

Election 2008

Curriculum links: Current events, social studies, American history, critical thinking

Briefing: The Presidential election is sure to be one of the major stories of the summer. Help students prepare for the campaign by guiding them toward these key issues:

- **Running mates.** Among the key questions yet to be resolved—besides who will emerge as the Democratic nominee—is who each party’s nominee will choose as a Vice Presidential running-mate. The answers will come no later than the major parties’ nominating conventions. The Democrats will meet in Denver from Aug. 25-28; the Republicans will meet in Minneapolis from Sept. 1-4.

- **Iraq and the economy.** Progress in Iraq could convince many voters to support John McCain in the general election; setbacks in the war could swing support toward the Democratic nominee. Similarly, the performance of the U.S. economy in the months ahead is sure to influence many undecided voters.

- **Campaign costs.** This will likely be the most-expensive campaign in history, as each party plans to raise well over \$200 million. There is sure to be much debate over why campaigns have become too expensive and whether the government should set new rules to limit election spending.

Newspaper activities:

- **Endorsements.** Many newspapers endorse candidates on their editorial pages. The endorsement tells readers whom the owners of the paper support for office and why. Has your local paper endorsed a candidate, either in your state’s primary or for the general election? Do you agree with its choice? Do you think their endorsements will convince many readers how to vote? Is it proper for a paper to endorse a candidate while its reporters are covering the campaign on its news pages?

- **Cartoons.** Scan the paper for political cartoons about the campaign. Which are the funniest? Which capture the personalities and quirks of the candidates best? Do any go too far in mocking one candidate or another?

- **Debate prep.** Divide the class into small groups. Ask half the groups to prepare for a debate as the Democratic candidate for President and half to prepare for a debate as the Republican nominee. Using the newspaper and other sources, have students research each party’s stands on key campaign issues—and their main criticisms of their opponents. After preparing notes, have the different groups square off in classroom debates. After each debate, ask students which party’s debaters were more convincing, and why.

Resources: Books: Judith St. George and David Small’s *So You Want To Be President?* (Philomel, 2004), Stephen Williams’ *How To Be President: What To Do and Where To Go Once You’re in Office* (Chronicle, 2004), David Rubel’s *Scholastic Encyclopedia Of The Presidents And Their Times* (Scholastic, 2005), Sara Jane Boyer’s *Teen Power Politics* (Millbrook, 2000), Elizabeth Rusch’s *Generation Fix* (Beyond Words, 2002), and Jeff Marx’ *How To Win a High School Election* (Jeff Marx, 1999). Websites: Visit the home pages of the Republican and Democratic parties to find out where each stands on the issues. Follow the campaign with the *Washington Post*, learn more about elections from Ben’s Guide, find out more about the Presidents from the White House, and learn how to get involved from Rock the Vote.

Classroom Debates

Does the Presidential campaign go on too long? Should there be limits on how much money candidates can raise or spend? What should be the most important criteria for choosing a Vice Presidential candidate? Have any Presidential candidates visited your area? Whom do you support in the election? Why?