A closely fought election, such as the contest we anticipate this year, puts the social studies classroom “at center stage” in schools and offers many unrivaled teachable moments to ensure that our future voters understand the principles and practices of democracy. Much of this issue consists of a special section that will help teachers educate students about the elections.

Syd Golston leads the section off with a general overview of the most effective strategies for getting students interested, informed, and involved in the electoral process. Making the point that no future voter should be left behind in understanding our electoral process, she recommends activities ranging from the evaluation of debates to service learning projects that bring out the vote.

After the election of 2000, the Electoral College is sure to be a subject that looms large year, some teachers would just as soon avoid voter turnout in the United States with that younger age groups, and compares overall young people. Our “guide to the presidential debates and voter turnout among the low incidence of voting among the classes across the country this fall. David Dulio and the staff of the National Parent/Mock Election present basic information about the distribution of electoral votes among states this year, and stress the importance of the “swing states.” They suggest classroom activities that will help make students avid watchers of the state-by-state results on November 2.

Two special Social Education features look at the importance of the presidential debates and voter turnout among young people. Our “guide to the presidential debates” provides the background to the debates and explains their carefully constructed format. Special tips for teachers suggest ways of getting the most out of debate watching. The feature on voter turnout examines the low incidence of voting among the younger age groups, and compares overall voter turnout in the United States with that in other countries. Experienced social studies teachers share their best strategies for encouraging young people to register, get interested in the campaign, and then vote on election day.

Appeals by the presidential candidates to different sets of social values will play a major role in the upcoming election. C. Frederick Risinger underlines the difficulty of discussions of values in the classroom, pointing out that, “in a presidential election year, some teachers would just as soon avoid the controversy that might ensue from heated arguments in the classroom and, even more frightening, among parents who might learn about the discussions from students.” (330) The values debate is, however, too important for teachers to avoid, and he recommends websites that will help examine it in the classroom.

This issue of Social Education marks the inauguration of a new column, “Democracy Education,” edited by Diana Hess, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who can draw on many years of prior experience as a classroom teacher. She discusses the benefits of inviting local, state and federal office holders and political activists to the classroom, and argues that guest speakers are most effective if they engage in interactive lessons rather than speeches or lectures. Teachers will value her strategies for maximizing interaction during class visits.

Two articles in this issue examine the challenges and rewards of teaching younger students about the presidency and presidential elections. S. Kay Gandy outlines a set of ten classroom-tested lessons on the election process that are taken from her own experience as a fifth grade teacher (but are also adaptable for a wide range of grade levels). The lessons integrate language arts, math and social studies, and Prof. Gandy takes us through them step by step, from the introduction of topics to suggestions for assessment activities.

For her part, Mary E. Haas recommends methods of introducing the concept of the presidency and the basic principles of our electoral process to students at levels ranging from kindergarten and first grade to the upper elementary grades. Her topics include the characteristics of presidents, polling, the secret ballot and the Electoral College. Prof. Haas recommends mock elections and an election night simulation as useful activities, and also identifies websites that are particularly useful for the elementary grades.

Outside the special section on elections, this issue of Social Education presents articles on U.S. and world history, and contemporary global education.

Our Teaching with Documents feature, the opening article of this issue, presents a little known document related to John Brown’s seizure of Harpers Ferry in October 1859—the demand for the surrender of Brown and the other insurgents holding the armory issued by Robert E. Lee, then a lieutenant colonel in the Second U.S. Cavalry, who had been ordered to suppress the insurrection. Daniel F. Rulli portrays the historical background to the document, and offers teaching suggestions that assist the analysis of both the document and of the Harpers Ferry raid.

Douglas Selwyn investigates the politics of pronouns. The use of the word “we” is common in political discourse, but the person using it may be promoting a cause that does less for the common good than the words “we” or “us” imply. “Pronouns,” Selwyn writes, “are sly as well as shy.” (349) They can be employed to imply shared purposes that do not in fact exist, and their use in civic or historical discussions can promote error and bias instead of understanding.

In an ever more complex world, knowledge of other countries and cultures is one of the most important skills that young people can acquire. However, as Merry Merryfield shows, proponents of global education face an uphill struggle at a time when the school system is focused on other subjects and there is resistance to the need to include the in-depth study of other cultures in the curriculum. Merryfield emphasizes the importance of countering stereotypes of foreign peoples. Teachers interested in expanding the horizons of their students by investigating international events and world cultures in class will appreciate her research-based advice.

Michael Yell, Geoffrey Scheuerman and Keith Reynolds address one of the biggest challenges facing history teachers: how to get students interested in the subject matter of history in ways that make them eager to obtain information and attain a better understanding of historical developments. They show how the use of a compelling graphic—in this case, Brueghel’s portrayal of the Black Death—and the right kind of Anticipation Guide can work wonders in stimulating the curiosity of students and encouraging them to investigate the past.

As always, the editors of Social Education welcome the comments of readers on any of the articles in this issue.