Lesson Plan: Political Party Platforms – Beyond the Sound Bites

By Rachel Roberson

Lesson opener: Where do the political parties stand on some big issues that are important to you?

Discussion/Quick-write prompt: What are 1-2 issues that are important to you or your community in this election? Explain why.

Objectives

- Students will analyze the differences between Democrat and Republican views on major election issues that matter to them.
- Students will identify where they agree and disagree with the two major parties on these issues, and develop arguments based on their views.

Relevance

Political party platforms—the carefully worded documents that outline each party’s views on major issues—provide a strikingly clear-cut counterbalance to the noise of the presidential campaigns. They offer a deeper and more complex explanation of what the parties believe in and stand for. For more on party platforms, see this Lowdown post.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

Where do the two major political parties really stand on issues I care about? In this lesson, students examine excerpts from the political platforms to discover where America’s two major parties stand on key policy issues. Find links to excerpts as well as links to the full platforms in this Lowdown post.

Activity: What I Believe/What They Believe

- Working in groups or individually, students choose a selection of issues they care about and read both parties’ position on those issues by either using the excerpts included in the Lowdown post or the platform document itself (also linked to in the post). Students should prepare to share with the class their responses to the following questions.
Discussion questions

- Where you surprised by certain views expressed by either of the parties? Explain and cite examples to support your answer.
- Which party do you most agree with? Explain why you agree. Cite examples from the relevant party platform to support your answer.
- Choose an issue where you don’t fully agree with either party’s position or where you disagree strongly with one party’s position. Explain your position on this issue and how it differs. Support your answers with evidence from the platforms and other reliable sources.

Extension activities

- **Primary source annotation:** If they haven’t already, students explore the full sub-section of each party’s platform related to an issue of their choice. Using annotation platforms like Hypothes.is, have students annotate the relevant sections of each party’s platform with their comments and suggestions. Get a quick teacher tutorial and further resources on the Hypothes.is site.

- **A national platform for your students’ voices:** Students make their voices heard on issues they care about by participating in Letters to the Next President 2.0. This national initiative gives youth a platform to express their opinion about election issues that matter most to them. Teachers must sign up and get a group code that students can use to upload letters. For more resources and examples, see also KQED’s student video project, My Backyard Campaign.

Common Core reading/writing standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1</th>
<th>Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7</td>
<td>Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9</td>
<td>Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1</td>
<td>Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.</td>
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