

VOTE 2008



Classroom Activities about the
Presidential Election
from Morningside Center

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Written by Tom Roderick & Alan Shapiro

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Introduction

Although Morningside Center is best known for its conflict resolution programs like Resolving Conflict Creatively and The 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution), a strong aspect of our work during our 25 years has been to provide guidelines and resources teachers and students can use to explore important issues of the day. The election of President of the United States is surely such an issue.

When teaching about this or any election, the teacher's role is to promote understanding of the candidates and the election process so that students can follow what's going on and form their own opinions based on evidence and clear thinking. Teachers must also take into account their students' stage of development.

This pamphlet contains sets of suggested classroom activities on the election for grades K-1, grades 2-5, grades 4-8, and grades 6-12. With the exception of the K-1 activity, the lessons focus on the two major candidates in the 2008 presidential election. But the aim of these activities goes beyond the particulars of this election to reinforce several big ideas, namely:

- Democracy is a work-in-progress: people have created the social, economic, and political arrangements that shape our lives, and people can change them;
- Dialogue and debate are tools for deepening our understanding of complex issues;
-
- Asking good questions is an essential skill for citizens of a democracy; and
- We can disagree without being disagreeable.

Enjoy the activities!

Tom Roderick Executive Director

- Activities for Grades K to 1 page 4
- Activities for Grades 2 to 5 page 6
- Activities for Grades 4 to 8 page 8
- Activities for Grades 6 to 12 page 13

To download these and many other free activities, go to www.teachblemoment.org.

Activity for Grades K and I

• “Duck for President”

Students will

- hear a story about a duck that runs for president;
- think of things they’d like to change in their classroom or school;
- vote for the change they’d like to see.

Materials Needed

- Optional: The book, *Duck for President* by Doreen Cronin / Betty Lewin, Illustrator, available in many bookstores
- Chart paper and markers

If you have the book, preview it. Show the students the cover, read the title, and ask what they think the book might be about. Ask, “What is a president? What does a president do? Does anyone know who is president of our country?” Ask if they understand what it means to vote.

If you don’t have the book, make up a similar story to tell the children. Here’s the gist: To improve the lot of animals on the farm, duck decides to hold an election to determine who should be in charge. Duck defeats Farmer Brown, but running the farm is only the beginning. Duck goes on to win the race for governor, and soon begins to plan a run for president.

Discuss the story. If you have used the book, you might ask the following: Why does duck want to be in charge of the farm instead of Farmer Brown? What does duck want to change about the farm? If you had been one of the animals, would you have voted for duck? Why? Why not?

Explain that now the students will do something similar to what duck did. Duck looked at the farm and decided there were certain things he wanted to change. Now the students will have the opportunity to say whether there’s anything they’d like to change in their classroom or school. Are there things they don’t like, things they feel are unfair, things that could be better?

Try to help the students identify one issue they feel strongly about—something they’d really like to change, a problem they’d like to address.

If students have identified a problem but not a solution, ask, what solution would they suggest? For example, if the problem is that recess time on the playground is boring, one


solution might be more sports equipment; another solution might be more adults available to play games with kids. Try to get the students to think of two possible solutions.

Now explain that they're going to vote for the solution they like best. Have the students decorate a voting box. Strips of paper are the ballots. You could number the two solutions and ask students to write the number of the solution they favor on their ballot and put it in the box.

When the voting is done, count the ballots to see which solution won.

Discuss: How was this experience? How did students feel thinking of something they'd like to change and coming up with a solution? How did they feel about voting?

Summarize by saying that adults will soon be voting for president of our country. Although more complicated, the process adults will be going through—thinking of things they'd like to change and voting—is similar to what the students have just experienced.

In a subsequent meeting with the students, help them compose a letter to the principal describing the problem, their proposed solution, and asking for a meeting to discuss whether the situation might be changed. 

Thanks to Jenni Turner, kindergarten teacher at P.S. 146 in Manhattan, for recommending *Duck for President* and suggesting this activity.

Activity for Grades 2 to 5

• **Presidential Election Web**

Students will

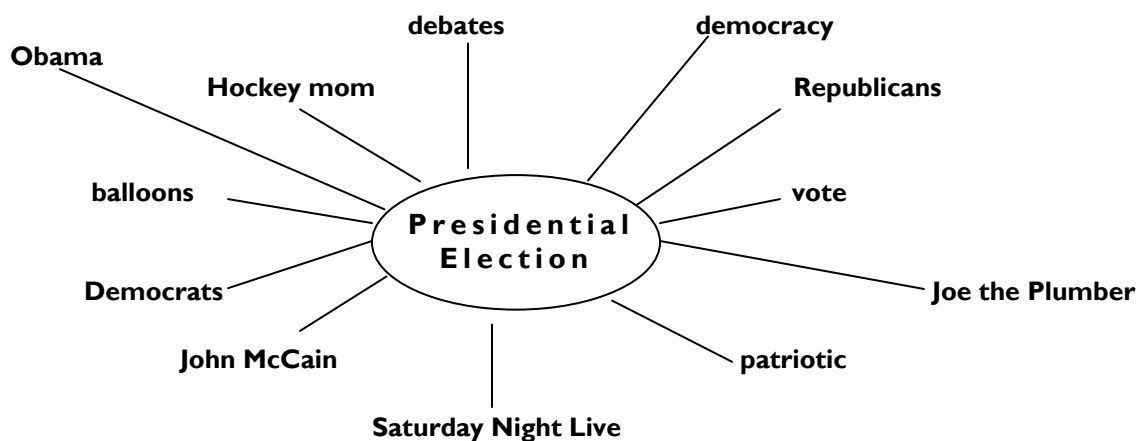
- share their free associations with the words “presidential election”
- get information about the election and correct misinformation
- ask questions and share feelings and concerns

Materials Needed

- chart paper and markers

Creating a “web” with your students is an excellent way to introduce a topic for classroom discussion and exploration. By having students share their free associations with a key word or term, you quickly get a lot of information about your students’ knowledge of a topic and their level of interest. As the web of associations grows, students often reveal misinformation and ask questions. What you learn from the activity can help you plan follow-up activities to deepen students’ understanding.

Write the term “presidential election” in the middle of a piece of chart paper and circle it. Tell the students that you want them to share anything that comes into their minds when they see or hear those words. Anything goes: there are no wrong answers. As they contribute their free associations, write key words on the chart paper. Continue as long as interest remains high. Create a web by drawing lines connecting “presidential election” to the words representing their contributions. In its early stage your web might look something like this:




If the students share misinformation (for example, “Barack Obama is a Muslim”; “John McCain was a prisoner in Iraq”), note it with a check to remind yourself to come back to it, but don’t interrupt the flow of free associations. When the web is fully developed, ask the students if they have questions: are there things about the election they don’t understand or would like to know more about? Chart their questions on another piece of chart paper.

Follow the web activity with discussion. Begin by correcting any misinformation that came out. For example, using the examples above, you might ask, “Is Barack Obama a Muslim?” or “Was John McCain a prisoner in Iraq?” Elicit the correct information from the students if possible. If no one knows, supply the correct information yourself.

Go over basic facts about the presidential election, eliciting them from the students if possible: the names of the candidates for president and vice president, their parties, the role of the president and vice-president in our system, voting as our way to choose our leaders, the voting to take place on November 4 (when schools will be closed), and so on.

Now turn to the students’ questions. Take each question in turn, and ask if any students have information or opinions about the question they’d like to share. If students share knowledge, ask them where they got their information. Ask the students what they might do if they want more information about a particular question. Where might they go? Brainstorm a list of information sources: the candidates’ websites, newspaper articles, TV newscasts. If interest seems high, you might ask for volunteers to research the answers to one or more of the questions and report back to the class.

A homework assignment for all of the students might be to read one news article from a newspaper, magazine, or the web; see one TV report; or have one conversation about the election. Then write a short paragraph describing the experience.

Building on this introductory activity, ask students in subsequent class meetings or current events discussions to share anything they’ve seen or heard relating to the election. 

Activity for Grades 4 to 8

• **Mock Debate and Vote**

Students will

- Research the positions of Obama and McCain on five key issues
- Participate in a mock debate in which students role-playing Obama and McCain answer questions posed by a moderator and the rest of the class
- Vote for which candidate they want for President of the United States

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Copies for all students of “Student Reading / Grades 4 – 8 /Where do the candidates stand?” (pp. 11-12)
- Computer(s) for internet research (optional)
- A timer for the debate
- A “voting box” created and decorated by the students (optional)

This “Mock Debate and Vote” activity takes a period on Day 1 and a period on Day 2. It will work best if it builds on previous classroom activities such as the “Presidential Election Web” described above or a series of classroom discussions you’ve already had about the candidates and the upcoming election.

Day 1

Ask if any of the students watched one or more of the televised debates between Barack Obama and John McCain. Explain that the class is going to participate in a “mock” debate and election for President of the United States. One student will role-play Obama, another will role-play McCain, and a third will be the moderator (who will ask the candidates questions and call on people who want to ask questions from the audience). Everyone else will role-play members of the audience. Say that at the end of this period, you’ll ask who would like to role-play the candidates and the moderator. You’ll select students to play the three roles from those who say they’re interested. Your choice will be based on who seems most knowledgeable about the candidates and their positions.

Begin by asking the students what they know about Barack Obama and John McCain. Chart their responses on a T-chart. If a student shares misinformation, correct it before charting it. *Spend about five minutes on this activity.* Your T-chart might look something like this:

McCain	Obama
Republican Senator from Arizona 72 years old Vietnam War vet Sarah Palin is his running mate	Democrat Senator from Illinois 47 years old Joe Biden is his running mate

By having the students count off, divide the class into five small groups. Ask each group to choose a reader, a discussion leader (who will call on people to speak), a recorder (who will jot down notes and questions from the discussion), and a reporter. *Give the students about two minutes to assign these roles in their groups.*

Distribute copies of the student reading to all students. The reading summarizes the candidates' positions on five key issues: the economy, Iraq, healthcare, schools, and energy. Assign one group to read the summary of the candidates' positions on the economy and discuss it, trying to understand it as best they can. In each group, one student will read the summary out loud, another will facilitate the discussion, and the recorder will jot down notes and questions from the discussion. Assign another group to Iraq, another to healthcare, and so on. The reading may be over the heads of some of the students. Encourage them to ask questions about any words or ideas they don't understand, and answer their questions as best you can. *Give the students about ten minutes to study and discuss the candidates' positions in their groups.*

After students have completed their work in small groups, give the reporter from each group about two minutes to share with the whole class what the small group discussed.

Ask who would like to role-play Obama, McCain, and the moderator. Say that you'll announce your choices later in the day after you've had a chance to think about it. Take into consideration that you can be flexible with the genders of those playing the roles: If boys play Obama and McCain, a girl should be moderator if at all possible, but if a girl seems most knowledgeable about the candidates and the election, don't hesitate to choose her to role-play Obama or McCain. Explain that to prepare for the debate, students will have homework. All students are to read the entire student reading summarizing the candidates' positions on the five issues, and each is to write a paragraph about one position of either candidate they agree or disagree with and why. In addition, the student playing Obama will need to study Obama's positions on the five key issues (doing further research if possible), and the student playing McCain needs to do the same with McCain's positions. The moderator needs to think of three good questions to ask the candidates to get the debate started, and everyone else needs to think of questions they might want to ask as members of the audience. When you

announce your choices, confirm that the three playing Obama, McCain, and the moderator are willing to assume the awesome responsibilities (and extra homework) their role requires.

Day 2


On the following day, begin the mock debate with the moderator seated facing the audience and a seat for “Obama” on one side of the moderator and a seat for “McCain” on the other side. Coach the moderator ahead of time to open the debate with a formal announcement: “My name is _____ and I’m going to be moderating this debate between Barack Obama and John McCain who are running for President of the United States.” The moderator should go on to establish certain ground rules: “The candidates will respond to questions from the moderator and the audience; they will have up to two minutes to respond to each question; the audience will remain quiet except now when we will welcome the candidates.”

Students applaud as the candidates enter and take their seats. Each has a large name tag identifying the candidate s/he is playing. The moderator asks the first of his or her prepared questions. After the moderator has asked three questions, s/he should begin to call on members of the audience to ask their questions. The teacher should keep time for each of the candidates’ responses using a timer.

After the debate is over, lead the students in a round of applause for the candidates and the moderator. Ask the candidates to remove their candidate name tags and ask how they felt playing their roles. Ask the moderator how s/he felt. Ask members of the audience to share feelings or comments. You may want to review with the class any questions they have, including unanswered questions that came from the small group discussions the day before.

Now it’s time for the election. Before students cast their votes, you may want to have a discussion with the class about how they will make their decision. Do they plan to vote on the basis of the candidates’ positions on particular issues? Are they voting based on the backgrounds or personalities of the candidates? What are the pros and cons of using these different criteria for deciding how to vote?

Hand out 3x5 cards or strips of paper and ask students to write their choice for president on the paper without letting anyone see what they’re writing. As soon as they are done, they should fold over the paper so that no one can see it and, one at a time, go up and put their votes in the box. Choose some students who have been especially attentive and helpful during the debate to tally up the votes and announce the results.

When the voting is through, have a discussion with the class about the process and the outcome. Ask for volunteers to explain why they voted the way they did. 

...on the **ECONOMY**

McCain:

McCain, like most Republicans, believes that one of the best ways to help the economy and increase prosperity for Americans is to cut taxes. He thinks the government, which gets its money from the taxes we pay, spends too much money. With tax cuts, people and businesses keep more of the money they earn. McCain says that's a good thing because then consumers will buy more goods and business owners have more money to expand and create new jobs.

McCain supports continuing the large tax cuts that President Bush passed, which helped mainly people with high incomes. He would also lower the tax corporations pay, and he would eliminate taxes on money that people pass on to their children when they die.

Obama:

Obama, like many Democrats, thinks that the money government gets through taxes can help pay for many important things that help everyone—like healthcare, education, and helping people who are in need. However, he says that under the Bush administration, taxes became unfair, with rich people paying too little, and workers paying too much.

Obama wants to overturn the Bush tax cuts for people who make a lot of money (over \$250,000 a year). He says he would cut taxes for anyone earning less than that. He also wants the government to help create new jobs by funding projects to build bridges and roads and other “infrastructure” that is crumbling in the U.S.

... on the **IRAQ WAR**

McCain:

McCain supported the U.S. decision to invade Iraq, but he has been critical about the way the Bush administration has conducted the war. He has opposed setting a timeline for the withdrawal of American troops, saying that it would be wrong to leave Iraq before the government there is functioning and can protect its own people.

Obama:

Obama opposed the invasion of Iraq from the beginning. He believes that the Iraq war has taken our attention away from defeating al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, which he thinks should be the focus. He says he would withdraw American troops in phases and that most troops would be out of Iraq by 2010.

... on **HEALTHCARE**

It's very expensive to go to the doctor, stay in the hospital or get prescription medicine. Many Americans get health insurance from their employers to pay for the cost of healthcare. But more and more employers no longer provide health insurance for their workers, partly because the cost of this insurance is going up and up. The government has programs that provide insurance for people who are retired from work or disabled (Medicare) and for people who have very low incomes (Medicaid).

McCain:

McCain thinks that instead of getting their health insurance from their employers, more Americans should buy health insurance on their own. He would give people a tax credit to help them do that.

Obama:

Obama would expand government programs that provide health insurance for people who don't have it. He would provide support to help lower-income people buy health insurance from either a private company or the government. He would require that families get health insurance for their children.

... on HEALTHCARE / continued

McCain:

McCain believes this is one way to reduce the skyrocketing cost of healthcare, since people won't go to the doctor as often if they have to pay for it themselves.

He thinks that the government spends too much money on healthcare programs for seniors and the poor.

Obama:

He says McCain's plan wouldn't do enough to help people get health insurance because the tax credit he proposed would cover less than half the cost of insurance.

Obama thinks Americans should continue to get health insurance through their employers and that larger employers who don't provide insurance should put money into a fund to help pay for insurance for people who don't have it.

...on SCHOOLS

McCain:

McCain thinks that many public schools have failed and that those that don't meet certain standards should no longer be funded by the government.

He supports using public money (from tax dollars) to give low-income families money for sending their children to private schools.

He supports "merit pay" for teachers – meaning that teachers would get paid more based on how well they teach.

Obama:

Obama supports increased funding for public schools, especially for recruiting and preparing teachers. He also supports more funding for afterschool programs and bilingual education.

He opposes using public money to help people go to private schools, arguing that it leaves public schools with fewer resources.

He supports merit pay for teachers who mentor new teachers and work in schools with special needs.

... On ENERGY

McCain:

McCain believes the U.S. needs to increase oil and natural gas production by allowing oil companies to drill for oil in the ocean. (There has been a ban on drilling offshore oil because of concerns about pollution.)

He supports giving tax credits to companies that are developing renewable energies such as wind and solar.

He supports nuclear power and says he would build 45 new nuclear power plants by 2030.

Obama:

Obama says he would allow some more offshore oil drilling, but he does not believe this should be the main focus of U.S. energy policy.

Instead, he would directly invest billions of dollars in alternative energy, including biofuels, hybrid cars, and renewable energies. He would also fund more research into new energy technology so we can find new ways to save energy.

Obama says he does not oppose nuclear power, but doesn't believe it should be a major energy source because we haven't figured out how to safely store the dangerous waste that comes from nuclear power plants.

Activity for Grades 6 to 12

• **Young voters are “stoked,” but are they informed?**

Written by Alan Shapiro for Morningside Center and published on www.TeachableMoment.org

To the Teacher:

The primary vote and polls demonstrate a greatly heightened interest among young voters in the coming presidential election--a worthwhile subject for classroom inquiry. **The first student reading** (pp 14-15) provides an overview of the growing political involvement of people aged 17-29 as well as information on young people's participation in community service and in community action. **The second reading** (pp 16-17) includes a student questionnaire that was informed by Rick Shenkman's "How Ignorant Are We? The Voters Choose...but on the Basis of What?" at www.tomdispatch.com, (7/1/08).

Suggestions for student inquiry and citizenship projects follow the readings, with a listing of online resources. Teachers may also be interested in "Young Voters: A Force in Politics," which was posted in the high school section of www.teachablemoment.org just after the 2006 congressional election.

For discussion after Student Reading 1

1. What questions do students have about the reading? How might they be answered?
2. How would you explain the increasing numbers of young people who vote?
3. How would you explain why those numbers still do not match those of older people?
4. In this election, young voters seem to favor the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama by a considerable margin. How would you explain this?
5. Do you also rate the top three issues as the economy, the Iraq war and healthcare? If so, why? If not, why not? What issues, if any, do you see as at least equal in importance to these three?
6. Why do you suppose that top universities want more students to consider public service careers?
7. Have you been active in your community on some issue? What? Why? Are you considering a career in public service? What? Why?

For discussion after Student Reading 2

1. How would you explain why many more Americans know who the five members of the Simpson family are than what five American freedoms are named in the Constitution? How do you explain your own answers to these two questions?
2. On what matters do students seem well-informed? Ill-informed? Why?
3. What does information have to do with the "perfectly planned democratic institutions" Einstein mentioned? What else do you think are requirements if democratic institutions are to function well?
4. Why do you think Jefferson believed that ignorance and freedom "in a state of civilization" is impossible? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
5. What are your sources of information about the news of your community? Your country? Your world?

Student Reading I / Grade 6-12

Young voter interest in the election and community service

Interested in the coming election? If so, do you identify yourself as a Republican? A Democrat? A Libertarian? A Green? An Independent? Leaning toward one or the other? Something else? The Pew Center for People and the Press and CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) can tell you a good deal about your generation and its political interests.

Pew Center polls in recent years show a sharp upswing in young voter interest both in voting and in voting for the Democratic Party. In 2004, 51% of young voters said they were either Democrats or leaning toward that party, 40% that they were either Republicans or leaning toward that party. Today the figures are, respectively, 58% and 33%. In contrast, according to the Pew Center, “the previous generation of young people who grew up in the Reagan years-Generation X--fueled the Republican surge of the mid-1990s.”

Today’s young voters are often called Generation Y or Millennials. Pew divides the age groups into the following categories: 17-29, 30-44, 45-59, and 60+. Though 17-year-olds cannot vote in a general election, a number of states allow them to vote in primaries if they will be 18 at the time of such an election.

The youngest voters gave the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry his “highest level of support.” They were the voters “most supportive” of Democratic congressional candidates in 2006. (www.pewresearch.org)

By the close of the 2008 primary elections, more than 6.5 million young people had participated, nearly doubling the 9% who voted in 2000 to 17%, according to the nonpartisan Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, or CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org). This is the first time the youth vote has risen in three consecutive elections since 1971 when the age for voting was lowered to 18.

CIRCLE reported that Senator Barack Obama was the choice of 60% of young Democratic primary voters and a majority in 32 of 40 states. Rohan Wagle, 18, a freshman at the University of California, Berkeley, said of Obama that he’s “the most inspiring leader I’ve seen” and can bring change to Washington “because he doesn’t have favors to repay to special interests because he doesn’t take money from them.”

Senator John McCain was the choice of 34% of young Republicans. Josh Curtis, 18, supports McCain because of his position on Iraq and said, “I think it’s important that America stick it out until the end, when Iraqis have enough security to really establish their political system. I think that if we left now, it could be chaos or even genocide.” (Katherine Mieszkowski, “Young Voters Are Stoked,” www.salon.com, 2/2/08)

Young voters will have several other candidates to choose from. Bob Barr, the Libertarian candidate and former Republican congressman, said on the Colbert Report, “A lot of people, particularly young people, are completely fed up with the system. They’ve seen the corruption of the system that has

given us bigger government no matter which party is in charge. They see the future as fairly bleak under the current system, and they're ready to vote Libertarian for the first time." (6/4/08)

In announcing his candidacy as an independent, Ralph Nader said that Washington D.C. is "corporate-occupied territory, every department, every agency controlled by the overwhelming presence of corporate lobbyists, corporate executives in high government positions, turning the government against its own people, [so] one feels an obligation" to run for President. (www.ontheissues.org, 2/24/08)

Former U.S. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney was chosen as the Green Party's presidential candidate. McKinney has campaigned on the slogan "Power to the People," which calls for the immediate withdrawal of American forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, single-payer universal health care, the creation of a Department of Peace, and reparations for African-Americans.

In a Pew Center survey, young voters said the economy was their number-one issue (46%). Other top issues were the Iraq war (31%) and healthcare (20%). All age groups view these three issues as the most important issues – and in the same order. (Pew, 2/11/08) A CBS-MTV poll showed that young voters are also very concerned about college costs and the 18% teen unemployment rate. (www.usatoday.com, 5/5/08)

Two years ago Pew reported: "As has long been true, young people don't match their elders in voter turnout or many other traditional forms of political engagement. But the gap between younger and older voters narrowed in 2004, and there are clear signs that youth are increasingly finding other ways to be involved in public life." That Pew survey found that 4 of every 10 young people in the 18-29 age group said they had done some kind of volunteer work in the past year, and 22% said they regularly volunteer for community activities. (5/30/06)

In the recent CBS-MTV poll, one-quarter of voters under 30 said they had "worked on a campaign, joined a political club or attended a political rally or march." And CIRCLE found that 19% of young people say they have worked "informally with some group to solve a problem in the community" where they live, a percentage matching that of older people. (6/08)

Some universities are putting more emphasis on encouraging public service. A *New York Times* article headlined "Big Paycheck or Service? Students Are Put to Test" reported that Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard has begun leading "reflection" seminars at three universities to urge undergraduates "to think more deeply about the connection between their educations and their aspirations." He wants to encourage more students "to consider public service and other careers beyond the consulting and financial jobs that he says are almost the automatic next step for so many graduates of top colleges. 'Is this what a Harvard education is for?'" asked Professor Gardner. "'Are Ivy League schools simply becoming selecting mechanisms for Wall Street?'"

At Harvard, Amherst, Tufts, the University of Pennsylvania, and other colleges "officials are questioning with new vigor whether too many top students...are being lured by high-paying corporate jobs, and whether colleges should do more to encourage students to consider other careers, especially public service." (6/23/08)

Student Reading 2 / Grade 6-12

Voter ignorance and a questionnaire

The turnout of young voters in the primaries suggests that even more will go to the polls in this presidential election than the 47% who voted in 2004. But how well informed will the average new voter be on civics and current issues? Probably not very. Surveys have repeatedly demonstrated the ignorance of the American people, in general – and of young people in particular.

In his essay “How Ignorant Are We? The Voters Choose...but on the Basis of What?” Rick Shenkman, an investigative reporter and history professor at George Mason University presents the evidence. (www.tomdispatch.com, 7/1/08) “By many measures,” he writes, young people today “know less than young people knew 40 years ago. Only 20% read a daily newspaper, and more than half of those eligible don’t vote.”

A report by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute this year gave no reason for optimism. It found that “on average 14,000 randomly selected college students at 50 schools around the country scored under 55 (out of 100) in a test that measured their knowledge of basic civics.”

How well-informed are you on basic civics and current issues? You might get a sense by answering the following 10 questions.

Five elementary civics questions + one question about “The Simpsons”

1. What are the five freedoms guaranteed to Americans in the First Amendment to the Constitution?
2. What are the three branches of the U.S. government?
3. Which branch of government has the authority to declare war?
4. If the President vetoes a bill passed by Congress, is there any way for that bill to become law? If so, how?
5. Who are your state’s two senators?
6. Who are the five members of the Simpson family?

FYI: According to the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum, about 1 in 4 Americans can name more than one of the five freedoms. One in 1,000 can name all five freedoms. But more than half can name at least two of the five members of the Simpson family, and more than one in five can name all of them. (Shenkman)

In surveys young voters, like their elders, have named the economy, the Iraq war and healthcare as the issues of most concern to them. Continue the questionnaire by responding to questions about those issues in one sentence each.

Four basic questions on major presidential election issues

7. What is one reason for the downturn in the U.S. economy?
8. What was one reason the president gave for the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003?
9. What is one reason why American troops are still in Iraq more than five years later?
10. What is one reason why tens of millions of Americans do not have health insurance?

Albert Einstein once said that even the most perfectly planned democratic institutions are no better than the people who use them.

Thomas Jefferson said: "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

Questionnaire results: Discuss answers to the ten questions. Have students grade their own papers.

Organizations and websites for inquiry and citizenship

The heightened interest of young people in voting and the political process has helped to generate a number of websites that focus on the political 3 R's—registration, resources, research—and a number of other matters, as the list below shows.

Student inquiry and citizenship activities might include the following:

1. Reporting to the class on what one of the websites has to offer young people interested in the presidential campaign.
2. Investigating political groups in the community: party offices and organizations and adult community action groups.
3. Volunteering to work for one of these organizations.
4. Establishing a school center from which to help students eligible to vote with information about registration and the candidates.
5. Preparing non-partisan FAQ sheets for students about economic issues, the Iraq war, healthcare, and any other issues that concern them.

For additional suggestions, see “Teaching Social Responsibility” in the high school section of www.teachablemoment.org.

Online resources for young voters and other interested students

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) (www.civicyouth.org): Based at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy, CIRCLE offers research findings, fact sheets, and information on community service and how young voters can use online tools to connect with each other. Its focus is the civic and political involvement of Americans ages 15-25.

Rock The Vote (www.rockthevote.com): "Rock the Vote's mission is to engage and build the political power of young people in order for people to achieve progressive change in our country." The organization sponsors its own channel on You Tube and has had the support of such celebrities as Justin Timberlake, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Madonna.

Redeem The Vote (www.redeemthevote.com): This group provides political information with a special focus on an Evangelical Christian perspective. The Washington Post called it "the evangelical answer to MTV's Rock The Vote campaign." It concentrates on getting young voters registered.

Project Vote Smart (www.votesmart.org): Its mission is to provide "factual, non-biased political information" on candidate backgrounds, biographies and statements. The site is for voters of all ages but includes a special section aimed at young voters.

Vote Gopher (www.votegopher.com): "We Dig, You Decide" is the slogan for its mission – to detail the candidates' positions on major issues. The site is mostly managed by Harvard undergraduates and emphasizes that its writers have taken a "non-partisan oath."

Smackdown Your Vote (<http://vote.wwe.com/>): This organization partners with a number of other groups, including the University of Virginia's youth leadership project, to research voting trends and grassroots organizations.

Scoops '08 (www.scoop08.com): The "first-ever daily national student newspaper," Scoops '08 features the work of hundreds of high school and college journalists on political issues. It says it is non-partisan, gets advice from Newsweek and New York Times writers and includes information for potential newcomers.

18 in '08 (www.18in08.com): Featured on this site are information about a documentary film, mobilizing the youth vote, interviews and discussions of "what's at stake" in the coming election.

The missions of the following three sites are to organize and mobilize young voters in their constituency to be active in the presidential campaign:

Black Youth Vote (www.ncbcp.org)

Young Republicans (www.yrnf.com)

21st Century Democrats (www.21stcenturydems.org)



Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

Contact Morningside Center for professional development services in

- conflict resolution
- diversity
- countering bullying, harassment, and teasing
- social and emotional learning, and
- planning and implementing an effective advisory program

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, formerly Educators for Social Responsibility Metropolitan Area (ESR Metro), has been providing professional development services for New York City public schools since 1982. Through our introductory courses, workshops, and classroom coaching, teachers create respectful classroom communities and students learn skills in dealing well with conflict and diversity. Rigorous scientific studies have demonstrated the powerful impact of our programs on students and teachers. We are an approved provider of professional development services for the NYC Department of Education.

We founded the **Resolving Conflict Creatively Program** in collaboration with the NYC Board of Education in 1985. Since then, the program has touched the lives of thousands of teachers and hundreds of thousands of students, grades pre-k to 12. The RCCP prepares teachers to provide regular classroom instruction in conflict resolution and trains students to be peer mediators. It has become one of the nation's largest and most effective school-based conflict resolution programs, and has been replicated in schools across the U.S.

Our **4Rs™ Program** (Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution), created in 1999, integrates conflict resolution and language arts for grades pre-k through middle school. The 4Rs prepares teachers to provide regular classroom instruction in The 4Rs curriculum, and supports peer mediators and younger “peace helpers” in contributing to a positive school climate. Preliminary results from a rigorous federally funded five-year study of The 4Rs show that children in the nine 4Rs schools developed significantly more positively—socially, emotionally, and academically—than their peers in the nine control schools.

Our new **Pathways to Respect** program focuses on building community and eliminating bullying at the elementary and middle school levels.

Our **SEL School Improvement Project** helps schools implement our model for school transformation based on the principles and practices of SEL (social and emotional learning).

Our **More Effective Advisories** program provides consultation, curricula, and professional development to support middle and high schools in planning and implementing advisory programs.

Through our **Peace in the Family** workshops, parents develop communication and problem-solving skills to help them build strong, collaborative relationships with their children.

Teachablenoment.Org, our on-line resource center, offers teachers inquiry-oriented curricula on current events, as well as other fresh teaching ideas.

In addition, we conduct workshops for after-school providers based on our model after-school program, **PAZ (Peace from A to Z)**, which serves 250 children at P.S. 24 in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

- **For free, downloadable activities on the election and many other topics, visit our on-line teacher resource center at www.teachablenoment.org.**
- **For more information about our services to schools, please visit our website at www.morningsidecenter.org and contact Lillian Castro, director of administration, at LCastro@morningsidecenter.org or 212-870-3318 x33.**