Race to the Ballot: The *Our White House* Presidential Campaign and Election Kit for Kids!

Created by The National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance for parents, family members, teachers, librarians, and community leaders

The National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance has created this Presidential Campaign and Election Kit to help all adults who live and work with young people engage with our kids in informed discussions about this year’s presidential campaigns and election, teach them to think critically, and energize them to learn more about the political process in America. This Kit includes:

- Exclusive articles regarding such topics as presidential job requirements, the history of presidential campaigns, the development of voting rights, and the evolution of the ballot.
- Engaging, hands-on activities to use with young people in the classroom or at home.
- Discussion questions you can share during class, around the dinner table, and at a Scout or club meeting.

We invite you to check out our interactive version of this Kit on our education website OurWhiteHouse.org, the online companion to our award-winning anthology *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out* (Candlewick Press). *Our White House* is an incomparable collection of essays, personal accounts, historical fiction, poetry, and a stunning array of original art, offering a multifaceted look at America’s history through the prism of the White House. Some of the ideas and activities provided in this Kit coordinate with the content and illustrations in *Our White House*, but most can be used independently of the book.

We believe you know the kids with whom you live and work far better than we do, so we leave to your judgment the articles and activities that best serve the needs and ages of the young people in your life. Please print what you need and feel free to share this Kit with others.

The National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit education and advocacy organization, founded in 1997 by award-winning young people’s authors and illustrators. The NCBLA acts as a freelance nonpartisan advocate creating and developing original projects and events that promote literacy, literature, humanities, and the arts and educate the public about practical literacy solutions. We are distinguished from other literacy organizations by the fact that we not only promote reading and learning, we also create books and online materials, both entertaining and educational, that motivate young people to read. We also believe there is a direct link between literacy and civic engagement, that literacy is intrinsic to a healthy democracy.

To learn more about the NCBLA, please visit our website (thencbla.org) and our Facebook page (TheNCBLA).
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First Lady Fact Files
Please visit OurWhiteHouse.org for the NCBLA’s extensive database of American first ladies, which includes basic information of each first lady’s life and legacy, as well as famous quotes.

Presidents, the President’s House, and More:
A Select List of Books (and a Few Web Sources) for Children and Young Adults
Please visit OurWhiteHouse.org for the NCBLA’s extensive list of books and web sources about American presidents, history, and civics topics created by librarian Maria Salvador.

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Help Wanted: President of the United States

by Geri Zabela Eddins

Not everyone dreams of becoming president, but Bill Clinton did. Before his senior year of high school Clinton was selected to attend Boys Nation, an intensive citizenship and government program organized by the American Legion and held in Washington, D.C. Clinton was enthralled with the experience and particularly relished debating civil rights with other students who had come from around the country. The highlight, however, was meeting President John F. Kennedy. In a ceremony hosted in the White House Rose Garden, Clinton and his peers were able to shake Kennedy’s hand. The once-in-a-lifetime experience sparked a fire in Clinton, and he set out to pursue a political life. Clinton’s path to the presidency led him through law school to the governor’s mansion in Arkansas, where he served two terms as governor before running for president. Though Clinton aspired to the presidency from his teenage years, many of our presidents did not set their sights on the executive office until later in life. President George W. Bush has acknowledged that as a boy his future dreams were focused on baseball, and remarkably, when he was forty-two years old, Bush realized those dreams when he became partial owner of the Texas Rangers baseball team. It was not until Bush was almost fifty years old that he entered politics and became governor of Texas. His success as governor, as well as encouragement from Republican Party leaders, led him to seek the presidency.

Just as our presidents have followed varying dreams and paths to the presidency, they have also come from many different walks of life. Some, like Andrew Jackson, were born in remote log cabins and raised in humble conditions, while others, like Bush, were born into wealthy families with strong political roots and grew up leading lives of privilege. Most presidents have attended college, served in the military, and also served as a congressman or governor, but such backgrounds are not required. Though almost all our presidents thus far have been white men, the U.S. Constitution guarantees that all American men and women—no matter what their race, religion, or background—have the right to run for president.

Job Description

The president serves as the highest government leader in the United States. Article II of the Constitution specifies that the president has two primary job functions: to serve as chief executive of the federal government and to serve as commander in chief of the armed forces. As chief executive, the president works with other leaders of the executive branch, including the vice president, cabinet members, and leaders of other federal agencies, to ensure that federal laws are carried out. The president does not make laws—that responsibility is delegated to Congress. However, the president does develop federal policies regarding issues such as education, foreign relations, and energy, and subsequently works with Congress to create legislation that administers those policies. In addition, the president has the power to approve or veto legislation. Additional job responsibilities include negotiating treaties with other nations, establishing a federal budget, appointing diplomats and Supreme Court judges, and granting pardons. Finally, as commander in chief of the country’s military, the president has the authority to send troops into combat, as well as the power to decide whether to use nuclear weapons.

Qualifications and Job Duration

Almost any adult American citizen is qualified to become president. Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution establishes that anyone who is a natural-born U.S. citizen, at least thirty-five years old, and has lived in the United States for at least fourteen years can become president. The qualifications seem straightforward, but many people disagree about the meaning of “natural-born.” In 1968 presidential contender George Romney’s eligibility was questioned because he had been born in Mexico. In 2008 some wondered if John McCain qualified as a natural-born citizen because he was born in the Panama Canal Zone while his parents were stationed at a military base. And in 2016 opponents of senator and presidential contender Ted Cruz question his eligibility because he was born in Canada.
The fourteenth Amendment states that “all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States.” Law professor Gabriel J. Chin declared that McCain did not meet the constitutional requirements. However, the Senate disagreed, noting that the Founding Fathers did not intend to deny citizenship to the children of military personnel born while stationed outside the United States. The Senate officially declared McCain eligible to become president by passing a nonbinding resolution in April of 2007. And although most legal scholars maintain that Cruz is eligible to be elected as president, the meaning of “natural-born U.S. citizen” continues to be uncertain because the Supreme Court has never ruled on the matter. This uncertainly provides fodder for Cruz’s opponents, particularly Donald J. Trump, who question Cruz’s eligibility on the campaign trail.

The Constitution also includes a few restrictions. Article I allows the Senate to forbid anyone who has been impeached from holding any federal office, including the presidency. In addition, the president is elected to serve for a term of four years, and the twenty-second Amendment limits the number of terms one person can serve to two. Furthermore, if a vice president assumes the office of president following a death or resignation and serves more than two years of his or her predecessor’s term, he or she can only be elected to serve one more term. If, however, the vice president assumes the presidency and serves less than two years of his or her predecessor’s term, then he or she can be elected to serve two additional terms.

When George Washington became president, the Constitution did not limit the number of terms. However, Washington personally believed that a president should serve only two terms and refused to run for reelection following his second term. Washington’s two-term precedent was respected until the turbulent years of World War II. Because many Americans believed it best to retain their president during wartime, Franklin Roosevelt was elected to serve four consecutive terms. Many believed that Roosevelt’s new precedent should not be repeated, so in 1951 Congress ratified the twenty-second Amendment to limit a president to two terms.

**Getting the Job**

The president is elected by the American people. Getting elected is no easy task. Getting elected means finding the right message that will appeal to voters and launching a nation-wide presidential campaign that will win the most number of voters. Such a campaign can be completely exhausting and demoralizing, requiring an endless torrent of fundraising events, strategy meetings, speeches, handshaking, and debates. Presidential candidates rarely have time for casual nights at the movies and sleeping in on Saturday mornings. A presidential campaign is a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week commitment that may last well over a year. For those who seek to serve the country at the highest possible level, such sacrifices may be well worth the costs.

**Compensation, Benefits, and Risks**

Like any fair-minded employer, the U.S. government provides a comprehensive compensation and benefits package to presidents. Basic compensation is awarded in a base salary of $400,000 per year, as well as $50,000 per year for expenses related to job functions and $100,000 for travel. The government also provides the president a pension for retirement. Additional compensation is awarded in the form of free room and board at the White House, which David McCullough describes in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*, as “the most important, the most famous, the most historic, the most beloved house in all the land.” Amenities in this storied mansion not only include spacious residential, office, and formal entertainment areas, but also recreational facilities that include a bowling alley, swimming pool, movie theater, and golf green. The president need not worry about mowing the grass or scrounging through the fridge for dinner because the White House also boasts an extensive staff to carry out these necessities of daily life. And when the president and his or her family feel the need to breathe some fresh, mountain air, they are provided free access to the private presidential retreat, Camp David. Other noteworthy benefits include travel aboard the luxurious presidential jet, Air Force One, as well as 24-hour security provided by the Secret Service.
If these benefits seem appealing, remember the risks. Look at a picture of any president before he was elected, and compare it to a picture taken at the end of his term—the stress of presidential responsibilities has grayed his hair and graced his face with many more worry lines. Imagine the turmoil experienced by Abraham Lincoln as he entered the White House with the nation ripped apart into North vs. South, Union vs. Confederacy. Think of the anguish Harry Truman must have suffered when the fate of tens of thousands was placed in his hands as he was forced to decide whether or not to drop atomic bombs on Japan. Imagine how Herbert Hoover was compelled to confront economic disaster when the stock market was seized by the most devastating crash in American history, plunging the U.S. into the Great Depression. Consider the pain suffered by President George W. Bush as terrorists transformed commercial jets into suicide bombs to execute an unprecedented assault against America on September 11, 2001. Nothing can prepare a president for such crises.

Even in times of peace and prosperity the day-to-day duties of the White House can be completely overwhelming. Some presidents, such as James Polk, are said to have worked themselves to death. Compounding the workload and the burden of making unimaginable decisions is the stress of being constantly scrutinized by the public. The president is able to maintain precious little privacy as his or her lives—past and present—become an open book for the entire world to read. John Quincy Adams detested the job so much that he commented, “Make no mistake about it, the four most miserable years of my life were my four years in the Presidency.”

The ultimate risk for a president, however, is assassination. Not being liked by everybody is just part of the job, but dealing with deadly dissenters is also a huge risk. Abraham Lincoln received over 10,000 death threats, but he never believed anyone would actually try to kill him. Lincoln noted, “I cannot bring myself to believe that any human being lives who would do me any harm.” Unfortunately, Lincoln did not understand the psyche of John Wilkes Booth. Although six presidents have survived assassination attempts, Lincoln and three others—James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy—did not.

**What Makes a Good President**

In 1869 Ulysses S. Grant rode triumphantly to the White House on the coattails of his victory as Union general, but later in life, perhaps recognizing that his military experience had not adequately prepared him for politics, he wrote, “I did not want the Presidency, and I have never quite forgiven myself for resigning the command of the army to accept it. . . . War and politics are so different.” Grant’s words speak a profound truth—his significant and successful military career differed greatly from what is required of a president. Indeed, no education, no job experience can prepare one to make the gut-wrenching decisions and carry out the often inconceivable responsibilities required of the president. So, rather than focusing solely on a presidential candidate’s resume or opinions on particular issues, voters might find it equally helpful to examine his or her leadership qualities.

Pulitzer-prize winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin has studied the histories of two of our most successful presidents—Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt—to determine what qualities distinguish them and led to their stature as exceptional leaders. In her *Parade* magazine essay “The Secrets of America’s Great Presidents,” Goodwin encourages citizens to consider ten qualities when choosing a president. According to Goodwin a great president has the courage to stay strong in the face of adversity; is confident enough to seek different viewpoints; can learn from his or her mistakes; is willing to embrace change; is emotionally intelligent (willing to share credit with others, accept blame, and convey strength); can maintain self-control in the midst of trouble; is aware and in touch with popular sentiment; possesses a strong moral compass; is able to relax; and finally, communicates well and inspires others.
Journalist and professor David Gergen agrees with many of Goodwin’s conclusions. In his book *Eyewitness to Power*, Gergen writes about his experiences working intimately with and observing four American presidents—Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Clinton—and concludes with seven lessons of leadership he has gleaned from them. One compelling similarity between Goodwin’s and Gergen’s conclusions is the need for a leader who actively seeks advice from knowledgeable advisors and is willing to listen to many different points of view. Gergen also agrees that the gift of inspiring others is vital, but adds the need to be able to explain policy and persuade others effectively, particularly the public at large. Additional qualities that Gergen deems critical are the ability to master one’s inner self and execute self control at all times; the possession of a clear, compelling purpose or mission; a willingness and ability to work with others throughout government; and, the motivation to get down to the business of the country as soon as he or she steps foot in the Oval Office.

**Read More**

- Read the qualifications and limitations on presidents in the U.S. Constitution at: [www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)
- For the complete text of the laws that explain presidential compensation, refer to: [www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/3/ch2.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/3/ch2.html).

**Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom**

- Have you ever dreamed of becoming president? What does or does not appeal to you about the job?
- Do you think the compensation and benefits offered to the president make the risks worth it?
- What qualities do you think are most important in a president? Do you recognize those qualities in any of today’s presidential candidates?
- Do you think the qualities recommended by Goodwin and Gergen might benefit other types of leaders other than presidents? Which of the qualities would benefit a school principal, team coach, or a business owner?

**Activity Suggestions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom**

Choose a leader you admire. You might think about someone you know personally, like a Scout leader, or someone you do not know personally but know about, like a politician. Think about what makes this person a strong leader. Make a list of his or her strong qualities. Compare your list to Goodwin’s and Gergen’s list. Did you list anything different?

**Reference Sources**

**Books**


**Periodicals**

Online Resources


millercenter.org/academic/americanpresident

“Citizen McCain's Panama Problem?” 1 October 2008.
www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/campaigns/junkie/archive/junkie070998.htm

“Is Ted Cruz, born in Canada, eligible to run for president? (Updated)” 26 March 2015.

www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/3/ch2.html

www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents

<http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2889/is_/ai_14415287>

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Presidents Are People Too!

*This article is intended for young people in grades 4-6. Adults may print copies for students to read to themselves or in small groups.*

What does it take to be president of the United States? Do you have to be brilliant? Well-dressed? Good looking? It’s true that our presidents might be many of these things, but there is one thing they are not: perfect.

Presidents are people, just like you. They make mistakes and embarrass themselves. They have quirks and flaws. Sometimes these traits are what make them caring human beings or give them the understanding necessary to lead a country. If you get to know your presidents, you might find you have something in common.

**George Washington** (1st President, 1789-1797) started losing his permanent teeth at age 22 and had only one tooth by the time he was president. He used dental powder daily, but was constantly plagued with toothaches and dental problems. Some historians think this may have been caused by the medical remedies used to treat his malaria or smallpox. Washington had false teeth made from many different materials, including an elephant tusk and a hippopotamus bone. He was embarrassed by his teeth, and most portraits show him with his mouth closed, looking serious. He would not take his false teeth out at the dinner table, which was the custom at that time. Washington did his best to protect his beloved horses from the same fate by making sure their teeth were brushed regularly.

**Thomas Jefferson** (3rd President, 1801-1809) greeted guests in his comfortable farmer clothes and slippers. Many were taken aback by his laid-back style, but it conformed to the simple tone of equality he wished to represent. He wanted the people to relate to him as one of them. Instead of presidential balls and state dinners, he chose to have more intimate, informal parties. Instead of bowing, he shook people’s hands. While Jefferson was casual about his clothes and social etiquette, he was meticulous in his work. He kept detailed written records and observations. He is best known for writing the Declaration of Independence.

**John Quincy Adams** (6th President, 1825-1829) enjoyed skinny-dipping. When he was president, the Federal City was mostly woods and fields without a lot of people. President Adams loved to go for a refreshing swim in the Potomac River every morning if the weather was good. Since there weren’t really bathing suits back then, he’d strip off his clothes and leave them on the riverbank while he took his morning dip. One morning a reporter followed him to the river and sat on his clothes. The president had no choice but to answer her questions!

**Andrew Jackson** (7th President, 1829-1837) often misspelled and misused words. Jackson was born poor in a log cabin. His informal education was cut short at age 13 when he fought in the Revolutionary War. He was captured and survived being a prisoner of war. Despite his lack of education, he became a teacher for a short time and later a lawyer. He valued education and sought out the finest schools for his adopted nephew and the other children he took into his home.

**Andrew Johnson** (17th President, 1865-1869) grew up extremely poor and was not able to read or write until he was an adult. He never attended a day of school. His father died when he was three. Although he chopped wood and helped his mother with chores, they could barely survive. So when Johnson was 13, his mother apprenticed him to the town tailor. By law, he had to work long hours for his master in exchange for food and lodging. Under the arrangement, Johnson would be free at age 21. He loved listening to books and speeches while he was busy at work. With some help from others, he taught himself to read, and eventually his wife taught him how to write and do arithmetic.
Theodore Roosevelt (26th President, 1901-1913) loved to play. He had six children and always made time for them. He liked to tell them stories about the Wild West or read from one of his favorite books, *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame. They set up obstacle races down the White House halls, played hide and go seek, and had “bear” fights. Roosevelt wrote about one night when, Archie and Quentin attacked him “with shrieks and chuckles of delight and then the pillow fight raged up and down the hall.”

Calvin Coolidge (30th President, 1923-1929) was so shy he was nicknamed “Silent Cal.” Despite his reputation for being quiet, he had a good sense of humor. A dinner guest once bet she could get President Coolidge to say more than two words. When Coolidge found out, he responded, “You lose.” He also had a playful side to his personality; wearing a cowboy hat, he loved to ride his mechanical horse every day.

Herbert Hoover (31st President, 1929-1933) loved to play every day with his medicine ball—a heavy ball the size of a basketball. To ensure he got enough exercise, he and his doctor invented “Hoover-ball,” a cross between volleyball and tennis using a six pound medicine ball. His cabinet members and other advisors would join him for a game on the south lawn of the White House at seven a.m. sharp. They became known as “the Medicine Ball Cabinet” and played every morning, except Sundays, even in the snow, wind, and rain.

Harry Truman (33rd President, 1945-1953) admitted he was a “sissy” as a child. He said, “If there was any danger of getting into a fight, I always ran.” His poor vision and glasses prevented him from playing sports. His mother forbade him from roughhousing, so he spent most of his free time playing the piano and reading history books. Truman experienced his first combat when he fought in World War I. There he impressed many with his courage and his ability to lead. He called upon these strengths in 1945, when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt died, and Truman was thrust into the presidency.

Ronald Reagan (40th President, 1981-1989) loved humor, especially the comics. Every morning before reading the serious news of the day, he’d read the comics. Spiderman was his favorite. President Reagan’s great sense of humor and clever punch lines helped him out of many difficult situations. When asked during a presidential debate in 1984 whether at his age (73) he could handle the lack of sleep, he replied with a grin, “I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience.”

William Clinton (42nd President, 1993-2001) was crazy about junk food. During his presidency he often consumed cookies, pies, tacos, and McDonald’s hamburgers. This was a contributing factor to his heart problems; in 2004 he underwent heart surgery. With the help of his daughter Chelsea, whom he always considered his “most important job,” he now eats a healthy, plant-based diet.

The president of the United States holds the highest position in America, and with that title come a lot of respect and high expectations. But presidents are people too. They have flaws and quirks, just like you. These character traits are part of what makes them interesting, well-rounded people. So just because you have trouble spelling or like to play silly games, don’t rule out being a leader—you could be president some day!

Read More

- Read some of Theodore Roosevelt’s letters to his children and learn about life at the White House during his presidency. [http://www.bartleby.com/53/](http://www.bartleby.com/53/)

Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

- Review the article "Help Wanted" (included in this Kit), discussing the qualifications for president and the qualities that make a good leader according to Doris Kearns Goodwin and David Gergen.
- Brainstorm a list of qualities that you think are presidential. Now list qualities you think are important in a leader. What do the lists have in common? Do you have any of these qualities?
- List your own quirks and flaws. Might any of them get in the way of being a successful leader or president of the United States? Would any of them be an asset?

Activity Suggestions for Young People in the Classroom

Play the game of Jeopardy. Assign each student a president and have him or her come up with two questions and answers using Jeopardy format (e.g. Q: The teddy bear was named after this 26th president; A: Who is Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt). One question should be a fun fact. Students may refer to “The Presidential Facts” on OurWhiteHouse.org as a resource. Divide the class into teams and play Jeopardy.

Resources

Books


Davis, Kenneth C. Don’t Know Much about the Presidents. New York: Harper, 2002. (For children ages 6-9)


Krull, Kathleen. Lives of the Presidents, Fame, Shame (and What the Neighbors Thought), New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998. (For grade 4 and up)


Online


“The Presidents.” [www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents](http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents)


Video
The Presidents Collection. www.pbs.org/wgbh/amERICANEXPERIENCE/films/filter/presidents/
Reagan-Mondale debate: the age issue. www.youtube.com/watch?v=loPu1UibKbc

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Persuading the People: Presidential Campaigns

by Geri Zabela Eddins

It is nearly impossible to miss the relentless advertising and media frenzy that characterize modern presidential campaigns. Today presidential candidates work tirelessly with their campaign staff and supporters—often for over a year—in their quest for the White House, proclaiming their unique visions for America throughout the long months of primaries, speeches, party conventions, and debates. The candidates seem to be everywhere—we see their names emblazoned on brightly colored signs dotting neighborhood lawns and their faces smiling sweetly on the nightly TV news as they exploit free media attention while mingling with voters in coffee shops. Though modern presidential campaigns invade our homes in a multi-media avalanche, our country’s earliest contenders communicated at a much-slower pace—political news traveled mostly through conversations at local taverns and post offices, as well as through newspaper articles and editorials. Westward expansion, population growth, and technology have changed the nature of campaigns dramatically, but many of the tactics and strategies we bemoan today actually originated very early. James A. Thurber writes in Campaigns and Elections American Style, “Campaigns are wars, battles for the hearts and minds, but most importantly for the votes of the American people.” Presidential campaigns as wars or battles seem an appropriate metaphor when we consider the extensive strategies and negative tactics employed by presidential candidates to win the nation’s highest office. And yet a campaign is also an elaborate form of entertainment—a stage show—with the players often acting as puppets whose strings are being pulled at precise moments behind the curtain. Strategy and, yes, manipulation take center stage as a candidate and his or her staff determine how to package and promote their finely tuned message, where to campaign to guarantee the most number of votes, and how to best spend the campaign funds. From simple slogans to well-choreographed speeches, presidential campaigns—past and present—demonstrate an uncanny willingness to do almost anything to persuade the people.

No Campaign Needed: Washington Is a Shoo-in

When it came time for the newly born United States to elect its first president, everyone knew George Washington was the best man for the job. Not only had Washington led the Continental Army to victory in our fight for independence from the British, he had also presided over the Constitutional Convention that gave birth to our new democratic government. Washington had proven himself to be not only a strong leader, but a national hero. No campaign was needed to convince anyone. Washington therefore ran unopposed and was subsequently elected unanimously—not once, but twice in 1789 and 1792—making Washington the only presidential candidate to be elected by a unanimous vote.

Early Campaigns Get Dirty

Diverse opinions about everything from building roads to confronting foreign aggression stoked the fires of dissent among early federal leaders, and they quickly sought to promote their unique visions for the country by organizing political parties. The straightforward elections that put Washington in office were quickly abandoned to the annals of history. The Federalists desperately wanted John Adams to succeed Washington, and the Democratic-Republicans preferred that their candidate, Thomas Jefferson, become our second president. Remarkably, the candidates themselves were prohibited by late eighteenth-century social conventions from campaigning on their own behalf in public. Although today we expect our political candidates to proudly proclaim their superiority in school gyms and factories from Alaska to Florida, two hundred years ago such behavior was considered inappropriate. Promoting oneself was not respected, and publicly criticizing an opponent was completely unacceptable. In fact, in the years following Washington’s presidency, most presidential candidates simply stayed home after they were nominated and awaited the results.
Although society’s strict rules dictated the candidates’ behavior, they did not apply to their supporters. Adams’ supporters fought a vicious battle in the press with those who championed Jefferson’s candidacy. Jefferson was slammed as an atheist and a “mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father.” Adams was condemned as a monarchist who sought to become a king; he was also branded as a fool and a hypocrite. It was this 1796 race, in fact, that introduced Americans to the practice of mudslinging—the usage of insults, false stories, and political “dirt” against an opponent. The ruthless nature of the Adams-Jefferson contest ripped apart a friendship the two men had nurtured as they served together as ambassadors and members of the Continental Congress. Such a sacrifice is not unknown in our modern campaigns as we continue to witness the intense desire of political hopefuls who seem willing to sacrifice anything—their families, friends, and even their own integrity—to get elected.

As luck would have it, the voting procedures in place at the time made Adams president and his political rival Jefferson his vice president. It was the worst possible match. Jefferson kept his eye on the executive seat and then ran against Adams in the following election. The 1800 rematch remains the only time an incumbent president has run against his vice president. To better his odds, Jefferson dug deeper into his bag of dirty tricks and hired a “hatchet man”—the controversial political journalist and pamphleteer James Callendar—to continue discrediting Adams in the press. Callendar declared that Adams was determined to make war with France and that only Jefferson would keep the nation at peace. He also attacked Adams’ character, trashing him as a “strange compound of ignorance and ferocity, of deceit and weakness.” Adams chose not to disgrace himself by engaging in hatchet work; however, he and the Federalist-controlled Congress did exploit the rising conflict with France by passing four laws known jointly as The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. The Sedition Act outlawed "false, scandalous, and malicious attacks" against Congress and the president. Callendar was soon arrested and convicted under the Sedition Act. Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans cried foul, proclaiming the act to be a violation of free speech and warning that the Federalists were unleashing a “reign of terror.” Callendar’s libelous fictions landed him in jail for nine months, but they also helped put Jefferson in the executive office.

In the 2008 campaign Republican candidate John McCain blasted his opponent Democrat Barack Obama as “eloquent, but empty” and “a confused leader.” Obama countered by attacking McCain as a leader who “represents the failed policies of yesterday.” In the 2012 campaign to decide the Republican nominee for president, candidate Newt Gingrich initially declared that he would run a “clean campaign about real issues.” But after placing fourth in the Iowa caucus, Gingrich swiftly changed tactics. Voters watching the campaigns of the 2016 presidential candidates have witnessed a continuation of caustic commentary. Republican candidate Donald J. Trump consistently disparages his opponents and does not shy from insulting their physical appearance or demeanor. In one interview Trump insulted rival candidate Carly Fiorina by saying, "Look at that face! Would anyone vote for that? Can you imagine that, the face of our next president?" Trump has also repeatedly attacked contender Jeb Bush as "low energy." In the December debate Bush pushed back with, "So Donald, you know, is great at the one-liners, but he's a chaos candidate. And he'd be a chaos president."

Watching the sarcastic campaign speeches and misleading TV ads demonstrates that the early negative campaign tactics of mudslinging, name calling, and passing the blame are not trapped in the past. We continue to accept the sharply barbed criticism opponents fling at each other as a norm. Campaigns also continue to hire their own “hatchet men,” although now we refer to them as invisible surrogates. Invisible surrogates are paid to dig up dirt about opponents and create doubt. Some surrogates are not publicly authorized by the campaign, however, and choose to work independently to smear a candidate. In the 2004 election, for example, an independent group of Vietnam veterans opposed to John Kerry ran a deliberately misleading series of TV ads that cast doubt on Kerry’s heroism during the war. The “swift boat” ads hit their mark and undermined Kerry’s aspirations.
Independent organizations continued their attempts to mislead and undermine campaigns in 2008. Commercials sponsored by the National Rifle Association (NRA) falsely claimed that Obama planned to ban handguns and the use of a gun for home defense. An ad sponsored by the Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund insisted Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin “actively promotes” the killing of wolves from airplanes, a practice the group condemned as “brutal and unethical.” Whereas the NRA appealed to gun owners’ sense of constitutional rights, the Wildlife Action Fund ad appealed to the softer, emotional side of animal lovers. According to FactCheck.org, the NRA ad is not simply misleading, it “distorts Obama's position on gun control beyond recognition.” Regarding the Wildlife Action Fund ad, FactCheck.org writes that, although it provides a “description of Palin's position that is essentially factually correct, [it is also] incomplete.” Instead of painting the entire picture so voters can determine their own opinions, the Wildlife organization chose to mislead and distort its facts by relating only half of the story.

In the wake of the 2010 Supreme Court decision in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, which eliminated most restrictions on spending for political purposes by corporations and unions, Super PACs have created their own relentless stream of TV ads to promote presidential candidates independently of each candidate’s campaign, adding more flames to the political fires. Quite often the TV ads run by a Super PAC denigrate the opponent of the candidate the Super PAC supports. The Super PAC Restore Our Future, for example, ran millions of dollars of ads in Iowa maligning Newt Gingrich by denouncing his “baggage” and his ethics violations, all to further the cause of his opponent Mitt Romney. Although Romney did not win in Iowa, the ads worked to deflate Gingrich’s campaign; he placed fourth. Yet Gingrich was not without his own supporting Super PAC. Buttressing Gingrich’s candidacy was the Super PAC Winning Our Future, whose video titled “When Mitt Romney Came to Town” portrayed Romney as a “predatory corporate raider” who “destroyed [the American dream] for thousands of Americans and their families.” FactCheck.org notes that the video “presents a one-sided, often distorted and misleading view of Mitt Romney’s years leading the venture capital firm Bain Capital.”

**Gaining Support from the Ground-Up: Grassroots Campaigns Emerge**

The 1824 election pitted four members of the same party, the Democratic-Republicans, against each other, making this election every bit as contentious as the Adams-Jefferson races. Andrew Jackson won more electoral votes than any of the other three candidates, but not the majority (more than one-half of the total votes) needed to win, so the decision was thrust upon the House of Representatives. Jackson believed that since he had won most of the electoral votes that the House would follow that lead and make him president. He was wrong. Instead, they chose his runner-up, John Quincy Adams. Jackson was furious.

If hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, then neither does it possess the fury of a presidential candidate who believes he was cheated. Declaring that Adams had negotiated a “corrupt bargain” to steal the election, Jackson quickly resigned his Senate seat and organized a new party—the Democrats. The Democrats began work immediately to create an unprecedented plan to win the next election. They established national and state-level committees and then launched a comprehensive, broad-based assault aimed at informing and courting all citizens in venues way beyond the press. For the first time, Americans from all walks of life were encouraged to actively participate in politics, making this the first-ever grassroots presidential campaign. (A “grassroots” campaign originates and operates from the people, rather than being organized by government officials or people with power.) The Democrats celebrated Jackson as a military hero who had risen from a life of modest means. Jackson did not campaign openly, but worked behind the scenes, allowing the Democratic Party to orchestrate events. Not only did supporters gather at rallies, parades, and picnics, they also produced campaign souvenirs to publicize his candidacy, such as medals, clothing buttons, and flasks. To exploit Jackson’s nickname of “Old Hickory,” his supporters planted hickory saplings throughout the country.
Adams’ supporters did not sit idly by. Although the National Republicans did not attempt to match the flurry of activity and excitement generated by the Democrats, they did retaliate with their own deluge of campaign tokens (mirrors, sewing boxes, and ceramic tiles), as well as negative ads. One negative tactic employed by Adams was to print posters that portrayed the war hero Jackson as a murderer. One poster, titled “Some Account of some of the Bloody Deeds of Gen. Jackson,” displayed lines of dark coffins that symbolized what many believed was the unnecessary deaths perpetrated by Jackson during his military career. Although the educated and distinguished incumbent had many supporters, Jackson’s humble beginnings (he was the first president who had been born in a log cabin!) and promise to return government to the common people ultimately appealed to more Americans. Jackson subsequently won the 1828 election in a landslide.

The lesson learned from Jackson’s grassroots campaign success may best be summarized as “Think Nationally, Act Locally.” With an eye on the White House, modern presidential contenders continue to gain huge momentum through grassroots efforts by establishing field organizations, often at the precinct level, whose mission is to identify and register voters, communicate information about the candidate and his or her message, and recruit and coordinate additional supporters. Former President Bill Clinton’s campaign organized a precinct-level field model in 1992 with a standardized message distributed from the top down that was so successful at gathering widespread support that the campaign recruited a staggering number of volunteers—over ten million. Such a number may seem unbelievable, but voters who admire a particular candidate and respect his or her message often turn their passion for a candidate into action by volunteering. Volunteers help support the paid staff not only by encouraging people to vote, but also by spreading the candidate’s message—in casual conversations, campaign phone banks, and even through email, Twitter feeds, text, and Facebook messages. Many campaigns continue to actively recruit volunteers and supporters the “old-fashioned” way, by mailing brochures, meeting shoppers outside grocery stores, and pounding the pavement in neighborhoods across America. However, technological advances made in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have made mobilization of the grassroots easier and faster through radio, TV, the Internet, and smart phones. Technology has enabled candidates to distribute their messages directly into people’s homes not only to solicit more votes, but to also generate activism and financial support.

Recreating an Image: William Henry Harrison’s Log Cabin Campaign

Although our ninth president William Henry Harrison is doomed to be remembered as the president who served only thirty-two days, the hallmark of his legacy resides with the innovative and deceitful strategy he invented to win the presidency. Harrison was a son of wealth and political prestige whose resume included a college education, as well as a valorous career in the military and public office. Nothing about Harrison was ordinary. Yet, when a Democratic newspaper printed a remark portraying the presidential hopeful as lazy and wanting nothing other than to hide in a log cabin and drink alcoholic cider for his remaining years, he and his supporters recognized a golden opportunity. They quickly transformed the disparaging comment into an effective campaign slogan: “Log Cabin and Hard Cider.” Harrison brought the campaign slogan to life by distributing a dizzying array of log cabins big and small—log cabin trinkets, log cabins on posters and newspapers, log-cabin shaped mugs filled with cider, and even real log cabins built as Whig party headquarters around the country. The down-to-earth message was well received by the public who appreciated this image of Harrison as a humble veteran living happily in a log cabin and welcoming all visitors with mugs of hard cider. In addition, this vision of Harrison contrasted nicely with the elitist attitude that many associated with his opponent, the incumbent President Martin Van Buren. Ironically, Harrison had never lived in a log cabin. In fact, his current residence was a spacious mansion in Ohio. Nevertheless, Harrison made the most of his everyman image as he campaigned actively around the country and inspired a record number of men to vote. For the first time, the Whigs won both the popular vote and the electoral vote.
An additional innovation attributed to Harrison’s robust 1840 campaign was the creation of a campaign song that literally sang his praises while also belittling his opponent. The song became so popular that its title—“Tippecanoe and Tyler Too”—is remembered even today as a catchy campaign slogan commemorating Harrison’s candidacy. “Tippecanoe” referred to Harrison’s perceived success at the Battle of Tippecanoe, and John Tyler was Harrison’s running mate. Although the mission of Tippecanoe was achieved (thwarting the Native American leader Tecumseh’s attempts to establish an Indian confederacy), using Tippecanoe as a victory song may be considered almost as misleading as the “Log Cabin” slogan since the troops under Harrison’s command suffered many more casualties than the Native Americans.

Harrison’s strategy for recreating his image into an everyman was so successful that most candidates continue to tweak their image to project a similar approachable persona, someone who understands everyday realities like the cost of a tank of gas or a gallon of milk. In the summer before the Iowa caucuses, candidates converge on the Iowa State Fair in their polo shirts or shirtsleeves to meet and shake hands with the thousands of voters who flock there each year. Savvy candidates take time to slurp lemonade and sample such culinary staples of the state fair as fried peanut butter and jelly and pork chops on a stick. In 2015 Republican candidate Mike Huckabee opted to help flip the pork chops on the grill, and candidate Carly Fiorina endeared herself to locals by wearing a pink plaid shirt, jeans, and cowboy boots. Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders—visibly sweating through his simple button-down shirt—attracted the largest crowd for his soapbox speech, the political highlight of the fair in which each candidate stands on an actual soapbox to make his or her pitch to the crowds. Such a performance is commonly identified as Plain Folks, a propaganda technique in which a candidate pretends to be one of the common people to demonstrate that he or she can relate to the average Joe’s and Jane’s of mainstream America.

Many presidential hopefuls are not content to simply portray themselves as average citizens. Candidates often go beyond the everyman image to create an idealized portrait of themselves that further appeals to voters. From day one of the 2008 campaign, Obama cast himself as THE agent of change, declaring himself as the “change we need” and beseeching voters to “vote for change.” His opponent John McCain consistently reminded voters of his status as “true American hero” based on his military service and experiences as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. McCain also painted himself as a “maverick,” a Senate rebel willing to confront corruption in Washington and to defy fellow Republican leaders when he feels they are straying onto the wrong path.

**Sitting on the Front Porch . . . and Winning the Election**

The construction of railroads enabled presidential candidates to travel easily from state to state throughout the nineteenth century, but even with mass transportation widely available two candidates made the unusual decision to campaign from home. James Garfield welcomed hundreds of flag-waving visitors—many of them simply curious to see an actual presidential contender—to his home in Mentor, Ohio. From his front porch, Garfield spoke to the people while his wife served cold drinks on the lawn. Garfield won the 1880 election, so in 1896 fellow Ohio native William McKinley followed his lead and invited voters to his home in Canton. McKinley’s campaign was much more controlled, however. His staff insisted on evaluating potential visitors rather than allowing unpredictable crowds of Americans to show up in the front yard for a rowdy party. McKinley was also carefully briefed in advance regarding the topics he was to discuss with his pre-approved visitors of the day. The front-porch strategy was successful for McKinley even though his opponent made hundreds of speeches to millions of people around the country. McKinley’s win cannot be attributed simply to his staying at home, however. Many Republican leaders spoke around the country on his behalf. Plus, his campaign manager raised millions of dollars, which allowed them to produce substantial amounts of advertising, including flyers printed in several foreign languages so that new immigrants could read them.
Star Power: Celebrities Endorse Their Candidates

Democrat Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign gained a huge publicity boost when cultural icon Oprah Winfrey freely pledged her support and pleaded with other Americans on national TV to vote for him. Although this was the first campaign endorsement ever offered by Winfrey, in every campaign cycle since 1920 Americans have witnessed an endless stream of celebrities contribute their time and talents to generate excitement and votes for candidates. In 2016 the candidates continue to seek out celebrity endorsements. Republican candidate Ben Carson enjoyed the support of rapper Kid Rock, and his opponent Donald J. Trump boasts the endorsements of actor Gary Busey and professional wrestler Hulk Hogan. Republican contender Ted Cruz was supported by playwright David Mamet and actor James Woods. Popular music icon Katy Perry has entertained and rallied audiences for Democrat Hillary Clinton, including at the Democratic National Convention.

The practice of recruiting celebrities to endorse a campaign was first envisioned by Florence Harding. Florence was the first spouse of a presidential hopeful to play a significant role in a campaign, and it was her idea to recruit popular movie stars and celebrities to endorse her husband Warren Harding’s campaign. The Hardings executed a front-porch campaign, and to help attract crowds Florence engaged movie stars and celebrities, including singer and movie star Al Jolson, to stop by and visit their front porch in Marion, Ohio. News photographers often snapped pictures of the Hardings standing side by side with the celebrities, providing additional free publicity.

Candidates are also eager to attract endorsements outside of Hollywood. Testimonials from business tycoons, popular politicians, military leaders, and even newspapers, unions, and other widely supported organizations help to solidify a candidate’s message and credentials within different constituencies. High profile leaders who believe strongly in a candidate’s message may also choose to work as a surrogate and speak on the candidate’s behalf. In 2016 Republican candidate Jeb Bush was supported by a range of veteran surrogates (including General Keith Alexander, Lieutenant General John Blount, and Illinois congressman and Iraq war veteran Adam Kinzinger), all of whom stumped for Bush in the early voting states to emphasize his national security policy. On the eve of the Iowa caucuses, of the 11 remaining Republican candidates, Bush enjoyed the greatest endorsement support in Congress, followed by Marco Rubio, and Chris Christie. And despite Donald Trump's rise to the Republican nomination, endorsements of his campaign by current and previous federal officials remain remarkably low when compared to the endorsements bestowed upon Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

Technology Revolutionizes Communication and Campaigns

The turn of the nineteenth century ushered in dramatic advances in technology that made communication with greater numbers of people possible. By 1800 over 150 newspapers were being printed in the U.S., and by the mid-1830s passenger railroads were available up and down the east coast. The ease of traveling far distances on the railroad enabled McKinley’s opponent, William Jennings Bryan, to reach millions of people in what has become popularized as a whistle-stop tour—a cross-country train trip in which the candidate stopped at up to twenty towns a day to give brief speeches from the train platform. Though Bryan lost his election bid, fifty years later the whistle-stop strategy was instrumental to Harry S Truman’s campaign success. Truman traveled over 30,000 miles to publicize his Fair Deal programs. Candidates travel mostly by private jet today, but Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton have also embarked on their own whistle-stop tours as a nostalgic means of meeting voters and generating free media coverage.
Many other technologies have revolutionized presidential campaigns. Radio became common in the 1920s, and it was radio that enabled candidates to reach more Americans than ever before. As a result, American men and women from all walks of life were better informed and subsequently began voting in record numbers. In the following decade TVs were introduced to American living rooms. In 1952 Dwight Eisenhower became the first candidate to exploit this new technology by appealing to voters in a series of 20-second commercials that showed Eisenhower answering questions posed by citizens on the street. Though many idolized the war hero, these TV ads demonstrated Eisenhower’s ability to communicate easily with ordinary people. TV enabled candidates to not only spread their messages in commercials, but to also demonstrate their debate skills. Millions of Americans watched Richard Nixon debate John F. Kennedy in 1960, but the new technology produced a surprising result. TV viewers were convinced that the young, handsome Kennedy had outperformed the pale and weary-looking Nixon, but those who had listened to the debate on the radio disagreed. Without the visual images informing their opinions, radio listeners were able to focus solely on the debate itself, and the radio listeners were confident that Nixon had outshined Kennedy.

TV remains a powerful force for reaching voters. Candidates exploit free air time as the news media covers party conventions, debates, and stories about the campaign trail. Candidates also pour millions of dollars into slick, customized ads that not only promote their message, but also condemn or satirize an opponent. Beyond the box of TV lies the wonderland of the Internet, which transmits up-to-the-minute poll numbers to our smart phones in the speed of light. Increasing access to computers and Wi-Fi connections has crowned the Internet as another vital resource in spreading information, raising money, and rallying voters. Hillary Clinton actually launched her presidential bid in 2008 with an Internet video message. A new technological trend also initiated in 2008 was the creation of pages on the social network Facebook as well as personal campaign websites to relate extensive information about the presidential hopefuls’ backgrounds, policies, and goals. On campaign websites supporters chat with each other, donate money to the campaign, and purchase campaign t-shirts and bumper stickers from the online store. In 2016 the social networking messaging service Twitter has played a pivotal role in the campaign rhetoric as candidates and their surrogates use it to not only share quick news of their own events and policy initiatives, but to also tweet their personal reactions to opponents’ interviews and campaign ads as soon as they are released.

**Fact or Fiction: Casting a Critical Eye on Campaigns**

With both feet in the present and a backward glance at the past, Americans can recognize the many common threads that are woven throughout campaign history. Though most of us groan about the overwhelming negativity of modern campaigns, those threads were spun very early, right after Washington’s presidency, when profound ideological differences degenerated into monstrous forms of mudslinging and backstabbing. The acidic insults and outright lies perpetrated in the early press undoubtedly made it difficult for the public to discern the candidates’ true positions. Deception plummeted to a new low, however, when William Henry Harrison chose to carefully craft an engaging, but utterly false, story about himself to attract and win voters. Intertwined with Harrison’s deception was his recognition that connecting with average citizens, as his predecessor Andrew Jackson had successfully done, would help win the most votes. A candidate’s decision to present oneself as a common, approachable person greatly influences how he or she chooses to campaign—Garfield was thrilled to meet voters on his front porch; Harry Truman shook hands enthusiastically across rural and urban America from the back of a train, and, with a nod to nostalgia, John McCain crisscrossed America on a bus christened “The Straight Talk Express.” Savvy voters can easily recognize when a candidate’s gestures and messages are intended to manipulate rather than inform. Still, to wield the amazing power of our vote effectively, it is always helpful to take two steps back and cast a critical eye on the strategies, tactics, and propaganda woven seamlessly into the multi-layered fabric of a campaign so we can make informed decisions.
Parents, teachers, and librarians can work with children from a very early age to not only encourage political curiosity, but to also teach them healthy skepticism and critical thinking skills that can serve them in all of life’s decisions. *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out* provides the perfect springboard for engaging youngsters in the discussion of history and the importance of the democratic vote in America. Reviewing magazine ads and TV commercials that market services and products directly to children with youngsters and asking them to question how they appeal to them lays the groundwork for critically reviewing political ads in the future. Older youngsters may be surprised to learn that many of the techniques used in spinning toothpaste and toys, such as leaving out critical facts and appealing to authority, work equally well in crafting campaign commercials. In their book *unSpun: Finding Facts in a world of Disinformation*, Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson provide a five-step process to thinking critically: “keep an open mind, ask questions, cross-check, look for the best information, and then weigh the evidence.” By helping young people understand the importance of separating their emotions from their decisions so that they can openly question claims and sources, you can teach them to think critically by separating fact from fiction.

### Read More

- Fact Check.org is a project supported by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania that “aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics.” Read unbiased, nonpartisan analysis of current campaign ads, debates, speeches, interviews, and news releases at: [www.factcheck.org/](http://www.factcheck.org/).
- Read the “Fact Checker” column in *The Washington Post*, whose goal is to provide the “truth behind the rhetoric” at: [http://blog.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/](http://blog.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/).
- Check out even more intensely researched articles at PolitiFact, which is a project of the St. Petersburg Times and Congressional Quarterly designed “to help you find the truth in the presidential campaign,” at: [http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/](http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/).
- Read presidential campaign slogans at: [www.presidentsusa.net/campaignslogans.html](http://www.presidentsusa.net/campaignslogans.html).
- Read more about the history of political memorabilia, including buttons, medals, pins, and postcards, and view pictures of these political tokens from the Ohio Historical Society at: [http://www.cyberbee.com/campaign/mem.html](http://www.cyberbee.com/campaign/mem.html).
- View pictures and descriptions of presidential campaign memorabilia from the Duke University Special Collections Library at: [http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/americavotes/](http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/americavotes/).
Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

- Think about a candidate whose message you value. What does the candidate say that intrigues you? Are the candidate’s words, tone, and actions respectful?
- What is the responsibility of the voter? How much and what kind of research should a voter conduct to make an informed decision?
- Do you believe that campaign commercials are truthful? Do they mislead in any way? If so, what are some ways a commercial might mislead voters?
- Identify negative campaigning techniques you have observed. Do you think they are warranted? What does negative campaigning say about America? Is it a problem? How can we change it?
- Do you think it is fair for organizations other than presidential campaigns and parties (such as religious or environmental groups) to produce ads and commercials promoting a candidate or a position? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the role Super PACs are playing in this year’s election? Are their TV ads fair? Most of the Super PACs have ambiguous names. A few examples are Make America Great Again, Keep the Promise, The Right to Rise, and Priorities USA. Do you find these names informative? Misleading? How so? Can you determine which candidate each PAC supports from its name? How might you choose to change or improve each PAC’s name?

Activity Suggestions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

- The League of Women Voters lists and explains eleven different campaign techniques, such as evading real issues and loading statements, in their free online guide called “Election the President,” which is available at: www.lwv.org/content/defeating-the-president-everything-you-need-know. Review the list and discuss examples in political campaigns and even in product advertising that demonstrate these techniques.
- In their book unSpun: Finding Facts in a world of Disinformation, Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson provide a five-step process to thinking critically: “keep an open mind, ask questions, cross-check, look for the best information, and then weigh the evidence.” Use these steps while watching a campaign commercial or presidential debate. How is it helpful?
- Read unbiased, nonpartisan analysis of current campaign ads, debates, speeches, interviews, and news releases at: http://www.factcheck.org/. This website is a project supported by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania that “aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics.” Discuss an analysis of one commercial or debate that provided insight you did not expect. What surprised you?
- What slogans do you remember? To see a list of presidential campaign slogans, go to: http://www.presidentsusa.net/campaignslogans.html. Which slogans do you think are the best? Which slogans would you change? How would you rewrite them?
Reference Sources

Books


Online Resources


“It’s the Super PAC Era.” 26 January 2012. www.realearapolitics.com/articles/2012/01/05/its_the_super_pac_era_112652.html


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The Second Shall Be First: The 1948 Presidential Election—Truman V. Dewey

by Renee’ Critcher Lyons

Wooting and tooting its way back to Washington, D.C. from America’s heartland on November 3, 1948, newly re-elected President Harry S Truman’s campaign train screeched to a halt for a short public appearance in St. Louis. As a jubilant Truman waved and greeted citizens attending the impromptu gathering, a supporter handed him a copy of the daily Chicago Tribune. “DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN” blared from the front page! The president held the paper high, grinning from ear-to-ear while camera shutters snapped. He noted, “This is for the books.”

Yes, Harry S Truman, incumbent president from Independence, Missouri, son of a mule-trader turned farmer, had whipped the arrogant, press-courtng governor from New York, Thomas E. Dewey. He won by over two million (that’s 2,000,000) votes, despite the fact that only 15 percent of the nation’s newspapers supported his campaign. Prior to the election, the Chicago Tribune referred to President Truman as a “nincompoop,” and the New York Times wrote, “The [Democratic] Party might as well immediately concede the election to Dewey and save the wear-and-tear of campaigning.” Magazines were just as bad. Time Magazine proclaimed, “Barring a political miracle, it was the kind of ticket that could not fail to sweep the Republican Party back into power.” Newsweek published election opinions from fifty highly respected political reporters; all fifty predicted Truman would lose. Life Magazine even ran a cover of Dewey with the caption “The Next President of the United States.” As for the topsy-turvy results reported by the Chicago Tribune, it became the most famous mistaken headline in our nation’s history!

The Washington Post tried to apologize, inviting the president to a banquet, saying the entire staff would wear sackcloth and ashes to “eat crow,” while the president, in white tie, would be served turkey. President Truman declined, stating, “We should all get together now and make a country in which everybody can eat turkey whenever they please.” The president, when asked about the fifty Newsweek election experts, said, “I know every one of those fifty fellows. Not one of them has enough sense to pound sand in a rat hole.” The Tribune did not apologize until after President Truman’s death, at the paper’s 125th anniversary. It turned out the paper had relied on a Washington correspondent to project the winner of the race instead of waiting for the election returns. Nonetheless, when proved incorrect, the Tribune blamed the pollsters instead of the correspondent.

All three major pollsters—Gallup, Roper, and Crosley—throughout the election, predicted Dewey would win by a landslide. (Perhaps the newspapers trusted the Gallup poll because it predicted the 1934 election within 1 percent, as well as the 1936 election of Franklin D. Roosevelt). The Roper poll even stopped surveys in September, so confident were they of Dewey’s victory. Columnist Marquis Childs wrote, “We were wrong, all of us, completely and entirely, the commentators, the political editors, the politicians—except for Harry S Truman…”

No one except Truman himself, and his own pollster, Lester Biffle, Secretary of the Senate, who disguised himself as a chicken peddler and conducted his own poll that showed “the common people” were for Truman, understood the power of the average American citizen to make up his or her own mind. Truman knew: “The people are with us. The tide is rolling. All over the country. I have seen it in the people’s faces. The people are going to win this election.”

Truman saw it in the faces of Americans as he traversed the country on train, “engineering” the most stunning upset victory in presidential election history. His campaign visits became known as “whistle-stops.” The press down-played these visits, which drew thousands of onlookers per stop. They failed to place pictures of the events in the papers, reporting the people were not interested in voting for the president, only catching a glimpse of him. Despite this deliberate shunning, Truman carried his message to the people with integrity. He turned down potential campaign contributors who wished to sail aboard
the presidential yacht, the Williamsburg, in exchange for a contribution. Dewey, on the other hand, took ninety reporters aboard his yacht, “Victory Special,” paying port hotel bills, and even laundry expenses, in exchange for positive reporting! According to Truman, he traveled 31,700 miles and made 352 speeches, even more “off the books.” At the Dexter, Iowa “whistle-stop,” Truman addressed 96,000 farmers attending the National Plowing Contest, noting “This Republican do-nothing Congress has already stuck a pitch fork in the farmers’ back. Vote for your farms!” He held the first integrated rally in the state of Texas, stopping by an orphanage in Dallas, for he understood “the loneliness of childhood.” He talked “square” with the American people, away from the “powder and paint” of the media, relying only on “the facts.”

On election eve, Truman thanked the American people “from the bottom of my heart” for “their interest in the affairs of this great nation and the world. I trust the people, because when they know the facts, they do the right thing.” This trust in the public allowed a farmer’s son turned president to vote with his wife and daughter on election day, enjoy an afternoon with friends, and without worry go to bed early after eating a ham sandwich and drinking a glass of milk. At midnight, the Secret Service woke the president and told him he was 1.2 million votes ahead, but still expected to lose. At 4:00 a.m. the president was awakened again and told of his two million vote lead. NBC broadcaster H.V. Kaltenborn still forecasted a defeat over the radio.

President Harry S Truman placed his trust in the American people, not the American media. He trusted the American people to seek facts, not the sensational stories found in the newspapers, magazines, and TV, many such stories instigated by Dewey himself. Truman’s trust inspired him to reach out to the common voter, shake his or her hand, and speak the plain truth. As Richard Strout wrote in the *New Republic*, the Truman victory “gave a glowing and wonderful sense that the American people can’t be tricked by polls, know their own mind, and picked the rather unlikely but courageous figure of Truman to carry on their banner.”

*Renee’ Critcher Lyons is an assistant professor in the School Library Media Program at East Tennessee State University. Be sure to check out her latest book *TEACHING CIVICS IN THE LIBRARY: AN INSTRUCTIONAL AND HISTORICAL GUIDE FOR SCHOOL AND PUBLIC LIBRARIANS* (McFarland, 2015).*

**Read More**

- Learn how music heals all wounds, and how President Truman’s piano initiated a restoration of the White House, in “A Perfect Image” by Linda Sue Park, found in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*. Also, be sure to look at Stéphanie Jorisch’s coordinating illustration highlighting Truman’s musical talent.
- Read about the note Maniac Magee author Jerry Spinelli delivered (almost) to President Truman in “A Note for the President,” found in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*. Terry Widener’s accompanying illustration features a courageous young Spinelli.
- Almost heeeeeeaaarrrr specters speaking from the page, and discover President Truman’s opinion about White House hauntings, in M.T. Anderson’s “The House Haunts,” found in *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out*. Don’t miss a transparent Abigail Adams floating through the White House with her load of laundry in Mark Teague’s complementary illustration.
- Learn why Truman began playing piano in Heather Lang’s *Presidents Are People Too!*
- Learn more about President Truman and his legacy on the *Harry S Truman Presidential Facts page* on OurWhiteHouse.org.
Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

• Do you believe news sources can be trusted to reveal “the facts” in a presidential election? Why or why not?
• To express his ideas and plans to build upon and improve the workings of our government, and therefore the standard of living, in America after World War II, President Truman decided to travel by train across the country to reach out and appeal to the working class. If you were running for president in twenty-first century America, what strategy would you use (remember Truman’s strategy was dubbed a “whistle-stop” campaign) to reach the American people? Would it be a time-honored strategy or a new, creative approach, such as President Truman’s?
• Have you ever read an incorrect fact in a newspaper, magazine, or online article? If so, what was the incorrect source and where did you eventually find accurate information?
• Have you ever been unfairly labeled an underdog, similar to Harry S Truman in the 1948 election? What actions did you take to overcome your obstacles, rather than be defeated by them?

Activities for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

• Conduct a free poll on http://www.poll everywhere.com/, in which you survey a sample of your community in an attempt to accurately predict the outcome of the presidential election. Then, conduct the poll face-to-face, after introducing and providing your viewpoint as to a certain election issue. Chart the difference in results between the two polls. Compare the results to the presidential election outcome in November. Assessment: Poll results, charts.
• Select an election-related article of interest from a newspaper. Identify the main idea and essential message from the story by answering the five Ws and one H (Who, What, When, Where, Why, How). (Draw a graphic organizer with the name of the article in the middle with branching bubbles for each question). Based upon this analysis, is the news reporter objective? Why is he or she writing the story? How do you know the information is factual and/or objective? Assessment: Graphic Organizer, group discussion.
• Examine an election-related story of the same topic from the following sources: CNN, New York Times, C-SPAN, Google News, Huffington Post, Slate, and NPR. (Create a table with Facts and Opinions as the columns and the individual news sources as the rows). How did factual information differ? How was it the same? Which did you find more of – facts or opinion? Was it difficult to tell the difference between fact and opinion? Assessment: Table, group discussion.
• Using a VENN diagram, compare and contrast the political cartoons of the 1948 election found at the Truman Library with that of the current presidential election (you may use http://nieonline.com/aaec/cfct.cfm for recent cartoons). Assessment: Venn Diagram, group discussion. Note: A Venn diagram is a graphic organizer which highlights similarities and differences between sets. To complete this type of organizer, draw two intersecting circles and place what is similar about the sets within the overlapping section and what is different within the outer circles. See http://www.purplemath.com/modules/venndiag.htm

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From Buttons to Pins: Campaign Tokens Evolve

by Geri Zabela Eddins

Lawn signs, bumper stickers, and buttons have advertised the political dreams of presidential candidates for years. But did you know that campaign buttons—those typically round, colorful pins with photographs and slogans—had their start as brass clothing buttons? Our earliest presidents did not actively campaign in the style we now associate with presidential campaigns but they and their supporters did wish to commemorate their inaugurations with souvenirs. For the inauguration of George Washington, many different types of brass clothing buttons were created—some simply sported Washington’s initials, and others were engraved with “Long Live the President.” Washington himself preferred the button that included thirteen chain links encircling the button’s perimeter to represent the thirteen original states; these buttons were sewn into the jacket Washington wore during his inauguration.

These functioning commemorative buttons served as the precedent for later inauguration and campaign tokens. Brass and copper coins and medals became popular in the nineteenth century. During the campaign of 1824 Andrew Jackson became one of the first to mass produce campaign souvenirs as a means to market himself. He continued the tradition of producing brass coins and had them imprinted with his image as a military general. In the mid-nineteenth century the inventions of ferrotype and tintype enabled photographic likenesses of the candidates (rather than sculptural reliefs) to be mass produced in mini portraits surrounded by metal frames that supporters wore as lapel pins. And then later in 1896, for the campaign of William McKinley versus William Jennings Bryan, the first colorful campaign buttons were created by printing photographs and slogans on paper and then binding the paper to a metal disk that had a stick pin attached to its backside. Such campaign “buttons” have not lost their charm. Production of campaign buttons has only increased over the years, and today people wear them on jackets, purses, and backpacks to advertise their allegiance not only to presidential candidates, but to thousands of other political candidates and causes as well.

Read More

- Read more about the history of political memorabilia, including buttons, medals, pins, and postcards, and view pictures of these political tokens from the Ohio Historical Society at: www.cyberbee.com/campaign/mem.html.
- View pictures and descriptions of presidential campaign memorabilia from the Duke University Special Collections Library at: http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/americavotes/.
- Read presidential campaign slogans at: www.presidentsusa.net/campaignslogans.html.

Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

- Buttons, bumper stickers, and yard signs are all forms of basic advertising. In evaluating the effectiveness of any advertising, young people need to ask some very simple, pragmatic questions: What is the purpose of the advertising and does it succeed? Can it be easily read? Does it grab your attention? Does it include the candidate’s name? Does it help you to remember the candidate’s name?
- What buttons, bumper stickers, and yard signs have you seen? Think about what makes them memorable. Is it because you support the candidate or cause? Do the tokens contain catchy slogans? Do you remember them because they are designed well?
- What colors and designs do you think are the most effective? Is it better to include a candidate’s photograph or just his or her name?
- If you were running for president and could only produce one type of token (buttons, bumper stickers, or yard signs), which one would you choose? Why? Which token do you think provides the best advertising?
Activity Suggestions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

- Make your own campaign buttons! You can make buttons to advertise your devotion to a certain cause or candidate. You may choose to make buttons for your own school election. If your school is hosting a mock election for U.S. president, you can make buttons to promote your favorite candidate. Kits for making official-looking buttons are available at craft stores, but you can also make buttons using poster board, markers, and pins. Cut circles from the poster board, draw your design with pencil, and then color it in with markers or crayons. You can trace around the bottom of a cup to make perfect circles, or you can use a protractor. You can also design your button using a computer. After you finish your button, tape a safety pin to the back so you can wear the button on your shirt or backpack.

- Make a collage of campaign buttons that promote ideas, causes, and candidates who are important to you. You can download images of buttons or draw your own. Cut them out, and glue them in any manner you think is most visually appealing to a sheet of paper or poster board. You might even glue them on a funny hat just like political delegates do at their conventions!

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Presidential Debates:
Watch the Debates with Your Kids and Teens!

By Mary Brigid Barrett

Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely.
The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.
Franklin D. Roosevelt

Watch the presidential debates with your kids and teens. Sharing the experience will inspire them to take an interest in the presidential election. A follow-up family conversation can also introduce the topic of responsible and active citizen participation, and why being an informed citizen is essential to a healthy democracy. If we want young people to be as excited about their right to vote as they are about obtaining their driver’s licenses, we need to enthusiastically share our own interest in the election process with them. Watching the presidential debates together as a family is a great place to start.

- Make an event of the presidential debates. In the pre-digital world, American families would bring hampers of food to munch on while they listened to presidential candidates argue and pontificate in public parks and forums. Sharing a bowl of popcorn and soft drinks would go a long way in making the current presidential debates palatable for all generations.

- Show your kids and teens that you value their concerns about the state of our nation and the upcoming elections. Let them know you are eager to hear their opinions. Challenge them to support their opinions with facts and reasons. Try to refrain from voicing your own opinions concerning presidential candidates and issues before the debates; let young people know you want them to think for themselves and form their own opinions.

- Informally discuss the concept of the presidential debates with young people before you watch them, especially if this will be the first time your kids or teens have watched a presidential debate. Let them know why presidential candidates debate. Explain why it’s important for everyone in the country to listen to and/or watch the debates. From the Annenberg Foundation: Every four years since the mid-20th century, the major U.S. presidential candidates have faced off in a series of televised debates leading up to the general election. While not an explicit requirement for candidates, debates have been viewed as a way for the public to get to know the candidates and their positions, as well as highlight the differences in their proposed policies. Debates give the candidates a chance to deliver their message on a massive public stage while providing an opportunity for committed and undecided voters to get to know the candidates on an in depth level - both their personalities and their stances on the issues - helping to determine their vote.

- If you need to inform yourself about presidential debates, read and share pertinent newspaper and news magazine articles with your kids and teens in the days before the debate. Never be afraid to admit to your kids that you need to seek information to educate yourself—in doing so you become a fantastic role model. Besides, kids love it when adults admit they don’t know everything. When seeking and sharing objective news sources, make sure those sources represent multiple perspectives.
On the day of the debate, try to sit down for a minute with your kids and teens and make a list of things, or issues, that are important to them and you. Is a healthy environment a big issue to your kids? Are they concerned about global warming? What do they think of their school, their educational opportunities? What are their thoughts and concerns related to war and terrorism? Make sure one of your kids shares your family’s “things we care about” list right before you watch the debate so you can all listen to hear if the candidates address issues important to you and your kids. (One of your younger kids will love the opportunity to be the family spokesperson.)

Don’t watch the debate “pre-game.” Listen and/or watch the presidential debates free of pundits and so-called political experts. Then your teens and kids, and you, can decide for yourselves what you think about the candidates and their policies. You may want to watch the debates on C-Span or listen to them on a public radio station, to free yourself and your kids from the slanted opinions of the pundits and political spin doctors.

During the debate, keep a pencil and paper nearby to jot down questions that are not answered by the candidates, as well as questions that occur to you and your kids as the debate progresses. Ask your kids what questions and follow-ups they would ask the candidates if they had the opportunity to quiz them on air. After the debate you may want to check on objective fact checker websites to ascertain which candidates gave factual and truthful responses.

Ask your kids and teens if they think the debate moderators are respectful. Are the moderators well informed themselves? Are they fair in giving each candidate a chance to respond? Do they confront candidates who avoid answering pointed questions? Are they asking questions across a broad range of important topics?

When the debate is over, turn the television or radio off. Ask your kids and teens what they thought about the debate. Which candidate cared about issues important to them? Which candidate best communicated his or her ideas? Which candidate offered viable pragmatic solutions to important problems? Which candidate personified leadership qualities in action, tone, and bearing? Which candidate responded to questions with insight, wisdom, grace, and strength? Which candidate demonstrated compassion and empathy for those in our society who are poor or have special challenges? Which candidate best articulated his or her vision for our nature’s future?

Let your kids and teens voice their thoughts and opinions before you voice your own. They can then think for themselves and feel free to express those thoughts with confidence. If you disagree, do not disparage or disrespect them. Yes, you may be more experienced, but they have their own unique experiences and ideas on which they base their decisions. Do challenge them to make decisions based on matters of sound reason, not on surface personality issues.

Ask your kids and teens if they have questions for the candidates that went unanswered. If yes, they can go to the candidates’ websites, read each candidate’s platform, and see if they can find the answers to their questions. If they still have questions, encourage your kids and teens to email the candidates their questions and concerns. Each candidate’s website has contact information with suggestions on how to contact the candidates.

Have a great family conversation surrounding the debates and continue the conversation throughout the election. A great family follow-up would be to attend a political presidential event if one of the candidates visits your town or county during the campaign. And be sure to take your kids with you when you vote so they can see how it’s done and experience the excitement at the polls. Taking the time to bring them along with you to the polls will show them how vitally important it is to vote.

Mary Brigid Barrett is the founder, president, and executive director of the NCBLA, as well as a children’s book author and illustrator. Her most recent books are ALL FALL DOWN and PAT-A-CAKE, illustrated by LeUyen Pham, published by Candlewick Press Publishing.
Great Debate Web Links
For other suggestions on the best way to watch the presidential debates, read Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s guest blog on the Bill Moyers Journal website at:
www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2008/01/guest_blogger_debate_watching.html

Dr. Jamieson is the Elizabeth Ware Packard Professor of Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication and Walter and Leonore Annenberg Director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. She also suggests that you fact check candidates’ debate statements at the following fact check sites:

- **FactCheck.org**
  FactCheck.org is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, which Jamieson directs, that aims to monitor the accuracy of major national candidates’ statements and rhetoric.

- **Politifact and Truth-0-Meter**
  Politifact is an extensively cross-referenced fact-checking resource run as a joint project by the *St. Petersburg Times* and *Congressional Quarterly*.

For current debate rules, times, and locations, go to the official nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates website at:  **www.debates.org/**

**Following are educational sites for more information about presidential debate history.** Some of the sites were originated during past presidential elections but do contain pertinent information about presidential debates in general.

- **www.debates.org/**
- **www.e-spanclassroom.org/**
- **www.museum.tv/debateweb/html/index.htm**
- **www.pbs.org/now/politics/debatehistory.html**
- **http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/debatehistory2.html**
- **https://ballotpedia.org/Presidential_debates_%282015-2016%29**
- **https://debate.uvm.edu/dcpdf/cpd2000.pdf**
- **http://millercenter.org/debates/presidential-debates**
- **http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/eight-lessons-for-the-presidential-debates-1-59255565/?no-ist**

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Choosing Sides: The Rise of Party Politics

by Geri Zabela Eddins

Our first two presidents, George Washington and John Adams, both adamantly opposed the development of political parties. As early as 1780, seven years before the Constitutional Convention first met, Adams declared, “There is nothing I dread so much as a division of the Republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader and converting measures in opposition to each other. This, in my humble apprehension, is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our Constitution.” Despite such trepidation, the Founding Fathers wrote nothing about political parties in the Constitution.

The Federalist and Democratic-Republican Parties Emerge

During the early, formative years of our nation’s history, the interests of north and south, rich and poor, and industry and agriculture were tossed into the same pressure cooker of dissent until two profoundly different visions for the country erupted. Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton believed that our new country’s federal government should be more powerful. Hamilton particularly advocated for the creation of a national bank that would establish fiscal policy, institute credit, and standardize a national currency. Opponents feared that a stronger federal government would function more like a monarchy and wipe out the newly born democracy. Such opponents, such as Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and House Representative James Madison, believed it more prudent to provide more power to individual states. Jefferson also believed the creation of a national bank was not permitted by the Constitution. Finding the distance separating their visions only widening, Hamilton formed the Federalist Party and Jefferson created the Republican Party. (The Republican Party was later called the Democratic-Republican Party.) Both parties emerged during the midst of Washington’s second term, and Washington was not pleased. Washington believed that such parties would only fracture our nation and “render alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection.” Washington wrote these words in his farewell address, pleading with Americans to set aside their differences and remain unified.

Two Opposing Parties Rise to the Top

Despite Washington’s urgent words of caution, the two new political parties assumed center stage in the 1796 election to wrestle not only with domestic issues, but also with our continuing contentious relationship with England. Our hard-fought independence guaranteed our freedom, but it did not guarantee normalized relations. The ratification of the Jay Treaty in 1794, in which England agreed to evacuate their posts on the western frontier and to secure American shipping routes, had helped to calm our turbulent relationship, but opponents believed the treaty was ineffective. So, in one corner stood the Federalist John Adams, who had supported the Jay Treaty as a means to avoid war and continue trade. In the opposing corner stood the Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson, who believed the treaty to be counter to American interests because it did not prevent the British from engaging in impressment (the practice of removing seamen from American ships and forcing them to serve in the British Navy). Social conventions of the time prevented both Adams and Jefferson from campaigning on their own behalf, but their parties’ supporters rose to the challenge and assumed the mantle of their candidates. The Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans vigorously promoted their respective candidates by fighting a brutal battle in the press. Those who championed Adams’ candidacy vilified Jefferson as an atheist and a “mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father.” Jefferson’s supporters did not remain silent. They retaliated with their own vicious attacks against Adams, condemning him as a monarchist who sought to become a king and branding him as a fool and a hypocrite.
Because the election procedures established in the Constitution did not anticipate the rise of political parties, neither party found the complete executive power it had sought. At the time, the Constitution specified that each elector cast two votes but did not specify one as being for president and the other as being for vice president—so all votes were counted together. As a result, Adams received the most number of votes and became president, and his opponent Jefferson received the second highest number of votes and became his vice president. So, the nation’s top two executives represented not only widely disparate views, but also two opposing political parties. When the following election resulted in a tie that needed to be resolved by the House of Representatives, it became clear that the unanticipated rise of political parties compelled significant change to the Constitution. Congress therefore ratified the Twelfth Amendment in 1804. This amendment requires separate votes for president and vice president and also stipulates that the president and vice president must come from different states.

**The Parties Grow and Evolve**

American politics has been dominated by a two-party system ever since Washington retired to Mount Vernon, but the parties have changed, separated, and evolved dramatically as the nation was forced to grapple with new challenges at home and abroad. By 1816 the Federalist Party had dissolved, but Jefferson’s Democratic-Republican Party remained and continues to exist today as the Democratic Party. Over the years different parties have set foot in the national spotlight—the Whigs, the Liberty Party, the Free Soil Party—but by the 1860s the party system had evolved into two major parties whose names we easily recognize—the Democrats and the Republicans. Although we consider the Democrats and Republicans to be the two major parties of modern times, their early policies varied quite a bit from modern standards. A twenty-first century Republican is undoubtedly proud of the early party’s stand against slavery, but is likely to cringe at its support of protectionist tariffs (taxes levied on imported goods to restrict trade) rather than free trade. Individual opinions continue to vary within each party, but today most Republicans believe that government should tax people less, intervene in people’s lives as little as possible, and maintain a strong military. On the other hand Democrats support government programs that help those in need, as well as protection of civil rights, public education, and environmental issues.

**Third Parties Exert Influence**

The longstanding dominance of the Democratic and Republican parties is demonstrated in the simple fact that every single president since the Civil War has been a nominee from those two parties. Although third parties have yet to win the White House, they do manage to exert significant influence in national politics despite such a formidable stronghold. One way third parties successfully influence American politics is by lifting certain issues into the limelight—such as stronger civil liberties and conservation—that Democrats and Republicans may be ignoring. If enough citizens take notice and demand action, then the two major parties may consider addressing those issues in their own platforms. In the late nineteenth century a group of farmers angered by the price collapse of agricultural products brought ideas for economic and political reform to Democratic and Republican leaders. The farmers’ innovative ideas fell on deaf ears, but they were not deterred. They created their own party—the Populists. In 1892 the Populists held their own convention and nominated a presidential candidate, James Weaver. When the votes were tallied it was clear that the Populist Party platform had resonated with voters. Though Weaver did not win the presidency, he did win over one million votes. The Democrats were duly impressed and chose to sponsor many of the Populist Party’s causes in the following election. Though the Populist Party faded into history, their ideas have greatly influenced American life. In fact, their demands to limit the work day to eight hours; to implement a graduated income tax; and to allow the people, rather than the state legislatures, to elect Senators by a popular vote were all eventually enacted into law. One additional significant role played by third parties is their ability to attract new constituencies and thereby increase overall voter turnout.
Organizing Committees and Conventions

When Jefferson neared the end of his two terms as president in 1809, his fellow Democratic-Republican leaders recognized the critical need to recruit and promote a new candidate. They quickly formed a committee to debate and decide who would become their next nominee. This process, known as a caucus, continued to serve the political parties well for some time because the potential candidates were all distinguished men who had served in the American Revolution and at the Constitutional Convention. But over time newer generations of men had made names for themselves by serving at local and state levels. Although their achievements were recognized locally, they were unknown on the national stage. To promote these lesser-known candidates, the political parties began hosting conventions to nominate candidates. The first national convention was held by America’s first third party, the Anti-Masons, who organized themselves in 1827 to oppose what they believed was improper influence of government by the secret, fraternal organization known as the Masons. In the fall of 1831 the Anti-Masonic Party met in Baltimore to not only nominate its candidate, but to also establish a platform (the official views, policies, and agenda of a political party). Delegates at these early conventions debated the qualifications of contenders from different states and then ultimately chose one candidate to represent their party in the election. This process changed in the 1970s, however, when primary elections became the venue for selecting nominees. With the primaries now in control of selecting each party’s presidential nominee, modern party conventions concentrate their efforts on debating and finalizing the party platform and promoting that platform and nominee to the country. Although the nominee’s acceptance speech serves as the much-anticipated grand finale of the party’s convention, his or her acceptance at this point is a formality that works to energize the party faithful and perhaps persuade undecided voters.

Despite the non-stop party atmosphere and perfectly choreographed schedule of events we commonly associate with modern party conventions, past conventions have fostered fine, shining moments of democracy, as well as shameful dark moments of violence. In 1856 as the United States became increasingly overwhelmed by the menacing threat of Civil War, the newly organized Republican Party engaged in robust debate then proclaimed its opposition to slavery as a key plank in its party platform during the first day of its very first convention. Over one hundred years later the nation was again shadowed by crisis as it fought an unpopular war in Vietnam and struggled with civil rights issues. The mounting national tensions exploded on the streets of Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention as anti-war demonstrators who had hoped to march peacefully clashed with police, generating riots that terrorized the city for five days. The convention itself was also thrust into chaos as the demands to make ending the Vietnam War were voted down from its platform, prompting many delegates to protest nonviolently by putting on black armbands and singing "We Shall Overcome."

Today the major political parties are professional organizations with national offices in Washington, D.C. The parties work not only to recruit, nominate, and support presidential candidates, but also to support politicians and policies at the state and local levels. One additional responsibility of modern political parties that has become even more critical and often controversial is fundraising. With the advent of new technologies that enable party messages to be distributed to even more people, the cost of political campaigns has risen higher than the balloons that float away at the end of presidential conventions. Just one 30-second TV commercial can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Read More

- To view a timeline that illustrates the development of American political parties, check out: www.edgate.com/elections/inactive/the_parties/.
- Visit the website of the Democratic Party at: www.democrats.org/.
- Visit the website of the Republican Party at: www.gop.com/.
- Visit the website of the Constitution Party at: www.constitutionparty.com/.
- Visit the website of the Libertarian Party at: www.lp.org.
- Read the complete text of the Twelfth Amendment at: www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html.
Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

- What positive roles do you think political parties play?

- Many people believe that John Adams’ and George Washington’s predictions that political parties would only serve to polarize Americans from each other have been realized. Do you agree? Why or why not?

- Hot-button issues such as overseeing the economy, providing affordable health care, and dealing with rogue foreign nations trigger a wide variety of opinions and ideas for action. Do you think it is possible in our diverse nation for most people to agree on such issues without the guidance of a political party? Is it OK to “agree to disagree” on some issues? What issues are most important to you?

- Why do you think we continue to have a two-party system? Do you think it is possible for a third-party candidate to become elected? Do you think third parties benefit the nation? How so? How would it be possible for third parties to be given a greater voice in American politics?

Activity Suggestions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

- Think about campaign fundraising and expenses. In the 2008 presidential campaign John McCain raised over $200 million, whereas Barack Obama raised more than twice that amount—over $450 million. Do you think this is fair? Why or why not? Pretend that you or someone you know is running for president, and think about how you would raise money to carry out a campaign. Make a list of fundraising ideas. Then, imagine you have raised $100 million to fund your campaign. How would you spend it? Make a list of potential campaign expenditures and number them by priority. Be sure to consider expenses such as staff salaries, travel, advertising, and media development. Think about how a lower-budget campaign can prioritize spending to maximize the difference. How do you think the McCain campaign maximized their much lower budget?

- Have your class or family create a new political party and corresponding presidential campaign. Find a complete lesson plan online for this project titled “Donkeys and Elephants and Voters, Oh My!” sponsored by PBS’s Democracy Project at: http://pbskids.org/democracy/educators/donkeys.html.

- Compare and contrast America’s political parties! Divide your class or family into groups, and assign each group to research one of the political parties. Try to research at least one of America’s third parties. Write each party’s mission and platform on a poster board. Decorate the poster with the party’s mascots and symbols. Post all boards side by side, and have each student compare and contrast the parties’ platforms. Make a list of key issues to serve as a starting point. Key issues might include the economy, health care, energy, and foreign relations. What issues stand out as being promoted strongly by one party or as being ignored by another? On what issues do some parties have similar ideas? After each student has been able to complete a thorough analysis, host a debate to discuss the parties’ stands on the issues.
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The Donkey and the Elephant

by Helen Kampion

The donkey and elephant have long represented the Democratic and Republican Parties. But how did they choose them? Did they spend months deliberating? Was a law passed? Was there a public vote? Actually neither party set out to find an icon. The acceptance of these symbols grew out of negative comments and political cartoons. Here’s how it happened.

Democrats

The Democratic Party’s first association with the donkey came about during the 1828 campaign of Democrat Andrew Jackson. Running on a populist platform (by the people, for the people) and using a slogan of “Let the People Rule,” Jackson’s opponents referred to him as a jackass (donkey). Much to their chagrin, Jackson incorporated the jackass into his campaign posters. During Jackson’s presidency the donkey was used to symbolize his stubbornness by his opponents.

After Andrew Jackson left office, political cartoonists furthered the Democrat and donkey connection. An 1837 cartoon depicted Jackson leading a donkey which refused to follow, portraying that Democrats would not be led by the previous president.

The habit of associating the donkey and the Democratic Party had begun.

Republicans

The earliest connection of the elephant to the Republican Party was an illustration in an 1864 Abraham Lincoln presidential campaign newspaper, Father Abraham. It showed an elephant holding a banner and celebrating Union victories. During the Civil War, “seeing the elephant” was slang for engaging in combat so the elephant was a logical choice to represent successful battles.

The elephant appeared again in an 1872 issue of Harper’s Weekly where it depicted Liberal Republicans.

For whatever reason, political cartoonists and the public did not yet associate the elephant with the Republican Party.

THOMAS NAST, Political Cartoonist

Thomas Nast is widely credited with perpetuating the donkey and elephant as symbols for the Democratic and Republican Parties. Nast first used the donkey in an 1870 issue of Harper’s Weekly to represent an anti-war faction with whom he disagreed and in 1871, he used the elephant to alert Republicans that their intra-party fighting was detrimental to the upcoming elections.
However, it was Nast’s 1874 *Harper’s Weekly* cartoon entitled “Third Term Panic” (pictured below) that solidified the use of symbols.

Republican Ulysses Grant had been president for two terms and was contemplating a third (it wasn’t until 1951 when the 22nd Amendment limited presidents to two terms). The cartoon depicted a donkey wearing a lion’s skin emblazoned with the words “Caesarism” (an undemocratic attempt to wield imperial power) frightening away an elephant wearing the words, “Republican Vote.” After this cartoon appeared, Nast used the elephant again and again to represent the “Republican Vote.” Eventually the “Vote” fell away and the elephant and Republican Party became synonymous.

It’s amazing to think that an insult, a war phrase, and dry humor influenced the symbols which came to represent two of the most powerful political parties in the world.

On the next page are two additional cartoons that include the donkey and elephant created by Thomas Nast, both of which were featured on the cover of *Harper’s Weekly*.

*Helen Kampion holds an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College and an MBA from Boston University. After a successful career in business, she became a writer of both fiction and non-fiction for young readers, including middle-grade novels and picture book biographies. Helen serves as Treasurer of the NCBLA.*
Read More

- Read more about Thomas Nast, take a look at a portfolio of his cartoons, and review questions in the teacher’s guide on the Cartoons website created by the Ohio State University Libraries at http://cartoons.osu.edu/digital_albums/thomasnast/
- Our first two presidents, George Washington and John Adams, both adamantly opposed the development of political parties. Yet, our nation’s first two political parties—the Federalist Party and the Republican Party—were both formed during Washington’s second term. Learn all about the rise of political parties in America and how they have changed over the years in “Choosing Sides: The Rise of Party Politics.”
- Discover more information about all our nation’s political parties by checking out the “Links for National Political Parties.”
- Not all our presidents have been a Democrat or a Republican! Discover the political party affiliation of each of our nation’s presidents, including which presidents were Whigs, in “The Presidential Fact Files” on OurWhiteHouse.org.
Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

- What positive and negative traits do donkeys have?
- What positive and negative traits do elephants have?
- Do you think the donkey and elephant were the best choices to represent the Democratic and Republican Parties? Why? Why not? What animals would you have picked and why?
- What kind of animal best represents you? Why?
- Do you think political cartoons influence readers? How so?
- Would a cartoon change your mind or just make you aware of the other side of an issue?
- Are political cartoons a good use of Freedom of Speech?

Activities for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

Research how the Democratic and Republican Parties came to be. The first political party called themselves Federalists. Visit your local library to learn more and also read “Choosing Sides: The Rise of Party Politics.”

Discuss the following:

- Why was the first party called the Federalists? What did they stand for?
- What party came next? What did they stand for?
- What did this next party change their name to?
- What happened to the Federalists after the War of 1812?
- Who became the Whigs?

How did the Republican Party get the name Grand Old Party?

What are the differences between our current Democratic and Republican Parties?

How many of our Presidents were Democrats? How many of our Presidents were Republicans?

Divide the class into two groups: Democrats and Republicans. Have each group research their party to determine the basic platforms and the names and dates of their party’s presidents. Have each group present its party’s core beliefs.

As a class, draw a time line of our presidents, identifying each party. Have we had more Democratic or Republican presidents?

Our nation has had other political parties in our history.

- What were they?
- Did they have mascots or symbols to represent them?
- Do you think the symbols were accurate?

Divide the class into three groups and give them a century to research (1800, 1900, and 2000). Identify each party, what it stood for, if it had a mascot, and how that mascot reflected the party’s beliefs.

Elephants are native to Asia and Africa and donkeys were brought here by explorers. Have the class study animals that were native to America in the 1800s and come up with two that best represent the Democrats and Republicans. Discuss why each was chosen and how its characteristics reflect the Democratic and Republican Parties.
Reference Sources

Books

Online Resources

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Links for National Political Parties

There are five parties that can nominate candidates for public office: the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, the Libertarian Party, the Constitution Party, and the Green Party. Each party has a website where you can learn more about their platform and philosophies.

🌟 The Democratic Party:  www.democrats.org
🌟 The Republican Party:  www.gop.org
🌟 The Libertarian Party:  www.lp.org
🌟 The Constitution Party:  www.constitutionparty.com
🌟 The Green Party:  www.gp.org
Who Gets To Vote?

by Geri Zabela Eddins

Today all U.S. citizens who are at least eighteen years old and not incarcerated are guaranteed the right to vote. However, voting rights were initially a privilege given to a small, elite part of the population. In fact, until the mid 1850s, only twenty-one-year-old white men who owned land (and who were not a member of certain religions) could vote. For many years Americans were denied the right to vote based on their race, gender, religion, age, economic status, and place of residence. Here’s a brief summary of how voting rights have increased over the years:

• In 1776 all white men who own property have the right to vote, except for Catholics, Jews, and Quakers.
• In 1856 North Carolina becomes the last state to remove the restriction that prevents citizens who do not own property from voting, so now all white men who are not convicted criminals can vote.
• In 1870 Congress ratifies the Fifteenth Amendment, which guarantees all non-white men the right to vote. However, this right was often denied through intimidation and the imposition of poll taxes, which many could not pay.
• Women are granted the right to vote in 1920 via the Nineteenth Amendment.
• Native Americans can vote in 1924 when Congress grants full U.S. citizenship to all Native Americans via the Indian Citizenship Act. This Act declares all Indians who have not yet been granted citizenship through marriage, military service, treaties, or other specialized laws and who were also born within the U.S. to be citizens, giving them the right to vote. However, many Native Americans continue to be denied the right to vote by states until 1948.
• Residents who live in the District of Columbia are granted the right to vote in 1961 by the Twenty-third Amendment.
• Poll taxes are prohibited by the Twenty-fourth Amendment in 1964 to ensure no poor American is denied the right to vote because of an inability to pay.
• In 1971 Congress ratifies the Twenty-sixth Amendment, which guarantees that all U.S. citizens who are eighteen years old can vote. Previously, Americans had to be twenty-one years old to vote.

Even though voting rights have expanded substantially over the years, many people do not execute their right to vote. Beginning in the 1960s the percentage of people voting began to decrease. The 2000 presidential election attracted the most voters in years—over 50 percent of those eighteen and older. The voting rate increased to over 55 percent in the 2004 election, with much of the increase attributed to younger Americans. An additional five million voters cast their votes in the 2008 election, which raised the voting rate to nearly 57 percent. This increase was due to votes from Hispanic, African-American, and Asian voters. The voting rate dropped, however, in the 2012 presidential election. Only 54.9 percent of eligible voters chose to vote that year.

People provide many excuses for not voting. Poor weather keeps some people from going to the polls, but many people simply do not believe that his or her vote counts. But it does—every single vote counts!
Read More

• For a complete history of voting rights in the U.S., check out the voting rights timeline at the American Civil Liberties Union’s website: www.aclu.org/timelines/timeline-voting-rights-act.

• For nonpartisan information about voting rights and election procedures, refer to the League of Women Voters’ website: www.lwv.org/.

• For “one-stop” access to election-related information, including factual data about candidates and how to locate your polling place, check out: http://vote411.org/.

• Read the complete text of the Constitutional amendments that expand voting rights at:
  www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=100

Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

• Do you believe it is important to vote? Why or why not?

• As of 2012, only 67 percent of eligible voters were registered to vote in the United States, but 95 percent of eligible voters were registered in Canada and Mexico. Why do you think so many Americans choose not to register?

• Why do you think some people choose not to vote? Is it acceptable not to vote? What are some sensible reasons for not voting?

• Many people do not believe that his or her vote counts even though a number of elections have been decided by extremely slim margins. Why does every single vote count? Or does it?

• How can young people who are not yet old enough to vote make their voices heard? What can young people do to encourage eligible friends and family members to register and vote?

• Some people think that voting for a third party candidate (someone who is not a Democrat or Republican) is wasting their vote. What do you think?

Activity Suggestions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

• Host a mock election in your home or classroom. Your “election” can focus on actual candidates who are running for office, or you may choose to vote on favorite books, athletes, or TV characters. Young people may choose to engage in typical campaign activities, such as advertising, speeches, and debates to promote their “candidates” before they actually vote. Consider having some students report on the campaign and election results by addressing the school during morning announcements, writing articles for your school newspaper, and producing video reports.

• Check out kid-friendly election coverage, classroom activities, lesson plans, and games at Scholastic’s website: election.scholastic.com

• Find classroom activities and resources prepared by Project Vote Smart at: www.votesmart.org/resource_classroom.php.
Reference Sources

Books

Online Resources
www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html

www.lwv.org/content/electing-president-everything-you-need-know


www.lwv.org

http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm


www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3750272

presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php

www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/voting/cb09-110.html


www.aclu.org/timelines/timeline-voting-rights-act

“Why foreign election observers would rate the United States near the bottom.” 16 September 2008.
<www.prospect.org/cs/articles?articleId=8960.>

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From Peas to Paper to IPads: The Evolution of the Ballot in America

by Heather Lang

The right to vote is one of our most important privileges as American citizens. On Election Day, we mark our choices on a ballot—typically a card or sheet of paper. A ballot was not always a piece of paper. “Ballot” comes from the word “ballotta” which in Italian means, little ball. In early America a ballot could have been just that: a small ball or an object shaped like a ball, such as a pea or a shell or even a bullet. In Pennsylvania people voted by dropping beans in a hat.

In many states people also voted *viva voce*—by voice. “All in favor, say ‘aye’!” Or perhaps the voter would approach the voting table and state his choice to the election judge.

These seemed like practical ways to vote at a time when many voters were illiterate. Some states used paper ballots, but it was BYOB: bring your own ballot! Voters could write down their vote on a piece of paper, but if they misspelled the name it might not count. Some voters cut their ballots out of the newspaper or got them at the polls where politicians handed out party tickets. These ballots were often big and colorful making it clear whom the voter supported. The voter either handed the ballot to an election clerk or placed it in a container, such as a ballot box or a tin canister. Some were locked; some were left unguarded.

The Constitution left it up to each state to decide what voting mechanism it would use, but until the late nineteenth century almost all states had one thing in common: voting was a public act. Many people thought the idea of voting privately, like we do today, was disgraceful and cowardly.

This early voting system was wrought with fraud and abuse. Politicians, thugs, and partisans intimidated voters at the polls. Tenant farmers opted to stay home rather than face their landlords while casting their votes. It was legal for politicians to bribe voters by handing out their party ticket with a coin. Ballots were stolen. Voters were mugged. Ballot boxes were stuffed or designed with hidden compartments so votes could be added without unlocking them. Not surprisingly there were sometimes more votes than voters.

As our country evolved, so did our voting system. In the nineteenth century our population exploded from about 4 million in 1790 to about 76 million in 1900. Initially voting was restricted to white men with property, but during the nineteenth century suffrage began to expand, further increasing the number of voters. Voting by tossing beans in a hat was no longer practical.

In 1888 Massachusetts was the first state to adopt the Australian ballot. This system required the government to provide uniform paper ballots that listed all individuals running for office. It also called for voting to be done in secret. New security procedures increased the safety of ballot boxes. Many states followed this model since it reduced fraud, violence, and intimidation, and it effectively addressed the increasing size of the electorate. Still, it was not a perfect system. Election judges disagreed about how to read a marked ballot, and it was not a good solution for illiterate voters. In some states the black vote decreased.

Along with a new voting system came new voting equipment. In 1892 the mechanical-lever machine promised to eliminate the paper ballot. This machine produced immediate election results and eliminated the problems with human bias in reading and counting ballots. However, there were no paper ballots to fall back on in case of mechanical failure or tampering.

The punch-card voting machine made its debut in 1964. The paper ballots are pre-scored. When the voter punches in his or her choice, a little piece of paper called a chad is punched through, making a hole in the ballot. But what if the punch isn’t clean, leaving a dimple or a dangling chad? The machine will not count the vote. This problem put into question the results of the 2000 election between George W. Bush and Al Gore.
There are several other types of voting machines commonly used today that store votes electronically. Direct recording electronic voting machines are paperless with touch screens or push buttons. A computer memory device records votes. Computer scientists and security experts argue that these electronic machines have many security risks. For example, a hijacker could easily use a Radio Frequency remote control device to intercept and change votes.

How about internet voting? We can pay bills and taxes online, wouldn’t it be convenient to vote from the comfort of our own homes? In 2011 disabled residents in Oregon cast their ballots using IPads. While internet voting could definitely increase voter turnout, hacking and security risks are significant. The D.C. Elections Board planned to use online voting in 2010 and tested the system by challenging anyone to hack it. Within 36 hours, a University of Michigan professor and some of his graduate students had gained complete control of the election server and could change votes at will.

As our country grows and evolves, we must continue to assess our voting technology. Whether pea, paper, or IPad, the form of the ballot is critical to the integrity of our right to vote and our democratic process.


**Read More**
- Read more about our country’s voting process in “Getting the Votes and Getting Elected: The Popular Vote vs. the Electoral College.”
- Read more about the history of voting rights in our country in “Who Gets to Vote.”

**Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom**
- Would you vote differently if you were voting privately instead of voting in front of your parent, teacher, class, or friends? Why or why not?
- Think of some times recently when you have had to cast a vote. What method did you use (e.g. viva voce, paper ballot), and was the vote public or private? Do you think that was the best method? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the most secure voting system? Why?

**Activities for Young People at Home and in the Classroom**
- Hold a mock election. It could be for a real person and position or for an imaginary position using television characters or other famous people. What is the most appropriate type of ballot and voting equipment for the election (viva voce, ball, paper ballot, electronic vote)? Are there any rules or can individuals use bribery and intimidation to persuade voters to vote for their favorite candidate? Should it be public or private? Design your own ballot and hold your election.
- Divide the classroom up into two groups. Each will hold an election for either a real or imaginary position. One group will follow modern day voting procedures (private voting). The other group can set up their election based on the loose procedures and public voting system used in early America. The entire class will participate in each election. What were the similarities and differences?
Reference Sources

Books

Online Resources

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Getting the Votes and Getting Elected: The Popular Vote vs. the Electoral College

by Geri Zabela Eddins

We vote for a new president every four years, on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, as established by Article II of the Constitution. Following the long, grueling months of advertising, primaries, conventions, and debates that make up modern presidential campaigns, Americans at last go to their polling places to make their voices heard.

The One Who Gets the Most Votes Wins . . . Right?

You might think that the candidate who receives the most votes becomes president. Although this is almost always the case, four times in our country’s history—in 1824, 1876, 1888, and 2000—presidential candidates have lost an election even though more Americans voted for them than their opponents. How can this be? The simple answer is that the Constitution specifies that the president is officially elected by the votes cast by a group of people known as the Electoral College, not by the popular vote—those votes directly cast by each voter. Although every elected official in the U.S.—from school committee members to U.S. senators—are elected based on the popular vote, the president and vice president are elected by the Electoral College.

Understanding the Electoral College

When we vote in November and mark our choices for president and vice president, we are actually voting for electors—people who represent our choices in the Electoral College. (The term Electoral College does not refer to an institution of higher learning, but to the group of representatives from each state who are pledged to vote for a particular candidate.) So, if our ballot reads “Jane Smith” and “John Doe,” each vote for Smith is really a vote for an elector who has pledged his or her support for Smith.

Although the news media announce the probable winner the evening or morning following the November general election, the election is not official until the Electoral College votes. The chosen electors meet in December (on the first Monday after the second Wednesday) in their respective state capitals to cast their votes. The Constitution does not require electors to vote based on their state’s popular vote, but twenty-seven states do have their own laws that legally bind electors to cast their votes for their pledged candidate.

The votes cast by the electors in each state are sent to the president of the Senate to be counted before a joint session of Congress on January 6. The candidate who has received a majority of the 538 possible electoral votes (which is at least 270) is declared president. The transfer of power to the new president occurs at noon on January 20 when he or she is sworn in by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

If this drawn-out voting process sounds unfamiliar, that is because today the workings of the Electoral College are a formality. Media outlets are able to “announce” the winner with near perfect accuracy based on the popular vote because the electors are pledged to vote for their party’s candidate. So today we almost always know the winner before the Electoral College meets.
Granting Electors

Article II of the Constitution grants each state the same number of electors to the Electoral College as it has Congressional representatives and senators. However, the Constitution does not stipulate rules that each state must follow in granting the electoral votes to presidential candidates. So, even though forty-eight states use a winner-take-all system (giving all its electoral votes to the candidate who receives the highest popular vote), the states of Maine and Nebraska do not. These two states grant their electoral votes based on the popular votes in each congressional district of their states. That means if a candidate receives the majority of votes in California, he or she will be awarded all fifty-five electoral votes. But if the same candidate does not win the majority in Nebraska, he or she can still gain one or two electoral votes if he or she wins one or more district.

Winners and Losers

When a president wins the popular vote but still loses the presidency, people can become very upset. In fact, when this happened in 1876, the state of the union was so fragile that the U.S. was nearly plunged into a second civil war. This controversial election pitted Republican Rutherford B. Hayes against Democrat Samuel J. Tilden. Both candidates and parties were advocating for the same thing—government reform—so in order to differentiate their campaigns, both sides engaged in mudslinging and vicious attacks. Republicans accused Tilden of evading taxes and profiting by defending corrupt politicians. The Democrats countered by declaring Hayes had stolen the pay of soldiers who died in the Civil War. They also alleged that Hayes had even shot his own mother. The election was incredibly close, and newspapers initially reported that Tilden had won. At first it did seem that Tilden had won because he had secured 184 electoral votes and Hayes had won only 165. But, 185 electoral votes were needed to win the election, and the votes of four states became hotly contested. Congress appointed a commission of seven Democrats, seven Republicans, and one Independent to resolve the dispute. Unfortunately, the Independent candidate resigned and a Republican was appointed to replace him. This shifted the balance of the commission to eight Republicans and only seven Democrats. Not surprisingly, the commission voted along party lines and all electoral votes were awarded to Hayes. So, in the end, Tilden won the popular vote, but Hayes won the Electoral College and the election. Democrats condemned Hayes as “His Fraudulency” and “Rutherfraud B. Hayes,” then took action. They armed themselves and threatened to secede. Tilden, however, kept his cool. He recognized the potential disaster and insisted that his
supporters accept the decision. In the meantime, Democrats and Republicans also met secretly to negotiate a compromise—the Democrats would accept Hayes as president in return for certain concessions to the South, including the final removal of federal troops. Both sides agreed, and Hayes was inaugurated with the nation at peace.

Such drama is not unique to our country’s earlier elections. The 2000 election was also a nail-biter, and the news media mistakenly declared the winner. At one point the Democrat Al Gore called his opponent Republican George W. Bush to concede. Later that evening, though, Gore learned that the votes in Florida were being deemed way too close to call, so he called Bush back to retract his concession. Bush was shocked, and so was the country as news reports surfaced with stories of voters who complained that their ballots were too confusing. Many voters were convinced they had voted incorrectly. The state of Florida was thrust into turmoil as it was forced to count and recount its votes into December after an automatic machine recount on November 14 revealed that Bush had won only 300 votes more than Gore in the almost six million total votes cast. Gore demanded a manual recount, but the recount produced an additional predicament. Many of the cardboard ballots had not been punched completely by voters, making it difficult for vote counters to determine the voters’ intentions. Legal battles ensued all the way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled that the manual recounts violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment because the vote counters used different standards to determine how they counted each vote. By using different standards the recount was not treating all voters equally. They further ruled that it would be impossible to complete an accurate recount before the date required by the Constitution, so the Court stopped the count and awarded the votes to Bush. In this election, Gore won the popular vote by more than 500,000 votes, but his opponent Bush won the Electoral College and the election. Although many people throughout the country were outraged, this controversial election did not prompt calls for an armed revolution and Bush served two terms as president.

**What Were They Thinking?! The Founding Fathers Compromise**

If you think the Electoral College system is confusing and unfair, you are not alone. Many Americans share your opinion. In fact, over 700 proposals have been introduced in Congress over the last 200 years intending to either reorganize or eliminate the Electoral College. Even Thomas Jefferson wrote that he considered the Electoral College to be “the most dangerous blot in our Constitution.” So, why do we elect our presidents this way? The simple answer is that the Electoral College was the best solution to selecting the president that the delegates at the Constitutional Convention could agree on. And this solution was a compromise.

Although Jefferson had written in the Declaration of Independence that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal”, the fact is that some of the delegates at the Constitutional Convention were skeptical about the ability of each American to cast an informed vote. Regarding the ability of the common man to vote, Massachusetts delegate Elbridge Gerry commented, “The people are uninformed, and would be misled by a few designing men.” And Virginia delegate George Mason noted, “The extent of the country renders it impossible, that the people can have the requisite capacity to judge of the respective pretensions of the candidates.” It is true that in the eighteenth century many people were uneducated and illiterate. Even by 1870 – almost 100 years since America had declared its independence – 20 percent of Americans continued to be illiterate. Other obstacles also prevented people from making informed decisions, such as geography; citizens were widely scattered, and many lived in remote locations. The lack of modern technology meant that mass communication did not exist. With no way to communicate information about potential candidates to all the voters – no radio, no TV, no YouTube – the framers gave the voting power to electors, whose job it was to learn about the candidates, debate their qualifications when they met at the state capitals, and vote for us. Although giving the vote to Congress was also considered, the delegates ultimately decided this would grant the legislative body way too much power. So, creating the Electoral College became the compromise between those who favored a popular vote and those who favored allowing Congress to determine the president. Furthermore, instituting the Electoral College addressed one additional concern—the need to provide equity between states with large
and small populations. By granting each state a number of electors equal to its representatives in Congress (which differs by state) and Senators (which is two, the same for each state), they hoped that more populous states would not exercise too much power in electing the president. Therefore, even a very small state is provided a minimum number of three electors.

**Political Parties Compel Changes**

When the delegates at the Constitutional Convention decided to create an Electoral College to choose the president, their vision for how this group would work was somewhat idealistic. In their minds, electors would be educated and distinguished citizens of each state who would be free to consider each presidential candidate. They envisioned that the electors would carefully discuss the qualifications of each candidate and engage in vigorous debate before casting their votes and sending them to Congress. And in our country’s early elections the Electoral College did work this way because electors were chosen either by the state legislatures or by popular vote within each state. However, the development and rising power of political parties transformed this process from the Fathers’ idealistic vision. Over time, electors were no longer chosen for their distinction as citizens, but for their loyalty to a particular party. Today, electors are chosen at state party conventions or are appointed directly by party leaders. Each major party elects or appoints the same number of electors as the state has electoral votes. So, when the electors chosen in the November election meet in their respective state capitols in December, there is no vigorous debate about the presidential candidates’ qualifications—the electors simply vote for their party’s candidate.

One additional departure from the Fathers’ initial vision for presidential elections centers on how the votes are cast. Initially, each elector cast two votes but did not specify one as being for president and the other as being for vice president. The candidate with the most number of votes became president, and the candidate with the second highest number of votes became vice president. This system worked well for only our country’s first two elections when Washington was elected unanimously. But in the midst of Washington’s second term, political parties rose to power to influence the subsequent elections in unanticipated ways. The winners of the 1796 election—John Adams as president and Thomas Jefferson as his vice president—were members of opposing political parties. The following election hosted a rematch between the two, which provided the only election in American history in which a president ran against his vice president. In this election the Democratic Republican candidate Jefferson and running mate Aaron Burr each received the same number of votes. The tie sent the vote to the House of Representatives, which became deadlocked for days. Alexander Hamilton, who believed his fellow Federalist Adams was a dishonest man, exercised his own political muscle as a Federalist Party leader and influenced five other Federalists to withhold their votes so that Jefferson could win a majority. On the thirty-sixth ballot Jefferson was finally elected. To prevent similar predicaments from happening in the future, Congress ratified the Twelfth Amendment in 1804. This amendment requires separate votes for president and vice president and also stipulates that the president and vice president must come from different states.

**Read More**

- To read more information about the Electoral College, refer to: [www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/faq.html#whyelectoralcollege](http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/faq.html#whyelectoralcollege).
- To see which states legally require electors to cast their votes for a specific candidate and which states do not, check out: [www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/laws.html](http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/laws.html).
- Read the stipulations for the Electoral College in Article II of the U.S. Constitution at: [www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html).
- Read the complete text of the Twelfth Amendment at: [www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html).
Discussion Questions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

• Think about the reasons the Founding Fathers created the Electoral College. Do you think they made the best decision possible at that time? If not, what method would you have chosen for selecting a president? Now that over 200 years have passed, do you think the U.S. should continue electing our president using the Electoral College? Why?

• Should the U.S. elect its president based on the popular vote? Why?

• Do you think that the system for granting electors to each state provides a good balance for states with different populations? If we eliminated the Electoral College, do you think states with smaller populations would have enough influence?

• One reason the Founding Fathers created the Electoral College was to ensure that those who voted were making informed decisions. Do you think today’s voters are well informed? Discuss the many ways we get information about candidates. How can we find accurate information?

• Do you know who the electors are in your state? How can you find out who they are?

Activity Suggestions for Young People at Home and in the Classroom

• Do you think electors should be required to vote for the winner of each state’s popular vote? Why? How does it work in your state? You can go to the website www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/laws.html to see if your state requires its electors to vote for the candidate who won the popular vote.

• Check out the lesson plan links provided by the National Archives for teaching young people about the Electoral College at: www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/teach.html.

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Race to the Ballot: The *Our White House* Presidential Campaign and Election Kit for Kids!

Get Out the Vote! Websites

To learn more about voter registration and activism, check out the following websites:

**The Democracy Project:**
PBS site where visitors can take a kids’ tour of government, follow the President for a day, and vote.
Go to: [pbskids.org/democracy/](http://pbskids.org/democracy/)

**Zoom Elections 101:**
PBS site with great election and voting information.
Go to: [pbskids.org/zoom/fromyou/elections/elections101.html](http://pbskids.org/zoom/fromyou/elections/elections101.html)

**Project Vote (Voters of Tomorrow through Education):**
A private-public partnership designed to help students become knowledgeable, responsible voters at an early age, and to stimulate a life-long commitment to the election process.
Go to: [http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/projectvote/index.shtml](http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/projectvote/index.shtml)

**CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement):**
Supports projects of practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life.
Go to: [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)

**Campus Compact:**
Educates college students to become active citizens who are well-equipped to develop creative solutions to society's most pressing issues.
Go to: [compact.org/vote/](http://compact.org/vote/)

**Generation 18: A film, A movement, A change—voter registration drive for young people.**
Go to: [Generation18.com](http://Generation18.com)

**Rock the Vote:**
Engages the political power of young people in order to achieve progressive change in our country. Rock the Vote uses music, popular culture and new technologies to engage and incite young people to register and vote in every election. It also gives young people the tools to identify, learn about, and take action on the issues that affect their lives, and to leverage their power in the political process.
Go to: [rockthevote.com](http://rockthevote.com)

**Project Vote Smart:**
Nonpartisan site where citizens come together, not in selfish interest or to support one candidate over another, but to defend democracy.
Go to: [vote-smart.org](http://vote-smart.org)

In addition, check in your own home state. Many state governments have nonpartisan youth vote and election websites and civic education programs.

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Activities and Discussion Questions for Young People

Relevant activities and discussion questions are provided at the end of every article included in the Presidential Campaign and Election Kit, but we include even more below.

Watch a Presidential Stump Speech... and Invite Kids to Write Their Own

All successful presidential candidates have a standard speech they know by heart that includes their key ideas and plans for the country. This standard speech enables the candidates to speak to voters along the campaign trail without writing a new speech for every stop along the way. Although each candidate may tweak the speech to acknowledge and address the people and places where he or she is talking, the majority of the speech content typically remains the same whether the candidate is talking to voters in Anchorage, Alaska or Miami, Florida. This type of speech is referred to as a “stump speech” because political candidates in the nineteenth century often stood on tree stumps as they spoke to the crowds.

Depending upon where you live, you may be able to take your kids to hear a presidential stump speech. You can read all about rocket scientist Homer Hickam’s experience listening to presidential contender John F. Kennedy on the campaign trail in West Virginia in “The White House, the Moon, and a Coal Miner’s Son” in Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out. Joe Cepeda’s coordinating illustration is featured at right.

Candidates visit all sorts of public places where you can take your entire family or a group of young people. Even if the candidate visiting your area is someone you may not vote for, consider taking your kids to see him or her anyway. Hearing a presidential candidate give a speech in person is a wonderful opportunity to engage young people in the political process and excite them to become active, involved citizens! After the event, be sure to ask your kids what they thought about the speech and the experience. Did they find the candidate engaging? Was he or she a good public speaker? Did he or she attempt to connect with the local people? How so? Did the candidate use humor, and was it effective or not? What ideas in the speech did they find inspiring or not?

Kids can compare the stump speeches of 2012 Republican candidates Mitt Romney, Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, and Rick Santorum in The New York Times interactive piece “Anatomy of a Stump Speech” (http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/01/03/us/politics/gop-stump-speeches.html). Have kids watch or read at least two of the candidates’ speeches and write a list of the types of information included in each, such as a personal story, an attack on another opponent, a quote from a former president, or a particular idea for the future. Ask the kids to compare their lists and determine how the speeches are similar and different. Do the candidates use a positive or negative tone? How does the speech persuade listeners to the speaker’s point of view? Which speech does each young person consider to be the most effective and why? Provide a rubric of criteria for “grading” or “rating” speeches and ask kids to use it to rate each speech…or have kids create their own rubric. Compare the grades assigned by each student. If students assigned different grades to a particular speech, ask students to explain their grades and discuss their reasoning together.
Have kids consider what they would want to say on the campaign trail if they were running for president. Ask them to write a list of the issues most important to them, then ask them to think about how they will present these issues in the speech. Can they support their arguments using facts or statistics? Will they appeal to the listeners’ emotional side using a personal story? Have kids write a rough draft of their speech. Consider having a peer review of each speech to provide constructive criticism on how each speech can be improved. Remind kids that speeches are meant to be heard—not read in silence—so have them each read their speeches to a partner for additional feedback. Ask kids to make final changes as needed and once they have completed a final draft, invite them all to take turns delivering their speeches to the group. Consider having kids grade each speech using the rubric used to grade the speeches of the actual presidential candidates.
Collect or Make Campaign Tokens and Posters

Whether an election is for a seat on the local school committee or the White House, hopeful candidates and their supporters work to promote their campaigns as widely as possible using buttons, bumper stickers, and yard signs.

Campaign tokens can be fun to collect! Encourage kids to attend a local rally or speech if possible or to visit the local campaign office for a candidate. Young people can make their own scrapbooks using 3-hole binders and construction paper to store and save all the campaign memorabilia they are able to collect. Kids may even want to cut newspaper articles and campaign ads to include in their scrapbooks. Another idea is to ask kids to write regular journal entries in their scrapbooks summarizing their thoughts, impressions, and opinions during the campaign and election process. As an alternative to collecting campaign tokens and articles in a scrapbook, kids could also collect news, photographs, campaign slogans, and ads in an online format using word processing or presentation software or even a blog. Be sure to have kids credit the sources of materials collected in their print and online scrapbooks.

Campaign tokens can also be fun to make! Discuss with young people the types of campaign tokens they have seen, then have them choose what type of campaign token they would like to make. There are many possibilities to consider. Buttons, bumper stickers, posters, yard signs, and banners can all be fun to make. Campaign tokens can be designed to promote one of the candidates in this year’s presidential election or students running in your school election. You might also consider having kids make tokens or posters to promote a certain cause that is important to them.

Kits for making official-looking buttons are available at craft stores, but you can also make buttons using poster board, markers, and pins. Cut circles from the poster board, draw your design with pencil, and then color it in with markers or crayons. You can trace around the bottom of a cup to make perfect circles, or you can use a protractor. You can also design buttons using a computer. After finishing the buttons, tape a safety pin to the back so kids can wear the buttons on their shirts or backpacks. Campaign buttons can also be designed and printed on a computer using word processing or graphics software.

Bumper stickers can be made using adhesive-backed paper from an office supply store. Simply cut each sheet to the desired size (bumper stickers are typically 4” tall by 12” wide), use a pencil to draw the design, then use permanent markers to color in each design. Bumper stickers can also be designed and printed using word processing or graphics software.
Separate Fact from Fiction: Analyze the Campaign Rhetoric

Presidential contenders have a LOT to say when meeting with voters and interviewers across the country. Not only do they present their own ideas and plans for the country, they are also known to twist the truth about their past record and achievements to present themselves in the best possible light. Furthermore, candidates also attack, insult, and sometimes tell untruths about their opponents’ records and positions, making it even more difficult for the voting public to determine the truth. (Read more about how mudslinging, misinformation, and other types of dirty tactics have been used throughout America’s history to promote or denigrate presidential hopefuls in "Persuading the People: Presidential Campaigns.") We can learn about where each candidate stands on the issues from many different sources, such as campaign websites, speeches, debates, and news coverage. Still, it can sometimes be extremely difficult to determine what is fact and what is fiction.

In their book unSpun: Finding Facts in a world of Disinformation, Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson provide a five-step process to thinking critically, which can be particularly helpful when trying to determine what campaign rhetoric is true or not:

1. Keep an open mind.
2. Ask questions.
3. Cross-check.
4. Look for the best information.
5. Weigh the evidence.

A good place to cross-check and validate information is a news fact-checking site. Excellent fact-checking sites include:

- **FactCheck.org**. This website is a project supported by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania that “aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics.” Here you can read unbiased, nonpartisan analysis of current campaign ads, debates, speeches, interviews, and news releases.

- **“Fact Checker” column in The Washington Post**. The goal of this column is to provide “the truth behind the rhetoric” in the national political debates regarding the presidential candidates, political ads, Congress, and specific issues.

- **PolitiFact.com**. This Pulitzer Prize winning project of the St. Petersburg Times and Congressional Quarterly is designed “to help you find the truth in the presidential campaign” and other issues facing the nation using its Truth-O-Meter scorecard regarding statements made not only by this year’s group of presidential contenders, but also by current politicians, advisors, and political groups.

Invite students to choose one particular candidate and to review fact-checking articles regarding that candidate’s statements on at least two of the fact-checking sites. Ask students: What did they learn? Were they surprised at how many of the candidate’s statements are true or not? Did they find the fact-checking articles helpful or not? Do the fact-checking sites “agree” on what is fact and what is not? Which site did they prefer and why?

Ask students to compare the truth scales used by The Fact Checker column in The Washington Post and the PolitiFact column. (The Fact Checker column uses a scale of up to four Pinocchios to indicate the level of truth or untruth being told. PolitiFact uses a Truth-O-Meter scale ranging from false to true, with “Pants on Fire” indicating the most outrageous falsehood.) Do students find these scales helpful or not? Why? Invite students to make up their own truth scale!
Watch a campaign speech, debate, or commercial with young people. Beforehand, review Jackson and Jamieson’s five-step process for thinking critically and ask them to be sure to keep an open mind and to question statements being made in the speech, debate, or commercial. Have kids take notes while watching the speech regarding questions that come to mind. Afterwards, ask students to research their questions. Encourage them to review one or more fact-checking sites, but to look for information using other authoritative sources as well to find the best evidence that either supports or repudiates the claims made by the candidates. A school or public librarian can be an excellent resource to help students with their research! Once students have completed their research, ask them to write their own fact-checking report that analyzes the speech, debate, or commercial. For fun, you can ask kids to provide some type of truth label for each of the candidate’s claims, using their own truth scale. You may also want to invite kids to present their reports to the group or class for further discussion.
Be an Eyewitness to History

Expanding the right to vote to women became a critical issue beginning with the presidential election of 1872 and did not subside from the national conversation until the Nineteenth Amendment was finally passed in 1920 during the administration of Woodrow Wilson. In the Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out piece titled “Eyewitness to History,” author Stephanie S. Tolan imagines a dialogue between a journalist and suffragists who are picketing outside the White House in 1917 demanding the right to vote. The journalist is working for a program that “travels through time to let you witness the major events of the past.” Emily Arnold McCully's coordinating illustration is featured at right.

Ask young people to read Tolan’s dialog and think about the voices being portrayed. Ask young people the following questions: Who is included in the dialog? Who is a real person from history and who is fictional? Does the dialog include perspectives from both sides of the issue? How does the dialog portray opposing sides? What is being said in favor and against expanding the right to vote to women? What do you learn about the women’s suffrage movement from reading this dialog?

Ask young people to think about other critical issues that have faced our nation and how supporters made their voices heard. Such issues they might want to think about include civil rights, wildlife protection, environment protection, prohibition, national defense, and economic disparity. Have students select one issue of particular interest to them and research it at your school or public library. (You might also consider having some students research issues of the past and others select issues being addressed in this year’s presidential campaign.) Ask them to read about both sides of the issue and to determine how supporters for each side made their voices heard. Kids should be asked to take notes during their research.

Using the information learned from their research, ask young people to write their own “Eyewitness to History” dialog! They can imagine they are a witness to a picketing event or rally for their issue of interest to write their own dialog. Students should determine “who” will be included in the dialog in addition to the journalist reporting the event. Remind students that a journalist asks questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? In writing the dialog, students should start with the journalist explaining where and when he or she is and who is with her to set the scene. Start the dialog by having the journalist ask questions of the event participants as Tolan does in her “Eyewitness” dialog. To ensure both sides of the issue are presented, also have the students ask questions of people who are passing by. Kids might want to end their dialog by summarizing facts about the issue. If writing about an issue from the past, kids can summarize how the issue was resolved or not. If writing about a contemporary issue, kids can summarize the ongoing debate and the current status of pending legislation if applicable.
Host a Mock Election

Encourage young people to host their own mock election at home, in school, at your local library, or at your local community center! Depending upon the number and ages of kids within your group, you may want to organize a full-fledged campaign and election with complete media coverage or a simpler voter registration drive and election day.

Discuss with young people the presidential campaign and election process and all the activities that are involved in getting someone elected as president of the United States. (Refer to "Help Wanted: President of the United States," "Persuading the People: Campaigning for President," and "Getting the Votes and Getting Elected: The Popular Vote vs. The Electoral College" for more information.) Then determine the activities you would like to include in your own mock election.

Below is a list of three ways you might consider grouping students and their responsibilities. This list includes LOTS of possibilities! You can pick and choose the responsibilities you want to assign based on the time and resources available.

• Campaign Committees.
  These groups are assigned to each of the major political parties, and each group researches the candidates and their respective platforms so they can create a strategy to promote their candidates throughout the campaign. Ask the kids in these groups to consider the following: How will they promote their candidate? What type of campaign tokens and materials will they create? How will they distribute their campaign materials? How will they inform voters about their candidates’ ideas and plans for the country? Will someone give speeches on the candidate’s behalf? Will they participate in debates? How can they relay information to the media? If possible, take this group to the party’s campaign office in your area and talk to a member of the campaign staff to learn how they are promoting their candidate. Or, invite a campaign staffer to give a talk at your school or library.

• Media.
  This group reports on the progress of each presidential campaign throughout the campaign and election process. Depending upon the resources available to you, this group can write short news reports to be read aloud during morning announcements or printed in the school newsletter or newspaper. Students may also want to try their skills as a news anchor by video recording a report to be played in class. Another idea is to have these students write questions and interview members of the campaign committees. If students have access to video equipment (such as an easy-to-use flip camera), they may want to record student speeches and debates and then show them in class. If possible, take this group of kids on a field trip to your local newspaper, radio station, or TV station and talk to journalists there about how they cover a presidential campaign, or invite a journalist to talk to your group.

• Get Out the Vote Committee.
  This group is responsible for all the voting procedures. Encourage these kids to learn about the history of voting rights in America, then have them make plans to hold a voter registration drive, help all students register to vote, produce a marketing campaign that encourages everyone to vote, and run the polls on primary days and election day. (Refer to “Who Gets to Vote?” and “Get Out the Vote! Websites” for more information and ideas.) Ask the kids in this group to consider the following: Should they set a goal for voter registration and what should it be? 100%? How will they notify voters about the registration process? How will they encourage voters to learn about the candidates and where they stand on issues? Will they host a rally to inform voters and encourage them to vote? How can they use print or social media to get voters to the polls?
Race to the Ballot: The Our White House Presidential Campaign and Election Kit for Kids!

Find classroom activities and election resources prepared by Project Vote Smart at: VoteSmart.org/education

Learn more about how the president is elected in the League of Women Voters downloadable guide titled "Electing the President: Everything You Need to Know" at: http://www.lwv.org/content/electing-president-everything-you-need-know

Check out kid-friendly election coverage, classroom activities, lesson plans, and games at Scholastic’s Election page at: http://election.scholastic.com/

Visit a Presidential Historic Site, Library, or Website

More than twenty states boast presidential birthplaces, historic homes, libraries, and museums. Many of these very special places include extensive exhibits profiling events from the campaign trail and include not only samples of campaign posters and other memorabilia, but also audio and video exhibits that enable you to hear or watch the candidates’ stump speeches and the commercials created to help win votes.

Before visiting a presidential museum or library, be sure to check out the special activities calendar by calling ahead or reviewing the website because many libraries offer child-friendly and family-oriented activities to engage young people during an election year. For a comprehensive guide to finding presidential sites and museums, listed by state, check out the NCBLA’s "Field Trip Guide! Presidential Birthplaces, Houses, and Libraries” on OurWhiteHouse.org.

If visiting a presidential museum or library in person is not possible, you can visit one virtually by checking out content on the library’s website. Many presidential museums and libraries offer articles, curricula, and other resources you can download and use free. For example, the Jimmy Carter Library website (jimmycarterlibrary.org) offers multi-disciplinary educational materials with content for students in grades 2 through 12. And the research section of the George Bush Library’s website (bush41.org) offers online access to some of its print and audio-visual archives. Included in the visual archives are photographs from Bush’s life, including his time in public office. The photos are organized by topic, such as Various Campaigns, US Vice President, US President, and Presidential Transportation.
Play a Game of Presidential Trivia

Do you know which president was the first to live in the White House? (Hint: It wasn’t George Washington!) Do you know which president served the shortest term? (Hint: He was president for 31 days in 1841.) Do you know which president is famous for having said, “My fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country?”

Find these answers—and make up your own presidential trivia questions to ask young people!—by digging into the NCBLA’s Presidential Fact Files on OurWhiteHouse.org. The Presidential Fact Files is a treasure trove of information for every one of our nation’s presidents that includes the dates of each president’s terms, party affiliation, family information, as well as legacy summaries and famous quotes. Using the information on each president’s page, you can quickly make up a list of questions regarding a president’s accomplishments or failures, an event that took place during the president’s term, or a famous line from a speech. Each presidential page also includes a “Did You Know?” category, which features additional facts perfect for a trivia game, such as the fact that George Washington was the only president to be elected by a unanimous vote and Theodore Roosevelt was the first American to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Jot down questions, type them up, or create questions on the fly by reading the Presidential Fact Files web pages from your smartphone or tablet computer. You can choose to play presidential trivia with just a couple people, or you can play with a large group divided into teams. Encourage kids to review the presidential and first lady facts and write their own trivia questions to share with friends and the adults in their lives.

Expand your trivia coverage by creating some questions based on America’s first ladies using the NCBLA’s First Lady Fact Files on OurWhiteHouse.org. You can also create questions based on the informative essays and stories in Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out. Be sure to take a look at the presidential images and notes in Bob Kolar’s “1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: Who’s in the House?” Kolar’s illustration is featured above.
If you plan to play with a group of kids who are different ages, you might want to consider creating a rating system for your questions, such as Easy, Average, and Advanced. Or, consider awarding bonus points for a particularly difficult question.

**Sample Trivia Questions and Answers**

- Which president was the first to live in the White House? (Answer: John Adams)
- Which president served the shortest term? (Answer: William Henry Harrison)
- Which president is famous for having said, “My fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country?” (Answer: John F. Kennedy)
- Which president was the first to use electricity in the White House? (Answer: Benjamin Harrison)
- Before the passage of the 22nd amendment, presidential terms were not limited to two. Which president served FOUR terms? (Answer: Franklin Delano Roosevelt)
- Almost any adult American citizen is qualified to become president. Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution establishes the exact qualifications. What are they? (Answer: Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution establishes that anyone who is a natural-born U.S. citizen, at least thirty-five years old, and has lived in the United States for at least fourteen years can become president.)
- Which presidential candidate was the first to promote his candidacy using television? (Answer: Dwight Eisenhower)
- Which president proclaimed "The Star-Spangled Banner" to be our national anthem? (Answer: Herbert Hoover)
- Which president campaigned successfully in 1840 using the populist slogan "Log Cabin and Hard Cider?" (Answer: William Henry Harrison)
- Which president was so well-known for his silent nature that during a dinner party a guest teased that she had bet a friend she could entice the president to say more than five words during the meal, to which he answered, "You lose?" (Answer: Calvin Coolidge)
- Which first lady worked with the Library of Congress to create the National Book Festival, an annual event first held on the Mall in Washington, D.C. in 2001? (Answer: Laura Bush)
- Who was the only presidential candidate to ever be elected by a unanimous vote? (Answer: George Washington)
- Which president considered himself to have been a "sissy" as a child, having said, "If there was any danger of getting into a fight, I always ran?" (Answer: Harry Truman)
- Which president was the first one to throw the first pitch in a major league baseball game? (Answer: William Howard Taft)
- Which president met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to improve relations and negotiate a treaty to eliminate a substantial number of nuclear missiles? (Answer: Ronald Reagan)
- Who was the first First Lady to sit in Cabinet meetings? (Answer: Rosalynn Carter)
- Which president was honored for his pioneering work in the discovery and study of fossils by having a species of mastodon named for him? (Answer: Thomas Jefferson)
- Which modern president is credited with passage of the Family Medical Leave Act? (Answer: Bill Clinton)
- Who assumed the presidency upon President Lincoln's assassination? (Answer: Andrew Johnson)
- Which president, in the wake of 9-11, took time off from his duties at the White House to throw the first pitch at a Major League Baseball playoff game in Yankee Stadium to show his support for New Yorkers? (Answer: George W. Bush)
- Which first lady hired a French chef to run the White House kitchens? (Answer: Jacqueline Kennedy)
- Our 43rd president, George W. Bush, is the son of former President George H. W. Bush, who served as America's 41st president. Who was our country's first father and son pair to both be elected as president? (Answer: John Quincy Adams served as our sixth president. He was the son of our nation's second president, John Adams.)
• Which president, having been thrust into the position following the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, made the decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan as a means to end World War II? (Answer: Harry S Truman)
• Who is the only vice president to have assumed the presidency for a reason other than the president's death? (Answer: Gerald R. Ford)
• Who was the first and only president to serve as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court? (Hint: He served from 1921 through 1930). (Answer: William Howard Taft)
Learn More About Presidential Campaigns and Elections

For even more information about presidential campaigns and elections, check out the following books and online resources:

**Books**

Over fifty well-known people, from actors to novelists, share their experiences and ideas to provide inspiration and a strong rationale for young people to become involved in the political process—and to vote. Recommended for high school readers to adult.

Explains all the details of how Americans elect the president and includes information regarding the constitutional requirements for elections, how the electoral college works, the role of political parties, conventions, and primaries. Recommended for ages 10 and up.

This outstanding collection of essays, personal accounts, historical fiction, and poetry melds with an equally stunning array of original art to offer a look at America’s history through the prism of the White House. Recommended for ages 10 and up.


With witty illustrations by Elwood H. Smith, this engaging book explains the complicated process of electing the American president for ages 8 through 12.

Presents engaging examples and practical advice for helping people of all ages use fact and reason to parse through the deceptions and misinformation presented in today’s media.

One town’s mayoral election provides a lucid introduction to voting (including a recount). Includes additional information such as a voting timeline and a list of internet resources. Recommended for ages 7 through 10.
Online Resources


http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/content/37e7e19a-d6d4-4c80-a76d-cc550fa5294/ 
Online activity that enables students to identify and analyze documents related to key presidential decisions.

www.lwv.org/content/electing-president-everything-you-need-know

Campaign news, interactive primary and electoral maps, games, and videos are all featured on the Scholastic website’s election page.

Thousands of items regarding presidential campaigns and elections are available for online viewing on the Library of Congress website. You can listen to campaign marches, view campaign posters and newspaper articles, and review all types of other materials. In the Search box, select the format (such as book, photo, or audio), type your search words (such as presidential campaign), then click Go to discover the vast amount of materials available to share with young people from any computer with Internet access.

“President for a Day.” PBS LearningMedia: The Democracy Project. 9 April 2012. 
http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/content/adc68b4-5235-4454-85c3-59169bb4bd80/ 
This interactive activity enables students to be “president for a day” by making decisions about events a president experiences on a typical day, such as making a speech and meeting with the Cabinet.

http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/the-us-presidency/ 
This content enables you to explore the rich history and the institution of the U.S. Presidency—from George Washington to Barack Obama. Understand the duties and powers of the President of the United States and the First Lady, gather important background information with Presidential biographies, and engage with videos and primary sources that place you back in time at some of the most pivotal turning points in American history.

“Welcome to Vote Smart Classroom.” Project Vote Smart. 6 March 2012. 
http://www.votesmart.org/education

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