



HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Fall 2016 Election

NOTE TO TEACHERS: The materials on the following pages are designed to guide high school students through a process that at the end will give them a better understanding of the importance of voting and why it is bedrock in a democracy.

After an historical overview of the evolution of suffrage in the United States, students will have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with how to register to vote, offer advice on how to explore the issues and the positions held by candidates on those issues, propose ways to evaluate campaign and media materials, and discuss and discern how to evaluate candidates.

Also, as you begin working on the project, ask students to begin collecting campaign materials and news articles for candidates. If your class is participating in a 2016 Mock Election, students should focus on those candidates running for an office on the mock election ballot. Students may bring in print materials or information from websites but also may want to record/tape campaign advertisement and speeches to help in the evaluating candidates.

We hope you find the material in this curriculum helpful. Feedback is encouraged so please let us know. And finally, have a good time helping your students hone their citizenship skills!

DEFINING VOCABULARY WORDS

Here is a list of some of the words you may want your students to define. There are, obviously, many others as well.

absentee ballot

district

electoral college

general election

grassroots

issues

literacy test

majority

National Voter Registration Act

platform

plurality

poll tax

precinct

primary election

same day voter registration

spin doctor

suffrage

THE HISTORY OF SUFFRAGE

Introductory Activity:

“Who Can Vote?” (cover answers before copying)

Group Work:

“The U.S. Constitution and Voting Rights” (Constitution, history text needed)

Topics for Discussion:

Voting rights as a reflection of the politics of economic, racial and gender discrimination

Reasons those in power might have found it politically/morally expeditious to admit a group (e.g., 18-year-old vote, including impact of the Vietnam War)

Some communities permit participation by non-citizens in school board elections or community referenda

Supplementary Activities:

- “Mock Elections with Historically Accurate Roles”
- Assign roles to students (27 voters, 2 candidates for each election)
- Candidates could give short statement of positions
- Hold mock election for each of the years described (only eligible voters can vote)
- Have several voters explain their votes

“Voter Rights Exercise”

Debate the question: Does one vote count?

WHO CAN VOTE?

Before you can vote, you have to sign up or register to vote. Which of these people is eligible, or allowed, to register to vote?

- Harry Thomas, 44 - homeless
- Tania Johnson, 19 - student
- Pam Morris, 58 - has not voted in 20 years
- Cora Solara, 39 - became a U.S. citizen this year
- Ron Dellums 63, - Congressman
- Nancy Evans, 48 - uses a wheelchair

Answer: They all can vote.

To be eligible to sign-up to vote you must be:

- a U.S. citizen
- at least 18 years old
- not incarcerated

In the past, certain people were not allowed to vote because of their skin color or their sex. In addition, literacy tests or poll taxes were used to keep poor people from voting. These have since been declared unconstitutional. Over the past 100 years, women, people of color and 18- to 21-year olds have all won the right to vote. Any adult citizen can vote. We have come a long way!

In Illinois, Individuals incarcerated for a felony conviction are ineligible to vote. However, voting rights are automatically restored upon release from prison and people on parole or probation can vote.

Answer true or false for each of the following:

- T F You do not have to be able to read to vote.
 - T F You can have someone help you read the ballot.
 - T F Ballots might be available in several languages.
 - T F Under certain conditions, a person can vote by mail.
 - T F You do not have to have an address to vote.
- In some locations, you may be able to indicate the two cross streets near where you live.

Answer: Surprise! All of these are true.

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION AND VOTING RIGHTS

Using your copy of the U.S. Constitution and your history text, explain the consequences of the adoption of each of the following amendments in terms of expanding voters' rights.

Note: When the Constitution was adopted, states determined who could vote. In almost all cases the states imposed property-holding requirements for white men. Women, Indians, and slaves were specifically excluded.

1870 - Fifteenth Amendment

1913 – Seventeenth Amendment

1920 - Nineteenth Amendment

1964 - Twenty-fourth Amendment

1970 – Twenty-sixth Amendment

MOCK ELECTIONS WITH HISTORICALLY ACCURATE ROLES FOR U.S. CITIZENS*African-American Roles:*

19-year-old farmer

41-year-old minister

32-year-old doctor

15-year-old coal miner; family receives a small welfare compensation for father's accidental death

16-year-old seamstress

28-year-old mother of two

20-year-old school teacher

European-American Roles:

20-year-old farmer

15-year-old coal miner

36-year-old plantation owner

52-year-old lawyer

15-year-old seamstress

25-year-old, single mother of two; receives a small welfare check to supplement full-time salary

32-year-old doctor

Latino Roles:

20-year-old farmer

17-year-old steel worker; he and his father receive a welfare check; father enrolled in a work training program

25-year-old land owner

45-year-old doctor

43-year-old lawyer

26-year-old mother of two

35-year-old mother of one, waiting for husband to emigrate from El Salvador

Native American Roles:

18-year-old who has not completed high school

72-year-old grandmother who is respected as the head of the family

25-year-old who pumps gas at local gas station

50-year-old who is unable to work because of a permanent injury

21-year-old who is attending community college

40-year-old who has recently been hired by a manufacturing company

Elections**Election 1852**

Voting Scenario: Only white and Latino male citizens over the age of 21 can vote.

Candidate 1:

Supports an end to slavery

Supports a tax system based on land ownership (the more land a person owns, the more taxes s/he must pay)

Candidate 2:

Supports maintaining all laws and regulations as they are

Believes a change of laws will only hurt the country

Election 1872

Voting Scenario: Male citizens of any ethnicity, over the age of 21 can vote.

Candidate 1:

Supports civil rights for all people, no exclusion

Supports a tax system based on wealth

Candidate 2:

Supports the maintaining the abolition of slavery

Believes that there is no need for civil rights for all people

Election 1928

Voting Scenario: By law all male and female citizens over the age of 21 can vote.

Note: Poll taxes and literacy tests ban many African-Americans, women, poor whites, and poor Latinos from voting, even though they are citizens. The grandfather clause preventing African-Americans from voting was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1915.

Candidate 1:

Believes that immigration should be illegal

Believes that all workers at hard labor are overpaid and unions are bad for business

Candidate 2:

Supports a government in which everyone participates

Believes no limits should be placed on immigration

Election 1968

Voting Scenario: By law every citizen over the age of 21 can vote.

Candidate 1:

Supports the continuation of the Vietnam War

Staunchly opposes recent civil rights legislation (the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act), which has provided legal support for African-Americans, Latinos, the poor, and women

Candidate 2:

Supports an end to the Vietnam War

Strongly supports civil rights legislation

Election 1980

Voting Scenario: By law every citizen over the age of 18 can vote.

Candidate 1:

Supports the death penalty

Supports an end to immigration

Believes that families should receive welfare benefits for no more than three months

Candidate 2:

Supports affordable health care for all

Believes that abortions should be legal and accessible

VOTER RIGHTS EXERCISE

OBJECTIVES:

- to dramatize the previous obstacles to voting in the U.S.
- to dramatize extension of the franchise in the U.S.
- to have individuals actually experience discrimination
- to motivate individuals to participate in government
- to dramatize who wielded political power in the U.S.

DIRECTIONS:

Ask everyone to stand. Ask everyone who does not meet the voter requirement to sit as they are read:

- Anyone not living in the same place for over a year must sit down. (Before the 1970 Voting Rights Act, most states had residency requirements of from three months to two years. 1970 law abolished any residency requirement of more than 30 days.)

- Anyone who cannot read or write English well enough to pass a literacy test must sit down. (1970 Voting Rights Act abolished literacy tests.)
- Anyone who is not fluent in English must sit down. (1965 Voting Rights Act made it possible for Spanish-speaking citizens to vote.)
- Anyone who does not have \$1.00 must sit down. (1964 - the 24th Amendment abolished the poll tax of \$1 that many states had required.)
- Anyone who is not a male must sit down. (1920 - the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote.)
- Anyone who is not white must sit down. (1870 - the 15th Amendment forbade denial of voting on the basis of race.)
- Anyone who lives in an apartment must sit down. (By 1821, most states had abolished property or tax requirements.)
- All non-Protestants must sit down. If Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, etc., you must sit down. (In the early years of the federal government, in most states being Protestant was a requirement to vote.)

DEBRIEFING - ask these questions:

Who is left who had the right to vote?

How did you feel when you were excluded from voting?

How did you feel about those who had the right to vote?

What did you learn from this exercise?

What is the purpose of this exercise?

Source: Institute for Political and Legal Education. Pitman, New Jersey.

UNDERSTANDING VOTER REGISTRATION

Background Information:

To be eligible to vote in Illinois, you

- Must be a U.S. citizen
- Must be 18 years old by election day
- Must be a resident of the precinct for at least 30 days
- Cannot be incarcerated
- Must be registered to vote

Two forms of identification are required to register, at least one of which must include the person's address. A citizen can register to vote online if s/he has a driver's license or state identification card. These individuals have an electronic signature in the database. Go to <https://ova.elections.il.gov>. If the individual does not have a driver's license or a state identification card, a paper based tool must be used <https://ovr.elections.il.gov>.

Each state's voting requirements must be consistent with the U.S. Constitution. Each county, parish, or ward in every state is divided into voting districts called precincts. A voter must live in the voting district for at least 30 days prior to the election. A registered voter may vote only at the polling place in the precinct where they live. Election officials distribute ballots and count the votes after the polls close. Illinois now has in-person only early-voting in addition to absentee voting. Check with your local election authority for more details. In Illinois, each of its 102 counties and some of its major cities have an election authority.

A temporarily absent student (enrolled at a college), a person who is ill, is traveling, is serving in the military service, is elderly or is disabled is able to vote by absentee ballot, usually by mail. They must complete an application and send it to the local election authority providing the name and address to which the ballot should be mailed. They cast their vote when they receive the ballot and mail it back to the election authority in time for it to be delivered to the relevant polling place on election day.

No reason need be given to vote by absentee ballot. One must complete an application and send it back to the local election authority providing the name and address to which the ballot should be mailed. A voter casts her/his vote when they receive the ballot and mail it back to the election authority in time for the ballot to be delivered to the polling place on election day. Specific instructions on how to do so are sent with the absentee ballot.

Early, no excuse necessary, voting is also available, Each election authority is responsible for setting up and working early voting sites. Dates vary by election authority so contact your specific election authority for these early voting sites and dates.

Oct. 11, 2016	Last day to register to vote
Oct. 23, 2016	Last day to register on-line
October 12, 2016	First day of grace period registration & voting
November 8 2016	Last day of grace period registration & voting
September 29, 2016	First day early voting at selected sites
November 7, 2016	Last day early voting at selected sites

Supplementary Activities:

Mock Election Registration

If you think your students would benefit from registering to vote in your school's mock election:

Fill out the sample voter registration form: Township/Ward will be filled in by county clerk's office; last four numbers of a social security number, a driver's license or state identification card number are usually required. However and for example, in DuPage County, the election commission prefers to have a driver's license number rather than the last four digits of a social security number

Before the end of registration for the November general election, set up a registration table staffed by students (who have been deputized*) and offer registration to students and others in the school district who are qualified to vote and will be 18 years of age by Election Day.

* Contact your County Clerk's office for information on deputizing student registrars and to obtain sample of actual voter registration form.

UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL LABELS AND HOW THE ISSUES AFFECT YOU

Topics for Discussion:

Hand out “The Political Spectrum” and talk about labels attached to groups that express their opinions in different ways.

Discuss the two most common labels used in political coverage, conservative and liberal, and give examples of how public life might be affected by their policies on the following social, economic and political issues:

Social Issues	Economic Issues	Political Issues
education	welfare	campaign finance reform
health care	taxes	redistricting
abortion	regulations on	appointment of Supreme Court Justices

Group Work:

Have each student fill out “Where Do You Fall on the Political Spectrum?” Divide the class into five groups and assign three statements to each group. Each group should debate and decide where each statement assigned to them falls on the political spectrum (refer to “The Political Spectrum” for political groups and their descriptions) and mark the appropriate box on the “Political Spectrum Chart”. Have each small group present their decisions. The rest of the class should fill in the blank spaces on their chart.

Have each student go back to “The Political Spectrum” line. The students should mark where they fall on each question. For example, if #1 was designated as a conservative statement, they should put an X on a position on the line as follows:

If they strongly agree: Reactionary

If they agree: Conservative

If they mildly agree: between Conservative and Moderate

If they mildly disagree: between Moderate and Liberal

If they disagree: Liberal

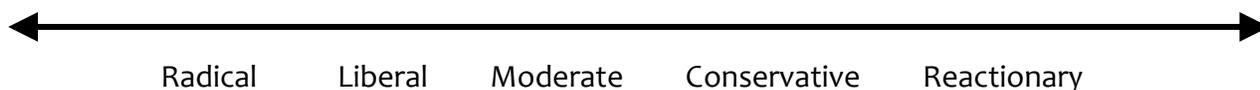
If they strongly disagree: Radical

Each student should have an idea after this exercise where he/she stands on the political spectrum (the positions could range from being solidly in one group or scattered between the groups).

Choose one or two statements where there is wide divergence and discuss with the students what influenced their marks on the spectrum.

Have the class suggest several school policies that students might like to change. Choose one school policy and suggest that five different groups were interested in running the school (representing each label on “The Political Spectrum”). Have a spokesperson for each group suggest an action the group might adopt to bring about this change.

THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM



RADICAL - A person who believes in swift and major changes in existing institutions towards something not seen before.

LIBERAL - A person who favors civil liberties, democratic reforms, and use of government power to promote social progress.

MODERATE - A person who holds some liberal and some conservative beliefs.

CONSERVATIVE - A person who believes in existing political institutions, values tradition, and favors less government involvement in social programs.

REACTIONARY - A person who is extremely displeased with existing conditions and supports a return to earlier, more conservative ways.

WHERE DO YOU FALL ON THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM?



Directions: In the space provided for each statement, evaluate where you stand on the issues. Either put strongly agree (SA), agree (A), mildly agree (MA), mildly disagree (MD), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD). Strongly agree means you would go even further than the statement. Strongly disagrees means that you would go to the totally opposite extreme of the statement.

- _____ 1. Our welfare system is too generous. Many people choose to live on welfare when they could be out working. We should provide welfare only to people with serious disabilities who are unable to work.
- _____ 2. Most crime is caused by things like poverty and abuse. We should pay less attention to “getting” criminals, and pay more attention to addressing the causes of crime.
- _____ 3. Some things are best done by the government. Companies are too worried about making money and do not think about what is best for the country. Things like health care and education should be left to the government.
- _____ 4. The government should control the type of programming that is allowed on television.
- _____ 5. Interracial marriages should be prohibited.
- _____ 6. Abortion should be legal.
- _____ 7. Cutting taxes by 15% is a good idea. This will leave more money in the pockets of hard-working people rather than allowing the government to waste it.
- _____ 8. We need a strong military in order to keep our country safe. We cannot afford further cuts in our military programs.
- _____ 9. Most American wealth is a result of the rich taking advantage of the poor.
- _____ 10. The government needs to increase regulations on business in order to protect the environment.
- _____ 11. It is not the government’s responsibility to care for poor people. Feeding people, giving them shelter, and providing other services is best left to churches and charities.
- _____ 12. Violent criminals cannot be rehabilitated and should be put in jail for life after three convictions.
- _____ 13. Immigrants come to the United States to share in the American Dream by working hard and making a better life for themselves.
- _____ 14. No national guarantee of health care should exist in the U.S.

IDENTIFYING CANDIDATES AND RESEARCHING THEIR POSITIONS

- Introductory Activity:

“Candidates and Responsibilities of Office” (finished outside class).

- Topics for Discussion:

Discuss issues candidates may address in the November election.

- Group Work:

Assign a candidate to each group of three students. Each group should present the position of that candidate in a graphic manner.

Have a student from each group present the positions the group has studied on an accessible medium (newsprint, flip chart, PowerPoint, etc).

- Supplementary Activity:

Have the students look for poll data in newspapers, in magazines, on television and on the internet. Then graph the data and compare the data to determine what these polls reflect (who conducted the poll, when the poll was taken, who participated, what the margin of error was, length of time the poll was conducted before election).

CANDIDATES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF OFFICE

List the party, candidate and responsibilities of that office for the parties that will be on the November ballot.

PARTY	PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

RESPONSIBILITIES:

PARTY	U.S. SENATE CANDIDATES

RESPONSIBILITIES:

PARTY	U.S. REPRESENTATIVE CANDIDATES

RESPONSIBILITIES:

FACT FINDING WORKSHEET

Name of Candidate
Party of Candidate
Candidate's view on three issues:
Issue #1:

Position:

Name of Candidate
Party of Candidate
Issue #2:

Position:

Name of Candidate
Party of Candidate
Issue #3:
Position:

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

IDENTIFYING DISTORTION TECHNIQUES IN CAMPAIGN MATERIALS AND COVERAGE

Introductory Activity:

Each student brings in a minimum of two different pieces of campaign material or coverage (e.g., campaign literature, print ad, campaign speech, statement in a debate, tape or video of an ad, newspaper or magazine article).

Topics for Discussion:

Discuss the following distortion techniques used in election materials and the role of negative campaigning.

Name Calling/Appeals to Prejudice: These are attacks on an opponent based on characteristics that will not affect performance in office. Accusations such as "My opponent is arrogant and full of hot air" do not give any real information about the candidate. References to race, ethnicity or marital status can be subtly used to instill prejudice.

Rumor Mongering: These include statements such as "Everyone says my opponent is a crook, but I have no personal knowledge of any wrongdoing" which imply (but do not state) that the opponent is guilty.

Guilt by Association: These are statements such as "We all know Candidate B is backed by big money interests" that attack candidates because of their supporters rather than because of their stands on the issues.

Catchwords: These are phrases such as "law and order" or "un-American" that are designed to trigger a knee-jerk emotional reaction rather than to inform.

Passing the Blame: These are instances in which a candidate denies responsibility for an action or blames an opponent for things over which s/he had no control.

Promising the Sky: These are unrealistic promises that no single elected official could fulfill.

Evading Real Issues: These include instances in which candidates may avoid answering direct questions, offer only vague solutions or talk about the benefits of proposed programs but never get specific about possible problems or costs.

Group Work:

- Analyze news media and advertising using: "Finding the Facts: News Media," and "Finding the Facts: Advertising."
- Use the "Ad Watch Guide" to see how campaign ads measure up in providing factual information without distorting the truth. When you see a campaign ad on TV, note the day of the week and the time of the broadcast. Campaign ads often appear in slots during a station's newscasts so you can usually count on seeing them about the same time each day. Set up a device to record all of a station's newscasts on that channel (morning, noon, early evening and 10 p.m. for the following day). When you replay the tapes, fast forward through the news section to the ad (most ads are 30 seconds). Show the ad in a classroom setting and use the guide to get reactions from students in the class.

FINDING THE FACTS: NEWS MEDIA

Learning about the candidates is not always an easy task. But when voters are informed about who the candidates are in an election and where they stand on the issues, they can make better decisions for whom to vote. The news media (newspapers, television and radio) usually run stories about the candidates as the elections near. They can help provide a different view about the candidates compared to campaign information that is always biased in favor of one candidate or another. Use this page to record information you find out about a candidate of your choice through the news media. Then use the questions below to analyze the type of information you find.

Date and source of information (name of newspaper, station)

Subject of news story	
Candidate(s) covered	
Office sought	
Party Affiliation	

What did you learn from the news piece?
What did you learn about the candidate(s) platform(s), issue positions or plans if
What did you learn from the news piece?
What did you learn from the news piece?

What did you learn about the candidate(s) platform(S), issue positions or plans if elected?

What did you hear about the candidate(s) covered here before you read/saw/heard this story? (i.e., education, experience, current employment, issue positions, etc.)

Describe the attitude of the news piece and the attitude of the reporter toward the candidates.

Would you consider the treatment of the story fair or biased toward a particular candidate? Explain:

Where else have you seen information about the candidates? How does the attitude, bias, depth of coverage of this piece compare to those sources? Is the news media also biased?

Project SED: Students for an Educated Democracy 1996: Midwest/Northeast Voter Registration Education Project

FINDING THE FACTS: ADVERTISING

Advertising can be among the most informative sources about the candidates and at the same time, can be quite misleading. Campaigns use paid advertising to help increase a candidate’s name recognition and positive image among voters and to provide voters with reasons to vote for the candidate. But the techniques for providing this information must be watched carefully for distortion and inaccuracies. Answer the questions and review the advertising techniques listed below to analyze a radio or television ad you hear or see about the candidate of your choice.

Time and station on which ad was aired	
Type of ad: radio, television, internet	
Name/group sponsoring the ad	

Name of candidate	
Was the ad supporting a candidate?	
Was the ad advocating the defeat of a candidate?	

Describe the content, style and quality of the advertisement (who was the announcer, what was said or shown, what images, pictures or keywords were used?)

What was said specifically about the candidate who sponsored the ad? Did you learn anything about the candidate’s platform, issue positions, or plans if elected?

Advertisements may use a variety of techniques, including some which may seem to distort the information presented. Place a check mark next to those positive and negative techniques you noticed in the advertisement:

<input type="checkbox"/>	straight talk from a candidate
<input type="checkbox"/>	a slice-of-life view of the candidate, with activities from a typical day
<input type="checkbox"/>	an appeal to voters’ emotions (which may/may not use facts)
<input type="checkbox"/>	a straight attack on a candidate’s opponent
<input type="checkbox"/>	a comparison, contrasting two or more candidates
<input type="checkbox"/>	words or ideas that “sound good” (which may/may not have substance)
<input type="checkbox"/>	a series of campaign promises (which may/may not be realistic)
<input type="checkbox"/>	a testimonial or endorsement from celebrities, “plain folks,” or others

Were particular strategies used in the ad that you liked; particularly disliked? Explain.

Was there a particular group of voters that seemed to be targeted in the advertisement?
Explain.

What was your impression of the candidate sponsoring the ad before you saw/heard it
Did your opinions changed about any of the candidates?

Project SED: Students for an Educated Democracy 1996: Midwest/Northeast Voter Registration Project

AD WATCH GUIDE

1. Images

_____ Are the images a true representation of implied location, object or person?

Does the ad contain any of the following?

_____ Misleading sets or locations

_____ Retouched or modified photos

_____ Film or video clips that are altered to distort the opponent’s image

_____ Suggestive, evocative or misleading images that play into racist or other negative attitudes?

2. Sound effects and music

_____ Frightening sounds, i.e., bullets, auto accidents

_____ Threatening or ominous music

_____ Patriotic music

3. Who is speaking?

_____ Is it the candidate?

_____ Is it a narrator used to make charges against an opponent?

_____ Other?

4. Content

_____ Does the content of the ad make blatantly false claims?

- _____ Can you document its claims?
- _____ Does the ad say negative things about the opponent?
- _____ Does it make negative insinuations on race, gender, religion, etc.?
- _____ Does the ad discuss a policy issue? If so, what issue?
- _____ Does the ad talk about personal character or experience?
- _____ Does the ad clearly identify its sponsor?

5. Purpose of the ad

- _____ Who is being targeted?

CHOOSING A CANDIDATE

Topics for Discussion:

- Voting by party
- Dilemma posed when candidates are too extreme for you
- Dilemma posed when no candidate reflects your position but candidates hold similar views
- Not voting
- Nations that fine citizens who do not vote (or do not register a not-voting presence)
- Implications of a law banning straight-ticket voting

Supplementary Activity:

Read through “How to Judge a Candidate” and fill out the Candidate Report Card.

HOW TO JUDGE A CANDIDATE

Elections present voters with important choices. Whether it is a local race that will affect your community or a national race that could change the direction of the country, it is a time to consider the issues that you care about and decide which candidate you support. Even if you are under 18 and not yet eligible to vote, election campaigns offer a way to learn about the people and issues that affect your future.

But how do voters go about comparing and then judging the candidates? All too often, slogans, name recognition and personality are all that come through in campaign materials. Television has come to dominate political campaigns making it difficult to move beyond a candidate's image to the substance of a campaign.

The seven steps outlined here will help you judge a candidate.

1. Decide what you are looking for in a candidate.

Candidates can be judged in two ways: the positions they take on issues and the leadership qualities and experience they would bring to the office. Both are important. Your first step in picking a candidate is to decide the issues you care about and the qualities you want in a leader.

When you consider issues, think about community or national problems that you want people in government to address. For example, you may be interested in the threat of nuclear war, government funding for student loans or teenage unemployment. Those are issues.

Activity: As a class, discuss the important issues in the election and the leadership qualities you look for in a candidate. Record them on the worksheet, Candidate Report Card, the issues and qualities most important to you.

When you consider leadership qualities, think about the characteristics you want in an effective leader. Do you look for intelligence, honesty, an ability to communicate? What else?

2. Find out about the candidates.

Pick a campaign to study. It can be any type of race: for a national office (such as president, senator, or representative), for a state race (such as governor), or for a local race (such as city council member or school board member). It will probably be easier to follow a visible race that is hotly contested or that involves a major office. Work alone or with a group of students to learn more about the candidates.

First, find out which candidates are running in the race you are following by making a phone

call to your local elections board, political party headquarters, or a political reporter on your local newspaper. Or look in the Voter's Guide published by your local League of Women Voters. Find out all of the candidates who are eligible to appear on the ballot. Be sure to include minor party and/or independent candidates.

3. Gather materials about the candidates.

Put together a “library” of information about the candidates. Collect any information you can find on the candidates. Call campaign headquarters and read the newspapers. Sources of information from which you may choose include:

- Campaign literature
- Direct mail letters (mass mailings sent to selected voters asking for support and funds)
- Press reports (newspaper clippings and television and radio reports)
- Radio and television ads
- Candidates' speeches
- Candidate debates

In a local race, interviews with the candidates can be helpful. For incumbents, a look at their voting records on issues that you have listed as important can tell you the candidates' positions on those issues.

4. Evaluate candidates' stands on issues.

As you read the materials you collect, keep a journal. Do the materials give you an overall impression of the candidates? What specific conclusions can you draw about the candidates' stands on issues? Record what you have learned about their stands on your priority issues from each source. Fill in the Candidate Report Card as you gather new information about the candidates.

5. Learn about the candidates' leadership abilities.

Deciding if a candidate will be a good leader is difficult. How can you know if someone will be honest, open or able to act under pressure if elected to office? Here are some ways to read between the lines as you evaluate the candidates' leadership qualities.

- Look at the candidate's background and their experience. How well prepared are they for the job?
- Observe the candidates' campaigns.
 - Do they accept speaking engagements before different groups?
 - Do they accept invitations to debate?
 - Do the campaigns emphasize media events, where the candidates can be seen but not heard?
- Review the campaign materials. As you read the materials and watch the campaign develop, add to your journal information that provides insights into candidates' personalities and leadership qualities. For example, do campaign

materials emphasize issues or just image? Are they accurate? Add this information to the Candidate Report Card.

6. Learn how other people view the candidate.

Now that you have accumulated information from campaigns and other sources, you will want to learn what other people think about the candidates. Their opinions can help clarify your own views, but do not discount your own informed judgments. You may be the most careful observer of all!

- Seek the opinions of others in your community who keep track of political campaigns. Interview three people (not family members), such as a shopkeeper, neighbor or politically active volunteer, to find out which candidate they support and why. Learn what has shaped their political opinions. Was it an event? An idea or program proposed by a candidate? A particular issue about which they feel strongly? A long-standing party loyalty?
- Learn about endorsements. This is a way for interest groups and organizations to give a “stamp of approval” to a candidate. Endorsements provide clues to the issues a candidate supports. For instance, a candidate endorsed by the Sierra Club (an environmental organization) will be in favor of legislation that protects the environment. A candidate endorsed by the National Rifle Association would be opposed to gun control laws. Get a list of endorsements from each of the candidates’ headquarters. Find out what these groups stand for and find out why they are endorsing this candidate.
- Look into campaign contributions. Where do the candidates get the funds to finance their campaigns? Do they use their own money or raise funds from a few wealthy donors, from many small contributors or from Political Action Committees? (PAC’s, as they are known, are groups formed to raise and distribute money to candidates.) Many types of information about campaign contributions must be reported to the government and are watched by the press. Check the newspaper for stories on campaign finance. How might these campaign contributions affect the candidates’ conduct in office? You might also want to analyze an incumbent’s voting record on issues important to PACs and other campaign contributors.
- Throughout the campaign, opinion polls will be taken by a variety of groups to evaluate public support for the different candidates. Polls reveal who is leading at a certain point in the race. This information can be crucial for a candidate because it can increase support and contributions from people who want to be on the winning team. As you read the polls, ask these questions: Who sponsored the poll? Were all the figures released? (When parties and candidates pay for polls, they may not publish unfavorable data.) What kinds of questions were asked? Were they slanted or unbiased? How were respondents selected — randomly or

in such a way to include all segments of the population? How many people were included in the poll sample?

7. See through distortion techniques.

All candidates are trying to sell themselves to voters. Sometimes their language is so skillfully crafted that they distort the truth in ways that are difficult for even the most careful observer to detect. Here are examples of distortion techniques that you should watch for as you review candidates' campaign materials.

Common distortion techniques:

- *Name calling/Appeals to prejudice:*

These are attacks on an opponent based on characteristics that will not affect performance in office. Accusations such as, "My opponent is arrogant and full of hot air," do not give any real information about the candidate. References to race, ethnicity or marital status can be subtly used to instill prejudice.

- *Rumor mongering:*

These include statements such as, "Everyone says my opponent is a crook, but I have no personal knowledge of any wrongdoing," which imply (but do not state) that the opponent is guilty.

- *Guilt by association:*

These are statements such as, "We all know Candidate B is backed by big money interests," that attack candidates because of their supporters rather than because of their stands on the issues.

- *Catchwords:*

These are phrases such as "Law and Order" or "un-American" that are designed to trigger a knee-jerk emotional reaction rather than to inform.

- *Passing the blame:*

These are instances in which a candidate denies responsibility for an action or blames an opponent for things over which he or she had no control.

- *Promising the sky:*

These are unrealistic promises that no single elected official could fulfill.

- *Evading real issues:*

These include instances in which candidates may avoid answering direct questions, offer only vague solutions or talk about the benefits of proposed programs but never get specific about possible problems or costs.

Sorting it all out.

Review the information in your Candidate Report Card and compare all the candidates. Ask yourself these final questions:

- Which candidate’s views on the issues do you agree with the most?
- Who ran the fairest campaign?
- Which candidate demonstrated the most knowledge on the issues?
- Which candidate has the leadership qualities you are looking for?

Is the choice clear? If so, pick a candidate

CANDIDATE REPORT CARD:

WHICH ELECTION (Presidential, U.S. Senate, other) ARE YOU FOLLOWING?

ISSUES

List the relevant issues	Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Candidate D

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

List the leadership qualities you think are relevant	Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Candidate D

My choice: _____

Now that you have thought through your choices, do something!

- Back the candidates you believe in.
- Talk to your friends and parents about "your" candidate.
- Ask questions at candidate meeting, rallies or when a campaign worker rings your doorbell.
- Send an email to television and radio stations to praise or criticize campaign spots.
- Be a letter writer. Tell candidates and party leaders how you feel about the issues.
- Volunteer to work on a campaign.
- Register to vote. You can register when you're 17, if you will turn 18 on or before Election Day. If eligible, VOTE

BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY

Curriculum Resources:

iCivics: www.icivics.org

McCormick Foundation: www.mccormickfoundation.org

Mikva Challenge: www.mikvachallenge.org

Candidate Information:

BallotReady: www.ballotready.org

Electoral College:

www.270towin.com

www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college