internet) in search of stories, political cartoons, and opinion pieces that mention a particular candidate. Have them clip out what they find. Pose some of the following questions to the groups; pose others to the entire class once groups have had a chance to compare notes:

- Which pieces are more fact-based and which are more opinion-based? How can you tell? Which pieces seem most biased? Least biased?
- How did the amount and nature of coverage for your candidate vary from publication to publication? Did some publications have more (or less) favorable coverage than others?
- Did some publications seem to favor certain candidates over others? How could you tell?
- Did you see any correlations between the publication’s target audience and the coverage of candidates?
- How would a newspaper’s time or space constraints affect how candidates are portrayed?
- How do you think different types of coverage might affect public opinion? (How did they affect yours?)
**Option: Exploring the Internet**
Challenge students to find as many sources of political content as they can find on the Internet (examples include online newspapers, candidate Web sites, political action Web sites, blogs, and content on Facebook, MySpace and Twitter).

- **Ask students to explore the biases of these different sources.** Emphasize that not all information found on the Internet is reliable. Anyone can publish content on the Web. Though this makes the Internet an empowering venue that allows everyone to have a voice, we also must be more critical of the information we find on it.

- **Discuss the ways in which the Internet can be a medium for students to express their own opinions about the issues they care about.** Encourage students to post political information and opinions on their own social networking profiles—or to start their own blog!

**Resource**

**The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008**
Activity 26

Ad Explorers: Seeing Through the Sell

Objective
Students view political campaign ads, ponder the ads’ purposes and target audiences, and examine their own reactions.

Prerequisite
None

Time
40 minutes

Materials
A computer with high-speed Internet access, and copies of Handout 26a
or Printed campaign materials and copies of Handout 26b; Handout 26c (for optional activity)

Preparation
Find at least two televised campaign ads in advance to use in this activity and Activity 27. (Many of these ads can be found on YouTube.) Try to find ads with different emphases (for instance, one that paints an unsavory picture of an opponent and one designed to evoke warm feelings about the candidate). If you don’t have the equipment required for viewing television ads, you can also do this activity with printed campaign materials such as flyers, brochures, or magazine ads.

1.
Remind students that political campaigns and supporters spend millions to sell candidates to television audiences in 30-second spots that run again and again. To make the ads effective, the creators carefully craft every sound, piece of clothing, backdrop, and other element to make us feel a certain way about a candidate or opponent. Invite students to use their critical eyes and dig in to some of these ads.

2.
Show the class the televised campaign ad you selected. Next, assign one or two of the questions from Handout 26a (Ad Explorer Questions for TV Ads) to each pair or small group. Once students have reviewed their questions, play the ad through twice more. Give groups five minutes to discuss their questions and record at least three points from their discussion to share with the class.

3.
Ask one student from each group to share the group’s questions and discussion highlights with the class. Discuss observations, insights, and questions sparked by the activity.

© 10 minutes
4. Share the following facts with students and invite their responses:

- Research studies over the past 20 years indicate that political commercials do “strongly affect” people’s attitudes toward candidates. Most people, however, say that they are not influenced by these ads.

- Though government closely controls claims made in product advertising, because of the principle of free speech guaranteed in the Bill of Rights, government does not control the content or truth of political ads.

- Those who create political ads, like those who produce other types of ads, use subtle and not-so-subtle techniques to influence viewers.

10 minutes

5. Tell the class that the next activity should boost their awareness of these techniques so they can become ad savvy as they learn about political candidates through the media.

Option: TV Campaign Coverage and Costs

Pass out Handout 26c (TV Campaign Coverage and Costs) and give pairs of students a chance to review the charts. Have them discuss these questions with one another, or tackle them as a class:

- What general conclusions can you draw from each chart? (What does each chart tell you?) What questions do you have?

- How do you think the changes from 1972 to 2008 depicted in the first chart could have affected the election process or voters’ understanding of candidates? How might the changes affect current candidates’ abilities to reach the public and, therefore, influence their election strategies?

- How do you think the information voters get from ads might differ from what they get from news and convention coverage?

- Why do you think some networks devote more airtime to news and election coverage than others?

- Some people have proposed making political advertising free. What do you think are the pros and cons of that idea?

Resources

The 30-Second Candidate
This site features a behind-the-scenes look at how political ads are produced.
www.pbs.org/30secondcandidate

The Living Room Candidate
Here you can view television campaign ads from 1952 to 2008 or read the transcripts.
www.livingroomcandidate.org

Historic Ads Archive
This site, from the University of Wisconsin Advertising Projects, features a collection of downloadable television ads from the past and present.
http://wiscadproject.wisc.edu/history.php

The Political Ads Database
The database includes political ads funded by campaigns, parties, committees, and independent advocacy groups. Most of the ads are tied to specific U.S. Congressional or state gubernatorial races throughout the country. Some of the ads are more general issue or advocacy ads not tied to a particular race or candidate.
http://projects.washingtonpost.com/politicalads/
Ad Explorer Questions
(for TV ads)

1. What type of audience do you think the ad is aimed at? What makes you think so?

2. What do you think the producers of the ad want the audience to feel or think about the candidate? What leads you to believe this? (How do you feel as you watch it?)

3. What issue(s) does the ad address? What questions do you still have about the issue(s) or the candidate?

4. Do you think the ad would influence your decision about voting for the candidate? Why or why not?
Ad Explorer Questions
(for campaign literature)

1. What type of audience do you think the campaign literature is aimed at?
   What makes you think so?

2. What do you think the producers of the campaign literature want the audience to feel or think about
   the candidate? What leads you to believe this?

3. What issue(s) does the campaign literature address? What questions do you still have about the issue(s)
   or the candidate?

4. Do you think the campaign literature would influence your decision about voting for the candidate?
   Why or why not?
TV Campaign Coverage and Costs

Political Advertising on Broadcast Television

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total money spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>$24,580,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>$50,842,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$90,570,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>$153,824,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>$227,900,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>$299,623,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>$400,485,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$611,945,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$637,975,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>$776,004,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Television Bureau of Advertising, 2008

Network Coverage of General News vs. Election-Related News
(in the 2 weeks prior to the 2004 “Super Tuesday” political primaries)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General News</th>
<th>Election Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FOX</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Alliance for Better Campaigns, 2004
Activity 27

Image Matters:
Ad-Savvy Sleuths

Objective
Students identify visual strategies and other techniques that people who create political ads use to set a tone, create an image, and persuade viewers to vote for a candidate or against an opponent.

Prerequisite
Activity 26

Time
50–55 minutes

Materials
Handout 27, a computer with Internet access, and two downloaded campaign ads used in Activity 26.

1.
Refer to the discussion from the previous activity and ask, What techniques did you notice in the ad that seemed designed to convince viewers to have positive feelings about the candidate, negative feelings about the opponent, or both? 5 minutes

2.
Show the previous activity’s ad again or use another example. First play the ad without sound and ask students to notice visual techniques designed to help persuade viewers. Have them share their observations. Play the ad again; this time, cover up the computer screen and ask students to focus on the audio elements. Ask, What new techniques did you notice when you focused only on sounds? Tell students they’ll have a chance to dig deeper. 10 minutes

3.
Give each student pair two copies of Handout 27 (Ad-Savvy Sleuths: Tips and Tricks). Discuss each technique, inviting students to offer examples in addition to those listed. 15 minutes

4.
Show another televised ad and give pairs five minutes to fill in the right-hand column on the handout. Show the ad several times to allow the students to consider all of the items on the handout. Remind them that they are unlikely to find all of the techniques in one ad. 10 minutes

5.
Have pairs share their findings with the whole class. Ask,

- Which techniques were used most frequently?
- Which do you feel were most effective, and why?
- Which do you feel were least effective, and why?
6. Dig deeper into the deliberate construction of the ad by discussing some or all of the following questions:

- Did the ad have substance (e.g., a candidate’s voting record on an issue) or was it mainly an emotional appeal?
- What did you learn from the ad? How can you verify that the claims and information are accurate?
- What issues did the ad address? What questions do you still have about the candidate or issue?
- What promises does the ad make? Are they clear or vague?
- What voter concerns does it appeal to (e.g., fear of unemployment or high taxes, health care worries, environmental issues)? What group of voters do you think was targeted (e.g., seniors, mothers, young people)?
- What, if any, slogan does the ad use? Do you think it’s effective? Why or why not?
- Who paid for the ad? How might this affect its reliability?
- Do you think there’s a connection between the types of political ads and the programs during which they’re shown? Explain your thinking.

Have students continue to track these kinds of questions as they run across election ads and materials in coming weeks.

7. Conclude by reiterating that all types of campaign materials use persuasive techniques to influence people’s thinking and emotions. It is always important to ask questions about who has created a particular media item, and why, and what carefully constructed message is embedded in it.

Option
Have students learn more about “truth” in political campaigns by going to the following Web site, www.factcheck.org. This nonpartisan site, run by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, reveals the accuracy of current political ads and corrects misinformation.
### Ad-Savvy Sleuths: Tips and Tricks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Techniques</th>
<th>1. Evidence from ad</th>
<th>2. What effect does it have?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Dress and clothing**
Examples: Rolled-up shirtsleeves convey a link to ordinary people. A military uniform or business suit suggests strength and power. |                      |                             |
| **Symbols and props**
Examples: An eagle or flag links the candidate with patriotism. A clip of a polluted river might send a message about an opponent’s environmental record. |                      |                             |
| **People**
| **Onscreen graphics**
Example: Blocky letters stamping a simple phrase such as “making a difference” reinforces a message. |                      |                             |
| **Setting and location**
Example: Is the candidate or opponent at a rally with a cheering audience? A senior center? The Oval Office? An unemployment line? |                      |                             |
### Techniques

|                | 1. Evidence from ad
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2. What effect does it have?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facial expressions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples: Do we see the faces of adoring supporters or a fearful crime victim?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples: Patriotic colors paint a positive image of the candidate. Grey and dark hues create a negative tone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples: Upbeat and uplifting tunes typically tout the candidate; ominous, disjointed music conveys fear and unease about issues or the opponent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lighting</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Examples: Is it bright and upbeat (typically associated with the candidate) or dark and shadowy (representing the opponent)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appeals to human needs and concerns</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: Fear of crime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OVERVIEW

Students work toward making informed decisions about whom to vote for, urge others to vote for, or both. They get to learn about and evaluate specific candidates (if they haven’t already done so) and then share what they learn via a presentation or forum. They use what the class uncovers to inform their choices of candidates. Finally, they learn details of the voting process and practice filling out ballots.

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Activity 28

Wrapping it Up: Presentations and Preferences

Objective
Students gather information and evaluate candidates for office (if they haven’t already done so). They use what they’ve uncovered to “introduce” their candidates to the class via presentations or a mock forum. Each student then documents which candidates he or she prefers.

Prerequisite
None (Activity 19 recommended)

Time
35–70 minutes in class, time for research outside of class

Materials
Lists of candidates obtained in earlier activities or sample election or absentee ballots (from your local board of elections or newspaper)
Copies of Handout 28
Copies of Handout 19 (optional)

Preparation
See Step 1

1. Tell students that as the election draws near, it’s time to take an even closer look at the candidates. Ask pairs or small groups of students to choose one candidate to get to “know.” If you conducted Activity 19 or 20, they may already have begun to evaluate specific candidates.

2. Decide together on a reasonable amount of time in which to complete the research. Set criteria for the kinds of information students will need for their presentations. Consider the following:

- The candidate’s stand on issues students care about
- Campaign promises (and questions and comments about their authenticity)

Direct groups to look at campaign materials, watch TV ads and news, research their candidates on the Web, and talk to others in the community about their candidates. If they’ve already conducted any of those activities, they can simply draw on their earlier notes and findings. Otherwise, they’ll need to spend some time outside of class doing this. If you want students to use some class time for this research, you and they should collect materials to bring in and identify useful Web sites (see Appendix V, Online Resources).

Remind students to also use what they learned through their candidate interviews or forum. Each group will use the information it gathers to present its candidate to the class or play the role of the candidate in a mock forum or debate.
• The candidate’s experience and record
• The candidate’s supporters and endorsers
• The image the candidate tries to project (and questions about its authenticity)

If students haven’t already used **Handout 19** (Critical Questions to Ask About Candidates and Campaigns), pass it out. Explain that asking these kinds of critical questions can help them tease out what’s authentic and what’s mere marketing.

Discuss how students should document their findings (e.g., in notebooks or on flipcharts). Explain that they’ll need to refer to what they uncover about candidates as they prepare for their presentations or roles in a mock candidates’ forum.

3. Conduct presentations or a mock forum; both options are described below. Pass out as many copies of **Handout 28** (Finally... Making a Decision!) as you’ll need to cover all the presentations. Explain that even students who are not eligible to vote should complete the handouts. Why? **All** of us can urge others to vote for candidates we want to represent us and our concerns. What’s more, students who will be eligible in the future can practice making informed decisions.

**Presentations**

Have each pair of students make a two- to three-minute presentation about the candidate. Consider offering students a choice of presentation format. For instance, they could introduce their candidate via a basic presentation, short stump speech, poster, rap song, poem, graphic organizer, mock radio show, video, or mock interview. In any case, students should try to present the candidate’s positions and perspectives on the issues as objectively as possible. Give audience members a minute to ask questions after each presentation before they complete one section of the handout.

Mock Forum: The “Candidates” Speak Out

Plan and hold a mock forum. Ask each pair or small group to choose one student to play the role of the candidate they researched. The other student(s) in the group can sit in the audience with classmates. Their role is to use the information they gathered to ask the candidate questions or point out things that reveal some flaws they uncovered. (For instance, “You talk about improving youth employment opportunities, but you’ve never presented a concrete plan.”)

Decide together on the format. For instance, a moderator can throw out a particular topic or issue and ask several candidates to respond, in turn. This is best if you have some candidates who are running against one another. Another option is to give each candidate a chance to present his or her “credentials” to the audience. In either case, audience members should be prepared to ask questions and take notes before completing one section of the handout for each candidate.
Option: Mock Debate
Instead of a public forum, consider holding a mock candidate debate. Have students work in groups of two or three. One group can represent each candidate, another group can serve as moderators, and the remaining students can play the role of the press and ask questions.

4. Evaluation
Ask,
- Do you feel prepared to make informed decisions as a voter?
- Which areas are you unsure of, and why?
- What additional information do you need to make decisions?

5 minutes

Option: The Candidates and Me: How We Match Up
If you haven't already done so, go to the interactive On the Issues Web site (www.ontheissues.org) and click on “quizzes.” In an election year, students can indicate their views on a range of issues and get visual results on how well they align with different candidates’ views. Discuss how this correlates with the decisions students made on their own. Ask, What might account for the differences?

Option: Voting Strategies
Introduce the following voting strategies to students; explain that they might choose any approach or a combination.

1) Vote along party lines (that is, vote only for candidates from your preferred political party).

2) Vote for the candidate who is most closely aligned with your views, regardless of party.

3) Only vote for offices if people you are informed about are running; leave others blank.

Note: Some people who exercise option 2 believe it’s the only way to go; they might vote for a third-party candidate even if he or she is unlikely to win. Others think that’s a bad idea (a “throw-away” vote) when there’s a tight race between major-party candidates. Why? This can take important votes away from a major candidate who they may prefer to the opponent. Here are some recent examples: In 1992, the candidacy of Ross Perot reduced votes for George Bush Sr., who lost to Bill Clinton. In the 2000 election, votes for Ralph Nader reduced votes for Al Gore, who lost to George W. Bush.

Resources

Vote Smart
www.votesmart.org
This site provides information on elected officials and candidates in five categories: biographical information, issue positions, voting records, campaign finances, and interest group ratings. It includes national, state, and many local offices.

(Also see the Web sites listed in Appendix V, Online Resources.)
Finally... Making a Decision!

Candidates for the office of ______________________________

Candidate 1 ____________________________________________

NOTES ON THE CANDIDATE:

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

Candidate 2 ____________________________________________

NOTES ON THE CANDIDATE:

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

................................................................................................................................................

MY CHOICE: I think I will (or would) vote for ______________________________

MY REASONS:

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________
Objective
Students fill out a sample ballot, participate in a mock election, and, if appropriate, arrange to obtain an absentee ballot. They also learn where to vote and what to do if they encounter difficulty at their polling places.

Prerequisite
None

Time
40–50 minutes

Materials
Sample election or absentee ballots from your local board of elections or newspaper. (You should also be able to download sample ballots from www.nationalmockelection.org.)

1. Completing the Ballot
Pass out ballots, have students review them, and invite the class to ask questions about completing them. When you have answered their questions, students can fill out ballots. If students express discomfort about doing so—because they feel they don’t know enough about the candidates or issues—consider focusing on one or a few of the most important offices or ballot issues. Remind your group that many citizens vote only for positions or issues they know or care most about.

2. Mock Election
Engage students in a nationwide mock election such as the one conducted by the Youth Leadership Initiative (www.youthleadership.net). Teachers will need to visit this site and enroll the class in advance. The National Student/Parent Mock Election (www.nationalmockelection.org) offers another option.

3. Where to Vote
Ask students if they know where they need to go to vote on election day. Direct those who don’t know their polling places to try one of the following options:

a) Go to www.vote411.org/pollfinder.php and enter your address to find its designated polling place.

b) Go directly to the Web site of your local secretary of state’s office. If you click on a link such as “elections” or “elections and voter information,” you should be able to find a list of polling places for your area.

c) Stop by your local town or city hall and ask for information.

© 15–20 minutes
© 10 minutes
© 10 minutes
Absentee ballot option
Find out how to obtain absentee ballots for students who can’t (or don’t care to) get to the polls on election day. Unless students will be out of the area, encourage them to go to the polls and vote. Voting in person brings young people together with other members of their community in a common act of civic participation. By physically joining with others in casting their votes, young people will gain a clearer sense of their place in their community and a greater investment in its future. For details on absentee voting in each state, visit the youth-friendly Declare Yourself Web site (www.declareyourself.com) or Harvard’s Institute of Politics (www.iop.harvard.edu/Voter-Information-Center/Absentee-Voter-Guide).

4. Problems at the Polls
Urge students to vote early in the day in case of problems. In some parts of the country, young voters report being hassled at the polls on election day. Make sure students understand that if they have such problems, they have resources to help them exercise their right to vote. Poll workers at each location are required to help voters who request assistance. The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law has an Election Day toll-free hotline (1-866-OUR-VOTE) to provide immediate legal assistance to voters before and on election day. The Web page for each state’s secretary of state office should include a link to information on filing formal complaints of voting irregularities. There is also a new law that gives voters the right to cast a provisional ballot if an election official deems that they are improperly registered or otherwise ineligible to vote.

5. Plan a party to watch the election returns and celebrate your participation!
The end of this curriculum is really the beginning of students’ journeys as political participants in our democratic society. Encourage them to continue to explore their interests, engage with others in their communities to bring about needed changes, communicate their concerns to their elected officials, exercise their right to vote, urge others to get to the polls, and consider running for office themselves.
Appendices

I Discussion Methods 199
II Frequently Asked Questions About Voting 201
III Planning and Running a Campaign to Get Out the Vote (GOTV) 205
IV A Beginner’s Guide to Mobilizing 217
V Online Resources 225
VI Glossary 231
VII Alignments with National Social Studies Standards 239
1. THINK/PAIR/SHARE. Students first think or write individually about a discussion topic. Next, students pair up and briefly discuss their ideas. Finally, the entire class discusses the topic.

2. STUDENT-FACILITATED DISCUSSION. Instead of the teacher calling on the students to speak, each student speaker calls on the next speaker.

3. TALKING STICK. For this approach, you’ll need a stick or other symbolic object to pass around. Students sit in a circle and discuss a topic. Only the person holding the stick or other object can speak. Students can pass the object on if they do not wish to speak. The stick can also be returned to the center of the circle after each speaker so anyone wishing to speak can pick it up.

4. NERF-BALL DISCUSSION. Students who wish to speak raise their hands and the previous speaker throws one of them the Nerf ball. Only the student holding the Nerf ball can speak. (If a Nerf ball is unavailable, any other soft object, such as a bean bag, will work.)

5. FISHBOWL DISCUSSION. Three students sit in an inner circle, which has four chairs, and begin a discussion. The rest of the students sit in an outer circle around the first group. When a student from the outer circle wants to join the discussion, he or she moves to the empty fourth chair in the inner circle. One of the three students originally in the inner circle must now leave and join the outer circle, leaving an empty chair. The students seated in the outer circle silently listen to the discussion happening in the middle: the fishbowl.

6. POPSICLE-STICKS DISCUSSION. Each student is given three to five Popsicle sticks. Each time a student speaks, he or she puts a stick on the floor. When a student's Popsicle sticks are all on the floor, that student is out of turns to speak in the discussion. This method is useful in a group where some students tend to dominate the discussion or where a few students tend not to speak at all. The presence of the Popsicle sticks inspires and limits contributions to the discussion.

7. NUMBERED HEADS. Each student in the discussion group has a number. The discussion leader asks a question and then randomly chooses a number (or, if there are fewer than six in the group, rolls a die). This determines which student will respond to the question.

8. POINT—COUNTERPOINT. This method is similar to an informal debate. One student makes a point for one side of an argument. The next student who speaks must make a point for the opposing side, and the pattern continues. Students need to listen closely so they are prepared to offer an argument from the opposite perspective.
1. How can I get the most current information on voting in my state?

Voting laws and procedures change regularly and vary by state. Your local or state election officials should be able to answer questions about voting, registration laws and details, the election calendar, restoring voting rights, and how and where to vote. Here are some online sources:

- The League of Women Voters (www.lwv.org) annually updates its wealth of FAQs and voting information.
- To locate your state elections Web site, you’ll need to visit your secretary of state’s Web site. You can find that by going to www.north-westregisteredagent.com/secr...html.
- Use a search engine such as Google (www.google.com); enter your state name and the word “voting” or “elections.”

2. Who is eligible to vote?

To be eligible to vote, you must be:
- A citizen of the United States
- 18 years old by the election date

Many states also have eligibility requirements that disqualify citizens for felony convictions or “insufficient” mental capacity. Some state voter registration applications describe eligibility requirements. See Question 7 below for more details on felony disenfranchisement.

3. How do I register to vote?

In all states but North Dakota you are required to register before you can vote; the details of how to register vary by state.

**In person.** You can register or obtain registration applications from the local election official in your county or city, or through registration outreach programs sponsored by such groups as the League of Women Voters. In some states you can also register to vote when applying for a driver’s license or I.D. at state motor vehicle offices, offices providing public assistance, and armed forces recruitment centers.

Prior to general elections in many states, you can secure registration forms or register at public libraries, post offices, unemployment offices, public high schools and universities, or colleges, universities, and trade schools participating in federal student loan programs.

**Online mail-in form:** In all states but New Hampshire and Wyoming, you can also register by downloading, completing, and mailing in the National Voter Registration form to the address provided. Send students to one these sites for a mail-in form: Election Assistance Commission (www.eac.gov), Declare Yourself (www.declareyourself.com), Rock the Vote (www.rockthevote.com), or League of Women Voters (www.lwv.org).
4. How do I know if I’m registered?
Within a few weeks after you send or hand in your registration application, you should get a notice in the mail confirming that you’re officially a registered voter. Hold on to that notice; it might tell you where to go to vote on election day. If you don’t receive a notice, check with your local board of elections to see if there is a problem with your registration. If there is a problem, address it immediately.

5. I am registered, but I’ve recently moved. Does this affect my registration?
Yes. If you are registered and have moved within your current election jurisdiction, contact your local election office to update your registration and determine where you should vote. If you moved outside of your old election district, you will have to re-register in your new district before the registration deadline in your state.

6. How late can I register?
Registration deadlines vary from state to state, but the earliest is 30 days prior to an election. In some states you can register on the day of the election. You’ll find registration deadlines on most of the Web sites listed in Question 3 and on your state’s election site.

7. If I am convicted of a felony, can I still vote?
The answer varies by state. As of 2009, forty-eight states denied prisoners the right to vote and 35 barred felons from voting while they are on parole. In 12 states, a felony conviction could result in a lifetime ban on voting. If you don’t find this information under “eligibility requirements” when you register, contact your state. You can find comprehensive, up-to-date information on the Brennan Center for Justice Web site: www.brennancenter.org/content/section/category/voting_after_criminal_conviction. There is also a chart with a summary of this information in Handout 9 of this curriculum. You can also find articles and updates on felony disenfranchisement from The Sentencing Project (www.sentencingproject.org—click on the Voting Rights tab).

8. My friend is a U.S. citizen who doesn’t speak English. Where can I get assistance for him?
Check with your local election office to see whether your state provides election materials in languages other than English. The Voting Rights Act requires local election officials to provide bilingual voter registration applications, ballots, and language assistance when a certain percentage of the jurisdiction’s population comprises a language minority group.

9. How can I find out where to go to vote?
Your registration card should include the address of your polling place. Many jurisdictions also send additional materials to registered voters. If you do not receive the information in the mail, call your local election office. During an election season, you can also check for up-to-date information on your state’s election Web site or at www.Vote411.org.

10. Are there other ways to vote besides going to the polls (absentee ballots)?
All states are required to have an absentee ballot (vote by mail) program to allow citizens who will be away from home on election day or who cannot get to the polls to vote. Many states make absentee ballots available to all voters. Contact your local election officials for information on absentee voting in your area. Remember to request an absentee ballot at least 30 days before the election. Check your state election information for the exact deadline.
11. What should I bring with me to the polls?

In some states you have to bring photo identification with you to vote. If you have one, it’s a good idea to bring it with you along with something that shows your address. Check with local or state election officials for your state’s requirements. You can also bring into the voting booth your own notes on candidates or a sample ballot you’ve marked up.

12. What if my name isn’t on the registration list? What if I encounter other problems at the polling place?

If your name is not on the registration list you will be allowed to cast a provisional ballot. This provisional ballot will be counted once election officials determine if you are eligible to vote in that jurisdiction. On major election days, you can phone 1-866-OUR-VOTE for legal assistance.

13. What kind of voting machine will I be using?

Contact your local election official for this information. If you need help finding your local election official, contact your state election officials. Some state Web sites provide information about the types of voting equipment used in that state.

14. Can I be discriminated against at the polls?

The Voting Rights Act bans all kinds of racial discrimination in voting. For years, many states had laws that served to prevent minority citizens from voting. Some of these laws required people to take a reading test or interpret some passage of the Constitution in order to vote; others required people wanting to register to bring someone already registered who would vouch for their good character.

15. Does my vote really count in a presidential election?

As in all elections, each eligible voter may cast one vote. In a presidential election, your vote is called a “popular vote.” Your vote is combined with all other popular votes in your state to select electors. In most states, the presidential candidate with the most popular votes wins all the state’s electors. (In Maine and Nebraska, the electors can be split based on the popular vote in districts.) The presidential candidate with the majority of electoral votes nationally is the winner. If no candidate wins a majority of electoral votes, the House of Representatives selects the president. Note: The number of electoral votes for each state is equal to the number of congressional representatives plus senators in the state.

16. Does registering to vote automatically register me for the selective service?

No. Males ages 18 to 25 are required by law to register for the selective service separately from voter registration. U.S. citizens and immigrant aliens residing in the United States must register. Registering to vote will not affect the likelihood of you being inducted into the military if a draft were again instituted. (It has been 30 years since this country had a military draft.) If a draft were instituted, the government would find and select those of prime draft age through a lottery system.
Throughout this curriculum, your students have explored the importance of voting. Now you can engage your emerging leaders in inspiring other young voters to get to the polls. This section provides step-by-step instructions on planning and running a get-out-the-vote campaign for your students, staff, and volunteers. These instructions are based on the experiences of YouthBuild programs around the country.

Participants in youth education and leadership programs need to be involved in the election process every year, not just during a presidential election cycle. Local and state elections can have at least as great an impact on issues that matter to young people as presidential elections can. Launching a campaign to get voters to the polls is an important strategy for teaching young people how they can make a difference in the election process. After all, whether a person is registered to vote makes very little difference unless he or she actually turns out at the polls!

Note: At most YouthBuild programs, voter registration is an ongoing process. If a student enters YouthBuild and is already 18, or turns 18 while in the program, he or she completes a voter registration form as soon as possible. The program director collects the form and mails it to the board of elections office where the student resides. When students receive their voter registration cards from the board of elections, they bring them to YouthBuild so copies can be placed in their files.
Election Year Timeline Leading Up to GOTV Work

**MAY** Find your local or state election calendar.
For most states, you can find this by contacting your local board of elections or secretary of state's office or Web site. (You can find links for each state at the national site: www.nass.org.) For many states, you can also get to the board of elections by going to the state government Web site. Type in www.state.xx.us, replacing the “xx” with your state’s two-letter code. See the box on the following page for tips on what else to ask for from your board of elections staff.

**JUNE** Develop a reverse calendar based on your state’s election calendar.
Work backward from the date of the November election to the present date. Remember the two primary goals: getting more youth registered to vote and calling registered voters ages 18 to 30 on election day to encourage them to go to the polls and vote. Your calendar should include pertinent tasks leading up to election day so it’s clear what needs to be done when (see Sample A, Reverse Calendar for 2008 New York State Elections, page 211). After you have developed your calendar, put the information on a large full-year calendar and post it in the classroom.

**JUNE** Develop a summary of who is running.
Many young people stay away from voting because they don’t know who is running or what positions are on the ballot. Develop a one-page list of who will be running for election. Include a brief description of each elected position (see Sample B, List of Elected Positions and Descriptions of Offices, page 214). You should be able to get this information from your local board of elections office.

**MID-JUNE** Get a list of registered voters ages 18 to 30.
Contact your local board of elections office to request a list of 18- to 30-year-old registered voters. You will use the list for two purposes: to identify which of your students and alumni are not registered already so you can encourage them to do so in time for the November election, and to refer to when you call registered voters to make sure they make it to the polls on election day. (See the box on the next page for details.)
What Can You Ask for From the Board of Elections?

Voter registration information is public, but you need to be specific about what you ask for. Some boards of elections ask for requests in writing and some charge a nominal fee for the information. Tell the person you speak to that you are a nonprofit organization working with other national organizations to get young people out to vote on election day.

1. Request an alphabetical list of all registered voters in your area (e.g., county or voting district) with a date of birth from X to X. The dates you fill in should represent all 18- to 30-year-olds. Also find your state’s last date for voter registration so you can go back and ask for a list of youth who have registered between your first request and the registration deadline. You’ll then have a complete file of registered voters.

2. Ask your contact person to export the list to a compact disc in a format you can use. ASCII text format can be used with any software capable of reading a .txt file, such as Microsoft Access or Excel. The file should include as many of these categories as possible: name, mailing address, district and precinct, gender, telephone number, date of birth, date of registration, party affiliation, and voting history.

Getting this information on a disc will enable you to sort the data in various ways. However, you can also make do with a printed copy. If you get one, ask that it be alphabetized by last name for each district or precinct.

LATE JUNE TO JULY

Begin to organize your GOTV effort.

You can do this on your own or you can join with other organizations working to get out the vote in your area (e.g., League of Women Voters, Rock the Vote, churches, or a college campus group). By getting volunteers on board early, you’ll have a core group to work with through the summer and fall.

1. On the basis of your voter registration information, the types of voters you want to target, or both, decide where you will do your GOTV work (e.g., specific districts or precincts).

2. Get polling place lists and “poll-watcher” information from your local board of elections office. Find out who can be poll watchers (sometimes called election workers) and what rights and responsibilities they have on election day. Note that this varies from state to state. You can usually get information on poll-watcher laws from the secretary of state or the board of elections. Poll watchers are volunteers (often representing a party or nonprofit group) who sit inside a polling place and observe.
Appendix III  Planning and Running a GOTV Campaign  continued

☐ 3. A poll watcher may be dedicated to a candidate or referendum, or may simply want to ensure that voting is fair and turnout is high. Poll watchers may not advocate for a candidate or referendum or ask voters how they voted. In many states they can bring in their own voter lists, listen to voters give their names, and send checked-off lists to other volunteers who will call people who have not yet voted. In some states poll watchers are limited to representatives of official campaigns or parties; in others, citizens appointed by a campaign or get-out-the-vote effort can serve.

☐ 4. Find volunteers to act as poll watchers on election day (at least two per polling place you are covering).

☐ 5. Find volunteers who are willing to make calls to voters starting two weeks before Election Day. (Schedule one per phone in each calling location you identify.)

☐ 6. Find volunteers to be “runners” (at least one per polling place you are covering). These people will go to polling places on election day to retrieve your lists of registered voters. (Your poll watchers should have checked off who has voted on each list so your callers know who still needs to be called.)

☐ 7. Find volunteers willing to drive voters who need a ride to the polls.

MID-AUGUST  Plan an evening event.
Invite all your current students, recent graduates, alumni, and recruits for the next cycle. You can make it an active planning event by inviting attendees to discuss new GOTV ideas. You may also want to invite candidates running for local office to speak to the group about the importance of voting; if you do, make sure to invite candidates from more than one political party. Make the event fun, festive, and inspiring, and show appreciation for your volunteers. Also use it to accomplish the following tasks:

☐ 1. Expand your volunteer list for poll watching and other election day activities.

☐ 2. Brainstorm who to approach about donating sites for making phone calls on election day. Consider offices of lawyers, unions, telemarketing firms, or other locations with multiple phones. If you join other agencies or campaigns, make sure you tell them you will only be calling young voters.

☐ 3. Explain the duties of poll watchers and their role in identifying who votes on election day. (Their work enables other volunteers to call only those people who have not yet voted.)
**SEPTEMBER TO MID-OCTOBER**

Continue to develop your GOTV plan for election day.

- 1. Make at least four copies of your list of 18- to 30-year-old registered voters for each district or precinct you're covering. On each list, put the time on election day when the runner should pick it up from a polling place and bring it to a calling location.

- 2. Confirm your calling locations.

- 3. Develop a schedule for when and where your volunteer callers should report; make sure each volunteer receives a copy.

- 4. Develop a brief script for callers; it should motivate and encourage young people to get out and vote on election day.

**LATE OCTOBER**

Have volunteers use your script to begin to call targeted voters on your registration lists.

Have them make notes on lists to indicate the level of enthusiasm of each potential voter. If you are tight on time as the election approaches, you may want to target those individuals who seemed most likely to turn out and vote. If you have plenty of volunteers, you may want to consider how to best persuade reticent voters.

**ELECTION DAY IN NOVEMBER**

Rally your volunteers to get out the vote!

Before scheduling your election-day activities, find out when polls open and close in your area. One place to find this information is http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/State_Poll_Opening_and_Closing_Times.

With this information in hand, you can adjust the times given below to best suit your situation.

- **Before the polls open in the morning.** First poll watchers go to your selected polling places. They should have the first copies of the list of registered voters. Call to remind other poll watchers to show up for shifts throughout the day.

- **4:30 p.m.** Runners retrieve the first lists from poll watchers and deliver them to calling locations.
5:00 p.m. Using the first lists delivered from the polling place, volunteers start making calls to 18- to 30-year-old targeted voters who have not yet voted.

6:00 p.m. Runners retrieve the second lists from poll watchers and deliver them to calling locations.

6:30 p.m. Using the second lists delivered from the polling place, callers continue contacting targeted voters.

7:00 p.m. Runners retrieve the third lists from poll watchers and deliver them to calling locations.

7:30 p.m. Using the third lists delivered from the polling places, callers continue contacting those who have not yet voted.

8:00 p.m. Runners retrieve the last lists from poll watchers and deliver them to calling locations.

8:30 p.m. Stop all calls to voters. Polls close at 9:00 p.m. and anyone you call after 8:30 will probably not get out to vote.

It’s all up to you!
Now get out the vote!
SAMPLE A
Reverse Calendar 2008 New York State Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2, 2008</td>
<td><strong>ELECTION DAY</strong> <em>(Polls open at 6 a.m. and close at 9 p.m.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First shift of poll watchers report to polling places at 6 a.m.; they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>check off those on our list who vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At 4:30 p.m., first list of checked-off voters is retrieved from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>polling place and delivered to calling location. Repeat process, as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 3, 2008</td>
<td><strong>Last day to postmark absentee ballots for general election.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Last day to apply in person at board of elections office for</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>an absentee ballot.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last day to call targeted voters to encourage them to vote on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>election day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribute first copy of registered voter’s list to poll watchers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 28, 2008</td>
<td><strong>Last day to postmark application for an absentee ballot</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to vote in general election. <em>Ballot will be mailed to you for</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>return by November 1.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 10, 2008</td>
<td><strong>Last day to register in person at a board of elections office</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to be eligible to vote in the general election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 21, 2008</td>
<td>Merge updated voter registration information from board of elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>office with our voter lists. Make at least four copies of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>final list of all registered voters (to be used on November 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 20, 2008</td>
<td>Request list from board of elections of all voters who registered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>between the time we got the first list (May 31) and the last date of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>registration (October 8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confirm calling locations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Planning and Running a GOTV Campaign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 18, 2008</td>
<td>Make first phone calls to targeted voters to encourage them to vote on election day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 11, 2008</td>
<td>Prepare script for making phone calls. Develop and distribute schedule for poll watchers, runners, and callers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 10, 2008</td>
<td><strong>Last day to postmark registration forms to go to board of elections.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Registration forms must be received by a board of elections office not later than October 13th for registrants to be eligible to vote in the general election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 27–October 8, 2008</td>
<td>Conduct final push to register people to vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 13, 2008</td>
<td>Get list of polling places from board of elections office. Get application for poll-watcher certificates from the office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 8, 2008</td>
<td>Make calls to find locations for making GOTV calls on election day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 16–20, 2008</td>
<td>Possible dates for evening event. Expand list of volunteers for election day GOTV activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 15, 2008</td>
<td>Meet with students to plan fun August evening gathering for brainstorming how, when, and what to do for GOTV. Begin to recruit volunteers for various GOTV activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 4, 2008</td>
<td>Contact board of elections office to request a copy of the official election calendar or download one from state’s Web site. Also request a list of elected positions that will be on the November ballot. Develop an outline and description of the elected positions to distribute to students and other groups of young voters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>TASK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1, 2008</td>
<td>Continue ongoing voter registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop strategy for registering graduates not on voter list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 17–May 31, 2008</td>
<td>Develop database of 18- to 30-year-old voters from the list. YouthBuild programs may want to look for YouthBuild graduates on the list to verify that alumni are registered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 15, 2008</td>
<td>Request list of registered voters ages 18 to 30 from board of elections office. Get the list on CD, and as a printout, if possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SAMPLE B
List of Elected Positions & Descriptions of Offices
(Local positions)

**County court judge** is authorized to handle the prosecution of all crimes committed within the county. The judge has executive authority to handle felony matters and shares authority to handle trials and misdemeanor cases with the local city, town, and village courts.

**Family court judge** has jurisdiction over matters involving child custody, visitation and guardianship, juvenile delinquency, persons in need of supervision, child neglect and abuse, adoption and paternity, child and spousal support, and domestic violence between family members.

**District attorney** conducts all prosecutions for crimes and offenses cognizable by the courts of the county for which they have been elected or appointed. The district attorney is the county's chief law enforcement officer.

**Mayor** is the chief executive officer who is expected to maintain the peace, good order, and prosperity of the city; take care the laws of the state; see that the ordinances of the common council and the board of health are enforced; take such action as is authorized by law, whenever necessary, for the prevention or suppression of public disturbances, mobs, or riots; exercise a constant supervision over the conduct of all subordinate officers; receive and examine all complaints against such officers for misconduct or neglect of duty and suspend them; and take on all of the powers and duties of a mayor, as authorized by state or local law.

**City alderman-at-large** is the president and presiding officer of the common council and shall have the power to name and appoint all of its committees and shall be a member of said common council with the same duties and powers of an alderman; however, he or she shall not be entitled to vote except in case of a tie. In case the mayor shall be unable to perform the duties of his office in consequence of continued sickness or absence from the city, the alderman-at-large shall be acting mayor and shall be vested with all powers, except to remove appointive officers, and shall perform all of the duties of the mayor until the mayor shall resume his or her office.

**City aldermen** attend the regular and special meetings of the common council; act upon committees when thereto appointed; report to the mayor all subordinate officers who are guilty of official misconduct or neglect; and in maintaining peace and good order in the city, perform or assist in performing all duties enjoined upon the aldermen separately or upon the Council thereof.

**Town supervisor** carries out the decisions of the town board, receives complaints and suggestions of citizens, and ensures the daily functioning of the town government. He or she is also the fiscal officer for the town.

**Town clerk** is in charge of most of the town records, issues licenses and permits with county and state agencies as required, has much to do with election administration, and posts legal notices.
SAMPLE C
List of Elected Positions & Descriptions of Offices
(Federal positions)

President of the United States is the chief executive officer of the United States of America. The president plans the nation’s budget and appoints Cabinet leaders to plan programs to carry out the laws passed by the U.S. Congress. The president must sign the laws that are passed by Congress before they are presented to the people. To be president you must have been born in the United States and be at least 35 years of age. The president is also the commander-in-chief of the U.S. military. The term of office for the U.S. president is four years; anyone elected can only serve two consecutive four-year terms in that office.

United States Representative in Congress is elected to the lower legislative house of the U.S. Congress to represent a specifically defined geographical section of the state of residence. Congress members in the House of Representatives share equally with the Senate the job of developing the laws of the nation. To be a representative in Congress, you must be at least 25 years old, a resident of the state when you are elected, and a U.S. citizen for at least seven years. The term of office for a U.S. House of Representatives member is two years; he or she can be reelected. All members of the House of Representatives run in the same year every two years. There are 435 members in the U.S. House of Representatives. The total number of representatives for each state is determined by the population of the state.

United States Senator is elected to represent his or her state of residence in the upper legislative house of the U.S. Congress. Congress is made up of two houses; the U.S. Senate is one of them. The most important job of the U.S. Senate is to develop laws for the nation. To be a state senator, you must be at least 30 years old, a resident of the state when you are elected, and a U.S. citizen for at least nine years. The term of office for a U.S. senator is six years; he or she can be reelected. Senators are elected on a rotating basis so that not all senators are running for office in the same year. There are 100 U.S. senators. Two senators are elected to represent each state, regardless of the state’s size.
This guide is a starting point for those who wish to engage in activism. It is based on content from mobilize.org’s *The Mobilizer’s Guidebook* (www.mobilize.org/resources-2/mobilizers-guidebook).

**Steps to Take**

**Step 1: Research your issue**
Remember, knowledge is power! The only way you can take action on an issue is if you understand it.

What is the history of the issue? What has been done about this issue in the past? What are the proposed solutions? What are arguments for and against the issue or its proposed solutions?

**Step 2: Know your argument**
Now that you’ve researched the issue, it’s time to decide what you think.

- Know at least three pros and three cons of your issue.
- Know your options for approaching the issue. Based on your research, decide what has been tried and what could be done. What do you believe will solve the problem?
- Know your allies. What groups, politicians and members of your community will support you?
- Collect all the facts and statistics about your issue, and then compile major talking points that you can use when recruiting supporters or approaching officials.
For example, if you want to petition city council to renovate an abandoned lot to create a playground, your argument might include points such as:

- The lot has been abandoned for two years, and it has become a territory for drug dealers. It is reducing property values in the neighborhood. You have spoken with several members of the neighborhood who say that it has made the neighborhood unsafe. Something needs to be done with this lot.

- The children in the neighborhood are playing in the street. Parents are concerned that there is increasingly little “friendly” space for their children to play after school. The lot could be turned into a playground.

- Though the new playground will cost money, it will raise property values in the neighborhood, and reduce crime in the area.

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**Step 3: Join a group or start a group**

Is there already a group of people dedicated to working for this issue? Find out and join them! The Internet is a great resource for finding information about groups in your area.

If there isn’t already a group—start one! Begin by approaching your friends. Ask them to reach out to people they know.

With a core group set, you can begin advertising to the community (by using flyers, the Internet, or canvassing).

**Be sure that everyone has a clear role within the group.** Depending on your goals, you will need a **team leader** to manage all the group’s meetings and money; a **press and communications leader** to write press releases, letters to the editor, etc.; an **advocacy and outreach leader** to recruit new members and volunteers and help create partnerships for your group in the community; and a **fundraising leader** if you plan to hold an event or raise money for a charity or political party. What your group looks like will depend upon your issue, your goals, and the amount of time and people you have.

Consider asking a mentor who has interest in the issue to help or advise you.
Step 4: Set a goal
As you form your group, consider the facts. What would be a realistic goal for you to achieve? How much time do you have to commit to this project? What resources do you have?

Set an achievable goal. Could you spread awareness, gain the support of a local representative, create a petition, encourage others to vote on the issue, bring your issue to city council?

For example, if your goal is to convince the city to turn an abandoned lot into a playground, you might start a petition and bring it to a city council meeting, encouraging as many people as you can to come with you as supporters.

Where to Gather Information

For local issues
Speak to members of your community about what has been done and is being done. Archives of local newspapers, available at your local library, are a great way to learn more. Ask a librarian to help you find the information you need.

For state or national issues
The Internet is a valuable resource. If you do not have access to the Internet at home, you can use a public computer at your local library—most local libraries have some. For background on an issue, newspapers are a great resource, and most newspapers have free online editions. Try searching a variety of different newspapers.

For information about specific issues and to find out what is being done nationally try Web sites such as:

Political Information.com. (www.politicalinformation.com) A search engine for politics, policy, and political news. You can search by topic or news event, or follow the site’s many links about political and policy issues.

Think MTV. (http://think.mtv.com) A Web site where young people can learn about the issues that directly affect them, take action, and have fun doing it.

DoSomething.org. (www.dosomething.org) Seeks to create a community of young people who are “doers.” Here you can learn about an issue and find out how to get involved.
Young Democrats of America. (www.yda.org) The Young Democrats of America is the largest youth-led, national, partisan political organization. Young Democrats of America mobilizes young people under the age of 36 to participate in the electoral process, influences the ideals of the Democratic Party, and develops the skills of the youth generation to serve as leaders at the local and national level.

Young Republican National Federation. (www.yrnf.com) The Young Republicans are the oldest political youth organization in the United States. Important to the growth of the Republican Party, the Young Republicans reach out to registered Republicans 18 to 40 years of age and provide with better knowledge of how Republicans are approaching the issues of our day.

Mobilize.org. (www.mobilize.org) An all-partisan network dedicated to educating, empowering, and energizing young people to increase our civic engagement and political participation. Mobilize.org works to show young people how their lives are impacted by public policy and, in turn, how they can impact public policy.

MoveOn. (www.moveon.org) A hybrid Web site: MoveOn.org. Civic Action focuses on education and advocacy on important national issues. MoveOn.org Political Action mobilizes people across the country to fight important battles in Congress and help elect candidates who reflect liberal values. Links for each site’s sister site can be found in the upper right corner of the home pages.

Townhall.com. (http://townhall.com/) A conservative online community that brings together the grassroots media of talk radio, the Internet, blogging and podcasting, creating a forum for conservative activism.

Generational Alliance. (www.generationalalliance.org) A strategic collaboration of organizations across the country that support the empowerment of low-income youth; youth of color; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are pursuing progressive victories for their communities.
Strategies for Spreading the Word and Getting Support

Canvassing
Canvassing is an organized way of contacting potential supporters and or spreading awareness about an issue or a political candidate. It can involve going door to door, approaching people on the street, or even making phone calls.

Some canvassing tips:

- Establish a target area. For example, if your issue most directly concerns people in a specific area of the city, you might start with those neighborhoods.
- Have a list of talking points and a handout with information about the issue and how people can learn more or get involved.
- Always be polite and respectful. If someone confronts you, just say “Thank you for your time. Have a nice day.” Don’t fight!
- Remember that not everyone may be supportive, and some may even be rude. Stay positive.

Tips for Effective Canvassing. (www démocrats.org/a/2006/03/tips_for_effect.php) The Democratic Party’s Web site includes an overview of effective canvassing techniques—no matter your party or your issue.

The Rules of the Road: Canvassing. (http://files.democracyforamerica.com/nightschool/DFANightSchool-RulesoftheRoad.pdf) Democracy for America is the nation’s largest progressive political action community. They have a great guide to canvassing, and the tips that can be found in this guide are effective no matter your issue or cause.
The Internet and social networking Web sites

As we saw in the 2008 election, the Internet has become an important tool for political organizing. Facebook and MySpace are great ways to spread the word about your cause and plan events with friends and members of your community.

Other Web sites to consider:

**ePolitics.com.** (www.epolitics.com) Provides an overview of how to use the internet as a political tool. Download “Online Politics 101” for a collection of how-to articles about online organizing.

**YouthNoise.** (www.youthnoise.com) Empowers young leaders to act for the causes they care about locally, nationally and globally. YouthNoise offers both online and off-line tools that equip youth as they take action on a wide range of social issues. From health to education, from violence to poverty. YouthNoise is where leaders can turn ideas into action. YouthNoise is composed of 158,000 registered users from all 50 states and 176 countries, creating a virtual meeting place for the next generation of activists.

**Petitions**

A petition is a request to change something, signed by supporters, most commonly presented to a government authority or public organization. You might petition a local authority or city council.

**Sample petition (University of Minnesota).** An example of a petition can be found at www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-4/10_action -activity6-sample.htm.

**GoPetition.com.** (www.gopetition.com/howtowriteapetition.php) A global nonpartisan petition-hosting portal, including advice on effective petition writing.
Letters to elected officials

Besides gathering signatures for petitions, you can send letters directly to your elected officials. Every letter sent to an official is recorded—the more letters he or she receives about an issue, the more likely he or she is to take notice.

Congress.org. Congress.org is a nonpartisan news and information website devoted to encouraging civic participation. Our mission is to provide information about public policy issues of the day and tips on effective advocacy so that citizens can make their voices heard. At the center of Congress.org is an award-winning software program that makes it easy for citizens to write their elected officials.


Op-eds

Writing letters to the editor and opinion pieces are a great way to spread public awareness. (Op-eds are usually found in newspapers on the page opposite the editorial page.)

The OpEd Project. An initiative to expand the range of voices heard from in the world, with an immediate focus on increasing the volume of women thought leaders in the public sphere. Since women currently do not submit to key opinion forums with as frequently as men do—and because these gateway forums feed all other media and drive thought leadership and policy—the OpEd Project targets and trains women experts at top universities, think tanks, nonprofits, corporations and community organizations to write op-eds and encourages them to take thought leadership positions in their fields. Follow links on the site's main page for tips on op-ed writing.

American Civil Liberties Union. A resource for collecting information on legislative decisions and action, this Web site also provides a basic guide to writing op-eds.
Use these Web sites as starting points for your research on voting and civic participation. Be aware that online resources may change, take “vacations” between major elections, or even disappear. If you can’t find what you’re looking for, try using a search engine such as Google (www.google.com).

**General voting information (all topics)**
Voting laws and procedures at local and state levels change regularly. Your local or state election officials should have updated information.

- **Voter Information: The League of Women Voters** (www.lwv.org)
  The League annually updates its FAQs and voting information. If you don’t see a link to voter information, click on Projects and then on Voter Information.

**Voting: registration and absentee ballots**
Look for state instructions and mail-in forms on the general sites listed above, or try these:

- **Declare Yourself** (www.declareyourself.com)
  This is an engaging site designed to inform and inspire young people about the voting process.

- **Rock the Vote** (www.rockthevote.com)
  This is another compelling youth-focused site.

- **Sample Election Ballots** (www.nationalmockelection.org)
  If you can’t get them from your local election board, you should be able to download them here.

**Voting information for convicted felons**

- **Lawyer’s Committee for Civil Rights Under Law**
  (www.lawyerscomm.org/projects/votingrights.html)
  This site features current, comprehensive information on voting rights for former felons. Click on #5 (Re-enfranchisement of People with Felony Convictions) to access a guide to restoring your vote.

- **The Sentencing Project** (www.sentencingproject.org/pubs_05.cfm)
  Here you’ll find articles and updates on felony disenfranchisement.
• **Should Former Felons Be Allowed to Vote?**
  (www.nationalmockelection.org/docs/curriculum_reform_lesson_5.pdf)
  This lesson for high school students is from the Teacher’s Guide to Election Reform.

• **Voting Rights Restoration Process** (www.ncsl.org/programs/legman/elect/voterights.htm)
  This site from the National Council of State Legislatures has a description of each state’s law.
  The site is updated every couple of years.

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**Youth voting and civic engagement initiatives**

• **Black Youth Vote** (www.bigvote.org)
  The nonpartisan project empowers black youth by educating them about the political process
  and training them to identify issues and actively influence public policy. When the project is
  active, you’ll find a link to it on this home page.

• **Kids Voting USA** (www.kidsvotingusa.org)
  This national nonpartisan organization fosters an informed, active electorate by educating and
  involving young people and their families in voting and civic engagement.

• **Project Vote** (www.projectvote.org)
  This nonpartisan civic participation organization works to register low-income and minority
  citizens and get them out to vote.

• **Rock the Vote** (www.rockthevote.com)
  This nonpartisan organization engages youth in the political process by incorporating the
  entertainment community and youth culture into its activities. You’ll find voter registration
  materials and a variety of viewpoints on current issues.

• **Young Democrats** (www.yda.org)
  This national grassroots organization links young adults to affiliated groups, news, events, and
  discussions of priority issues.

• **Young Republicans** (www.youngrepublicans.com)
  This national organization links young adults to affiliated groups, news, discussions of priority
  issues, and conservative organizations.

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**Mock elections**

You can engage students in nationwide mock elections through these sites:

• **National Student/Parent Mock Election** (www.nationalmockelection.org)

• **Youth Leadership Initiative** (www.youthleadership.net)
  One teacher per school needs to be registered with the initiative in order for students to
  participate in these mock elections.
Candidates, public officials, and the issues

You can obtain information about candidates from your local board of elections, secretary of state’s office, and the following nonpartisan Web sites. (Note: Some of these sites accept paid ads and may publish opinions that are partisan.)

- **Congress.org** (www.congress.org/congressorg/e4/)
  You can find out who’s running in your area; learn about issues and positions; and get information on polling places, registration, and more.

- **Fact Check** (www.factcheck.org)
  The site critiques major party and candidate campaign claims.

- **How to Hold a Candidate’s Forum** (www.ctaconline.org/candidates.asp)
  (The URL is correct as written, despite the misspelling of “candidates”)
  The site offers good advice on how to plan and run a forum for local candidates.

- **The League of Women Voters** (www.lwv.org)
  The site features a wealth of FAQs and information on voting, candidates, and issues.

- **On the Issues** (www.ontheissues.org)
  You’ll find in-depth information on current issues and the positions of political leaders and candidates. Students can also click on Quizzes, check off their views on a variety of issues, and get a visual overview of how they match with different party platforms, political philosophies, or candidates.

- **Organizing a Candidate Debate**
  (www.campaignyoungvoters.org/toolkit/reach/debates/index.html)
  These guidelines are from the Campaign for Young Voters, which encourages candidates to reach out and engage young people.

- **Public Agenda** (www.publicagenda.org)
  A dropdown menu on this site features categories of key issues (e.g., crime, poverty) along with related facts, research, and other resources.

- **Vote Smart** (www.vote-smart.org)
  You’ll find information on elected officials and candidates in five categories: biographical information, issue positions, voting records, campaign finances, and interest group ratings. It includes national, state, and many local offices.

- **YouthBuild USA** (www.youthbuild.org)
  Search by your state or zip code for basic information on who holds local, state, and national offices. Go to the home page and click on Take Action.
Appendix V  **Online Resources** continued

**Political party Web sites**
- *Democratic Party* (www.democrats.org)
- *Republican Party* (www.gop.com)
- *The Constitution Party* (www.constitution-party.net)
- *The Green Party* (www.greenparty.org)
- *The Libertarian Party* (www.lp.org)
  You'll find descriptions and links to a host of third parties here.

**Media literacy and campaigns**
- *The 30-Second Candidate* (www.pbs.org/30secondcandidate)
  The site offers a behind-the-scenes look at how campaign ads are produced.
- *FactCheck.org* (www.factcheck.org)
  Run by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, the site reveals the accuracy of current political ads and corrects misinformation.
- *The Living Room Candidate* (http://livingroomcandidate.movingimage.us)
  Here you can view television campaign ads from 1954 to 2008 or you can read their transcripts.
- *Picking a Candidate* (http://www.smartvoter.org/voter/judgecan.html)
  This straightforward voter’s guide promotes critical questioning.

**Voting rights and social justice**
  This section of the U.S. Department of Justice Web site has an overview of federal voting rights laws, past and present.
- *Voting Rights for Women* (www.pbs.org/stantonanthony)
  *Not for Ourselves Alone*, a video about the women's suffrage movement, is available through PBS home videos. You can order the video or watch an introductory clip.
- *The Immigrant Voting Project* (www.immigrantvoting.org/material/misconceptions.html)
  Here students can discover common misconceptions about immigrant voting rights.
  This instructional program uses biographical sketches to tell the story of the labor movement.
The site features a series of activities for high school students.

**Election reform**

- *Election Reform Information Project* (www.electionline.org)
  This nonpartisan Web site serves as a clearinghouse for election reform information.

- *Election Deceptions* (www.nationalreview.com/jos/osullivan200411020753.asp)
  Vote fraud is the topic of this opinion article on the 2004 elections from the conservative
  magazine, *The National Review*.

- *Smithsonian Exhibit: The Machinery of Democracy* (http://americanhistory.si.edu/vote)
  This interactive online exhibit looks at the history of voting methods and machinery in the
  United States.

**Money and election campaigns**

  From here, students can use a simple search form to find out who contributed to presidential
  and congressional candidates in their state.

- *Money in the U.S. Election* (www.opensecrets.org)
  Operated by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, this site reveals where money
  comes from and goes to. It covers all candidates and parties with its “equal opportunity”
  perspective.

- *Open Secrets* (www.opensecrets.org/states/index.asp)
  Students can put in a zip code to find out who’s giving to presidential and congressional
  candidates (and for many states, to local candidates).

  You’ll find readings and activities for students on the history, regulations, and current status
  of campaign spending. Also see this activity: Campaign Finance Reform: An Activity for High
  School Students (www.teachablemoment.org/high/campaignfinance.html).

**Miscellaneous topics**

- *Civic Engagement and Community Action Sourcebook* (http://hub1.worlded.org/docs/vera/index1.htm)
  These online excerpts from a printed guide present tools to help readers examine their own
  beliefs about community, citizenship, and democracy; identify and analyze issues that concern
  them; and build skills and strategies to take informed action.

- *The Electoral College* (www.nelrc.org/changeagent/selectedArticles/article2vol18.htm)
  The process is described in this concise article from *The Change Agent*, a publication focused
  on adult education and social justice.
• **How Laws Are Made** ([http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/lawmaking](http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12/lawmaking))
  This overview for high school students is from Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids.

• **Political Ideologies Lesson** ([www.youthleadership.net](http://www.youthleadership.net))
  Click on “lesson plans” to find several lessons on ideologies and other political topics from the Youth Leadership Institute. (You may need to sign up to participate.)

• **Pure Politics** ([www.purepolitics.com](http://www.purepolitics.com))
  The nonpartisan site features educational resources, news, cartoons, and games related to politics and government.

• **U.S. Government Services and Agencies** ([www.usbluepages.gov](http://www.usbluepages.gov))
  You can search by state and city to find local phone numbers.

• **YouthBuild’s Declaration of Inter-Dependence** ([www.youthbuild.org/declaration.html](http://www.youthbuild.org/declaration.html))
  Young people created this document to share their views on what types of policy changes would ensure that all young people in this country flourish.
Appendix VI

Glossary

A

Absentee ballot. A ballot a voter requests, completes, and typically returns through the mail, rather than going to a polling place to vote.

Affirmative action. A policy or a program providing access to college or employment for people of a minority group who have traditionally faced discrimination.

Amendment. A revision or addition to a document or bill. The Constitution of the United States may be amended when two-thirds of each house of Congress and three-quarters of the state legislatures approve a proposed amendment.

Appeal. In a legal sense this means formally filing a notice with a lower court to indicate one's intention to take the matter to the next higher court.

Attorney general. The main legal adviser to the government. In some areas, he or she may also have executive responsibility for law enforcement or public prosecutions.

B

Ballot. A device used to record choices made by voters. Each voter receives and returns one single ballot. Elections in the United States use either preprinted or electronic ballots.

Ballot initiative. This allows citizens in some states and many local governments to try to get laws passed when the legislature refuses to act. A petition signed by a certain percent of the voters is typically required for placing an initiative on the ballot.

Bicameral. The characteristic of having two branches, chambers, or houses. The U.S. Congress, which is composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives, is a bicameral body.

Bill. A proposed law put before a legislature.

Bipartisan. Cooperation on an issue or issues by two political parties, usually the two major parties controlling a government.

Budget. The budget of a government is a plan or summary of the intended revenues and expenditures of that government.

C

Cabinet. A body of high-ranking members of government, typically representing the executive branch.

Campaign. (n.). An organized effort to win an election. (v.) To strive for elected office. The term can also refer to an organized effort to influence people or policies.

Campaign finance reform. An effort to change how funds are raised for election campaigns. There are many sources of funding for campaigns, both direct and indirect. These include donations from individuals, unions, corporations, and other special interest groups.

Candidate. A person seeking or being considered for some kind of position, such as public office.

Capitalism. An economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately owned and controlled; it is characterized by competition and the profit motive. This is the dominant system in the United States.

Centrist. A person with moderate political opinions and policies.

Civil liberties. Basic individual rights, such as freedom of speech, religion, and privacy. These are usually guaranteed and protected by law from government or other interference.

Civil union. A civil status similar to marriage, typically created for the purposes of allowing same-sex couples access to the legal benefits enjoyed by married opposite-sex couples.
Communism. A system of government in which the state plans and controls the economy, encourages the elimination of private property, and aims to equitably distribute goods and services to all citizens. A Communist government typically maintains central control over banking, business, housing, education, industry, medical care, and the military. Often, a single authoritarian party holds power.

Congress. The name of the main legislative (lawmaking) body in the United States. It consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Consensus. A general agreement among the members of a given group.

Conservative. A person who is right of center on the U.S. political spectrum. A conservative tends to support traditional values, a large role for private businesses, a small national government, and limited spending on social welfare programs. Of the two main political parties, the Republican Party is regarded as being the more conservative.

Constituent. A voting citizen who is represented by an elected government official.

Constitution. A document that defines a nation's basic political principles and laws. The U.S. Constitution also guarantees certain rights to the people.

Constitution Party. A conservative third party in the United States. It has a strict approach to moral and personal issues, especially homosexuality and abortion, and promotes the role of religion in American life.

Convention (political). An official gathering of the delegates of one political party before a presidential election. There they select candidates for office and approve the party's platform.

Corporation. A legal entity (typically a business) chartered by a state or the federal government. Corporations can own property, incur debts, sue, and be sued.

Declaration. A statement or written text that expresses (or declares) an idea; declarations attempt to argue that something is true.

Democracy. A system of government in which the people hold the ruling power either directly (direct democracy) or through elected representatives (representative democracy).

Democratic Party. One of the two major political parties in the United States. (The other is the Republican Party.) It is regarded as the more liberal of the two parties.

Democratic socialism. A leftwing political and economic ideology that seeks the redistribution of wealth to eliminate the injustices and inequalities of a class-based society. It calls for alternative economic structures such as cooperatives and facilities that are owned by consumers, communities, workers, and the government.

Demographics. The characteristics of a population. Demographics include age, income, race, ethnicity, educational attainment, home ownership, employment status, and geographic location.

Direct democracy. A system of government in which political power is vested in the people. Each citizen has one vote and directly decides which laws will be passed.

Disenfranchisement. This occurs when someone is restricted from voting or loses the right to vote. This can happen through laws or other means, such as intimidation.

Dictatorship. Absolute rule by a leader. The leader’s actions and decisions are not restricted by law, constitutions, or other factors.

Donation (political). A gift in support of a political cause.
Appendix VI  Glossary  continued

E

**Economic development.** Developing financial wealth of countries or regions for the well-being of people who live there.

**Election.** A decision-making process in which people vote for political candidates or parties to act as representatives in government. Election day in the United States is the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

**Electoral college.** The group of representatives that formally elects the president and the vice president in the United States. The number of electors from each state is equal to the sum of the state’s senators and representatives in Congress.

**Electronic voting.** The use of electronic equipment and computerized systems to tabulate votes.

**Embargo.** The prohibition of commerce and trade with a certain country.

**Emissions.** Gases given off from industrial processes and vehicles.

**Estate tax.** A form of tax on the estate (all assets, such as money and property) of a deceased person when the estate is left to a living person or organization.

**Ethnicity.** A culture or subculture whose members come from the same race or nationality.

**Executive branch.** The branch of a government that executes (administers) the laws and affairs of the nation. The head of the executive branch in the United States is the president. The branch also includes a wide array of departments and agencies that work with the president.

**Extremist.** A person who holds extreme views (either right-wing or left-wing) that are far beyond the norm.

F

**Far left.** The extreme left wing of the political spectrum.

**Far right.** The extreme right wing of the political spectrum.

**Federal government.** The central government of the United States; it was created by the union of the states under the Constitution.

**Felony.** A very serious crime. (Misdemeanors are considered to be less serious.)

**Forum.** A public meeting or meeting place for discussion or lecture.

G

**Gender.** The sex—either male or female—of a person or organism.

**Government.** The body that has the power to make and enforce laws within an organization or group.

**Governor.** The elected head of a state’s government.

**Green Party.** A political party initiated by the environmental movement. Its concerns include ecological sustainability, social justice, respect for diversity, and increased local economic control.

H

**Hard money.** Contributions made to political parties and candidates in federal elections that are legal under the Federal Election Campaign Act or that are overseen by the Federal Election Commission.

**House of Representatives.** One of two chambers of the U.S. Congress (and most state governments). A member is called a representative (or a congressman or congresswoman). The 435 members are elected for two years at a time. Each state has a set number of representatives based on its population.

I

**Ideology.** An integrated system of ideas about politics, values, and culture. A core belief system about how society should work and how power and resources should be allocated and used.

**Immigrant.** Someone from another country who intends to reside permanently in a new country; not a casual visitor or traveler.

**Incumbent.** A current officeholder.
**Glossary continued**

**Impeachment.** To charge a public official (e.g., the president) with misconduct while in office. This is the first step in removing an official from office.

**Indirect democracy.** A system of government in which political power is indirectly vested in the people. The people elect government officials or delegates to a lawmaking group (Congress, for example) instead of voting directly for specific laws and issues.

**Intimidation.** The act of making others do what one wants by using scare tactics.

**Issue ad.** An ad that focuses on issues related to a candidate without directly advocating the election or defeat of the candidate. Issue ads are often used to attack an opponent.

**Judge.** An official who presides over a court and administers justice.

**Judicial Branch.** The branch of a government that administers justice and interprets the law. The federal government and states have a set of courts for doing this. The U.S. Supreme Court is the highest court in the United States; its justices are appointed for life.

**Left wing.** The liberal segment of a political party or organization.

**Legislator.** An elected person who writes and passes laws. A member of the federal or state house of representatives or senate.

**Legislature.** The federal or state governmental body responsible for making laws and appropriating funds. The national legislature of the United States is the U.S. Congress.

**Liberal.** A person who is somewhat left of center on the U.S. political spectrum. One who favors reform or progress. Liberals tend to favor greater federal power to remedy social inequities (e.g., via spending on social welfare programs) and to support freedom of personal choice and behavior. Of the two main political parties, the Democratic Party is regarded as being the more liberal.

**Libertarian Party.** A political party that believes that individuals should have the liberty to do as they wish with minimal government involvement or regulation.

**Lobby.** A group seeking to influence an elected official, or the act of seeking to influence. A lobbyist is a person who is usually paid to influence legislation and public opinion.

**Majority.** A subset of a group that makes up more than half of the entire group.

**Medicare.** A publicly funded health insurance plan that covers the elderly and disabled.

**Minority.** A group that does not form a majority or a plurality of the total population. It can also be a group that, while not necessarily a numerical minority, is disadvantaged or otherwise has less political or economic power than a dominant group.

**Moderate.** (n.) An individual who holds an intermediate position between those classified as being left-wing, liberal, or socialist and those seen as being right-wing, conservative, or fundamentalist. (adj.) intermediate, neither conservative or liberal.

**Monarchy.** A form of government that has a monarch (often royalty) as head of state. In such a government, the leader keeps his or her office for life rather than being elected for a certain amount of time.

**Municipality.** An administrative local area such as a city, town, or village government.

**Naturalization.** The process of voluntarily acquiring a citizenship or nationality at some time after birth. It is typically associated with a person who has immigrated to a country, resided there as a noncitizen, and voluntarily chosen to become a citizen of that country after meeting specific requirements.

**Nomination.** When a political party chooses its official candidate for a particular office.
Nonpartisan. Not involving or influenced by or supporting a particular political party.

Nonprofit organization. An organization whose main purpose is to support an issue or matter of private or public concern for noncommercial purposes. Nonprofits may be involved in a variety of areas including the arts, charity, education, politics, religion, or research. They do not seek to obtain profits that enrich stockholders or owners.

Oppression. The negative process of targeting people for consistent mistreatment within a society.

Partisan. Someone with a personal or professional commitment to one particular political party or faction. Others may describe such people as “being partisan,” and their outlooks as “partisan views.” It is often used negatively, implying that the person’s devotion is excessive.

Patriotism. A feeling of love and devotion to one’s own country or homeland. Often implies a willingness to sacrifice in its name.

Petition. A petition is a document—generally a request or demand—addressed to an official and signed by numerous individuals. Plurality. The number of votes in an election that the leading candidate obtains over the next highest candidate. The candidate does not have to have a majority. (Majority refers to one candidate receiving more than half the votes.)

Politics. The process and method of making decisions for groups. Although it is generally applied to governments, politics is also observed in all human group interactions.

Political action committee (PAC). An organization representing the interests of a corporation, labor union, trade association, or other interest group, that solicits and collects political campaign contributions from individuals and distributes them to particular candidates.

Political party. A political organization that subscribes to a certain set of ideas (ideology) and seeks to attain political power by getting selected members elected to public office.

Political platform. The positions that a party adopts, and stands on, at the beginning of an election campaign. It often takes the form of the party’s stance on a list of issues. Individual topics are often called planks of the platform.

Poll. A survey used to forecast an election or get a sense of public opinion on particular issues. Also, the voting location on election day.

Primary election. An election held to decide which candidates will be on the November general election ballot. Closed primary. A primary election in which voters must declare party affiliation and may vote only for candidates of their party. Open primary. A primary election in which a voter registered with one party, or not registered with any party, can vote for any candidate.

Privatization. The process of transferring a nationally run enterprise (schools or the prison system, for example) from public ownership to private corporate ownership.

Progressive. A political philosophy with followers that promote policies they believe would dramatically reform a country’s government, economy, or society and make it more democratic and equitable. This position is left of center on the political spectrum.

Protest vote. A vote for the candidate of an alternative party that is cast not to elect that candidate, but to indicate disapproval of the major political parties and their candidates.

Public campaign funding. The partial financing of presidential election campaigns from a fund consisting entirely of voluntary contributions. U.S. taxpayers check off the appropriate box on their federal income tax return to authorize that a certain amount be contributed to the fund. Candidates who qualify for public money must agree to follow certain rules and restrictions.

Public service announcement (PSA). A noncommercial advertisement, typically on radio or television, that is broadcast for the public good.

Race. A population of individuals typically distinguished from other populations by common visible genetic attributes such as skin color, hair color, and other features.
**Radical.** A political viewpoint that is extreme and far beyond the norm.

**Reactionary.** A political viewpoint that is extremely conservative.

**Referendum.** A voting process in which a state or local government allows registered voters to make a final decision about an issue or piece of legislation (law). This is sometimes called a proposition or ballot initiative.

**Regulations.** Rules that control something rather than prohibit it altogether. For example, the government regulates the amount of specific pollutants that certain industries can release into the environment.

**Representative democracy.** A form of government in which citizens rule through elected representatives. The United States is a representative democracy.

**Republic.** A nation in which power rests in its voting citizens and is exercised by representatives elected by them and responsible to them. The United States is a republic.

**Republican Party.** One of the two major political parties in the United States. (The other is the Democratic Party.) It is regarded as the more conservative of the two parties.

**Responsibility.** The obligation to answer for actions. Also, the recognition that in order to achieve a goal or see something change, one must act oneself (take responsibility) rather than expecting others to do something.

**Revenue.** Money collected by the government from taxes, duties, user fees, and premiums from social insurance programs. Also, the amount of money a company takes in from its sales and services. It differs from profit, which is the amount of money a business earns after deducting all its expenses.

**Right wing.** The more conservative segment of a political party or organization. (The other extreme is left wing.)

**Senate.** One of two houses, or chambers, of the U.S. Congress or most state legislatures. The 100 U.S. senators—two from each state—all serve six-year terms.

**Social democracy.** A political philosophy that maintains that government and other institutions must help reduce social and economic inequalities. For instance, its followers believe in strong regulations to protect the interests of workers, consumers, and small businesses. They also advocate for comprehensive government-funded or subsidized social services.

**Social movement.** A type of group action to effect change. This typically involves large-scale informal groupings of individuals or organizations focused on specific political or social issues.

**Social security.** The major social insurance program in the United States. Workers contribute financially to the system during their working years, typically through payroll deductions. In return, they are entitled to family benefits upon retirement, disability, or death.

**Socialism.** A political or economic system in which the basic means of production and distribution are owned and controlled by the public (through the government), rather than by private interests. A primary goal is to distribute wealth more equally.

**Socioeconomic class.** People having similar social or economic status (working class, for example).

**Soft money.** Money contributed to a political party. These contributions are outside the restrictions of the Federal Election Campaign Act. They have become controversial because they are regarded by many as a loophole in the regulation of campaign funding.

**Special interests.** Individuals and organizations that attempt to influence the political process to advance their own interests. These include corporations, labor unions, and a variety of advocacy groups.
State. An organized political community occupying a definite territory and having an organized government. Sometimes a country is referred to as a state.

Statistics. The science and practice of collecting, organizing, and analyzing numeric data (for example, the number of voters from each state who turned out in an election).

Subsidy. Money or a grant given by a government to lower the price faced by some or all producers or consumers of a product or service (housing, for example).

Supreme court. The highest court in a state or the country; it functions as a "court of last resort" whose rulings cannot be appealed. The nine justices on the U.S. Supreme Court are nominated by the president, approved by the Senate, and appointed for life.

Swing vote. The undecided, usually independent, portion of eligible voters that can "swing" the outcome of an election one way or the other.

Ticket. The list of candidates nominated by a political party in an election.

Trade. The voluntary exchange of goods, services, or both. Trade is also called commerce.

Union. An organization formed by workers to bargain with employers. A single union will typically represent workers in one or more industries or crafts in all or part of the country.

Veto. Something that gives a leader unlimited power to stop a certain piece of legislation.

Vocational education. Programs that prepare learners for specific trades or occupations.

Voting age population (VAP). The total number of people in the United States who are 18 years of age or older regardless of citizenship, military status, felony conviction, mental state, or registration status. (The number of eligible voters will always be less than this number.)

Wealth. Refers to all of a person's money, property, and other assets—not just income.

Welfare. Refers to services provided or money paid by the government to people who are in need of financial assistance but who are unable to work or earn enough to make ends meet.
Alignments with National Social Studies Standards

This table lists middle school and high school content standards from the national *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* that you can address through each *Blueprint for Democracy* activity. It also features a few items from the *National Standards for Civics and Government* that are not covered in the social studies document.

*Note:* Each state has its own particular standards to obtain a high school diploma. The standards listed below should only be used as a guide to make sure your classrooms are covering the important skills necessary to think critically about the issues presented in this document. For your particular state standards, contact your state's Department of Education. There are no standard curriculum requirements to obtain a GED.

**Resources**


*National Standards for Civics and Government* ([www.civiced.org/standards.html](http://www.civiced.org/standards.html)). This is an online version of the civics standards from the Center for Civic Education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Relevant Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What Do I Care About?</td>
<td>Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What Do I Know About These Issues?</td>
<td>Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic. Locate, access, analyze, organize, and apply information about selected public issues—recognizing and explaining multiple points of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How Can We Tackle Issues We Care About?</td>
<td>Locate, access, analyze, organize, and apply information about selected public issues—recognizing and explaining multiple points of view. Explain and analyze the various forms of citizen action that influence public policy decisions. Examine strategies designed to strengthen the “common good,” which consider a range of options for citizen action.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. How Does Government Affect My Life?</td>
<td>Describe the purpose of government and how its powers are acquired, used, and justified. Identify and interpret sources and examples of the rights and responsibilities of citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is a Democracy?</td>
<td>Identify and interpret sources and examples of the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Civics: Explain discrepancies between American ideals and the realities of political and social life in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Power to the People (Directly or Indirectly?)</td>
<td>Identify and interpret sources and examples of the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Explain and analyze the various forms of citizen action that influence public policy decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Who Decides? How Do Things Change?</td>
<td>Analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture. Identify and describe the basic features of the U.S. political system and identify representative leaders from various levels and branches of government. Identify and interpret sources and examples of the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Locate, access, analyze, organize, and apply information about selected public issues—recognizing and explaining multiple points of view. Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic. Explain and analyze the various forms of citizen action that influence public policy decisions. Identify and explain the roles of formal and informal political actors in influencing and shaping public policy and decision making. Examine strategies designed to strengthen the “common good,” which consider a range of options for citizen action.</td>
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### Alignments with National Standards

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<tr>
<td>9. How Do People Gain, Lose, or Regain the Right to Vote?</td>
<td>Identify significant historical periods and patterns of change within and across cultures, such as social, economic, and political revolutions.</td>
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<td>Examine the interactions of ethnic, national, or cultural influences in specific situations or events.</td>
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<td>Compare and evaluate the impact of stereotyping and other behaviors on individuals or groups.</td>
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<td>Explain and analyze the various forms of citizen action that influence public policy decisions.</td>
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<td>Analyze the effectiveness of selected public policies and citizen behaviors in realizing the stated ideals of a democratic republican form of government.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Who Votes?</td>
<td>Civics: Explain how political parties, campaigns, and elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Can Young People’s Votes Make a Difference?</td>
<td>Identify and interpret sources and examples of the rights and responsibilities of citizens.</td>
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<td>Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic.</td>
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<td>Explain and analyze the various forms of citizen action that influence public policy decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. What Do We Know About Young Voters?</td>
<td>Civics: Explain how political parties, campaigns, and elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Why Do Some of Us Choose Not to Vote?</td>
<td>Civics: Explain how political parties, campaigns, and elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process.</td>
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Explain and analyze the various forms of citizen action that influence public policy decisions.  
Work independently and cooperatively to accomplish goals.  
Civics: Explain how political parties, campaigns, and elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process. |
| 15. What Influences My Political Beliefs? | Describe the ways family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and institutional affiliations contribute to personal identity.  
Analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture. |
| 16. Political Positions: Where Do I Stand? | Identify and describe examples of tensions between belief systems and government policies and laws.  
Explain and apply concepts such as power, role, status, justice, and influence to the examination of persistent issues and social problems.  
Explain and illustrate how values and beliefs influence different economic systems. |
| 17. A Tale of Two Countries | Compare similarities and differences and analyze the ways groups, societies, and cultures address human needs and concerns.  
Analyze and explain ideas and governmental mechanisms to meet needs and wants of citizens.  
Give and explain examples of ways that economic systems structure choices about how goods and services are to be produced and distributed.  
Compare how values and beliefs influence economic decisions in different societies. |
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| 18. Political Parties: Where Do I Stand? | Identify and describe the basic features of the U.S. political system, and identify representative leaders from various levels and branches of government.  
Civics: Describe the role of political parties. |
| 19. Evaluating Candidates: How Do They Measure Up? | Identify and describe the basic features of the U.S. political system and identify representative leaders from various levels and branches of government.  
Locate, access, analyze, organize, and apply information about selected public issues—recognizing and explaining multiple points of view.  
Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic.  
Civics: Explain how citizens can evaluate information and arguments received from various sources so that they can make reasonable choices on public issues and among candidates for political office. |
Identify and describe the basic features of the U.S. political system and identify representative leaders from various levels and branches of government.  
Locate, access, analyze, organize, and apply information about selected public issues—recognizing and explaining multiple points of view.  
Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic.  
Identify and explain the roles of formal and informal political actors in influencing and shaping public policy and decision making.  
Civics: Explain how political parties, campaigns, and elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process. |
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| 21. Where I Stand, Where the Candidates Stand | Identify and describe examples of tensions between belief systems and government policies and laws.  
Locate, access, analyze, organize, and apply information about selected public issues—recognizing and explaining multiple points of view.  
Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic.                                                                                                          |
| 22. Know the Issues: Research and Debate     | Identify and describe examples of tensions between belief systems and government policies and laws.  
Locate, access, analyze, organize, and apply information about selected public issues—recognizing and explaining multiple points of view.  
Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic.                                                                                                          |
| 23. Money Speaks: How it Influences Elections | Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic.  
Identify and explain the roles of formal and informal political actors in influencing and shaping public policy and decision making.  
Identify representative leaders from various levels and branches of government.  
Civics: Explain how political parties, campaigns, and elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process.                                                                                       |
| 24. The Election Process: Fair or Flawed?    | Compare and evaluate the impact of stereotyping and other behaviors on individuals or groups.  
Locate, access, analyze, organize, and apply information about selected public issues—recognizing and explaining multiple points of view.  
Civics: Explain discrepancies between American ideals and the realities of political and social life in the United States.                                                                                                                                                        |
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<td>25. Media Matters: Laying the Groundwork</td>
<td>Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic. Civics: Explain how citizens can evaluate information and arguments received from various sources so that they can make reasonable choices on public issues and among candidates for political office.</td>
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<td>26. Ad Explorers: Seeing Through the Sell</td>
<td>Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic. Civics: Explain how citizens can evaluate information and arguments received from various sources so that they can make reasonable choices on public issues and among candidates for political office.</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Image Matters: Ad-Savvy Sleuths</td>
<td>Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic. Civics: Explain how citizens can evaluate information and arguments received from various sources so that they can make reasonable choices on public issues and among candidates for political office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Wrapping it Up: Presentations and Preferences</td>
<td>Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic. Civics: Explain how political parties, campaigns, and elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. How Do I Fill Out a Ballot and Vote?</td>
<td>Practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic. Civics: Explain how political parties, campaigns, and elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process.</td>
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