

Lesson 2

The President: Politician in Chief

This lesson is excerpted from PBS, www.pbs.org/elections/kids/lessons/lesson_plan5Print.htm

Objectives: Students will observe media coverage of the current presidential election; assess information provided by campaign literature and advertisements; develop criteria for evaluating presidential candidates; and compare presidential candidates' qualifications for office.

Materials and Handouts: U.S. Constitution; textbook on U.S. government and politics; media; campaign literature; computers with Internet access; current newspapers and periodicals; (8) Write a Help Wanted Ad; (9) Job Requirements chart

Online Resources: www.georgewbush.com/, www.johnkerry.com/

A. Daily warm-up and current events alert!

1. Elicit student reaction: What should an informed voter know today? Or, since we last met, what have you heard (read or seen) about the election?

B. Strategies

A. Ask, "what are the results of your interview?" In large group learn what (1) voters think it means to be informed, and (2) issues they consider most important. Offer students the opportunity to remember and reflect on what they heard.

B. Students will decide on the personal qualities needed to carry out the president's formal and informal powers. They may cite experience in public office, intelligence, the ability to work with others and sound judgment. To demonstrate their understanding of personal qualities needed to fulfill the formal and informal responsibilities of the presidency, students may:

- Write a "help wanted" ad which lists qualities required to carry out presidential duties (Handout 7)
- Create a diagram that demonstrates links between personal characteristics and presidential duties
- make posters of "Ideal President" in which students label the body parts needed by the president. Examples: a good brain to think through issues; a voice to make your thoughts known; a heart to care for others; hands to do the hard work; etc.

3. Students will collect campaign literature on presidential contenders, watch TV ads and political talk shows and investigate presidential web sites. They may conduct these activities individually or in teams.

4. Students will discuss the qualities necessary to win presidential election. These may include personal attractiveness, speaking ability, persuasiveness, organizational skills and the ability to raise money. Students will **compare** their list of **qualities needed to carry out presidential responsibilities with those needed to win election**. Students will form

conclusions: To what extent are the qualities the same? To what extent are they different? How can this knowledge help voters to make an informed choice among presidential candidates?

5. Using their list of qualities needed to carry out presidential responsibilities, students will evaluate the current contenders for U.S. president. They may use information from newspapers, web sites, the media and campaign literature they have collected. While all should use their developed criteria, they may use various forms of evaluation. For example, students may:

- develop a chart comparing two or more candidates;
- design a media ad that uses key points in their evaluation; or
- write a newspaper editorial using their evaluation to support a particular candidate.

E. Extended Activities, Homework, Journal Entry

Students may determine the value of the campaign literature, newspaper articles, Web sites and media in helping voters to make informed choices. Using the material they have reviewed, students may develop a scheme to determine its relevance. For example, they may ask, "how much space/time is devoted to a discussion of the candidates' qualifications and stands on issues?" or "how much space/time is used to discuss the candidates' campaign schedule or strategies?"

Based on their analysis, students will form conclusions as to which sources are most useful.

Consider the presidency as a pie chart. In small groups, students divide the pie into the pieces they consider to be most important to the job. For example, knowledge of terrorism/homeland security and the economy may have large slices while the religious/ethnic background may have a small slice. With whole class, compare charts.

Students may present their findings by:

- developing a chart which rates material according to its educational value;
- writing a paper in which they analyze the value of one source of information, i.e., TV talk shows or candidates' Web sites.

To demonstrate their findings, students may:

- create a voter's guide to help citizens focus on important characteristics of presidential contenders;
- draw a cartoon which illustrates obstacles to informed voting;
- make up a "smart voter's quiz" which enables citizens to assess whether they are using informed criteria to make political choices; or
- design a flow-chart which shows steps to sound voter decision making with hazards along the way.

Journal Entry: Discuss what characteristics you selected as most important for a president and why. Or, "something I learned today about being an informed voter was _____. This was surprising or interesting to me because _____."

Relevant National Standards established by McREL may be found at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/docs/contents.html>