

Creating Your Ideal Presidential Candidate

Overview:

In this lesson students will create a Presidential candidate. Students will craft what their candidate looks like and define their candidate's stance on a few key issues. Students will then experience the campaign process by explaining their candidate's values and skills to other students in order to convince others to vote for their candidate. Students will then vote on the best candidate created for president and reflect on the voting process.

Grade Level:

3-6 (Can be modified for grades K-2)

National Social Studies Standards:

- Understand how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- Understand the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

Objectives:

- Identify attributes of a good leader and Presidential candidate.
- Create an image of an ideal Presidential candidate.
- Describe four key issues Presidential candidates face.
- Create a campaign convincing other students to vote for Presidential candidate.
- Examine and compare different candidates and their ideologies.
- Define key vocabulary: election, candidate, beliefs, campaign, voting, ballot, primaries, results.

Suggested Time:

(5) 45 minute class periods

Materials:

"Who is your Presidential candidate?" sheet (1 copy for each pair of students)

Blank paper (lined or unlined) for brainstorming ideas and taking notes (probably 4-5 sheets for each pair of students)

Poster board or flipchart paper (could substitute blank sheets of paper)

Crayons, markers, and/or colored pencils

The Lesson:

Part 1: Defining a Leader and Presidential Candidate

1. Lead a class discussion about what a leader is. What makes a good leader? What qualities does a good leader have? When you picture a good leader what do you see in your mind? Write these ideas down somewhere they will be visible throughout the lesson.
2. After discussing leaders, segue into the upcoming Presidential election. Tell the students that the United States is in the process of electing a new leader, or president. Discuss the election process including: there are candidates running for President, the citizens of the United States get to vote for who they think would do the best job, the candidates try to convince citizens to vote for them by explaining what they believe in, and then the candidate with the most electoral votes becomes the next President.
3. Explain to the students that they will be creating a Presidential candidate that they think would make a good President. Tell them that they are not picking a particular person, but creating a new person. Instruct the students to close their eyes and picture what they imagine their leader/Presidential candidate to look like. Is that person a man or a woman? How are they dressed? Are they wearing glasses? What does their hair look like?
4. Divide the students into groups of 2. Give each group a brainstorming sheet, crayons, and a piece of poster board. Have the students brainstorm what they envision their candidate to look like. Once the partners have agreed have them draw the candidate neatly onto their poster board.

Part 2: Defining a Presidential Candidates Beliefs

1. Have students think back to the class discussion about leaders and what makes a good leader. Review with them the process in which the United States chooses/elects a person to be the President.
2. Have the students think about their Presidential candidate that they created in the previous lesson. Discuss how and why they created them in the way they did.
3. Next, inform the students that since they have already designed the “look” of their candidate. Today they get to decide how their candidate feels about important issues that real Presidential candidates face today.
4. Discuss that there are some very important issues in our country today. Explain that candidates have to tell the voters how they feel about these issues and what they are planning to do about these issues. Voters often choose who they think will do the best job based on what the candidate believes.
5. Tell the students that their candidates are going to focus on four key issues. (Note that there are many more issues, but they are going to focus on four.)
6. Reveal the issues to the students while discussing what each question means.
 - a. What will the candidate do to keep kids healthy?
 - b. What will the candidate do to protect our country?
 - c. What will the candidate do to keep our environment clean?
 - d. What will the candidate do to make sure all kids receive a great education?
7. Inform the students that they will do about these issues.

8. Have the students reconvene with their partners to discuss their candidate's ideologies. Hand out the attached document so the students can brainstorm and record their thoughts.
9. Once the students have recorded their candidates' beliefs have them display these beliefs on their posters with their candidate's image.
10. Once complete, display all of the posters around the room.

Part 3: Campaigning for President

1. Have students review what they did/learned in the previous lesson. Review what some key issues are and why these issues are important to voters.
2. Since the students have created their candidate and defined their stances on four key issues, it is now time to convince people that they have created the best candidate for president. Explain that this called campaigning. Have students brainstorm some ways that they have seen the current Presidential candidates campaign for the presidency. (i.e. commercials, lawn signs, radio ads, t-shirts...)
3. Tell the students that they will get to campaign for their candidates. Tell them they will have some time to work with their partner to come up with a way to campaign for their candidate. Explain that they can come up with a slogan, poster, or commercial that explains the candidates' views on the key issues.
4. Explain that the students will have three minutes to present their candidates to the class. Remind students that they will not have a lot of time so they will have to be concise and prepared.
5. Give the students time to work and prepare.

Part 4: Primaries

1. Recap what happened during the last lesson. Remind the students that every candidate campaigns, or tries to convince people to vote for them. Ask students some ways that they observed their classmates campaigning (posters, slogans, etc...).
2. Explain to the student that there are often many people who want to run for the Presidency. Explain that not all of the people who want to be President get to participate in the actual election. Each political party has to decide who they think should be their candidate. Explain that the class will get to choose two candidates for the final election.
3. Tell students that it is time to present their formal introductions of their created candidates. Go over expectations for both presenters and the audience.
4. Each group will present their candidate.
5. Once the presentations have all been given tell the students that now is the time to decide who they think is the best candidate.
6. Explain that each student will receive a ballot and that they will get to vote for who they think should be in the final election to be President. Explain that this will be a secret ballot as voting in the United States is private and does not need to be discussed. (note: since most students will vote for their candidates (as a real Presidential candidate would vote for themselves!) it may be beneficial to have students vote for two candidates so you don't have two votes for each candidate, but explain that in the real election, voters only vote for their top choice).
7. Hand out the ballots and have the students vote.

8. Tally the votes and reveal what two candidates received the most votes and will be in the final election for the Presidency.
9. Inform the groups who created the two candidates in the final election that they will have an additional day to campaign for their candidate. They will also have one more chance to give a formal speech to convince the citizens of the classroom to vote for their candidate.
10. You could also discuss some strategy as well. You can inform the other students whose candidates did not make it into the final election that they can help also. They can help to create a speech or by campaigning in various ways for their desired candidate.

Part 5: The Election

1. Reflect on the election process so far and recap the different steps it took for someone to be in a Presidential election.
2. Tell students that it is Election Day! The final two groups will present their candidate one last time in order to persuade the class to vote for their candidate.
3. Go over expectations during final speeches.
4. Each candidate will present their candidate one last time. While the groups are presenting, you may want to have the students think about a few things. Which candidate do you think has the best ideas/solutions to the key issues and problems being discussed? What are the pros and cons to each candidate? Do you find the candidates trustworthy?
5. After the speeches have concluded hand out the ballots. Remind the students that this is a private vote and it is not to be discussed.
6. Before tallying the votes inform the students that traditionally the person who does not win the election will usually call the winner to congratulate them. The person who won the election will also compliment the runner up on their efforts during the election.
7. Tally the votes and reveal the class's choice for President.
8. End with a class discussion. Why did you choose the candidate that you voted for? Was it a difficult decision? What was their one key issue that was the most important to you? Did anything surprise you about the election process? If you could do anything different with your candidate's campaign, what would it have been?
9. This lesson does not go into political parties, but this would be a good time to discuss if the children are aware and old enough to comprehend.
10. To end the discussion, segue into the current presidential election. Who are the candidates? Which parties do they represent? Is one of them currently the President (incumbent)? How might this change the election any? If they could vote, who would they vote for? Why?
11. Congratulate the class on making it through the election process.

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Who is your Presidential candidate?

Group members: _____

Candidate's name: _____

Beliefs:

What will this candidate do to keep kids healthy?

What will this candidate do to protect our country?

What will this candidate do to keep our country clean?

What will this candidate do to make sure all children receive a great education?