

NIE ELECTION ACTIVITIES GUIDE

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PART 2

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2. Study the elections in a context of reality and connectedness to other events.
3. Pursue informed discussions about politics and current issues.
4. Compare coverage of issues and candidates by different newspapers.
5. Strengthen inferential and evaluative comprehension skills.
6. Improve analytical reading skills.
7. Develop lifetime habits of active participation in the election process and the government.
8. Synthesize different sources and writing styles for valuable information.

PART 3

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The U.S. Economy

Explore

What is the position of each candidate for President of the United States on the economy?

Weblink: www.ontheissues.org offers information on the candidates' positions on important issues. Editorials published in newspapers, as well as news articles on the Internet, offer timely information about the candidates' positions and statements they make every day.

Express

Students can write their own plan for restoring stability to the U.S. economy. For example, they can suggest actions that individuals, banks and the federal government can take to protect savings and retirement accounts. Read letters to the editor in the local newspaper to see what others are saying.

Debate

This issue and other campaign issues offer great material for students to conduct debates in classes. The school's debate team coach (or any teacher) can organize and videotape a debate within the school or with a neighboring school. Clips of the debate can be sent to YouTube, which has already received numerous Mock Election videos produced by students. This is a great way to put your school on display.

Create

Students can create "mock" stock portfolios and track their money for one week or month, using stock tables in printed and online newspapers, as well as other websites.

Which one of the following statements about the economy most closely reflects your beliefs about the economic policies the next President should use to improve Americans standard of living?

- a) International trade agreements like NAFTA have benefited our partner countries at the cost of American jobs and business and should be terminated or renegotiated to include better terms for U.S. workers, and stronger protection of consumer goods.
- b) The President should take measures to significantly reduce the federal budget deficit, which is projected to be \$1.1 trillion for 2012. Doing so would lower our trade imbalances, raise savings while lowering our need of foreign debt, and improve our long-term economic growth.
- c) The President should make extensive improvements to our aging infrastructure. Replacing old bridges, investing in modern rail networks, and upgrading our outdated electricity grid would create jobs and promote greater efficiencies that would benefit our economy.
- d) With oil prices high and job creation slow, taxes should be lowered to give households more income to meet their rising bills. This would put money back into the economy and create new jobs.
- e) Uncertain, need to learn more about this issue.

U.S. Involvement in the War in Afghanistan

Explore

What is the position of each candidate for President of the United States about the war in Afghanistan?

Express

Students can write letters to the editor for the school newspaper and send brief "essays" on this issue to the local newspaper as a letter to the editor.

Debate

Conduct a debate on this issue.

Create

Students can create their own colorful "Support Our Troops" ribbons similar to those seen on many car bumpers.

Which one of the following statements most closely reflects your beliefs about American involvement in the war in Afghanistan?

- a. The United States should stay in Afghanistan until all our military and political goals are achieved, even if it takes decades. Our security and interests are paramount. As the only world superpower, we can do things alone and without concern to world public opinion.
- b. The war is still to be won and its goals achieved. When the military and political situations improve in Afghanistan there should be a slow gradual withdraw of American troops.
- c. The war has not been successful in achieving the goal of making our nation safer. Our international reputation has been harmed. American casualties have been much greater than expected. All American combat troops should return home when the political status of Afghanistan improves.
- d. The war has severely damaged the reputation and power of the United States. It is in the best interest of our country that our armed forces immediately leave Afghanistan in an orderly manner. Let the people of both countries resolve their own internal problems, with the U.S. giving economic help when needed.
- e. Uncertain, need to learn more about this issue.

The Energy Crisis

Explore

What is the position of each candidate for President of the United States on energy issues?

Express

Students can prepare a list of ways their families have reduced their energy consumption. Examples could include buying a more fuel-efficient car, changing thermostats at home and efficiently organizing shopping trips. Read articles in the local newspaper for tips about saving energy.

Debate

Conduct a debate on this issue.

Create

Students can draw maps for more efficient school bus routes or family shopping routes to save gasoline.

Which one of the following statements most closely reflects your beliefs about the energy crisis, especially fuel costs and resource conservation?

- a) The government should heavily subsidize the research and development of alternative energy sources to reduce our demand of oil, as it is harmful for the environment and increasingly expensive to consume.
- b) As oil companies collect record profits with the ever-increasing price of gasoline, the government should impose windfall profit taxes on the companies if they fail to increase their investment in greater oil production and/or new energy alternatives.
- c) With the price of gasoline stretching many American's pocketbooks to near breaking point, the government should suspend the federal gas tax of 18.4 cents a gallon to lessen the burden to drivers at the pump.
- d) The rise in oil prices is mainly due to an increase in world demand, without a corresponding expansion of supply. To increase supply, the government should remove the ban on off-shore drilling so that oil companies can remove more oil from the ground to meet the rising demand.
- e) Uncertain, need to learn more about this issue.

Healthcare Policies and Costs

Explore

What is the position of each candidate for President of the United States on healthcare issues?

Express

Students can clip from the local newspaper statements the candidates have made about the nation's healthcare system and how they would improve it. With that information, students can propose their own plan for improving health insurance coverage, as if they were running for office.

Debate

Conduct a debate on this issue.

Create

Students can conduct a survey of other students, using the questions on this page. They can write a news article about the results and send the article to the local newspaper.

Which of the following statements most closely reflects your beliefs about healthcare policy and costs?

- a) The federal government has no responsibility for healthcare of private citizens. It should be the responsibility of each individual to gain healthcare coverage through health insurance companies. Self-reliance and the free market system should be used for all services in the United States.
- b) The federal government should largely stay out of providing healthcare to Americans. This should be done mainly through the private sector. Only the most needy citizens should be provided a basic level of medical assistance.
- c) The federal government should play a major role in assuring that affordable, quality healthcare is available to all Americans. Federal healthcare insurance should be provided to citizens who cannot get private healthcare coverage.
- d) A national healthcare insurance program is needed. All Americans should be provided quality healthcare through a federal program, funded by tax revenues. Healthcare is too important to be left to the private enterprise.
- e) Uncertain, need to learn more about this issue.

USING NEWSPAPERS TO TEACH ABOUT THE ELECTION

Adapted from material by Colette Yeich, Newspaper in Education Coordinator, The Hartford Courant

OBJECTIVES

Using newspapers in classrooms as primary resources will help students to:

1. Gain a deeper understanding of candidates, issues and the election process.
2. Study the elections in a context of reality and connectedness to other events.
3. Pursue informed discussions about politics and current issues.
4. Compare coverage of issues and candidates by different newspapers.
5. Strengthen inferential and evaluative comprehension skills.
6. Improve analytical reading skills.
7. Develop lifetime habits of active participation in the election process and the government.
8. Synthesize different sources and writing styles for valuable information.

METHODS

Contact national and local newspapers to order classroom newspapers. These activities will help enhance students' election learning:

- 1. Follow and analyze general election news coverage.**
- 2. Collect and analyze polls.**
- 3. Collect and analyze editorials.**
- 4. Learn how to recognize advertising propaganda techniques.**
- 5. Use the classified ad format to explore the responsibilities of public officials.**
- 6. Use commentary to evaluate the results of the election.**

1. Follow and analyze general election news coverage.

A. DOCUMENT CANDIDATES, ISSUES, AND EVENTS.

Create a timeline documenting the most important events leading up to the election, or a

candidate collage of headlines, photos, political cartoons, quotes, and campaign promises from newspapers, magazines, and campaign materials.

Include party symbols, political jargon, names of special-interest groups, and national and domestic issues.

B. TRACK CANDIDATE TRAVELS.

Encourage students to track a candidate's travels on a U.S. map, using newspaper articles. What states do candidates visit most often and why? Is there a correlation between the number of visits to one state and the number of electoral votes allowed? When do candidates plan their visits and why?

C. EXAMINE THE ISSUES.

Using articles about candidates and the election, underline all references to campaign issues and investigate each candidate's stand on the issues. Explore such questions as:

- Are there major differences of opinion or just differences in approach?
- Does the candidate criticize the opponent rather than address the issue?
- On what issues do candidates take a strong position and why?
- Do candidates hedge on certain issues because of special-interest groups?
- Do their positions change when addressing audiences in different regions of the country?
- How do one candidate's beliefs about a given issue differ from another candidate's?
- Do candidates offer specific solutions to a problem or speak in generalities?
- How do these issues directly affect you, your family or your community?
- With whom are you aligned? With whom are your family members aligned?
- How do your opinions differ from the opinions of your family? Why?
- Who do you think special-interest groups (such as environmentalists, religious

organizations, business people, ethnic groups) will support and why?

- How do reports about the same candidate or issue differ from newspaper to newspaper?
- Using posterboard, develop a classroom chart of such topics as candidates' positions on issues, your class's position on the issues and/or candidates, and appeal of the candidates to special-interest groups.

D. DEBATE THE ISSUES.

Host a classroom debate on the pros and cons of an issue or candidate based on newspaper coverage. Divide the classroom into sympathizers and non-sympathizers. As the debate continues, students should move freely to whichever side influences them most.

Consider:

- Which issues and tactics were most compelling? The least?
- What would convince the staunch opponents or supporters to switch sides?
- Ask students to explore with family members evidence that would persuade them to change sides.
- Write a press release about the debate and submit it to your local newspaper.

E. MONITOR PRE-ELECTION PRESS COVERAGE.

Tally the amount of coverage each candidate gets preceding the election, including positive and negative articles, cartoons, advertisements, letters to the editor, and photographs. Consider:

- Which candidate received the most coverage (both positive and negative)? The least?
- How did it affect public opinion? The opinions of your family members?
- Which candidates did the newspaper endorse?
- Compare newspaper articles with TV news and ads about the same candidate. Are the images portrayed in each medium complementary or contradictory?

- Compare coverage of the same candidate in different newspapers. Are the news reports the same?
- Encourage students to write letters to the editor or draw political cartoons about their analysis of candidate press coverage.

F. COMPARE CANDIDATE PLATFORMS.

- What do Democrats support and oppose? Republicans?
- What effect has a third-party or independent candidate like Ross Perot or Ralph Nader had on the major parties, their platforms, and final election results?
- How do the major parties differ from minority parties (e.g., Green Party, Independents)?
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2. Collect and analyze polls.

Collect and analyze polls and surveys from various newspapers over several weeks and discuss their value and purpose.

- Who was sampled? Were the questions leading or objective?
- What is the relevance of polls to the outcome of the real election?
- How do polls differ or reinforce each other? How do recent polls differ from earlier polls? Why are they similar or different?
- What events have impacted a candidate's position in the polls?
- If the election were to be held today, how would your class/grade/school/family vote?
- Have students design a poll and question their schoolmates or family members.
- What is the difference between an objective question and one that prejudices the results?
- What is a "scientific sampling"?
- The public often interprets polls as indicators of which candidate will win an election. Is there any way an election winner can always be predicted?

- What is the difference between a preliminary poll and an exit poll?
- Compare past polls and actual election results.
- Which newspaper carried a headline declaring Thomas Dewey the winner of the Presidency in 1948? Why? Who actually won?
- Suggest that students compile their findings and write a news article (for a school or newspaper) about their results and how the results may be interpreted.

3. Collect and analyze editorials.

- Clip and post newspaper editorials on a bulletin board.
- What is the difference between an editorial and a news article?
- Analyze the contents by highlighting the editor's position, circling issues, underlining the facts, placing X's beside negative comments, boxing opinions, and starring solutions.
- Encourage students to respond to editorials with their own letters to the editor. Display on a bulletin board and use as a basis for discussion or debate.

4. Learn how to recognize advertising propaganda techniques.

Collect campaign newspaper ads & video online from different candidates. Review advertising propaganda techniques used such as glittering generalities, testimonials, bandwagon and plainfolks approaches.

- Which techniques can students recognize in campaign ads?
- What is the target audience?
- Is the advertisement effective, why or why not?
- Using clippings from newspapers (cartoons, headlines, articles, photos), create original campaign ads and have the class analyze each product. What

propaganda techniques were used? To whom will this ad appeal and why? How could the ad be improved?

- Encourage students to explore advertising propaganda techniques with their family members. Which techniques are used for different family members?
- When/where are these messages most prevalent (i.e., at what times on television, in what sections of the newspaper)?

5. Use the classified ad format to explore the responsibilities of public officials.

- Study the general format of classified ads as well as the responsibilities, privileges, experience, and salaries of national and local public officials.
- Discuss the duties, privileges, and compensation of public officials such as the President, Governor, and Secretary of State, and write classified employment ads for their positions.
- What qualifications must a responsible journalist bring to the job? Write an ad for a news reporter, an editorial writer, a cartoonist, or a managing editor.

6. Use commentary to evaluate election results.

- Compare the results of the mock election with the results of the real election.
- In what ways are they similar or different and why?
- Which issues had the greatest impact on the election (both mock and real) and why?
- Using both pre-election and post-election press for references, did the candidates' messages remain consistent throughout the campaign?
- How accurate were the published polls?
- What efforts are the elected candidates making to fulfill campaign promises?
- What role did the press have in the success or failure of each candidate?

Election Newspaper Activities

Assessing the Candidates:

Find articles in the newspaper about the candidates. Analyze and evaluate their positions on issues that are important to you. Which candidate stands out, why?

Bias in the News:

News stories are supposed to present the facts. Sometimes the reporter's own bias is reflected in a story. Read elections stories. Identify the facts in the story. Do you find opinions in the story or an effort to lead you to a particular viewpoint?

Candidate Quotes:

Develop a classroom portfolio of quotes by the presidential candidates. Sort the quotes by issues and then by what position the candidate took a stand on. At various points during the election cycle discuss the issues. Take notice if the recent candidate quotes show that they have altered their positions on an issue. Before the election decide where you stand on the issues and choose the candidate that represents your stance. Write an editorial supporting your candidate.

Comparing Media:

Follow an issue that is being reported about in the newspaper, on TV, and online. Compare and contrast the coverage between these news sources. Which provides the most in-depth, accurate information? Do the media report on the same issues or events differently? Do they focus on different slices of an issue or event?

Editorial Bias:

A newspaper's opinion about candidates is usually confined to the editorial pages. However, choice of news stories and candidate coverage can reflect the bias of the newspaper. Over a period of time pull all the elections stories in the newspaper. Now analyze and evaluate the number of stories for each candidate as well as how the candidate was portrayed. How many stories were published for each candidate? How many reflected positively or negatively on the candidate? Based on your results, is the paper

biased in its coverage toward a particular candidate? Write a Letter to the Editor about your results.

Editorial Cartoons:

Editorial cartoonists use a variety of tools to communicate their message. Among them are use of symbols, caricatures, stereotypes and analogies. Find editorial cartoons about the candidates. Which of these tools is being used in the various cartoons? What prior knowledge did you need to call on in order to make sense of the cartoon? Now create your own editorial cartoon about a candidate's position that you either agree or disagree with.

Editorial Opinion:

From the editorial section find editorials, cartoons and letters to the editor focused on election issues and/or the candidates. Make a two-column sheet with facts on one side and opinions on the other. Based on your analysis, evaluate which ones you think are most persuasive, those with more facts or with more opinions.

Election Vocabulary Board:

Find election words in the newspaper on an ongoing basis. When you first find a word, write your own vocabulary definition of the word. If you don't know the meaning of the word, use context clues in the story to help determine the meaning. Look up your word in the dictionary to determine if your definition is accurate. Place your definition or the dictionary definition on the board in alphabetical order for the class to refer to during the election campaign.

Endorsements:

Organizations and the media often endorse a candidate that reflects their view or that they think will do a good job. Look for endorsements in the newspaper and other media. What impact might the endorsement have on voters' opinions?

Issue Comparison:

Choose a major issue that is in the newspaper. Briefly describe the issue. What do the Democratic and Republican candidates say about the issue? What does your newspaper editorial page write about the issue? What is your own opinion on the issue? Explain why?

Party Platform:

Using the newspaper and online resources create a chart of the party platform (core beliefs) of the Republican and Democratic Parties.

Picture Tells a Thousand Words:

Find several pictures of the candidates in the newspaper over time. Do you think the pictures show the candidate positively or negatively? Why might a particular picture of a candidate be chosen for the particular story? What does the picture tell you?

Polls:

During the election campaign collect polls from newspaper and online sources. Create a graph and update it weekly showing the most recent polling information. Based on the graph, has the advantage shifted between the candidates? Who appears likely to win? After the election, based on the final results, determine if the polls were accurate.

Political Candidate Stance:

As a class, discuss and reach a definition of conservative and liberal. Also discuss what positions each side takes on major issues. Based on information from the newspaper and online sources, determine the political stance of the candidates, conservative or liberal or perhaps middle of the road. Which position do you agree with and why? Which candidate does this lead you to support?

Presidential Choices:

Find articles about important decisions or policy choices the current President is making. Now pretend you are a news reporter at a press conference with Presidential candidates. Write questions you'd ask them about the current

President's choices and what choices they would make. Now try to find the answer to your questions using the newspaper and the Internet. Finally, write your news story with the answers to your questions. Make sure to use the 5W's and H (Who, What, When Where, Why & How) in the first paragraph.

Where do the Candidates Stand on the Issues:

Using newspaper articles and online resources, create a guide showing where the candidates stand on important issues such as: the war in Iraq, the economy, health care/insurance, defense/homeland security, education, immigration, crime, reproductive choice, environment/global warming, the trade deficit, and taxes/federal budget deficit.

Activities for Close to Election Day

Advertise Your Candidate:

Use the newspaper to assess the candidates. Decide which one you believe would be the best choice. Now examine ads in the newspaper and using techniques found in the ads create an ad promoting your candidate.

Campaign Promises:

Candidate often promise or commit to many things during the election campaign. Using the newspaper make a list of those promises or commitments. Do you believe the candidate will be able to fulfill them?

Campaign Trail:

Candidates cross the country taking their appeal to potential voters. Use the newspaper to follow the travel of the candidates. Create a chart of where they are. Also mark the locations on a map. Use the newspaper weather map to determine what the weather was like at each location. Were there some states or cities that were visited more than others? What do you think the reasons are for that?

Comic Relief:

During the election campaign comic strips are often about election issues. Read the comics regularly and clip the comics that make reference to the election. Put them on a board or create a portfolio. Before the election analyze the comics and evaluate which candidate each referred to. What portion of the comics were supportive of, or against, a certain candidate?

How Does It Feel:

The election results are in. Based on newspaper reports, how does the country feel about the results? Is there fear or concern? Does it seem likely that citizens will unite behind the new President, or will there be division?

Political Volunteers:

Campaigns rely on volunteers to get their message out to the public. Find newspaper stories about volunteers and other supporters of the various campaigns. What are they doing to promote the candidate? Does it appear that their efforts are effective?

Special Interest:

Special interest groups often support candidates that they feel best represent their position on an issue. Identify such groups from news articles or from advertisements they purchased to promote the candidate. Identify what the focus of the special interest group is and why it is investing in the candidate.

Voter Turnout:

After the election, newspapers report voter turnout locally and on a national level. Based on the reports does it appear that voter turnout had an effect on the outcome of the election?

Where and When to Vote:

Through the newspaper and online resources determine the 5W's and H of registering to vote. Then determine where and how people need to vote in your area. Create a flyer or brochure that educates voters on what they need to do to register and then vote.

Winner Takes All:

It's the day after Election Day and the results are now in the newspaper. Who's the winner? Analyze the winning factors being reported and explaining how and why the candidate won?

Understanding Campaign Techniques

Before each election voters are bombarded with word and images hoping to persuade them to support one candidate while rejecting another. Citizens should understand the tricks used by candidates, campaign staff members and the media to take advantage of a voter's emotions.

Some techniques include:

- **Baiting:** Badgering or intimidating an opponent to make him/her look weak or out of control.
- **Bandwagon:** Claiming, "everyone else is doing it," is an effective technique used to help people make up their minds on issues.
- **Cardstacking:** Presenting only one side of an issue. "Cardstacking" gives only the facts that support the candidate's claims.
- **Evading Real Issues:** Talking around a subject or changing the subject so as to avoid having to give direct answers or details.
- **Generalities:** Generalities are phrases that promise a lot but don't explain how the promise will be kept.
- **Guilt by Association:** Criticizing an opponent for the views or actions of their supporters or friends.
- **Loaded Statements:** Using half-truths and distorted facts to make an opponent look bad.
- **Name Calling:** Referring to someone using a negative name or symbol.

- **Passing the Blame:** Unfairly accusing another candidate or party of being the cause of a problem beyond their control.
- **Plain Folks:** Pretending to be "one of the regular folks" is an attempt to get people to relate to a candidate.
- **Promising the Sky:** Making election promises that are unrealistic.
- **Rumormongering:** Sharing negative statements about an opponent's character or views without backing up the statements with facts.
- **Testimonials:** Having some important person endorse a candidate.

Campaign Techniques Activities

Read newspaper articles about the election to identify at least two of these campaign techniques candidates or the media are using.

How does understanding the techniques help people become better voters? Write a newspaper article describing how this information can help you and others make better voting decisions.

Some of these techniques are also used in ads to make them more persuasive. Look through ads in the newspaper and identify ads where these techniques were used. Now create your own campaign ad for a candidate using one of these techniques.

(Credits: Activity adapted from R. Sam Garrett and James A. Thurber, Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, American University)

ELECTION SCAVENGER HUNT

**Search through the newspaper to find each item.
Then cut out the item or make note of the page number.**

A news article about a candidate or the election campaign

A symbol of one of the major political parties

A graph, chart or map that refers to the election

A letter to the editor about the election

A comic strip about the election

A quote from the Presidential candidate or their campaign staff

An election vocabulary word

A campaign promise or commitment

An editorial cartoon on an election topic

An endorsement of a candidate

Text or image with polling information

Photo of a candidate or that relates to the campaign in some way

ELECTION WEBSITES

Partner Links

- KidsVotingUSA.org – Helps youth experience voting
- NationalMockElection.org – National Student/Parent Mock Election
- LWV.org & smartvoter.org – League of Women Voters
- LWV.org/our-work/registering-voters.org – LWV High School Registration Program
- VOTE411.org – All the information needed to participate in elections from LWV

Election Web Links

- C-SPAN.org/campaign2012 – Information on Campaign 2012
- Debates.org – Commission on Presidential Debates
- Electoral-Vote.com – Updates possible electoral vote count based on recent polling
- FactCheck.org – Checks accuracy of political ads & allegations
- FEC.gov – Federal Election Commission: Regulates campaign finance
- OpenSecrets.org – Center for Responsive Politics: Money in U.S. elections
- PollingReport.com – Polling trends in American public opinion
- RockTheVote.org – Make decisions, shape our future
- VoteFair.org – One ballot mark isn't enough for fair results
- VoteSmart.org – The voter's self-defense system

Teen Voices of Democracy

The Youth Citizen-Journalist Network

Free iPhone App "Teen Voices" TeenVoicesOfDemocracy.com TeenVoicesMobile.org

284 Westminster Lane, Souderton, PA 18964

newsroom@ycjn.us

215-715-9809

Benefits of Reading Teen Voices of Democracy

1. Weekly posting of teen-written articles about the social and political issues affecting them and their families.

- Articles offer great ideas for future articles in school newspapers.
- All articles are archived on inside pages that are organized by state.

2. Instructions on how to send articles to Teen Voices. Students are urged to write and then submit their articles for publication in TeenVoicesOfDemocracy.com.

- Articles will be published on our website and on our smartphone apps with a worldwide audience.
- Include Teen Voices as an out-of-school activity on college applications.
- Practice writing for college entrance tests and AP English exams.

3. Writing tips and tools for students.

- Reporter tools include tips on interviewing and other journalistic topics.
- Checking for factual accuracy of statements by politicians.
- Easy access to national news on virtually any topic.
- Background information about elections and democracy.
- First Amendment information.



4. Curriculum tools for journalism and social studies teachers.
- Tips for teaching students how to cover issues.
 - Curriculum produced by the National Student/Parent Mock Election.

5. Instilling in American teenagers the importance of voting in our democratic society.
- Articles often discuss the importance of voting as a vehicle to make changes in national and local policies.
 - Articles help prepare students for their own voting choices in the 2012 National Student/Parent Mock Election, as well as their choice of candidates when they become eligible to vote at age 18.

