



Citizens, Not Spectators

Lesson 2: Where Do the Candidates Stand?

Teacher Resource 1: Fact v. Fiction, Learning About the Issues

This activity has two parts. First, it asks students to research factual information about an issue that is important to them. In the second segment, it has students trying to determine where the presidential candidates stand on that issue.

Part 1: Learning About the Issues

Step 1: Divided the class into small groups of three (triads). As described in the lesson procedure, each triad should choose an issue and determine which sub-category is important to its members and that they want to know more about.

Note: Ideally the triads would reflect a variety of issues and a variety of subcategories. Depending on the size of the class, duplication of subcategories could pose a problem. Upon completion of this lesson, the class will have a chart of issues that contains background information on these issues and where the presidential candidates stand on them. This chart will serve as the foundation for the next lesson.

Step 2: When each triad has reached a consensus on an issue's subcategory, employ a form of the K-W-L strategy*, and allow students 5–6 minutes to write down everything they think they know about the issue they have chosen.

Step 3: The group's members should determine what they need (and want) to learn about their issue. Student Handout 1 offers some basic suggestions.

Step 4: The group will need to research the questions and bring its responses to class. (This can be a homework assignment or a research assignment over several days, etc. It is a choice to be made by the individual teacher.) To help students complete this task, it would be helpful to review the importance of finding solid, credible sources for their information. Student Handout 2 could be used at this point.

Step 5: Once the allotted time has elapsed, students meet in their respective triads and share the information they have gathered. They should take note if any of the information they have gathered is different from their original thoughts about the subject.

Step 6: Each group should share its information with the class.

Step 7: Lead the class in a discussion about the issues and the information they uncovered. The following questions may be useful in guiding the discussion:

- What types of sources did you use to gather the information?
- How easy or difficult was it to get specific information?
- If your sources contradicted one another, how did you determine what information was accurate and useful?
- Did any of the information you discovered surprise you? Why?
- What discrepancies did you find between what you thought you knew and what you learned from your research? How might you account for these discrepancies?
- Did your issue have ties to other issues? If so, what were they?
- Many of these issues are viewed and discussed as problems. What possible solutions did you come across?

Part 2: Where Do the Presidential Candidates Stand?

Step 1: Within their triad, students should take a quick poll about where they believe the presidential candidates stand on their issue. Each student should write a sentence or two about why they think the candidate would take the particular position they attribute to them.

Step 2: Share with students the outline of the “Issues Chart” that they will fill out and will be used in other lessons (A sample of the chart is available in Teacher Resource 2).

Step 3: The students within the triad should determine who will do each of the following tasks:

- a) Write the information about their issue into the chart
- b) Explore where President Obama stands on their issue
- c) Explore where Governor Romney stands on their issue

(The teacher must determine how much time it will take to complete task (b) and (c). Task (a) could easily be done as a homework assignment.)

Note: This is also a good time to reiterate how to determine a credible source and how to identify bias in information sources. Remind students to review Student Handout 2, or go over certain aspects with the class as a whole.

Step 4: Groups need to meet and share their findings about the candidates. They should compare what they initially thought with what they found out—or, in some cases, what they weren’t able to find out. Finally, they need to add their new information to the chart.

Step 5: Have the groups share their findings about the candidates’ positions with the class. As they share, each group should also indicate if their initial belief of the candidates’ positions matches what they learned. Collect each piece of the chart as the groups share out.

Step 6: Conclude with a class discussion about their findings on the candidates. The questions below may be used to guide the discussion.

- Did the candidates line up as you predicted on the issues?
- What difficulties did you encounter in trying to determine a candidate's position on a particular issue?
- Where did you find most of your information on the candidates?
- Were there any issues for which there was no clear position by either candidate? If so, why might you think that is?
- Were there instances of contradictions in either candidate's position?

*K-W-L strategy: Generally used as a simple three column chart: K = What I Know (eliciting from students prior knowledge of a subject or topic). W = What do I want to know? (gives students a direction or focus on finding out information on a topic) L = What I Learned.