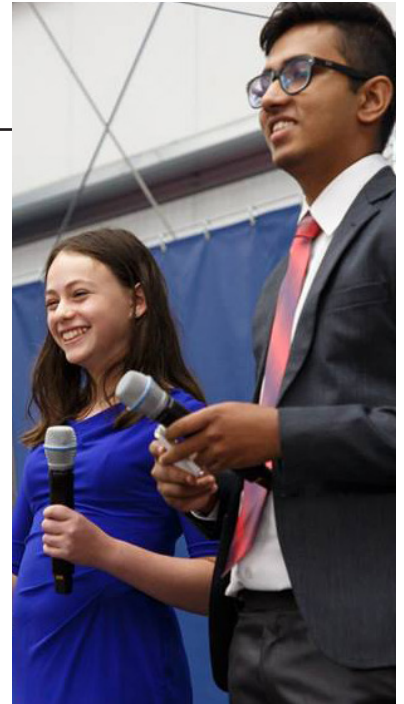


# Elections in Action

Abridged



The following lessons are selections from Mikva Challenge's Elections in Action curriculum. To access the full experience, go to [www.mikvachallenge.org/curriculum](http://www.mikvachallenge.org/curriculum).

**Mikva  
Challenge**

## Introduction

### What is Mikva Challenge?

Mikva Challenge is a nonpartisan 501(c)3 organization, founded in 1997 as a tribute to former White House Counsel, Judge, and U.S. Congressman Abner Mikva and his wife Zoe, a lifelong education activist. Mikva Challenge develops youth to be empowered, informed and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society. We believe that the best way to learn leadership and to learn democracy is to experience both.

The most important cornerstone of our work is our belief that young people have knowledge and deserve to fully participate in our democracy. Young people know what's happening in their neighborhoods. They understand the strengths and challenges of their schools. Young people are experts on issues affecting them, their peers, and their communities. Mikva Challenge was founded on the simple premise that youth voice and participation matter, and that our civic and political life will be stronger when youth participate and help shape their own future. To learn more about getting involved with Mikva Challenge, go to [www.mikvachallenge.org](http://www.mikvachallenge.org).

### What is Action Civics?

Mikva Challenge believes that the best means of training young people for their roles as citizens and leaders is actually to allow them a real chance to participate in authentic democratic activities—from elections to advocacy, from public debates to creation of new civic media. We believe that this is the best way to begin cultivating a vibrant democratic ethos in young people.

We facilitate this learning for students through an Action Civics process in which:

- youth voice is encouraged, valued, and incorporated to the fullest extent possible;
- experiences, knowledge, perspectives, and concerns of youth are incorporated;
- students learn by doing, with a focus on collective action; and
- student reflection and analysis are central to the process.

# Introduction

## Why *Elections in Action*?

We've all seen the dire news stories about youth voting statistics and youth civic knowledge.

We know these statistics, but we also know that young people aren't apathetic. They care deeply about their communities, and—if we give them the opportunity—they want to have a voice in how their communities are run. We also know that young people can have a major impact in the outcome of elections as evidenced by the results of recent elections. Youth need to be equipped with the tools to be informed and engaged in the political process.

Mikva Challenge has prepared the *Elections in Action* curriculum for students to learn about the electoral process and campaigns, learn about the candidates, identify, and reflect on their own ideologies, and get involved in the electoral process.

We believe that the best way for students to learn civics is to “do civics.” With that in mind, this curriculum includes multiple opportunities for action, from registering voters to campaigning for candidates. These opportunities are described in the final section, entitled **Taking Action**. We recommend you look at all options before beginning and make a decision about what types of actions you would like your students to participate in.

## How to use this Curriculum

Welcome to the 2019 edition of our *Elections in Action* curriculum! We are excited by the additions and changes in this version.

Mikva Challenge profoundly believes in the power of teachers to guide and facilitate learning for their students that can alter their perceptions of themselves, the world, and their roles in it. We know that students have expertise and do not come to your classrooms as empty vessels. We know that the learning environments teachers create in their classrooms matter. We believe that students should be able to drive the topics they explore so that their learning is relevant, and that students need opportunities to practice new skills in authentic ways. We know that learning can be rewarding and fun. This curriculum is here as a guide for you in this endeavor.

*Elections in Action* is by no means a one-size-fits-all manual. The curriculum was expressly designed for educators to pick and choose lessons that best suit their needs and the needs of their students. Teachers use this curriculum in a variety of different contexts, including integrating it into their standard curriculum, in advisory, as an elective course, or in an after-school club. Given this range, we have designed the lessons to allow for maximum flexibility and adaptability. You may find the need to modify some lessons to differentiate for the needs of your students by providing more challenge or more scaffolding. We provide suggestions for adaptations and know that teachers possess a host of strategies to do so as well.

## Introduction

Each lesson includes an overview, objectives, materials, assessments, and alignment to Common Core State Standards and C3 standards.

We have added a section entitled **Creating a Democratic Classroom** which we STRONGLY recommend you start with. If you attempt to engage students in Action Civics learning without creating a classroom environment in which it can thrive, you will not have the positive impacts you are hoping for. For example, engaging in controversial conversations without establishing classroom agreements/norms may be more harmful than useful.

### Format

The lessons in the *Elections in Action* curriculum follow a **Before, During, and After** format, beginning with a **Bell-Ringer**. Here is a brief explanation of this format:



**BELL-RINGER:** Helps get students settled and ready for the day's lesson. The purpose of the **Bell-Ringer** is to activate prior knowledge. The **Bell-Ringer** is inquiry based, activating student expertise and interest as a jumping off point for deeper learning. Ideally a **Bell-Ringer** should take no longer than five minutes and can be done independently by students (with minimal teacher direction) so the teacher can attend to logistics in the first few minutes of class like taking attendance and conferring with individual students if necessary.



**BEFORE:** This part of the lesson usually builds off of the **Bell-Ringer** and acts as a transition to the day's lesson (e.g., students sharing their responses to the **Bell-Ringer** in a discussion or pair and share). The purpose of the **Before** is to set the purpose for the lesson.



**DURING:** Generally consisting of new knowledge or skill acquisition, the **During** can be accomplished through the teacher modeling a skill, direct instruction of a concept, or deep student-directed inquiry.



**AFTER:** Students apply their new knowledge in some way, either through guided work or independent practice to demonstrate their understanding of the new material. The **After** can act as the daily assessment, so the teacher can gauge whether students understood the day's objectives. If the students do not seem to have understood the objectives, the teacher may want to stop and re-teach what they missed.



## Introduction

Mikva's curriculum is used in a variety of grades and settings and so we have also included a section called **Modifications and Adaptations** to provide suggestions for ways to modify and differentiate the lesson to provide multiple entry points for different learners. In addition, we have included **Enrichment and Extension** suggestions if you have more time, want to challenge students more or want to go deeper into a particular topic.

### Non-Partisanship

Mikva Challenge is a non-partisan, not for profit organization. We do not impart political ideologies on our students, but instead work to create a space for them to examine, explore and analyze so they can form their own opinions. We guide them in skills and tools to be effective civic actors, without telling them how to act or what to act upon. We work to provide exposure so there is balance and choice. We encourage you to follow this framework as well.

### Addressing Equity

*"The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do."*

— James Baldwin

The mission of Mikva Challenge is to develop youth to be empowered, informed and active citizens who will promote a just and equitable society. We ground all of our Action Civics process on students improving their community in ways that address root causes of problems. In order to understand today's issues and political challenges, students need to understand the history that brought us to our current world. This version of the curriculum provides some of that context and perspective so students can place their civic action work within a continuum. This curriculum embraces student exploration of topics of social identity and it how it shapes civic identity, privilege and oppression so that students can form their own opinions and work to effectively solve root causes to societal problems. The Issues to Action process includes attention to developing empathy and engaging in civic discourse to encourage a diversity of opinions with the understanding that sustainable change requires engaging people of all viewpoints and experiences.

### Gender Pronouns

This iteration of *Elections in Action* has paid particular attention to issues of equity and inclusion. To this end, we utilize the non-gender pronoun of "they" throughout. For more on gender neutral pronouns go to <https://www.glsen.org/article/pronouns-resource-educators>.

# Introduction

## Acknowledgments

We're excited to offer this resource to teachers across the country because of the generous support that begins in Illinois. We would like to thank the McCormick Foundation, for their tireless and visionary efforts to extend meaningful civic learning to students across Illinois, and for their ongoing support for Action Civics and Mikva Challenge. We would also like to thank the MacArthur Foundation for their generous support which has made this version of the curriculum possible.

Thanks to Jessica Marshall, Heather Van Benthuyssen and the hardworking team at Chicago Public Schools who have partnered with us to make Action Civics a priority in Chicago. A very special thanks to the Cook County Board of Elections for being such a tremendous partner and champion for youth electoral engagement.

Mikva Challenge curricula are inspired by and written by teachers. Thanks to our Teacher Advisory Board for their brilliance, insight and challenge: Linda Becker, Colby Chapman, Donald Davis, Maria Gaspar, Scott Goldstein, Sasha Guzman, Adam Kubey, Karen Lee, Stormie McNeal, Erik Peterson, Erika Ramirez, Roberto Vega, and Shelina Warren. Thanks to all the teachers who have submitted lessons and activities for this version of the curriculum. And thanks to all the teachers and students who have participated in our Elections in Action and Student Judges program over the past 20 years. Teachers have provided inspiration and leadership that has helped thousands of students become active citizens.

Special thanks to our Mikva program team — Meghan Goldenstein, Karla Morin Castilla, Kenneth Porter, Andrew Conneen and Justine Hipsky — for field testing activities and tweaking them until they work! Thanks to Scott Goldstein for his contribution on this latest version of the curriculum. Thanks to our wonderful designer Erika Harano.

Of course, we are forever grateful for our students; without them, Mikva Challenge wouldn't exist. It is their passion, motivation, and dedication on the campaign trail that enables us to continue to believe in the future of our democracy.

Jill Bass

Chief Education Officer

Editor

## LESSON 9: The Power of Voting

### Overview:

The purpose of this lesson is to activate students' current opinions regarding voting and challenge them to consider the power of voting in new ways.

### Objectives:

- Express views on voting
- Discuss the value of voting
- View and respond to the Rock the Vote video *The History of Voting*
- Analyze reasons why suffrage has been denied to certain groups in history
- Present an argument for or against voting
- Discuss the connection between voting and power

### Materials:

- Stand and Declare signs
- Rock the Vote *The History of Voting* video (available online; link in lesson)
- *Suffrage Timeline* handout
- *Suffrage Events* handout
- Computer with LCD player and speakers
- Optional: *A Day in the Life* handout

### Assessment:

- Persuasive paragraph on voting

### Common Core State Standards:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1C**  
Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2**  
Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.1**  
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

### C3 Standards:

**D2.CIV.2.9-12.**

Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.

**D4.7.9-12.**

Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.

## LESSON 9: The Power of Voting

### PRIOR TO CLASS

Before students enter the room, create four signs labeled Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Hang one sign in each corner of the room so as to create a spectrum from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Cue up video to show at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar7r5aG\\_B0Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar7r5aG_B0Y)

Print one *Suffrage Timeline* handout and one *Suffrage Events* handout for each group. (If possible, print each group's handouts on a different colored paper.) Cut each *Suffrage Events* handout into six slips of paper: one for each suffrage event.



### **BELL-RINGER: Stand and Declare (10 minutes)**

Explain how Stand and Declare works (see page 38 for instructions.)

Have students respond by going to the corner that best represents their view using a few of the following statements, one at a time:

- "Elected officials can make a difference on issues that matter to us."
- "Voting is a right."
- "Voting is powerful."
- "When I am old enough to vote, I plan to vote."
- "Voting should be mandatory (e.g., eligible voters who do not vote should have to pay a fine)."
- "16 year olds should be eligible to vote."

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### **MODIFICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS**

Create a poster with directions to Stand and Declare activity. Post in room to use and reference later in the curriculum.



### **BEFORE: The struggle for the vote (15 minutes)**

Clearly, who votes affects the outcome of elections. Remind students that throughout the history of the United States, not all Americans have been allowed to vote. Show Rock the Vote's 3½-minute video, *The History of Voting* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar7r5aG\\_B0Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar7r5aG_B0Y)).



## LESSON 9: The Power of Voting

Divide class into small groups and distribute one *Suffrage Timeline* handout and the six suffrage event slips of paper to each group. Create a mini-competition where each group needs to complete the timeline by placing each slip of paper next to the appropriate timeline dates. Once a group completes the timeline, they should raise their hands to have you check it. The first group to successfully complete it wins. In order to avoid random guessing, tell students that they must wait 30 seconds before they resubmit their answers. Have the winning group share the correct answers with the rest of the class. Note the dates that these suffrage milestones occurred. Ask students if they were surprised by any of this information.

Then lead a discussion using the following prompts:

- Why would people be denied the right to vote?
- What does that say about the importance of voting?



### **DURING: The power of voters (15 minutes)**

Explain that they are going to listen to an example of a place where citizens were not satisfied with the quality of the services provided by their government and did something about it through their power as voters.

Have students read and/or listen to “An Act of Faith in America” by Michael Seifert (<http://thisibelieve.org/essay/989/>) from the National Public Radio broadcast of “This I Believe” and write down three facts from the text.

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### **MODIFICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS**

Create a graphic organizer to help students recognize the main idea and three important facts from the text.



### **AFTER: Discuss “An Act of Faith in America” (5 minutes)**

Lead a discussion and/or assign a writing assignment using the following prompts:

- In your own words, describe what that piece was about.
- Why, initially, was the county commissioner unresponsive to the Cameron Park community’s needs?
- How did the community get the attention of elected officials?

## LESSON 9: The Power of Voting

- How did the lives of the residents of Cameron Park change as a result of voting?
- 



### **HOMEWORK**

Have students write a one paragraph reflection on the questions:

- Do you plan to vote when you get older? Why or why not? Support your answer with evidence that will help convince others that they should or should not vote.
- 

### **EXTENSION AND ENRICHMENT**

Additional discussion questions to consider include:

- Who tends to vote more in US elections?
- Who votes less?
- Why do you think this is?

One documentary that chronicles the power of the ballot by explaining voter disenfranchisement in 2000 and 2004 is American Blackout:

*[www.topdocumentaryfilms.com/american-blackout](http://www.topdocumentaryfilms.com/american-blackout)*

It can be a powerful tool for discussion but note that the film represents the perspective that the disenfranchisement of voters was an intentional tactic used by the party in office to win an election. In this case, the party in office is the Republican Party and voters who are denied the right to vote are predominantly people of color.

# SUFFRAGE EVENTS

**Teachers:** Prior to the this matching activity, you will need to print one *Suffrage Timeline* worksheet and one *Suffrage Events* worksheet for each group. (If possible, print each group's worksheets on a different colored paper.) Cut each *Suffrage Events* worksheet into six slips of paper: one for each suffrage event.

The Voting Rights Act outlaws the use of voting taxes and literacy tests to prevent citizens from voting.

Land-owning white male citizens over the age of 21 can vote.

All male and female citizens over the age of 18 can vote.

All male citizens over the age of 21 can vote.

All white male citizens over the age of 21 can vote.

All male and female citizens over the age of 21 can vote.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## SUFFRAGE TIMELINE

Have someone in your group read the six suffrage event slips of paper aloud. Then, as a group, place each slip of paper next to the appropriate date on this timeline. Raise your hands when you are finished.

**1776**

**1856**

**1870**

**1920**

**1965**

**1971**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# SUFFRAGE TIMELINE ANSWER KEY

<b>1776</b>	LAND-OWNING WHITE MALE CITIZENS OVER THE AGE OF 21 CAN VOTE.
<b>1856</b>	ALL WHITE MALE CITIZENS OVER THE AGE OF 21 CAN VOTE.
<b>1870</b>	ALL MALE CITIZENS OVER THE AGE OF 21 CAN VOTE.
<b>1920</b>	ALL MALE AND FEMALE CITIZENS OVER THE AGE OF 21 CAN VOTE.
<b>1965</b>	THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OUTLAWS THE USE OF VOTING TAXES AND LITERACY TESTS TO PREVENT CITIZENS FROM VOTING.
<b>1971</b>	ALL MALE AND FEMALE CITIZENS OVER THE AGE OF 18 CAN VOTE.



## LESSON 15: Candidate Blind Match

### Overview:

This lesson has students examine the candidates' positions on issues without any preconceived notions about who each candidate is.

### Objectives:

- Examine candidates' positions
- Identify which positions they most favor
- Reflect on their candidate choices

### Assessment:

- Reflection

### Materials:

- Candidate list: handout and projected or posted (**NOTE:** This is not provided in this curriculum. The teacher will need to create this handout.)
- *Sample Issue Positions* handout
- *Issue Positions* handouts for each issue with candidate names removed (**NOTE:** Only a blank template is provided in this curriculum. The teacher will need to create the specific handouts.)
- *Candidate Report Card* handout

### Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.10  
Read appropriately complex texts.

### C3 Standards:

D3.1.9-12.

Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

D1.3.9-12.

Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a supporting question.

### PRIOR TO CLASS

Create a set of issue sheets. Include short statements about each candidate's position on the same issue such as immigration reform. Do NOT include the candidates' names or gender pronouns (e.g., "he," "she," "they") on the handouts. Label each candidate a letter of the alphabet, such as "Candidate W." An example handout is provided in this lesson. (You might want to keep an answer key for yourself.)

### NOTE

This lesson begins talking specifically about the election at hand. If you have not already done so, be sure to set aside time to introduce the current race to your students.

## LESSON 15: Candidate Blind Match



### **BELL-RINGER: Who are these people? (5 minutes)**

Distribute a list of the candidates running for office and have students underline the names of all the candidates they have heard of. If they already support a candidate, have them circle that candidate's name.



### **BEFORE: Reading candidates' positions (25 minutes)**

Give each student a copy an *Issue Position* handout for five issues. (You will need to prepare these *Issue Position* handouts before class, using positions each candidate has expressed on particular policy issues). Students should read and complete the *Candidate Report Card* handout individually, giving each candidate a grade (A-F) for their position on each issue.

### **MODIFICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS**

You can post the candidate's positions on chart paper around the room and have students move around until they have read all of the candidates' positions on the issues. Or, you can project the positions on an LCD projector.



### **DURING: Discussion (5 minutes)**

Lead a discussion with the following prompts:

- Which candidate had the highest "GPA"?
- If this is all the information you knew about the candidates, which one would you vote for?
- How did you decide? The candidate with the highest overall "GPA"? The candidate with the highest grade on a particular issue? Something else? Why?



### **AFTER: Reflection (10 minutes)**

Ask students to guess who each candidate might be. Reveal the names of each candidate and have students fill in the candidate's name on their *Candidate Report Card* handout. For example, you might say, "Who do you think Candidate A might be?...Candidate A is John McGregor."



### **HOMEWORK**

Students should respond in writing to the following questions:

## LESSON 15: Candidate Blind Match

- Were you surprised by the positions of any of the candidates? Explain.
- Were you surprised by your choice of candidate? Why?
- Do you want to choose your candidate by their average score, or are there particular issues that are non-negotiable for you?
- Go back to your voter values — how do your values, your ideology and position on a specific issue have influenced your opinion of the candidates and which candidate you are most likely to support at this time?

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### MODIFICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Provide alternative options to writing. Students can create a short video on their phones describing who they are likely to support and answering the prompt. Students can have a family member or friend interview them and record the interview using voice record or video.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

ISSUE POSITIONS: \_\_\_\_\_

CANDIDATE:	POSITION:

## EXAMPLE

### ISSUE POSITIONS: IMMIGRATION

CANDIDATE	POSITION:
<b>W</b>	Candidate W believes all immigration is bad. This candidate supports the building of a wall with Mexico and wants to put an end to DACA. This candidate has voted against a path to citizenship on numerous occasions.
<b>X</b>	"If elected I would conduct research to find out more about best solutions to our immigration problem."
<b>Y</b>	"I believe in Sanctuary Cities and local control over decisions around immigration."
<b>Z</b>	Candidate Z has stated on many occasions that they support DACA and immigration reform policies that support immigrant families.



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# CANDIDATE REPORT CARD

Write each candidate's name in the column labeled "Candidate Name." Then, label each column with an issue area (e.g., healthcare, immigration, environment, economy). Then, give each candidate a grade based on where they stand on that issue. Finally, give each candidate an average grade based on the grades you assigned in the five issue areas.

CANDIDATE NAME	ISSUE #1:	ISSUE #2:	ISSUE #3:	ISSUE #4:	ISSUE #5:	AVERAGE

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## CANDIDATE REPORT CARD: SAMPLE

Write each candidate's name in the column labeled "Candidate Name." Then, label each column with an issue area (e.g., healthcare, immigration, environment, economy). Then, give each candidate a grade based on where they stand on that issue. Finally, give each candidate an average grade based on the grades you assigned in the five issue areas.

CANDIDATE	ISSUE #1: immigration	ISSUE #2: education	ISSUE #3: violence	ISSUE #4: women's rights	ISSUE #5: environment	AVERAGE
W	C	B-	D	F	D	D
X	F	C-	C	B-	B	C-
Y	C-	A	F	C	D	C-
Z	B	C	B+	C	C-	B-

## LESSON 19: Candidate Profiles (Multiple Days)

### Overview:

This lesson requires students to conduct their own research on the candidates. The goal is for students to create a Voter Education Guide that can be printed or published online and shared with the school and community.

### Objectives:

- Evaluate the candidates based on criteria established by students
- Evaluate sources
- Identify candidates' positions on various issues
- Create a voter education guide

### Materials:

- *Candidate Profile* handout
- *Candidate Notes* handout
- *The Candidate I Support Is* handout
- Computers with Internet access

### Assessment:

- *The Candidate I Support Is* handout
- Voter Education Guide

### Common Core State Standards:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1**  
Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and over-reliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2

Write informative / explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through

the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

### C3 Standards:

#### D2.CIV.12.9-12

Analyze how people use and challenge local, state, national, and international laws to address a variety of public issues.

#### D3.1.9-12

Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

## LESSON 19: Candidate Profiles (Multiple Days)

### NOTE

If time is short or computer access is limited, you can provide candidate information to your students instead of having them conduct the research. Be sure to give them a packet of information from various sources so they can continue to practice the skill of evaluating sources.



### **BELL-RINGER: Voter education guide brainstorm (5 minutes)**

Have students respond to the prompt:

*What information about a candidate does a voter need in order to make an informed choice at the voting booth?*



### **BEFORE: Creating a plan (5 minutes)**

As students share their responses from the **Bell-Ringer**, write their ideas on the board.



### **DURING: Creating the guide (times will vary)**

Assign students (independently, in pairs, or in small groups, depending on the size of the class and the number of candidates you wish to research) a candidate to research and distribute a *Candidate Profile* handout for them to fill out. Have the class choose four issues they want to know more about their candidate's positions on.

Have students visit a range of websites (see the **Finding Out About Candidates** lesson on page 122 for ideas) to gather information about their candidates. Remind students that these are informative profiles, not persuasive profiles. Therefore, they should be neutral and objective. If they are not already familiar with what neutral and objective looks like, you can give them a copy of a candidate literature (best if it is from a previous election or a candidate in another district/state) and have them underline facts versus opinions. Then lead a discussion about how to be as objective as possible.

When groups complete their section, they should switch papers with another group to proofread each other's work, paying close attention to clarity as well as potential bias. Assign a student to design a cover and another student to create a title page and table of contents. Allow groups to revise any content based on student feedback, type up results and assign an editorial team to compile the cover and the profiles into a single document.

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### **MODIFICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS**

Explain and model what objective and neutral should look like.

## LESSON 19: Candidate Profiles (Multiple Days)

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### **AFTER: Develop a plan for distribution (10 minutes)**

Facilitate a brainstorming session where students think about ways to get their Voter Education Guide into the hands of voters.

The **Election 411** lesson also suggests creating a Voter Education Guide with information about how to register and vote in your area. Consider combining these two projects. Suggestions on distribution are also available in **Creating and Distributing a Voter Education Guide** in the **Taking Action** section.

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### **HOMEWORK: Evaluating the candidates**

Students should read the profiles and complete the *Candidates Notes* chart and *The Candidate I Support Is* handout.

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### **ENRICHMENT AND EXTENSION**

Have students conduct in-depth research on the candidate's policy position (assign small groups a candidate and an issue) and then meet as a larger group to fill out the *Where Do I Stand?* questionnaire from the **Where Do I Stand on the Issues?** lesson for each candidate. Then place the candidates on the political compass in front of the class.

---



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## CANDIDATE PROFILE

Create a candidate profile sheet as formatted below. Include as much of the following information as you can.

Name and Picture of Candidate

Political party: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Children: \_\_\_\_\_

Religion: \_\_\_\_\_

Education: \_\_\_\_\_

Political experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Other experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Explain the candidate's position on the following issues (you may paraphrase or use direct quotes from the candidate's website):

ISSUE:	POSITION:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## CANDIDATE NOTES

Read all of the *Candidate Profile* sheets. Then, complete the following chart by writing reasons to support and not to support each candidate. On the back of this paper, explain which candidate for each race you would campaign for and why.

CANDIDATE	REASONS TO SUPPORT	REASONS NOT TO SUPPORT

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## THE CANDIDATE I SUPPORT IS:

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Answer the following questions about the candidate you most support.

1. What are the overall reasons you support this candidate?
2. Which qualities of the candidate do you think will help them perform in office? Explain.
3. Which qualities might limit the candidate's performance in office? Explain.
4. Describe the work/leadership experience the candidate has.
5. Is the candidate's experience relevant to the position they are seeking? Explain.
6. What is the candidate's stance on the extra issues that the class chose as important? Do you agree with their position? Explain.

## LESSON 27: Analyzing Campaign Messages

### Overview:

This lesson focuses on analyzing the style and substance of campaigns in both free media, such as the news and televised debates, and paid media, such as TV commercials.

### Objectives:

- Analyze messages, images, and target audiences in advertising and political campaigns
- Compare and contrast advertisements and political campaigns

### Materials:

- Videos of candidate television commercials
- Examples of candidate ads (not included)
- LCD projector and laptop
- Tricks of the Trade* handout
- Break it Down: Analyzing Campaign Ads* handout
- Analyzing Campaign Commercials* handout

### Assessment:

- Campaign commercials analysis
- Analyzing Campaign Commercials* handout

### Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1C

Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a

hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

### C3 Standards:

D4.4.9-12.

Critique the use of claims and evidence in arguments for credibility.

### PRIOR TO CLASS

Locate a sample advertisement or commercial to use as an example in the **Before** section (it will need to be projected) and find examples of contemporary campaign commercials on YouTube or on candidates' websites. You can also access ads dating back to 1952 for presidential campaigns at [www.livingroomcandidate.org](http://www.livingroomcandidate.org). Preselect a few and have them queued up and ready to go for the whole class to watch together.

Refer to the Stand and Declare activity instructions on page 41 for information on how to facilitate the activity (which takes place during the **After** section of the lesson).



### BELL-RINGER: Think like an advertiser (5 minutes)

Assign students a product to sell (e.g., a soft drink, a cell phone, a pair of sneakers). Have them

## LESSON 27: Analyzing Campaign Messages

answer the following:

- Who is the audience you are targeting to sell this product to?
- How would you try to convince them to purchase your product?

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### MODIFICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Give an example of a popular advertisement and the target audience for the ad. Next, ask students to provide examples of ads and target audiences.



### BEFORE: Pair and share (10 minutes)

Have students pair up and share their responses to the Bell-Ringer and then solicit some responses to share with the whole class.

Ask students to define what they think a target audience is and how that relates to advertising. Share an example of a commercial or print advertisement using an LCD projector. Ask students to describe the images, identify the message, and identify the target. (You may want to model this first and repeat this process a few times with a few different examples.) Introduce the following vocabulary and have students copy the following definitions.

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**TARGET AUDIENCE:** a specific group of people for whom a message is created to influence or appeal to

**COVERT MESSAGE:** a message that is not openly or obviously displayed

**EXPLICIT:** fully and clearly expressed or demonstrated

**IMPLICIT:** implied rather than expressly stated

---

### MODIFICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Create a poster of the terms and post in the room.



### DURING: Campaign commercials analysis (20 minutes)

Explain to students that political campaigns use some of the same advertising strategies. Distribute *Analyzing Political Commercials* handout and read aloud together, stopping for explanation and examples.

Distribute the *Tricks of the Trade* handout and ask for student volunteers to read it aloud. Ask



## LESSON 27: Analyzing Campaign Messages

if they can think of any examples of these tactics in the current campaign and have them share examples.

Watch preselected examples of campaign commercials together as a class as you model completing the *Break it Down* handout. We recommend you follow an “I do, we do, you do” strategy where you model the first one on your own, then do one or two examples together as a class before having students analyze an ad or two on their own.



### AFTER: Stand and Declare (10 minutes)

Facilitate a Stand and Declare activity using the following statements:

- Negative advertising is effective.
- Political ads do more to confuse voters than inform them.
- Stretching the truth is acceptable if it helps win voters.
- People shouldn’t pay any attention to political ads.



### HOMEWORK

Distribute additional handouts and have students gather examples of campaign messages from newspapers, TV, radio, mailings, posters, and other media sources to complete their handout. We recommend giving students a few days to complete this assignment.

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### ENRICHMENT AND EXTENSION

[www.factcheck.org](http://www.factcheck.org) does research to analyze the accuracy of every campaign ad in the presidential race. It is a well-respected nonpartisan website.

Ask students to write a personal essay on one of the following questions:

- How does each candidate try to stretch the truth and why?
- Do ads that stretch the truth help or hurt the candidate with the voter?
- Does negative advertising work for candidates? Why or why not?
- Are voters good at detecting falsehoods in ads? Why or why not?

## LESSON 27: Analyzing Campaign Messages

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### Campaign Ads In-Depth

[www.pbs.org/30secondcandidate/front.html](http://www.pbs.org/30secondcandidate/front.html) provides a good deal of information on political advertising, including a brief history, interviews with experts, and a step-by-step explanation of how media consultants take something from an idea and create an ad.

### Campaign Ad Archive

[www.livingroomcandidate.org](http://www.livingroomcandidate.org) provides an archive of presidential campaign ads dating back to 1952. Have students compare campaign techniques over the years.

### Digital Campaigning

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digital-campaign/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digital-campaign/) follows the digital campaign and how it targets voters and [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/campaign-targeting/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/campaign-targeting/) provides an interactive program for students to experience digital campaign targeting.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# ANALYZING CAMPAIGN COMMERCIALS

## THERE ARE FOUR MAIN TYPES OF ADS



### Negative

One candidate portrays the other in an unfavorable light.



### Warm and Fuzzy

Candidates make the viewer feel good about the country or their campaign.



### Humorous

Candidates elicit a laugh or smile from the viewer.



### Scary

Candidates evoke images of fear (usually combined with a Negative ad).

## TECHNIQUES USED IN POLITICAL ADS



**Bandwagon** promotes the idea that “everyone is voting for this candidate, so why aren’t you?” e.g., “Polls show that Americans prefer their current health care system.”



**Self-promotional advertising** involves candidate’s visions and goals if elected. Examples of terms used are honest, integrity, stronger America, stronger defense, etc.



**Testimonial** involves having a famous or ordinary person describe why they support you.



**Scare tactics** are ads that try to make you afraid of something, predicts dangerous outcomes if you follow a course other than the one they support. e.g., “We could be attacked.”



**Plain folks** involves either showing the candidate with their family as a symbol of family values, or the candidate mingling with ordinary people giving them their opinion.



**Card stacking** involves listing all the great things about a candidate, but none of the weaknesses.

## WATCH FOR:

- Citing an authority who is not qualified to have an expert opinion
- Citing an expert when other experts disagree on the issue
- Exaggeration
- Personal attacks on a person instead of arguing the issue
- Saying there are only a couple options when there are obviously more/simplification of issues
- Uses a sample too small to support the conclusion
- Slippery Slope: “If we allow gay marriage, what will happen next? Incest?”

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Here are some persuasive devices that advertisers and campaigners use.

TRICK	EXAMPLE
Use catchy phrasing, slogans, and jingles that stick in the voters' minds.	"We're fired up." (Obama campaign)
Use celebrities for appeal and reputation.	Endorsements by other politicians and celebrities
Stating opinions and conclusions in a factual matter to sound more convincing.	"John McCain has the type of experience we need for president."
Calling the opponent names.	"Hillary Clinton is a tax-and-spend liberal."
Using facts, statistics, percentages, and cost figures.	"Crime went down 56% under George W. Bush's leadership while the economy rose 11%."
Flattery designed to get the audience on the side of the candidate.	"I love being out here in Main Street America where the real America lives."
General, abstract statements that can't be proven.	"No one knows Illinois better than Tom Smith."
Using well-recognized images to portray certain emotions like trust and patriotism.	Candidate sitting with their family around a fireplace or standing in front of an American flag.
Presenting the message that everyone is on board for this candidate. Also known as "bandwagon."	"Americans who love their country are voting for Jones."
The repetition of key phrases, the candidate's name, or images in print.	"JR Thorpe cares for Wisconsin. JR Thorpe cares for the environment. JR Thorpe cares for this country."
Appeal to fear and prejudice.	Connecting Obama to terrorists and claiming he is a Muslim played on fears of Islam.
Branding a candidate with an image and a name.	Presenting a candidate as a "working class regular guy," or "family guy."
Slice of life view of the candidate, with activities from a typical day, aimed to build trust and appeal.	Images of candidate doing daily activities.
A straight attack on the opponent.	"Jim Blobbo is a lying cheat."

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# BREAK IT DOWN: CANDIDATE AD ANALYSIS

Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_

## TECHNIQUE

Is there music? If yes, what kind of emotion does the music provoke?

How does the ad make the candidate look? Strong, smart, sincere, experienced, etc.?

Is the voice the candidate's voice or someone else? Describe the voice (e.g., strong, soothing).

What images are used in the ad? Do those images provoke emotions?

## TARGET

What kind of people appeared in this advertisement?

Who does this ad seem to be aimed to?

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## BREAK IT DOWN: CANDIDATE AD ANALYSIS

### MESSAGE

What information is presented? Is it mostly facts, stories or something else?

What is the focus issue(s) of the ad? What issues are discussed? Is it about policy issues?  
Candidate's character? Other?

### RATE THE EFFECTIVENESS

Does this ad make you want to support this candidate? Why or why not? (And if you do not think you are the target group for this ad, do you think it would be effective with the target group?)

## Taking Action



### TAKING ACTION

Mikva Challenge believes the best way to learn civics is to “do civics.” This Action Civics approach centers on giving students opportunities to take action during the election season. In this section, we offer suggestions to help you facilitate and reflect on these powerful learning experiences with your students. We encourage you to choose actions that best fit your context (e.g., student age, geography, time) and by all means, engage in multiple actions!

As with all experiential learning for youth, student safety is paramount. Take care, if necessary, to ensure that students are safe.

This is an abridged version. You will find more action opportunities, and all 32 lessons, in Mikva Challenge’s complete Elections in Action curriculum. To access the full experience, go to [www.mikvachallenge.org/curriculum](http://www.mikvachallenge.org/curriculum).

## Campaigning



### WHAT IS IT?

Even if students are not eligible to vote, they can volunteer to help get a candidate elected. Campaigning requires going to campaign offices and volunteering to phone bank, canvass (knock doors) or any other host of activities the campaign might need help with. Student volunteers are free labor and most campaign offices are happy to have them.

### WHY DO IT?

There is no better way for students to get an inside view of the political process than to volunteer for a campaign and reflect on their experiences. It is great work experience and if they are passionate and competent, they might quickly get promoted to overseeing OTHER volunteers. The goal is to show students that this work is not “for other people” but instead is exactly where they need to be.

### WHAT DOES THE TEACHER DO?

Whether you take a class trip to a few campaign offices or have students campaign outside of school time on their own in small groups, you will want to help them prepare for their experience ahead of time. (Even if students will be going on their own, we recommend that you escort your students to the different campaign offices their first time if possible.) Teachers should stay non-partisan and have students visit campaigns for all viable candidates. If students are campaigning outside of class, offer credit. Verify participation through forms signed by the campaign volunteer coordinator, have students take a selfie at the campaign office, and / or have students write reflections.

### CAMPAIGNING PREPARATION

Divide students into groups of ten and spread groups around the room. In each group, students should line up facing each other—five on one side, five on the other, with a fair amount of space in between pairs so they can talk without disturbing each other.

One side of each group will play the role of a voter. Give each student in the voter group an index card that describes the way they will respond to the campaigner when they come to their “door.”

Responses can include:



## Campaigning

- “I am not interested.”
- “Thanks, but I always vote for the other party.”
- “I don’t vote.”
- “How does your candidate feel about (pick an issue)?”
- “Why are you campaigning, you’re not even old enough to vote?”

The other side of each group will practice campaigning for the candidate they have chosen to support. Sentence starters to help the campaigners with their pitch include:

- “I care about \_\_\_\_\_ and my candidate cares about this issue, too.”
- “I like the candidate’s experience and leadership.”
- “I support the candidate’s position on \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “The candidate and I share similar views on what the U.S. needs.”

Explain that each campaigner will be given one minute to make their pitch. Once the activity starts, there will be a lot of talking at once. Allow one minute for the first round of door-knocking. Allow for feedback and reflection. Ask the “voters”: *“Were you persuaded? Why or why not? What did the campaigner do well? What shouldn’t they have done?”*

Have “campaigners” move down the line to the next “voter” and begin another minute of campaigning. You can repeat, moving down the line, as much as you have time for. Then have “voters” hand their index card to the student standing across from them. Have the “campaigners” become the “voters” and have the “voters” practice their campaigning.

---

### MODIFICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Give ample time for practice before the pitch.

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## TIPS FOR CONTACTING POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Whether you are planning to bring students to a candidate’s office yourself or help them get in touch with a campaign on their own, here are some tips for how to give students a good experience.

### WHO TO CONTACT

There are usually three main departments in a campaign: Finance (fundraising), Communications (e.g., press, messaging, advertising), and Field (voter contact). If you are taking students

## Campaigning

campaigning, you will want to get in touch with the campaign's Field Department. If you are inviting candidates to a forum or other event, you will likely want to get in touch with the Communications Department or the Scheduler.

### GETTING IN TOUCH

Look up their campaign online. Reach out (email or phone) and ask for the correct person with a brief description of why you want to connect. If you can, check out the campaign office in person to see what the environment will be like for your students.

### ASK A FEW KEY QUESTIONS

- What kinds of activities do you have for students?  
*It's best for students to be contacting voters as much as possible (phonebanking and canvassing) but campaigns may also need help with post cards, yard signs, and events.*
- Will students be required to use their own phones and / or laptops?
- Who is the contact point who will be present in the office when students arrive and what is their phone number?
- Do students need to sign up ahead of time or can they just walk in? Who should they email / call if they need to sign up?
- If you are canvassing, can students have a location close to the campaign office to shorten travel time?

### FOLLOWING UP & CONFIRMING

Campaigns are usually busiest on weekends and slowest on Mondays, and most are always busy. That means, call multiple times, leave voicemails, follow-up with emails, and if you are lucky enough to get the cell number of a staffer, TEXT THEM! Texting and / or calling will always get you the quickest, and best response.

Good campaigns will confirm events / phonebanking or canvassing shifts with you multiple times including a couple days before and the day of. However, you should plan to confirm and remind them of any accommodations they agreed to for young people.

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### REFLECTION

A reflection handout is provided on the following page. Students should fill one out every time they campaign. You can then have them write a summative reflection of their experience, what they learned and whether they would consider running for office or running a campaign in the future.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## CAMPAIGNING REFLECTION

Candidate I campaigned for:

Hours Campaigning:

Volunteer Coordinator Signature:

Circle all the activities you participated in while working in the office.

CANVASSING

PHONE BANKING

VISIBILITY

OTHER:

GIVE A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE ACTIVITY YOU PARTICIPATED IN BELOW.

IF YOU TALKED TO VOTERS, WHY DID PEOPLE SAY THEY WERE GOING TO VOTE FOR YOUR CANDIDATE?

WHY DID PEOPLE SAY THEY WERE NOT GOING TO VOTE FOR YOUR CANDIDATE?

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## CAMPAIGNING REFLECTION

HOW DID YOU TRY TO CONVINCE THEM?

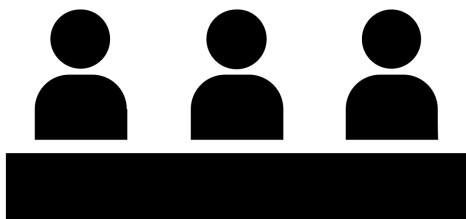
WHAT WAS THE MOST POSITIVE PART OF THE EXPERIENCE?

WHAT WAS THE LEAST POSITIVE PART OF THE EXPERIENCE?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM CAMPAIGNING?

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THIS EXPERIENCE TO A FRIEND? WHY OR WHY NOT?

## Organizing a Candidate Forum



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### WHAT IS IT?

A forum (we recommend an open forum rather than a debate format) for local candidates to share their views on issues of concern to youth.

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### WHY DO IT?

In addition to bringing the political process up close and personal to students, it is a tremendous leadership development opportunity for them. Rarely do candidates address the needs of young people and this provides a great opportunity for them to have those conversations.

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### WHAT DOES THE TEACHER DO?

This type of event involves a fair amount of preparation and time -- we encourage you to utilize student leadership to the fullest extent possible and allow yourself ample time (a month or two). Contact each campaign (you should invite all candidates running) and see if they are interested and willing to participate. Once you get agreement from the candidates, find a date that works for all of them AND is available for your venue (e.g., school auditorium or gym). Candidates often want to know the format before they commit and are often hesitant to engage in back and forth debate. A debate format puts tremendous pressure on student moderators so we recommend instead allowing each candidate a set amount of time to make a statement and then answer a series of questions from a panel of students. The candidates do not need to be on the stage at the same time.

Adding a Campaign Fair in the 45-60 minutes before the Candidate Forum can create a very festive and engaging event for a wide number of students. (See **Campaign Fair** for details).

We recommend creating the following committees of work for students:

- **Outreach Committee:** responsible for publicizing the event within the school and community to turnout a large audience. Committee members should use flyers, social media, contact local media, morning announcements etc.
- **Media Committee:** responsible for getting a media presence at the event. Committee members should write a press release, contact local media and prepare talking points to be prepared to greet press and be interviewed when media arrives at the event. Committee should choose a hashtag and take over social media.

## Organizing a Candidate Forum

- **Facilities Committee:** responsible for set up/take down and decor. Committee members should meet with building staff to ensure the space is available and ready and arrange seating and decorations as needed.
- **Questions Committee:** responsible for soliciting questions from the broader student body and then curating the questions to focus on the most important issues and avoid repetition. Committee members should ensure a mix of policy questions as well as some fun questions that allow the candidate to show their character (e.g., What is your favorite game? What is your favorite book? How might your high school teachers describe you?) Committee members should also decide if each candidate will be asked the exact same questions or if you prefer to have questions placed on slips of paper in bowls and randomly picked. For fun you can have different bowls for different types of questions (e.g., PBS for serious policy questions, MTV or Cartoon Network for fun questions) and allow candidates to choose which types of questions they want to answer.
- **Materials Committee:** responsible for deciding on and creating or collecting necessary materials for the event. Will you be setting up a voter registration table? (If so, what materials are needed?) Will there be programs? Voter guides?
- **Moderating Committee:** responsible for MCing the event. We recommend utilizing a few students here. They should introduce the event, the candidates and ask the questions. You may also assign a time keeper in this group to hold candidates to their allotted time (We recommend having them hold up a yellow sheet of paper when there are 30 seconds left and a red sheet of paper when they are out of time).

If you are interested in having students work directly with candidates but organizing a candidate forum feels daunting you could:

- Partner with an organization interested in hosting a forum that will engage your students in some aspects of the work.
- Invite candidates to come speak with your class(es) on separate days.

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## REFLECTION

- What went well?
- What would we improve if we did it again?
- What surprised you about the candidates? About the experience?
- Did the forum change your opinion of any of the candidates? Explain.