

## The Great New Party: A Lesson in Political Parties

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### About this Lesson

*The United States Constitution does not mention political parties, but the right for the people to assemble peaceably, as granted by the First Amendment, clearly allows for them. Throughout U.S. history, dozens of political parties have come and gone and many have had runs at the White House. Some have evolved into the parties we know today, while some have disappeared altogether. This lesson is designed to give students the chance to explore modern political parties by allowing them the opportunity to create their own political party, "The Great New Party." In groups, students will be charged with creating a website for The Great New Party. To successfully complete the website they must first create a history of the party, a party symbol and a party platform. After creating a webpage for their new political party, students will present their project, share the history and beliefs of their party and compare its ideals to those of the real modern political parties. Overall, students will have to explore their own opinions on current events, identify the positions of contemporary political parties, and consider whether alternative parties should play a larger role in our political system.*

## Grade(s) Level

9-12

## Classroom Time

3 or 4 class periods

## Materials

Students will have access to the following resources:

Computer with Internet access either at home or in school and

The following websites:

Democratic National Committee  
<http://www.democrats.org>

Republican National Committee  
<http://www.rnc.org>

Green Party  
<http://www.gp.org>

Libertarian Party  
<http://www.lp.org>

Constitution Party  
<http://www.constitutionparty.com/>

## Handouts:

- \*Party Comparison Graphic Organizer (3 different attachments)
- \*Student Website Guide
- \*Rubric

## Background

Political parties have a long and complicated history in the United States. Arguably, the first political parties came with the framing of the Constitution when the Federalists and Anti-federalists disagreed on the amount of power that ought to be given to the national government. George Washington, most famously in his farewell address, warned against the rise of political parties. Washington saw the beginnings of what would become the two-party system we now have in America.

Washington despised the idea of political associations, because he believed they would bring one group of citizens against another and would be “destructive” to the “fundamental principle” of a democratic government.

Most historians cite the beginning of political parties with the rise of Andrew Jackson and the Jacksonian Democrats in 1828. Prior to this there were certainly factions and regional differences, but this is considered by many to be the rise of the political party structure we are familiar with today. Formed in the 1850s, the Republican Party established itself as a major political force with the election of Abraham Lincoln. Although the Republican and Democrat parties have gone through vast changes and realignments since the 1860s, the Republican and Democrat parties are the most active and powerful parties in the United States today. There have been many other parties throughout US history. The Whigs, Populists, Greenbacks, Progressives and many others have left their mark on US policy. Currently, US politics are primarily dominated by two political parties, leaving other parties unrepresented and struggling to garner any significant support. Many blame the winner-take-all system of voting and the Electoral College for the lack of third party representation and point to the absence of third parties to explain the gridlock and extreme partisanship often evident in Congress today.

## Objectives

Students will:

- Examine modern political parties.
- Analyze and compare the websites of today’s current political parties.
- Gain deeper understanding of current issues facing the United States.
- Understand the role of the internet in modern politics.
- Integrate technology into the classroom.

## Standards

From the National Council for the Social Studies

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands>

- **X: Civic Ideals and Practices:** *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic*
- **V: Individuals, Groups and Institutions:** *It is important that learners know how institutions are formed, what controls and influences them, how they control and influence individuals and culture.*
- **VI: Power, Authority and Governance:** *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.*

## Activity

### In-Class Activity:

1. Divide class into groups of three to five students.
2. Explain to students that they are to compare and contrast the platforms of different political parties. If students are unfamiliar with the term “platform,” consider having students complete the activity located here:  
<http://constitutioncenter.org/headedtothewhitehouse/downloads/YourPartyPlatform.pdf>
  - Provide the websites listed in the “Materials” section for students to research.
  - Pass out Party Comparison Graphic Organizers, either Venn diagram or alternate compare/contrast model provided.
3. Encourage students to research party issues, identify each party’s spin of news headlines, and examine how the party appeals to their core constituency through blogs or social networking sites.
  - Note: If you have 45-50 minute classes you may find it necessary to spend an additional day on this portion of the activity. No additional time should be required for 90 minute blocks.
4. Inform students that they will be creating their own political party: the Great New Party.
  - Instruct students that they will decide which issues are most important to the party, create the party platform and determine which segments of the voting population would support their party most.
5. Explain to students that they are creating a website for the Great New Party.
  - As a group, the students must decide on the following: party issues/platform, party symbol, and groups their party will appeal to through the website.
  - Since there are five to six students in a group, have each student pick an issue on which they would like to write.
6. Handout the *Website Guide for Students* that has been provided.
  - Answer and clarify any questions students may have after reading the guide.
7. Students may choose to create their website in any program available through the school, including websites like wiki spaces or wiki pages, My Space, Blogger, or web space available through the school. An overview of one of the aforementioned options may be necessary.
  - If the technology is not available, have student groups create a party pamphlet, or storyboard their website.
8. Allow students sufficient time to create their website.
9. Once websites are completed, student groups will give 7-15 minute presentations.
10. Students should display their websites to the class. Their presentations should include an explanation of the following:
  - The history of their party
  - Their party symbol

- Their party platform
  - How their party's platform is similar or different from other political parties.
    - Note: You may choose to skip this part of the assignment and review your students' websites at your leisure due to time or technology constraints. You may also choose to grade students on their presentation of their website in addition to the website itself.
11. Discussion/Debrief: After presentations have concluded, bring class back together and discuss project. Possible discussion questions include:
- What commonalities did our class's variations of the Great New Party share? Differences?
  - How did our parties compare to the Democrats and Republicans?
  - How did your group try and use your website to advance your agenda? What does this say about the role of the Internet in modern politics?
  - Why do you think the vast majority of our elected officials only come from two political parties?

## Website Guide for Students

### Required Elements: 100 points possible

#### News: 3 headlines (15pts)

What is going on with your party? Do you have a candidate running for president? Has there been a misunderstanding or scandal you need to clear up? Has your party taken a stance on an important issue? Is your party relevant? Be creative!

#### Blog: 2 entries (10pts)

Who is writing your blog? Why are they blogging? Are you using your blog to connect with a core constituency? Is that clearly visible?

#### Take Action/ Volunteer (5pts)

Are you giving your supporters a chance to help out? Suggestion: Block parties, house parties, phone trees, registering voters, etc.

#### History of the Party and Party Symbol (20pts)

How did your party begin? Reference other historical parties when telling the history of your own. What is your party symbol? Why? Do you explain the meaning of your symbol?

#### People/ Groups (15pts)

How are you going to appeal to various groups? Some groups include women, minorities, seniors, youth, and the LGBT community. You could also include groups like rural Americans, veterans, or particular religious groups to name a few. You must consider who your party platform would appeal to and why. You must prove to these groups that your party will benefit them in some way. You must choose a minimum of 3 groups.

#### Issues (30pts)

This is the most important part of your website. This is the part that defines your party and what it stands for. You must clearly explain your party's stance on at least six issues. You may discuss more than six if you'd like. Everyone will prepare a summary of their party's position on the economy and national security. The other four are up to you and your group. Here are some suggestions:

Campaign and Political Reform, Education, Energy, Environmental Issues, Foreign Policy, Healthcare, Immigration, Social Security (Retirement), Tax Reform and Women's Issues.

#### Resources:

Websites highlighting political issues:

To fit time constraints, you may want to offer students several websites where they can easily find information about various positions. The websites below are just a few suggestions.

<http://www.politics1.com/issues.htm>

[http://dir.yahoo.com/Government/U\\_S\\_Government/Politics/Political\\_Issues/](http://dir.yahoo.com/Government/U_S_Government/Politics/Political_Issues/)

[http://www.presidentialelection.com/Political\\_Issues/](http://www.presidentialelection.com/Political_Issues/)

<http://www.procon.org/>

## Great New Party Project Rubric

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
<b>History of Party and Party Symbol</b>	All historical information appeared to be accurate and in chronological order.	Almost all historical information appeared to be accurate and in chronological order.	Most of the historical information was accurate and in chronological order.	Very little of the historical information was accurate and/or in chronological order.
<b>Issues</b>	Can clearly explain several ways in which the party held different positions than other parties and can clearly explain why.	Can clearly explain several ways in which the party held different positions than other parties.	Can clearly explain one way in which the party held positions that differed from other parties.	Cannot explain one way in which the party held different positions from other parties.
<b>Groups</b>	Evidence of thorough examination of the way issues affect target groups is clear. Compatibility is excellent.	Evidence of examination of the way issues affect target groups is clear. Compatibility is proficient.	Evidence of some examination of the way issues affect target groups is clear. Compatibility is minimal.	No evidence of links between issues that effect target groups. Compatibility is non-existent.
<b>Blogs</b>	Blog topics clearly target chosen groups in subject, rhetoric, and design format.	Blog topics target chosen groups in subject, rhetoric, and design format.	Blog topics target chosen groups in subject, rhetoric, or design format.	Blog topics does not target chosen groups in subject, rhetoric, or design format.
<b>Headline News</b>	Website displays scandals, rulings, and misunderstandings about the party. Strong defense of party's action or position is given equal representation.	Website displays scandals, rulings, and misunderstandings about the party. Some defense of party's action or position is given representation.	Website displays scandals, rulings, or misunderstandings about the party. Little defense of party's action or position is given representation.	Website displays scandals, rulings, or misunderstandings about the party. No defense of party's action or position is given representation.

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