Every social studies class holds special importance this fall. Thoughtful young citizens are being formed and in presidential election years, no future voter can be left behind. —Syd Golston

The original impetus behind the creation of free public education was the need for an informed electorate. Social studies stands at center stage every four years in American schools, and in a welcome reversal, English teachers collaborate with us as they assign political topics for essays and term papers. In elementary classrooms, teachers affirm the importance of the election with their bulletin board space, tricolored bordette and all.

Yes, we will teach about the election. But what will we teach? Most importantly, how will we teach it? Charles Quigley, of the Center for Civic Education, describes best practice this way: “Democracy requires citizens with the capacity to inquire, evaluate, advocate, and defend positions on civic matters. Democratic citizens must also learn how to monitor and influence their government in the many ways that are available to them. Development of these capacities requires both attention to appropriate content and the use of methodologies that bring the subject to life and help students develop the necessary intellectual and participatory skills.”

The activities below emphasize active learning and respect for K-12 students as individuals who can indeed inquire, develop an opinion, and even influence the electorate in their own age appropriate ways. A child who can write can help to bring out the vote with a postcard or an e-mail to his grandparent, and a high school student can work at a political headquarters years before she or he can actually cast an official ballot.

Gather and display bi-partisan election materials.
Start the collection off yourself, and then turn the task over to your students, who will enjoy acquiring the colorful posters, buttons, brochures, bumper stickers, flyers, and varied campaign freebies—from pencils to flyswatters. The class bulletin board offers a good introduction to the issues of the campaigns, which the class will soon study in depth. What is the message a candidate seems to repeat in his campaign articles? How is the candidate attacking his opponent, directly or obliquely, in his slogans or brochures?

Subscribe to a set of newspapers for your students.
Use the newspapers for Sustained Silent Reading or for “bell work.” You might split the class into two parts, those who will seek out and read articles about the national election, and those who will read about state and local contests. Hundreds of newspapers donate free copies to schools through the Newspapers in Education Program, which you can contact via e-mail (info@nieonline.com) or by telephone at their headquarters in Michigan (248-879-2133).

Obtain sample ballots for your community, one per student.
Review the offices and propositions on the ballot as an excellent introduction to the election. (One caveat: sample ballots may not be available in certain communities, even online, until October.)

Assign one candidate or proposition for each student to investigate and report on. This activity should continue over several weeks before the election, so that each student has “ownership” over a single election race. Give out graphic organizers (charts, diagrams, etc.) for students to use in recording viewpoints and events. During full classroom reports, use organizers to compare candidates on the issues. (Covering the presidential candidates may be shared among several students, a Bush/Cheney group and a Kerry/Edwards group.)

Require all students to watch the televised presidential/vice presidential debates. Hold a classroom debate (secondary students).
Debate dates are:
• Thursday, September 30, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Fla.
• Tuesday, October 5, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio
• Friday, October 8, Washington University, St. Louis Mo. (Vice Presidential debate)
• Wednesday, October 13, Arizona State University, Tempe, Ariz.

The Commission on Presidential Debates publishes, with Kids Voting USA, DebateWatch materials for even the youngest students. For the older ones, use the enclosed debate format/ballot sheet, and write a resolution on the hottest topic which emerged in the debate the night before. Debaters should rehearse not only their arguments, but what they will say to the arguments they believe the other side
will use. This activity provides an opportunity to collaborate with your high school's
speech and debate teacher, if you have a chapter of the National Forensic League.

Use a textbook search by cooperative groups to compare this election with
past ones.

Twentieth century Republican incumbents running for re-election were:
1. Theodore Roosevelt, re-elected (1904, vs. Alton Parker)
2. William Howard Taft, defeated (1912, vs. Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt)
3. Calvin Coolidge, re-elected (1924, vs. John W. Davis and Robert LaFollette)
4. Herbert Hoover, defeated (1932, vs. Franklin D. Roosevelt)
5. Dwight D. Eisenhower, re-elected (1956, vs. Adlai Stevenson)
7. Ronald Reagan, re-elected (1984, vs. Walter Mondale)

Divide your class into eight groups, and ask each group to look up one of these
eight elections. Important questions for groups to consider include: state of the
economy; political conflicts over recent legislation; foreign relations; closeness of
each election; media impact; influence of vice presidential nominees.

Reserve the computer lab so that your students can spend a class period
checking international press reportage on the election.
The World Press Review reprints articles (most translated from more than twenty
different languages) from dozens of world newspapers [www.worldpress.org]. You
can access recent political cartoons from Argentina to New Zealand on Slate.com
cagle.slate.msn.com/politicalcartoons where Daryl Cagle publishes hundreds
of cartoons daily from both domestic and international sources.

Gather political cartoons about the
election.
Select a cartoon and make an overhead to
be analyzed during bell work. Review the
purposes of political cartooning (entertain-
ment, satirizing viewpoints or situations, championing causes), and the symbols
used by the cartoonist. Ask students to
create their own political cartoons, or refer
to historic cartoons in your textbook. (A bonus: analyzing political cartoons is a skill
frequently tested on college admissions
and state standards examinations.)

"Adopt" a small local race for your class
to follow.
You may be able to book the candidates for
a local office to speak in your classroom,
and students can see the process of running
for office “up close and personal.” Invite
the winning candidate one additional
time for a debriefing and victory party,
catered by your students. Investigate the
age requirements for community offices;
perhaps one of your students will be
couraged to run in the future.
Political Debates Format

**Topic:** “Resolved: that __________________________________________________________”

**Affirmative Team Members**

1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________
4. ________________________________

**Negative Team Members**

1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________
3. ________________________________
4. ________________________________

**Sequence of the Debate**

Follow the numbers for proper order of speakers. This order balances advantage during the debate. (Compare with the order of games in a sports championship series.)

**Affirmative Team**

1. Opening Statement 3 min
   *Debater’s name:________________________

3. Rebuttal Argument 3 min
   *Debater’s name:________________________

6. Question Session 5 min*
   *Debater’s name:________________________

7. Summary 3 min
   *Debater’s name:________________________

**Negative Team**

2. Opening Statement 3 min
   *Debater’s name:________________________

4. Rebuttal Argument 3 min
   *Debater’s name:________________________

5. Question session 5 min*
   *Debater’s name:________________________

8. Summary 3 min
   *Debater’s name:________________________

* Debater answers 4 questions, one from each member of the opposite team; if time, also answers questions from the floor.

**The winning team was:** (Check one.)
   □ AFFIRMATIVE  □ NEGATIVE

**This team won the debate because:** (List one argument which convinced you that this side won.)

_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________

When you choose the winner, consider only the evidence presented during today’s debate. Your own personal opinions about the topic must be set aside, so that you may judge only the relative strength of each team’s arguments. Needless to add, don’t vote for a team because your friend is on it.

**Extra Credit**

Look out for the misleading use of techniques of persuasion and for logical fallacies. If you catch any debater using one of these, quote the statement below and identify the logical flaw and you will receive extra credit.

**Statement:**

_______________________________________________________________________________

**Logical Fallacy/Technique of Persuasion:** (Check one.)

□ Appeal to Authority  □ Appeal to Force  □ Appeal to Popularity  □ Attacking the Person

□ False Dilemma  □ Hasty Generalization  □ Name Calling  □ Slippery Slope
Partner with your school’s journalism teacher to publish student articles about the election.

1. Teach the elements of writing a newspaper article (the “journalistic pyramid”). Each student should choose a topic that interests him or her from a list of national issues, and spend some homework time investigating it. One remarkably useful website, [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org), provides exhaustive issue guides for twenty-three topics.

2. Then, send students to conduct oral interviews of neighborhood sources to obtain a unique local slant: a pharmacist on the new Medicare drug program; a CPA on the Bush tax cuts; an airport security person on the homeland security precautions; a librarian on the PATRIOT Act.

3. Articles of merit can be sent to your hometown newspaper, or at least to the school newspaper.

   Hold a role-play of one of the Sunday news panel shows: “Meet the Press,” “Face the Nation,” etc.
   The guest, a presidential or vice-presidential candidate, should be supported by the research of half the class, while the questioners receive the help of the other half to construct their thorny “attack questions” and follow-ups. This is also an ideal time to address the power of the media in a presidential election.

   **Service Learning Activities**
   
   1. Bring out the vote.
   K-12 students can exercise political clout through varied service learning projects: writing and placing door knockers with polling sites and times, sending postcards to remind family and friends to vote (or e-mails), holding registration drives at local supermarkets, forming phone banks to remind neighbors of their polling places the day before the election, mounting student-made signs in store windows. Use your own creativity and your community’s resources. (Can you get a local supermarket chain to reprint your students’ voting poster on its grocery bags? Is there a large factory or office building nearby that would welcome a registration drive by your students in its lobby?)

   2. Encourage students to volunteer at a campaign headquarters (secondary students).
   There is probably nothing more memorable or meaningful than this experience. It empowers students in an instant, mainstream way, even though they themselves cannot vote.

   Enroll your class in one of the student straw vote activities.
   National student tallies are taken and reported in the press by many organizations, such as Channel One, First Vote, Rock the Vote, and the Student-Parent Mock Election. There are also several statewide student polls, often mounted by the secretary of state’s office; the Kansas and Oregon Student Mock Elections are well established. Kids Voting USA is a program which actually brings students to the official polling sites to vote beside their parents; you can check [www.kidsvotingusa.org](http://www.kidsvotingusa.org) to see whether your community is included in the Kids Voting program.

   This list should provide just a beginning; NCSS is maintaining a page on its website for your suggestions on teaching Election 2004: www.socialstudies.org/election. Tell us about your classroom project.

   **Note**
   1. Charles Quigley, of the Center for Civic Education, in a speech at the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) meeting, November 1998, at the U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

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