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# Setting the Student Agenda for 2008 Spring 2008

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## Written by:

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To Be Determined

## Program Overview

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This curriculum is designed to provide you and your students with the information needed to create a student agenda for the 2008 presidential election for your classroom and school. It asks students to consider issues, research them, present information to their class, and deliberate the importance of each.

- **Introduction:** To provide an overview and background on the topic, we are using the format we have pioneered here at the National Constitution Center, the Town Hall Wall. Designed as a poster, it presents an issue-based question and then provides a short description of the issue, as well as talking points for both sides. This is used to frame the issue and present a question to start the conversation in each of our Exchange programs.
- **Relate:** This lesson begins the unit by asking students to determine which political issues matter to their lives and why. We hope this activity, and the accompanying worksheet will encourage students to begin to think about the important issues facing the nation, what they expect candidates to talk about, and how their personal values affect their political outlook.
- **Constitution:** The lesson begins with student reflection of the issues that have brought about constitutional change in the past. Students are then asked to think of the issues that are important to them and what the president can do to affect these issues. Students read the Constitution to learn about the system of checks and balances and amending the Constitution to uncover the relevance and importance of the Constitution to their issues.
- **Investigate:** This lesson asks students to track an issue in the media to gain a further understanding of the issue, and what candidates are saying about the issue. Students then partner together and present the issue to the class as a whole so all students have the opportunity to learn about a number of varied issues.
- **Deliberate:** Students are asked to adopt various perspectives on the creation of a political agenda, then use each perspective to create mini-agendas. Students are then asked to consider the limitations and benefits of each of the agendas that they have created before creating a final agenda for their small group. Once students have completed these activities, the class reconvenes to deliberate and create a class-wide student political agenda.

## What issues have motivated you to take interest in this election?

The election of 2008 is proving to be one of the most competitive and exciting elections in American History. There are a number of factors contributing to the interest in this election including the quality of the candidates and the lack of an incumbent, but most importantly, there are a number of important issues facing the nation. People of all ages across the country are reacting to issues such the war in Iraq, the economy, the cost of higher education, the role of the United States in the world, global warming, and education reform such as No Child Left Behind and others. These issues have young people volunteering their time in record levels, passionately supporting candidates and showing up at the polls in astonishing numbers.

The ratification of the 26th Amendment to the United States Constitution was designed to give young Americans an opportunity to become more civically engaged through voting in all elections. According to CIRCLE, young people have participated in numbers comparable to older demographics. Voting among young people fell to its lowest point in a presidential election in 1996 when just 36% of 18-24 year olds voted and remained that low in the election of 2000.

The election of 2004 and the presidential primaries of 2008 have shown a substantial shift in the level of voter participation among young people. From 2000 to 2004 the number of voters in the 18-24 age range rose 11%, which was a greater increase than any other demographic group experienced. The party primaries for the 2008 election have also seen unprecedented increases. Young voter participation, thus far, has doubled in two states, tripled in seven states, and quadrupled in Tennessee, as well as increasing in all other states where comparisons can be made.

It seems that young people are once again engaged in this election cycle and it seems that it is the issues that have gotten them so interested. They are using their vote to voice their opinion on issues they feel will define the country. Citizens who are too young to vote have voiced their opinion on these issues by talking to classmates, family and friends; following the news and volunteering in their communities. With all the excitement surrounding the election, what issues have motivated you to take interest in this election?

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### What issues have motivated you to take interest in this election?

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## Relate

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### *What Matters to Me in '08?*

#### *A Classroom Discussion*

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*This activity is designed to ask students to consider the issues facing the nation. It gives students an opportunity to consider the issues candidates feature in their policy proposals. They also have the opportunity to focus on or add issues as they see fit. Students will work collaboratively to determine which issues they find important, discuss why they feel that way and share their thoughts with the class.*

#### Suggested Procedures

1. As students have entered the classroom, ask them to think about the news coverage of the presidential race. Use the following questions to promote discussion.
    - Is there anything missing from the candidates discussion of the issues that they have addressed?
  2. Distribute a copy of the student handout, *What Matters to Me in '08?* to each student. Ask students to work with a partner. Once students have found their partner, review the directions on the top of the sheet.
    - *Read the following list of "issues" taken from the websites of the major party presidential candidates. Discuss issues and determine if you think it should be **Important** or **Not Important** in the presidential election. Circle your choice, then use the space provided to write why you feel that way. Use the space at the end to add any important issue you feel is missing from the list.*
- Note:** The terms which appear on this worksheet are taken from the websites of presidential candidates.
3. Ask each pair to complete the worksheet together. Provide sufficient time for students to discuss and fill-in the worksheet.
  4. Going around the classroom, ask each group to share their choices and statements with the class as a whole. Encourage students to share issues which they added to the list and why they feel those new issues are important.
  5. Compile a class list of important issues on the board or large sheet of paper to be used in later *Exchange* activities.
    - You may want to write all of the issues out, then use tally marks each time a group thinks the issue is important.

What Matters to Me in 08? - Student Worksheet

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Directions:

Read the following list of “issues” taken from the policy proposals of the major party presidential candidates. Discuss issues and determine if you think it should be **Important** or **Not Important** in the presidential election. Circle your choice, then use the space provided to write why you feel that way. Use the space at the end to add any important issue you feel is missing from the list.

<b>Economics</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Government Spending</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Iraq</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Health Care</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Human Dignity</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>National Security</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Ethics Reform</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Second Amendment</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Civil Rights</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Environment</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Border Security</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Education</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Energy</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Faith</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Family</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Foreign Policy</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Rural America</b>	Important	Not Important

<b>Seniors</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Technology</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Women's Rights</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Middle Class</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Taxes</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Social Security</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Supreme Court Appointments</b>	Important	Not Important
<b>Abortion</b>	Important	Not Important
	Important	
	Important	
	Important	

## Constitution

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### How Can Issues Change the Constitution?

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*The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which gave 18-year-olds the right to vote, was passed and ratified, in part, because many young people across the country believed they were being treated unfairly. The citizens who protested and worked to lobby legislators to pass this legislation had a huge impact on the most important document in American government. Though the process is not always easy, this change was possible because the Constitution allows for the modern concerns of citizens to be addressed in a variety of ways in the Constitution, including amendment.*

#### Suggested Procedures

1. Provide each student with a copy of the United States Constitution. The Constitution can be downloaded from <http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution/constitution.pdf>
2. Divide students into three groups and assign each group one of the following amendments. Each group should consult a American History Textbook, or the interactive constitution available at [www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution](http://www.constitutioncenter.org/constitution) to complete section 1 of the attached worksheet.
  - 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment
  - 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment
  - 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment
3. Begin discussion by having each group share what their amendment does and what lead to its ratification.
4. After each group has presented their amendment, continue discussion by asking students to consider how an expanded electorate affects the demands placed on the president.
  - With a more diverse group of people eligible to cast votes for the president comes more and different concerns from the electorate.
  - Now, read Article II of the US Constitution to find out what the Constitution empowers the president to do, and how these powers allow presidents to address the issues facing the nation.
5. Once students have completed section 2 of their worksheet, create a class list on a large sheet of paper or on the blackboard which lists all of the presidential powers your students have identified in the US Constitution.
  - Possible answers include:
  - The appointment of Supreme Court Justices
  - The appointment of Cabinet Secretaries
  - The power to negotiate treaties
  - The presidential veto
6. To either further discussion, or as an extension activity, have your students look at the list of presidential powers they have created, and identify how the next president can use these powers to address an issue each student finds to be important.

## Constitution Connection Worksheet

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### Section 1: Amending the Constitution:

1. Amendment number: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What does this amendment do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What events or issues facing the country when your amendment was passed and ratified do you think helped lead to its ratification? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Section 2: Article II of the United States Constitution

1. Read through Article II of the United States Constitution and write down as many powers for the president as you can find listed. There are a large number of powers, so do your best to identify as many as possible.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## Investigate

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### Tracking Issues: What the Candidates, Media, and Organizations Are Saying.

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*This activity is designed to increase your students understanding of issues, media literacy, and their ability to critically evaluate information and persuade others. Students will be tasked with collecting information about an issue that interests them, and then present the many aspects of the issue to the class.*

#### Suggested Procedures

##### Day 1

1. Before beginning this activity, it is important that your students understand the difference between horserace coverage and issue coverage.
  - a. Horserace coverage focuses on who's ahead. It often includes candidates' gaffes and coverage of polls and rarely discusses the substance of political issues.
  - b. Issue Coverage is focused on informing people about a specific issue and where candidates stand on the issue. These stories will include information about campaign events if related to the issue, but it is the issue, not the campaign that is the main point.
2. Ask students to choose a partner to complete the project with. Once students have formed groups, ask each group to choose one issue which they are interested in, would like to know more about, and believe is important.

**Note:** You may want to present the class with the list created during the *Relate* activity.

3. Ask each partner to find two sources which cover the issue they have chosen. Students should look for one feature, one op-ed or editorial, and one non-print source, such as a video or audio clip. Have students complete the attached *Current Events Worksheet*.
  - Possible sources:
    - The Constitution Newswire (via "Educational Resources" on NCC homepage)
    - Local newspapers or television channels
      - To find your local news sources visit:  
<http://capwiz.com/constitutioncenter/dbq/media/>
    - New York Times Upfront  
[\(www.nytimes.com/learning/students/upfront/\)](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/students/upfront/)
    - Scholastic News ([www.scholastic.com/news](http://www.scholastic.com/news))
    - National Newspapers and Networks

##### Day 2

1. Ask students to exchange articles so that both students have read four articles on their issue.
2. Provide each group with attached worksheet, and ask them to complete the information requested and prepare a short presentation for the class.
3. Have students share the information on their worksheet with the class. The presentation should provide the rest of the class with necessary background information on their issues as well as help make the case that this issue is important and should be placed on the student agenda. Ask each student group to decide if the news sources they found are issues coverage or horserace coverage.
4. Display worksheets around the room and encourage students to read them before beginning the next activity. These worksheets should be used as sources of information in the next activity.

## Investigate

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### Current Events Worksheet

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Article Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize the main points of the article: \_\_\_\_\_

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Is this a primary or secondary source? \_\_\_\_\_

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Article Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize the main points of the article: \_\_\_\_\_

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Is this a primary or secondary source? \_\_\_\_\_

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Article Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize the main points of the article: \_\_\_\_\_

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Is this a primary or secondary source? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Investigate

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### Issue Evaluation Worksheet

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Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please complete the following worksheet using the articles you collected. Provide as much relevant information and be prepared to spend 5 minutes presenting you issue and research.*

Briefly give background information on your issue:	Briefly describe why you think this is important:
What have the candidates said or done about this?	Next steps: What can we do to help?

## Deliberate

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What issues should be on the student agenda for the 2008 presidential election?

### Deliberation Student Activity

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*This activity is designed to encourage students to examine the question from three different perspectives. Using the activity handouts and the background information provided, students will deliberate in small groups, and ultimately with the class as whole, to create a school agenda for the 2008 presidential election. This activity can be completed in one class period.*

#### Suggested Procedures

1. Print out a copy of the student handout “Deliberate: Student Activity Worksheet” and provide a copy to each student.
  - Encourage students to use the worksheets created in the *Investigate* activity to gather information about issues.
2. Instruct students that you now will be having a classroom deliberation on the question.
3. If your students have not held a deliberation before you may want to spend a few minutes reviewing with them what a deliberation is and how it differs from debate.

#### What is deliberation?

*Deliberation is a form of interpersonal communication which most often takes the form of public conversation. Deliberation is different than discussion because it is measured conversation and almost always leads to action. Deliberation is focused around an issue, generally laws or policy, but also can cover public behavior and cultural practices. The public includes everyone, not just experts and politicians, but everyday people who have an opinion on the topic. Current deliberation practices offer three possible choices or outcomes, and then arrange the conversation around the pros and cons of each.*

#### Is deliberation debate?

*Deliberation is often confused with debate, but the two are very different. Debate is a formally structured conversation between two opposing sides; some even define debate as a “quarrel.” Debate creates a dichotomy while deliberation allows for careful consideration of many sides, so the best choice can be made. The two also differ because debate is also between experts, while deliberation allows for input from laypeople. Essentially, debate is black and white, who is right and who is wrong, while deliberation allows for shades of gray.*

4. Divide students into groups to work through the worksheet. Once each group has completed all three pages, have the groups return to the class as a whole.
5. Ask each group to present the agenda they created. Encourage other students to challenge the agenda and, working together as a class, create one school policy.

**Note:** During deliberation, make sure students participate positively by having them ask questions, avoid raising their voices, allow others to speak, make eye contact with the class, not say any insults or put downs, and not monopolize the conversation.

## Deliberate: Student Activity Worksheet

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### Step 1

Read each of the perspectives on creating a student agenda.

**Perspective One: The issues which should be on the agenda are those which are most urgent.**

**Perspective Two: The issues which should be on the agenda are those which affect the largest number of people.**

**Perspective Three: The issues which should be on the agenda are those which directly affect students and young people.**

### Step 2

Using each perspective, fill out the table below. Make sure to consider both the positive and negative aspects of each.

	What are the benefits of adopting this perspective?	What are the limitations of this perspective?
Perspective One		
Perspective Two		
Perspective Three		

**Step 3**

Imagine you are creating a political agenda that addresses the issues facing the nation in this election cycle. What five issues do you feel would appear on the agenda of a person who holds Perspective one? Perspective two? Perspective three?\*

Perspective One	Perspective Two	Perspective Three

\*The same issues may appear on all three agendas.  
 \*\*Issues do not need to be ranked in order of importance.

**Step 4**

Now consider the limitations of the agendas created for each of the perspectives.

	What are the benefits of adopting this agenda?	What are the limitations of this agenda? Do you think there are any issues missing?
Agenda One		
Agenda Two		
Agenda Three		

**Step 5**

Keeping in mind the benefits and limitations of each mini-agenda and perspective, create an agenda of up to 10 issues you feel are important in the upcoming election. You will be asked to share this with the class during a class-wide deliberation.

Group Name:	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

## Words to Know

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**Agenda:** A document that lists areas of interest for a group, or a list of issues which a group plans to address.

**Candidate:** A person running for elected office.

**Deliberation:** A process of coming to a decision through conversations that lead to action.

**Perspective:** The point of view of an individual.

**Source:** Anything from which information can be obtained.

**Horseshoe:** The “who-said-what-about-who” coverage of political campaigns.

**Issue Coverage:** Media analysis of the candidate’s policies and positions.

**Primary Sources:** A firsthand or eyewitness account of an event or statement.

**Secondary Sources:** Any document that describes but does not give a firsthand account of an event, person, place or thing.