



## **Citizens, Not Spectators**

### **Lesson 2: Where Do the Candidates Stand?**

#### **Lesson Overview**

This lesson allows students to explore where the presidential candidates stand on issues that are important to them. It also allows them to scrutinize informational sources in order to obtain accurate and unbiased data.

#### **Suggested Grade Level**

High school (Grades 9–12)

#### **Estimated Time to Complete**

Three class periods

#### **Objectives**

By the end of this lesson students should be able to

- demonstrate an understanding of a citizen's role in an election cycle;
- discuss the role of the media (print, television, Internet, etc.) in a presidential election;
- analyze sources of information for bias versus objectivity;
- discern the essential core of contemporary issues in society;
- use information gathered to develop a position on a contemporary societal issue;
- compare and contrast the positions of presidential candidates on important issues.

#### **Materials Needed**

##### **Teacher Resources**

- Teacher Resource 1

- Teacher Resource 2

### **Student Resources**

- Student Handout 1
- Student Handout 2

### **Lesson Procedure**

1. *Introduce the lesson.* Begin the lesson by engaging students in a short discussion based on the following questions:
  - What is the role of a citizen during an election cycle?
  - How can citizens inform themselves about issues that are important to them or their communities?
  - How can citizens learn about where candidates stand on these important issues?
  - Are political campaigns important to the democratic process?
2. *What do they care about?* Conduct a brainstorming activity with the class. Write the word ISSUES on the board (or chart paper) and ask students to name any issue they have heard about, think they know about, or is important to them—anything at all that they think fits under the title ISSUES. Post all the responses without comment. Once completed ask students to review the list and: a) categorize the issues as federal, state, or local issues. Some will fall under two or three categories and need to be indicated as such; b) determine which issues, if any, could be directly linked or grouped together under a broader title. Some may fall neatly under an umbrella category. For example, failing schools, a high drop-out rate, etc. could fall under Education. Others may fall under more than one category. For example, funding cuts to colleges and universities could fall under Education or the Economy. If that is the case, place the issue in more than one place. There is no need to get into a lengthy conversation about these issues at this point. Example of some major or broad issues include:
  - *Education*
  - *The Environment*
  - *The Economy*
  - *Foreign Policy*
  - *Civil Rights*
  - *Health Care*
3. *Learning about the issues:* Break the class up into small groups of three (a triad). Direct each group to choose an issue and review the sub-categories associated with it. (Because the focus of this unit is the presidential election, the issues should be federal or national in scope. If you choose to apply this to other election races, the issues could be either state or local in

nature.) Each triad should choose which subcategory they are most interested in and write up what they think they know about it.

Inform students they are going to complete a two-part activity. Provide them Student Handout 1. Teacher Resource 1 provides a step-by-step description of the entire activity. First, each triad needs to research the topic they chose and find out as much factual information as they can about it. They should compare what they learn to what they thought they already knew and see where differences, if any, may exist. This is a good time to review with students how to be critical readers and researchers. You may choose to use Student Handout 2, which provides tips on how to scrutinize sources of information.

Follow Teacher Resource 1 to complete Part 1 of the activity and lead a class discussion on the issues.

4. *Where do the candidates stand on the issue?* Part 2 of the activity has students try to determine where the presidential candidates stand on their issues. Please review Teacher Resource 1 to complete this activity.
5. *Looking at the larger picture.* Post the completed chart around the classroom. Remind students that they will come back to this information in the weeks to come before the election. Students should begin to formulate in their minds which candidate they might choose for president based on the information gathered in this lesson. They should also determine what other information might they need to know before making their choice.
6. *Concluding the lesson.* Students should reflect upon what they learned about their issues and about where the candidates stand on their issues. Students can share aloud or write an essay about what they learned from this lesson. How has their initial view changed? Where do they stand on this issue and why? Has their stance changed as a result of their research? Do they agree with either of the candidates?