Unit Overview

Introduction

In this unit, students begin an intensive study of the issues and the candidates in the election the class will be studying. Here students learn how candidates try to communicate messages directly to citizens about their positions on issues and qualifications for elected office. The following lessons are options. Choose those options that are most applicable to the races in your community.

Option 1: Campaign Websites

In this lesson, students learn about the role of the Internet in gathering information about candidates and they analyze the candidates' websites to learn about positions on issues.

Option 2: Political Advertising

In this lesson, students research candidates' positions on issues using candidates' political advertising and analyze the messages in those ads.

Option 3: Candidate Debates and Forums

Students learn about the role of political debates in providing candidates with a forum to express their positions in their own words.

Option 4: Inviting Candidates to Class

In local elections, candidates may be able to come to class to answer students' questions about where they stand on issues of importance to students. In this 2-day lesson, students prepare for a meeting with a candidate and then meet with him/her to ask about his/her position on the students' issues.

Option 5: Writing to the Candidates

For elections in which candidates may not have websites or advertise or where there is not extensive media coverage of candidates' positions on issues (or in cases where there is little information on an issue that concerns the class), students can write directly to the candidate or campaign office to request information on where candidates stand on issues.

Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Discuss the role of candidate websites in a campaign

- Evaluate candidate websites as a source of information about candidates' positions

- Research candidates' websites to determine their positions on the students' Youth Issues Agendas

Preparation before Option 1

- Remind students to bring their **Election Research Worksheet** (from Unit 1) to the next class.

- Make one copy of **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** for each student.

- Make one copy of **Using the 'Net** handout for each student.

- (If Internet access is available): Arrange for access to the **Student Voices Website** for use in student research.

- (If Internet access is not available): Print out copies of candidates' issue statements or other relevant materials from their websites for students to use in their research.

- (Optional for assignment) Make copies of **Grading the Candidates' Websites** handout OR the **Campaign Website Analytical Form** for a more in-depth analysis.

★ Project Idea

- Have students design their own website, for a real or for fictional candidates, with an eye to attracting young voters.

Lesson Plan

1. Explain to students that one of the ways to prepare to vote on Election Day is to find out where the candidates in the election stand on the issues that are most important to them. Ask students to brainstorm and come up with a list of ways they can find out where the candidates stand on their issues. Call on students to discuss what they came up with and write them on the board.

2. Point out to the students that some of the ways they will learn about candidates and issues is through listening to (or reading) messages presented directly from the candidates in *their own words* (on their websites, in public appearances and debates, in a classroom, in letters, or in their ads).

3. Another way to learn about the candidates is to find out what others have said about their positions and qualifications, most notably through *the role of the news media and non-partisan and interest groups,* which will be discussed in the next lesson.

4. Explain that today your students will begin to see what the candidates have said in their own words on their campaign websites.

NOTE: You may want to discuss with the class whether they would like to research their top issue or several of their issues, or make this decision yourself.

5. Divide the students into Issue Research Teams with three to five students per team.

6. If the class is going to research several issues, each team should be assigned one of the issues. If the class is going to focus on one issue, each team can focus in depth on a single candidate's approach to the issue.

7. Hand out **Candidates' Issue Position Chart**. As a class, fill in the blocks on the chart as described below.

   ✓ If the class is examining several issues from their agenda, have students fill in the cells of the left-hand column with those issues.

   ✓ If the whole class is researching a single issue, have them think about the four or five most important aspects of the issue and list them in the cells of the left-hand column.

   ✓ Have students fill in the top row of the **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** with the names of candidates in the election you have chosen to study. (They may need to use additional sheets if there are more than three candidates.) Choose one race to look at OR look at several races with the class—use one sheet for each.

8. Have students use the candidates' websites to research the candidates' positions on their issue.

    ▪ If Internet access is available: Have students look for the candidates' positions on issues by going to the **Student Voices Website** and linking to candidates' websites.

    ▪ If Internet access is not available: Distribute copies of candidates' websites you made before class. Instruct students to use the materials to complete their charts.

9. Based on their research, have students consider how the office that the candidates are seeking can affect their issue. They should record their thoughts in the third column of their **Election Research Worksheet.**

10. Ask students to read **Using the 'Net** and in their Issue Research Teams write down one reason why candidates would use the Internet to reach potential voters. Share as a class.

Assignment Suggestions

- Ask students to analyze two candidates' websites, using the **Grading the Candidates' Websites** worksheet. Share the grades and reviews in the next class.

- Have students analyze one or more candidates' websites using **Website Analysis** form and share analysis in the next class.

- Have students use the chart completed during the class activity as a guide to write an op-ed on which candidate they believe would be the best choice based on the information gathered thus far. Students can revise this initial essay as they proceed through the succeeding lessons and gather more information on each candidate. Students should revisit these revisions at the conclusion of the unit to write a final draft.
  Prompt: *If the election were held today, I would cast my vote for…*

Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Discuss the role of candidate advertising in a campaign

- Evaluate candidate advertising as a source of information about candidates' positions

- Research candidates' advertising to determine their positions on the students' Youth Issues Agendas

Preparation before Option 2
- Remind students to bring their **Election Research Worksheet** (from Unit 1) to the next class.

- Have available **Candidates' Issue Position Chart**.

- (If you want to use "The Living Room Candidate" website to show political ads): Arrange for Internet access.

- Make copies of **Campaign Advertising—Selling the Candidates** reading.

- (Optional for in-class activity or assignment) Make copies of **Campaign Advertising Worksheet** and, if using in-class activity, arrange to play a video of a TV political advertisement or bring in a newspaper ad or direct mail ad.

- (Optional) Make copies of **Are "Negative" Campaign Ads Bad?**

★ Project Ideas

- Have students conduct an Adwatch of one or more of the candidates' campaign ads, using **How to Do An Adwatch** reading and the **Adwatch Activity Sheet. NOTE**: Students may want to look at Factcheck.org's website to see how candidates' ads can be examined for their accuracy at http://www.factcheck.org.

- The class can work on a series of candidate campaign ads that they think will be both accurate and effective. The ads can focus on leadership qualities of a candidate or on positions on issues. Students should think about how they will get their message across, and whether the ad should be TV, radio, print, or by telephone. If students want to target young people with their ad, what techniques would they use?

Lesson Plan

1. Have students read **Campaign Advertising—Selling the Candidates** and, working with a partner, come up with two reasons why candidates use political advertising to communicate with voters—and why ads may be considered more effective than making public appearances. Share with class.

2. Ask students why some candidates are able to advertise more on television than others, touching on the cost of making the ad itself and buying time on television. Discuss with students the other avenues for "advertising" candidates have besides television, such as radio, direct mail, yard signs, or bumper stickers. Ask students to point to one advantage and one disadvantage of each form, compared to television.

3. If you are analyzing an ad in class: as a warm-up activity ask students to think of campaign commercials they have seen. What thoughts do they have on them? How are they different from other TV commercials?

4. Hand out copies of **Campaign Advertising Worksheet** and ask students to look over the questions they will be expected to answer after they watch the ad.

5. Show a TV ad by one of the local candidates OR use a presidential campaign ad from the Living Room Candidates website (http://www.ammi.org/livingroomcandidate). You may need to show the ad more than once. Have the students fill out their worksheets and then discuss the central message of the ad, as well as the visuals and music used.

6. If the ad contains negative information about a candidate's opponent, ask students what they think of that strategy. Do such negative ads help inform voters? (Optional: Have students read **Are "Negative" Campaign Ads Bad?)**

7. If you are able to examine local candidates' ads (TV or print) in class, ask students what information they can take from the ad(s) to fill in cells of their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart**.

8. If you are able to examine local candidates' ads (TV or print) in class, ask students what information they learned from the ad(s) to fill in the 3rd column of their **Election Research Worksheet.**

9. For more information on claims made in campaign ads, visit the Annenberg Public Policy Center's adwatch website Factcheck.org at http://www.factcheck.org.

Assignment Suggestions

- Ask students to write a 1-page essay evaluating the usefulness of candidates' political advertising as a source of information about their positions.

- Have students keep a campaign logbook, writing down when they see a campaign ad, the location of the ad, and its central message. Ask them to use the information from their logbook to continue filling out their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart**.

- Have students take one candidate's position on an issue from their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** and make an ad from it—in the form of one billboard (poster size), or the script of one 30-second radio spot or one 60-second TV spot.

- Have students write a 1-page essay, choosing one of the following two topics:
    "The Ad Candidate X Should Make to Get Elected"
    "Why I Think Candidate Y's Ad Hits the Mark…or is Way Off Base"

- Have students use the chart completed during the class activity as a guide to write an op-ed on which candidate they believe would be the best choice based on the information gathered thus far OR have students revise the initial essay they began in Option 1. If students are revising, remind them to keep track of their revisions so they can write a final draft at the conclusion of the unit.
    Prompt: *If the election were held today, I would cast my vote for…*

Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Discuss the role of candidates' debates and forums in a campaign

- Evaluate debates and forums as a source of information about candidates' positions

- Observe a debate or forum to determine the candidates' positions on the students' Youth Issues Agendas

Preparation before Option 3

- Remind students to bring their **Election Research Worksheet** (from Unit 1) to the next class.

- Have available **Candidates' Issue Position Chart**.

- Have available a videotape of a candidates' forum or debate to show in class OR assign students to watch a forum or debate before this class.

- Make copies of **What Can We Learn from Candidates' Words?**

⭐ Project Ideas

- Hold a mock debate in class or in the school with students acting as candidates, moderators, and questioners. Other students in the audience may pose questions.

- Have students deliver their speeches on behalf of candidates at a school forum before the election.

- Host a Candidates' Forum for your school and/or community, in local elections.

- Host a Candidates' Debate viewing at your school, inviting school and community members to attend and engage in a discussion of the debate after its conclusion.

Lesson Plan

1. Have students read **What Can We Learn from Candidates' Words?** and write down whether they agree or disagree with the statements about why candidate forums and debates help citizens decide who to vote for. Ask them to choose what they think is the most important reason why citizens should pay attention to debates and forums.

2. Provide time for students to watch a debate or part of a debate or forum. As the students watch the video have them take notes on the candidates' main points and the way they support those points.

3. After watching the debate, ask students if the candidates addressed the issues on the class's Youth Issues Agendas. What positions did they take? Ask students to use this information to continue filling in their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart**. Students should also fill in the third column of their **Election Research Worksheet** using information they learned from the debate.

4. Ask the students to write down the strongest argument each candidate made for why he or she should be elected. Ask students to then think of whether any candidate made a strong argument for why another candidate should NOT be elected. Which statements did the students agree with?

5. After watching a debate, return to the question of what function debates and forums play for citizens and ask students to summarize what they have found.

Assignment Suggestions

- Ask students to write a 1-page essay evaluating candidate ads as a source of information about candidates' positions on the issues.

- Have students write a paragraph about what the effect would be if candidates decided not to participate in campaign debates or forums. If a candidate won't debate, what can media or citizens do to increase the likelihood that he/she will change his/her mind? How would their decision affect voters?

- Have students use their Candidate Position Chart to choose one candidate and one issue and write a speech for a public appearance that the candidate would make, detailing the candidate's position on the issue in question. Students should decide on the setting/location of the public appearance and the audience for the speech and tailor it accordingly.

- Have students use the chart completed during the class activity as a guide to write an op-ed on which candidate they believe would be the best choice based on the information gathered thus far OR have students revise the initial essay they began in Options 1 and 2. If students are revising, remind them to keep track of their revisions so they can write a final draft at the conclusion of the unit.
  Prompt: *If the election were held today, I would cast my vote for...*

Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Develop questions for a candidate for elected office, based on the class's Youth Issues Agenda

- Discuss the role of face-to-face meetings with candidates in a campaign

Preparation before Option 4, Day 1

- Remind students to bring their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** and **Election Research Worksheet** (from Unit 1) to the next class.

- Invite one or more of the candidates in an upcoming election to class. Refer to the **Inviting Candidates to Class** template for suggested format.

Lesson Plan

1. As a group, discuss why citizens might want to meet with a candidate for office face-to-face. How does this method of gathering information about candidates' positions compare with the other forms (websites, ads, debates or forums, etc)? Write a list of students' expectations about the visit on the board.

2. Ask students to refer to their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** to determine whether they still need to find information about where the candidates stand. Have students brainstorm a list of questions for the candidate related to their Youth Issues Agendas.

3. Ask students to think of other questions they might want to ask the candidate. For example:

    ✓ How did the candidate become interested in running for office?

    ✓ What in the candidate's background has prepared him or her for this office?

    ✓ What leadership qualities does he or she have to qualify for office?

4. Discuss with students whether they have any hypothetical questions for candidates. For example:

    ✓ What is the first thing you would do if there was a major accident or natural disaster?

5. Hand out index cards and ask students to write down the questions they would most like to ask on the cards, one question to a card, with their names on each card. Collect the cards. You may want to select which questions the students ask and in what order, and hand out the cards at the beginning of the class when the candidate visits. OR you may want to ask the students to decide the order of the questions, giving them the following guidelines:

    ✓ Ask routinely factual questions first
    ✓ Move on to questions about the person's background and experience
    ✓ Proceed to questions about positions on issues
    ✓ Ask thought-provoking questions when the speaker is warmed up

6. Have one or two students prepare an introduction to the speaker, by referring to his or her website. Identify the student to ask the first question and on the day of the visit, hand back index cards to students with the questions they will ask.

7. Ask students to introduce themselves before asking their questions.

8. Follow up with a thank-you note from the class.

Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Meet with a candidate for elected office to determine his or her position on issues of concern to youth.

- Evaluate face-to-face meetings with candidates as a source of information about candidates' positions.

Preparation before Option 4, Day 2

- Remind students to bring their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** and **Election Research Worksheet** (from Unit 1) to the next class.

- Confirm candidate visit.

- Invite local media to cover candidate visit. (Refer to the Press Kit section of the curriculum for more information on how to invite media.)

Lesson Plan

1. Distribute students' 3x5 cards and identify one or two students to ask the first questions.

2. Remind students to take notes on the candidate's answers to their questions so that they can fill out their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** and their **Election Research Worksheet** after class.

3. Ask the students who prepared an introduction for the speaker in the last class to introduce the speaker.

4. Ask the candidate to give a few opening remarks about his/her background, reason for seeking office, or some other biographical information.

5. Open the floor to questions. Remind students to introduce themselves before asking their questions.

Assignment Suggestions

- Ask students to use the candidate's visit to continue to fill in their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** and **Election Research Worksheet**.

- Ask students to write a 1-page essay evaluating face-to-face meetings as a way to gather information about a candidate. Did their experience match the expectations they brainstormed in Day 1 of this lesson?
- Have students write a paragraph summarizing what the candidate said about one of the issues on the class's Youth Issues Agenda.

Overview

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Discuss the usefulness of contacting a candidate or campaign office directly to obtain information

- Compose letters to candidates summarizing the class's objectives and requesting information about specific issues.

- Use the candidates' responses to determine their positions on issues.

- Evaluate writing to candidates as a source of information about their positions on the students' issues.

Preparation before Option 5

- Remind students to bring their **Election Research Worksheet** to the next class.

- Remind students to bring their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** to class.

- Make one copy of the **Inviting Candidates to Class** template for each student.

⭐ Project Ideas

- Voters' Guide: Have students write to each of the candidates to find their positions on the students' Youth Issues Agenda and compile a Voters' Guide, based on the results, that can be distributed within the school or in the community.

- Local Political Race Website: Have students create a website on local office elections in cases where elections get virtually no coverage and where the candidates themselves do not have websites. Students would contact each candidate for the necessary information to complete the website. On the final website, for each political race, students would display:
  - ✓ Profiles of all candidates on the ballot
  - ✓ Pictures of each candidate
  - ✓ Stances on important issues
  Once students create the website, they could try to get some public attention for it by creating a Public Service Announcement on local radio or TV or on local public access channels or by letting the local newspaper know about it.

Lesson Plan

1. Explain to students that in elections where candidates do not have websites or advertising and where there are no formal debates or forums, OR where the candidates have not made any statements about issues of concern to young people, students can go directly to candidate and campaign offices to request information.

2. Ask students to examine their **Candidates' Issue Position Chart** and **Election Research Worksheet** to see if there are places where they still do not have information in a candidate's own words.

3. Hand out copies of the **Inviting Candidates to Class** template and ask students to use it to begin to draft letters to the candidates asking them or their campaign staff to supply information on where they stand on the issues. If there are several candidates, you may want to break students into teams to draft letters to each candidate.

4. Have students locate addresses for the letters, either by going to the candidates' websites or by contacting your county election board.

Assignment Suggestions

- Have students complete their letters to the candidates.

- Have students write a 1-page essay comparing the pros and cons of writing to a candidate with other ways of gathering information about a candidate's positions on the issues.