

Growing Voters and Election 2008: Grades: 9-12

Activity Title: Candidate Debate / Press Spin Room

Overview

The best way for students to see behind the curtain of media *Opz* is to create it themselves. Once students play the role of interpreting and analyzing the candidates and issues, including as ‘spinners,’ they can immediately grasp it as opinion rather than fact.

Being an informed voter requires one to listen critically and to analyze information in debates, speeches, and commercials to insure making informed decisions about which Presidential candidate to support. It is important to research the issues and to scrutinize amidst the vast amounts of information disseminated during the campaigns. In this activity students will simulate key elements of the candidates debates including debate camp preparations and post-debate media spin.

Essential Questions

1. How does each party contribute to shaping the foundation of national politics?
2. How does commentary and media coverage of the candidates and issues influence how the public perceives their choices in the election?
3. What criteria do people use to select their candidate for President?
4. What process do we use to elect our officials in the United States, and does the process work well?

Objectives

Students will role-play influential individuals in the current political arena.

Students will participate in a classroom debate between two candidates representing two political parties.

Students will understand the impact that political parties have on the actions of the candidates.

Students will understand the history of the political parties in the United States.

Students will understand the role and issues of each party.

Students will identify the issues that require the voters’ decisions.

National Standards

Locate, organize, analyze, and use information from various sources to understand an issue of public concern, take a position, and communicate the position.

Evaluate the ways in which public opinion can be used to influence and shape public policy.

Identify the sources, evaluate the justification, and analyze the implications of the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

Understand the structure, politics, and positions elected officials of state and local government hold. (Students will understand how state and local governments foster civic responsibility and further the Constitutional principal of Federalism).

Activity Instructions

Procedure

Students will act as members of a political party in the United States. Suggestion: students will pick a party card out of a hat or be assigned to a party.

Students will be divided into teams according to class size and teacher preference.

1. A Democratic Party Prep Team to prepare and support Senator Barak Obama in the debate.
2. A Republican Party Prep Team to prepare and support Senator John McCain in the debate.
3. A Media Consultants Republican Team to develop “spin” analysts for the post debate follow-up media room.
4. A Media Consultants Democrats Team to develop “spin” analysts for the post debate follow-up media room.
5. A Journalists Team to generate questions in advance and then conduct interviews with spin experts following the debate in the media room.
6. (optional) A Video Crew Team to use webcams or video camera to film debate and spin interviews.

Preparation for Debate

1. Students will research, create, and submit a list of ten resources about their representative party.
2. Students will peruse primary source documents from prior presidential election debates, including online video footage and editorial commentaries.
3. Students will outline the details of what they know about the Presidential electoral process and list any questions they have about how the process works or about the role of political parties.
4. Students will generate debate questions on the major issues affecting their party and its platform.

Specify team play

1. Each candidate prep team will select a student to play each Presidential candidate (either Senator McCain or Senator Obama).
2. The entire team will work together to prepare their candidate for the debate by
 - a. Identifying key issues and their candidate’s position on those issues.
 - b. Identifying key arguments and points that their candidate should make about him/herself and against the other candidate.

- c. Anticipating their opponent's position on various subjects and preparing counter remarks.
 - d. Putting the candidate through a practice session with other team members playing the part of the opponent and the journalists posing questions to the candidates.
3. Each **media consultant's team** will select party notables and/or key journalists to be spokespeople for each candidate in the post-debate media room.
4. Depending on time and the number of students available, there can be multiple "spinners" for each party.

Student research will provide background information on "spinners" before the students determine the number and types of people who will make up this group.
5. Each team will prepare their spin experts for the interpretive work following the debate. The team must
 - anticipate the issues that are most likely to arise during the debate.
 - understand how the assigned party wants the key issues to be interpreted and explained by the spin expert in the media room.
 - practice taking what the candidate may have said, misspoken, or not said "on message" and re-interpreting it so that it fits the message that the party is looking for on that issue.

(Tip: study online footage of spin experts. Example is YouTube.com footage of spin experts interpreting and declaring who won after presidential candidate debate.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2StvPrEvTk>)
6. **Journalists team**: Identify key issues and generate questions for candidates during debate, follow-up questions for debate analysis, and questions for spin experts to interpret the debate in post-debate media room.

Time permitting, the journalists team will develop a "news analysis" story to report on the debate afterwards. (i.e. who "won", what key sound bites were noteworthy, what was newsworthy about the debate, what the media and party pundits had to say about the debate). This may be a TV news (video) story, a newspaper print story, or an online story.

7. **Video Film Crew team** (optional) has two roles that can be divided. One role is filming the debate and interviews, and the other role is editing footage to broadcast debate coverage.

In their first role, the video crew team will

- a) prepare to film the debate.
- b) prepare to capture individual interviews with media analysts (spin experts) at the conclusion of the debate.

- c) organize journalist news coverage of debate.
- d) decide who is behind the camera, who is organizing the shots, who is directing the filming, who is the technician, etc.

For their second role, students on the filming team will decide which shots are needed and edit the footage from their candidate's debate and spin room interviews. From this footage, the film team will create a movie simulating TV news footage.

Equipment

- video camera, or
- inexpensive webcams attached to a laptop(s) to feed digital footage straight onto the computer, or
- cell phone -If cell phones are used for filming, students can use the free program "qik" http://qik.com/info/about_us to place captured film on computers.
- still photography cameras have short "video capture" tools available: if several of those are used in a coordinated fashion, the small files can be downloaded and edited together.

Editing and producing movie footage

Using free online editing tools at www.eyespot.com, debate news footage can be easily edited using free "click-and-drag" online software and the movie draft and final versions stored there free online. (These can be password protected or easily shared across schools.)

1. Go to www.eyespot.com
2. Login username growing_voters
3. Follow screen instructions at "upload" to get filmed footage into the editor.
4. Select "mixer" to do free click-and-drag editing. There are FAQ's and Help getting started links for each.

Suggested extension assignment

Use the same raw film footage for student crews to edit debate coverage. Create two different "stories" with the same material; each showing a different conclusion (or spin). This could also be done with print journalism.

Materials

Internet Research Resources: http://www.ikeepbookmarks.com/Growing_Voters
Magazines Newspaper TV

Activities

1. Prepare candidates with Debate Camp practice.
2. Stage a debate between the candidates.

3. Have journalists pose questions in the spin room and during the debate.
4. At the conclusion of the debate, have party notables and political pundits interpret, analyze and spin the debate.
5. Film debate and post-debate analysis.
6. Students produce movie clip(s) simulating TV coverage.
7. Journalists write new stories.
8. Upload the TV coverage and/or news analysis onto a blog and/or TeacherTube and continue the discussion by encouraging collaboration outside the classroom.
9. Consider the authorized and monitored use of *Facebook* to distribute the weblink to student coverage.

Additional Ideas: Party Slogans, Posters, Music

Assessments Rubrics added below.

Teamwork Assessment Rubric				
	Above Standard	At Standard	Below Standard	Points Earned
	(3)	(2)	(1)	
Use of Class Time	Group members came to class prepared and equipped; made effective use of time; were always on task and actively involved in the project.	Usually came to class prepared and equipped; usually made effective use of time; were usually on task and actively involved in the project.	Group came to class unprepared a majority of the time, did not use time effectively or stay on task.	
Project Execution	Group completed each step with virtually no intervention from the teacher; utilized problem-solving skills.	Completed each step with some intervention from the teacher; utilized problem-solving skills.	Group needed considerable help from the teacher.	
Synthesis	Consistently worked together as a well-coordinated team; team members responsibly handled their own share.	Usually worked together as a well-coordinated team; team members usually handled their own share.	Team did not work together and effectively divide tasks. Outside intervention was necessary; team members did not pull their own weight.	
Team Name			Total Points	

Debate/Spin Rubric				
	3	2	1	Points Earned
Process	Uses original approach effectively. Highly organized, uses vivid, precise language, and delivers with ease.	Somewhat organized, few facts to back opinions, slightly prepared.	Needs improvement in organization and preparation. Unsure delivery.	
Execution	Interesting Logical Order, fluid delivery, clear connections in materials. Good use of delivery techniques.	Somewhat logical delivery. Slightly unclear connections in material. Delivery techniques need some work.	Disorderly delivery. Does not connect with material.	
Delivery	Engages audience. Clear and understandable. Uses appropriate language. Takes turns.	Lacks clear delivery. Teamwork somewhat fluid.	Delivery unclear, use of teamwork needs improvement. Does not engage audience.	
Student's Name:			Total Points	