

## **Teachable Political Moments, Every Four Years**

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### **Background**

My school setting is suburban serving approximately 1500 students in grades six through eight. My middle school is among the few public middle schools to receive a distinguished Great Schools rating due in part to affluent, educated, and supportive families as well as dedicated, creative, and caring staff. Language Art classes are either Honors or Standard Plus, the latter including inclusion and LEP co-taught classes. The student assignment to these classes is based on the previous year EOG Reading score, teacher recommendation, and parental request. The focus is high school prep as eighth grade is considered a Gateway Year, and students must pass all core subjects, including electives, as well as score a minimum of three on the core subject EOG test. I have two Honors and two Standard Plus classes ranging from 27-32 students. The Honors students are generally high-achievers who read above grade level to as high as young adult; the Standard Plus students generally struggle with reading comprehension and read significantly below grade level to developing. Several of the latter are LEP students and former inclusion students on a consultative basis. Because of this wide range of reading abilities, this unit will be suitable for students at all levels of achievement.

Human beings naturally have opinions and the innate propensity to argue, and this includes our middle school students. As a language arts teacher I am accustomed to asking tough questions or to making tenuous generalizations to prompt the thinking of my students. Middle school students always have an opinion, and they like to tackle issues just like adults. Many of the discussion topics are complex and do not have a right or wrong answer; however, students must learn to support their opinions with justifiable support from what they already know. The way we think about issues can inform us about ourselves and our core beliefs.

This unit incorporates argumentation and emphasizes 21<sup>st</sup> Learning Skills, which demands teachers to create and instruct in inter-disciplinary ways in addition to instilling collaborative skills and student responsibility for learning. According to the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process 21<sup>st</sup> Century themes include Global awareness, Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy, and Civic Literacy. Learning and Innovation Skills prepare students for increasingly complex life and work environments and include Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, and Communication and Collaboration. Information, Media, and Technology Skills are included as our students live in a technology and media-driven environment; therefore, students must be able to exhibit a

range of functional and critical thinking skills, such as Information Literacy, Media Literacy, and ICT Literacy. Students must pay rigorous attention to developing adequate life and career skills such as Initiative and Self-Direction as well as Leadership and Responsibility.

Civic Literacy plays heavily in this unit. Students learn to be informed citizens in order to participate effectively in government. Students are enabled to exercise their rights and responsibilities at the national level and to understand the implications of civic decisions. Thinking and Learning Skills are also emphasized as students make complex choices, articulate thoughts and ideas clearly, analyze and evaluate information in a variety of forms, and demonstrate the ability to work effectively with diverse teams. A presidential election occurs every four years and with it opportunities to intersect the language arts classroom with the political arena, while simultaneously affording students with opportunities to incorporate and develop 21<sup>st</sup> Learning Skills.<sup>i</sup>

I envision a transitional unit between the National Common Core Unit 1—“Urban Settings in America”—and Unit 2- “Rural Settings in America, “as we approach the November Presidential Election. I want to comfortably introduce my students to the political arena for several reasons: 1. to offer students background knowledge in order for them to engage effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners, 2. to propel conversations by posing questions that probe reasoning and evidence, 3. to ensure students hear and understand a full range of positions on a political topic as they try to clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions, and 4. To dispel the “echo chamber” effect so students reflect on rather than react to diverse perspectives.

## Rationale

*American Political Parties: Their Failures and Their Futures Seminar, 2012*, offered a knowledge base of the American political system, which enhanced my understanding as the presidential election and the 2012-2013 school year intersected. I knew very little about political party systems and only a smidgen of political science. I found I was politically handicapped to instill 21<sup>st</sup> Century principles of Civic Literacy; however, this seminar created a knowledge base that equipped me to promote critical thinking and argumentation in the language arts class. At the same time, I experienced a metamorphosis in myself; the change in me as a person, as a citizen, is something abstract. I began to view the political spectrum with a new-found interest and understanding. I read, I viewed, I noted, and I became a critical thinker. This is exactly what we as educators try to instill in our students, being critical thinkers. I profess that my political science experience enabled my students to see me as a student; I learned alongside my students. Every week, the morning after my CTI Seminar, eighth grade students would rush to my door and ask me, “What did you learn last night? What did your professor say about the debates?” And the questions streamed along-

but, remember these are middle school students who should be asking about the football game, the field trip, who is the cutest, etc; my students became just as fascinated in the political process as I did. That is something intangible that cannot be wrapped neatly and bowed. Students continued to explore the concept of groups and political parties, which led them to further exploration of different political viewpoints and issues through research, class and small group discussions, and ultimately debate and argumentative persuasive writing.

## **Challenges**

The ELA Curriculum changed again; 2011-12 was new Holt McDougal texts and ancillaries and a “new” curriculum draft, while 2012-13 is the same “new” materials but another curriculum change, that being total and complete transition to Common Core. Unit 1 Urban Settings has the student consider the relationships between the setting and the theme in literature; students write their own stories set in cities. I envision a parallel between the effect of setting on literature as a segue to the effect of setting on the political parties. My overall vision is for students to understand what are political parties, what are the common issues within the political parties, and which 2012 candidate based only on issues will be the best candidate for the urban/suburban setting (eg. Charlotte/Cornelius). Students will have to research, discuss, debate, and ultimately argumentatively write and substantiate their claim.

Compounded with the transition to Common Core mandates and new text books, the class scheduling also changed. Rather than 90 minute instructional blocks, our school initiated six 57 minute periods. The shortened class period minimizes the luxury of in-class, independent student work in addition to computer lab availability for research. Fortunately, our school was one of the ten chosen in Charlotte Mecklenburg for B.Y.O.T., Bring Your Own Technology; however, the WiFi wiring and liability logistics have delayed the initiation of this district program. For the reasons of time and technology, the unit will span quarters one and part of two in its entirety and end the week of the Presidential Election Day.

## **Introduction**

The first three weeks of school are devoted to creating an affective class environment and getting to know the students in order to collect the data to establish and re-establish heterogeneous and homogenous groups. The idea of commonalities and differences among students within a classroom is planted early, and we celebrate these qualities in different arrangements to enhance the learning of the students.

I also initiate the quarter one novel study as affirmed by Dr. Susan Roberts who astutely said, “The idea of using fiction allows students to talk through issues without having to ‘open their hand.’” Selecting the novels includes attention to quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. Common Core level 8 ZPD exiles are within the range 980-1185, and qualitative levels are determined by content complexity; therefore, I chose *The Great Gatsby* for Honors (1110) and *The Outsiders* (710) for Standard Plus. Neither novel will be completely read over the three week time period allotted; nevertheless, we will focus our reading on the Common Core Unit 1 essential question “What is the effect of the setting on the story elements?” and two-three times weekly laser on a particular excerpt from the literary text to discuss the setting and its particular effect.

*The Great Gatsby* focus will be on the 1920’s setting effect on the main characters Nick, Gatsby, Daisy, and Jordan, the choices they make as a result, and possibly the idea of the American Dream as it fizzles with the onset of the Depression. Nick Carraway, the narrator, has recently moved from the Midwest to West Egg, a nouveau riche neighborhood outside of Long Island, New York. Jay Gatsby, his neighbor, lives in an ostentatious home, the frequent site of elaborate and rowdy parties. Nick’s cousin Daisy and her obnoxiously rich husband Tom Buchanan live across the bay in East Egg, the area reserved for the traditionally, established wealthy families of Long Island. Jay Gatsby is the façade of a self-made and successful businessman whose sole purpose is to live lavishly and entertain in order to see his beloved Daisy, who once refused his love due to his lack of money. Tom exploits his position in society by having extra-marital affairs, ironically with a low class woman Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the Valley of the Ashes. The three settings West Egg, East Egg, and the Valley of the Ashes visibly affect the motivations, choices, and actions of the main characters as well as propel the conflicts. Ultimately, Jay Gatsby is murdered by Myrtle’s husband, after being scorned by Daisy in a dramatic confrontation, and Nick realizes the vast differences between Mid Westerners and Easterners.

*The Outsiders* will focus on the 1960’s setting effect on the gangs the Greasers and the Socs and possibly the idea that “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” This story is set in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where the low class Greasers struggle for existence on the West side of town, in stark contrast to the more affluent and educated Socs, who live on the East side of town. The conflict between the gangs gains momentum in the continuous confrontations between the two groups. Ponyboy, the Greaser narrator, realizes that people are basically the same, regardless of where they live or how much money they have; his insightful perspective casts a pall over the ensuing events, many of which end in the deaths of noted gang members.

The novel units will be initiated with a Research Tic-Tac-Toe Board and Gathering Grid for students to incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in simplified research of different categories from the 1920’s and the 1960’s in order for the students to understand the impact of cultural areas on the characters in the novel.

Students will also begin a current events homework activity using a teacher-made current events template and focusing on articles dealing with politics, especially the presidential campaign. Students will also view live or on YouTube the presidential debates. These articles or summaries will be due every Monday and discussed in class as well as related to the essential setting question. It is my hope that students will see the parallels of the effect of setting on the characters in the novels as well as the effect of setting on people, especially with the impending presidential election. The current events will be discussed in Kagan collaborative Round Robin structures in order to promote student engagement and accountability.

### **Strategies and Activities**

In order to make the unit more interesting and engaging, I will utilize different types of technology and encourage the students to do the same. As part of our teacher evaluation instrument, teachers are expected to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century learners with 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, but also it is more enjoyable for the teacher and students. These students have used technology all of their lives, and this is the way our world is moving. Students are now encouraged to bring their technology to the classroom, which increases their motivation and curiosity while making the classroom a technical reality.

#### **Research Tic-Tac-Toe and Gathering Grid**

In order to build background knowledge for the 1920's and 1960's, the teacher will create a Tic-Tac-Toe Board and Gathering Grid. The nine choice categories may include music, clothing, transportation, housing, crime/gangs, period presidents/political parties, economy, entertainment, life styles, science, and education. These categories will be evidenced in the novel and in some manner affect the characters. Students will choose three categories, in essence three categories across, down, or diagonally- hence the name Tic-Tac-Toe- to formulate a research question and discover three facts to answer that question while maintaining a modified Working Bibliography on a Gathering Grid. Students will be strongly encouraged to use internet sites to gather facts for their chosen categories in addition to textual resources. In the text It's Even Worse Than It Looks, the author interestingly alludes to the 1930's economic crisis as being similar to the 2012 recession. Although we will begin the novel reading during S.S.R. or Sustained Silent Reading the first day of the second week of school, students will share their findings within a week of the assignment.

#### **Gallery Walk**

The rationale to use this activity is that students must learn to work in groups to successfully function in industry, business, or academia. Cooperative learning roles- Manager, Reporter, Recorder, and Runner are assigned in groups of three or more students. The assignment is to gather information at each station located on the classroom walls. Students will read, and add to their content lists before rotating clockwise to another station. At the end of the rotations, students will synthesize information and make oral reports to the class. The data shared whole class will always be focused back on the novel text to analyze the effect of the setting on the characters, plot, and conflicts. The teacher will also share insights as to the effect of the setting on the respective authors F. Scott Fitzgerald and S.E. Hinton.

### Reading Log

A reading log or book journal is a great place to react to what is read. Students can find out exactly how they feel about the characters or gain insight about the setting, conflicts, and plot. A variety of formats are available; however, I prefer to track page numbers read and time allotted in addition to questions that promote students' comprehension of character development, conflict and resolution, and the effect of the setting on the previous elements. I differentiate the format of the Standard Plus reading log by supplanting the aforementioned question stems with active reading strategies: connections, predictions, visualizations, and summaries. Students at both levels are required to cite page numbers for their responses to emphasize the importance of going back to the text.

### Current Events Template

An array of templates for middle school students are found on-line; however, I prefer students to not only document their findings- date, type of current event (eg. Internet, newscast, newspaper, etc.)-but to also include a summary of and reflection on the article. Due to the focus of this unit, I encourage students to select current events about the presidential campaign, particularly focusing on the debates when those are initiated. Students may need to understand that according to Dr. Susan Roberts, "Debates give more information but rarely move public approval."

### Round Robin Discussion

Students take turns responding orally in groups of four. The teacher poses a question or a "problem," and the students take turns stating their responses or solutions. The activity should be timed to ensure completion.

### *The Great Gatsby Discussion/Short Answer/Essay Questions*

How does the geography of the novel dictate its conflicts and characters? What role does setting play in *The Great Gatsby*?

In what sense is *The Great Gatsby* an autobiographical novel? Does Fitzgerald write more of himself into the character of Nick or the character of Gatsby, or are the author's qualities found in both characters?

How does Gatsby represent the American dream? What does the novel have to say about the condition of the American dream in the 1920s? In what ways do the themes of dreams, wealth, and time relate to each other in the novel's exploration of the idea of different social classes in America?

#### *The Outsiders* Discussion/Short Answer/Essay Questions

How is "Nothing Gold Can Stay," the Robert Frost poem that Ponyboy recites to Johnny at the church, relevant to Ponyboy and Johnny's story?

Discuss the role of the novel's physical setting. How does the division between the East Side and the West Side represent the conflict within the novel itself?

Think about the role of physical violence in the novel. Is the violence shocking, predictable, boring, or melodramatic? Do you think such violence has a different effect on readers today than it did when the novel was first published?

#### *Both novels*

(Standard Plus) Can you make any generalizations about the effect of the urban setting in both novels?

Suggested activity: Students in collaborative groups create a Venn Diagram or 3-Column Chart or students could make posts on a Blog, the latter incorporating the 21<sup>st</sup> Learning Skills.

(Honors) Analyze how the novel made connections or even distinctions among individuals, ideas, or events in a well-developed essay. Cite a minimum of three examples from the text to illustrate your thesis. Use direct quotations and paraphrasing.

#### Pass A Question

The teacher poses four questions. Each student chooses one question and writes the question on notebook paper. When the teacher gives a signal, students write the answer to the question and continue writing until the teacher says stop. Students pass their question to the next

group member who reads the question and the response. When the teacher gives a signal, students answer the “Pass” question. This procedure continues until all four questions have been answered by four different students.

Students must become familiar with the different groups represented in the classroom, realize the commonalities among themselves, and stand up proudly for whom they are and the communities they represent. The teacher will need to connect the students to the novel/text recently studied. Ask students to recall the groups represented in The Great Gatsby- the West Egg, the East Egg, and the Valley of Ashes/ The Outsiders- the Greasers and the Socs. Who were they? Which communities did they represent? What were their similarities and differences?

#### *Activity One- Stand Up, Pair Up*

Instruct students in your class to take a few minutes to think about how we are all a part of different groups and belong to different communities. Ask students to think about some of the different groups they are a part of. You may want to hand out index cards where students can list some of the groups/communities they are a part of.

Explain that in this gathering you'll ask students to share some of the groups and communities they just listed. Next we'll appreciate them with applause. Model the activity by sharing a group or community you are a part of by standing up and saying "I am \_\_\_\_\_." Then ask everyone else in your class who is part of the same group (eg. Puerto Rican) to stand up with you and get everyone else in the class to applaud.

Having modeled the activity with a few of the groups you belong to, ask several students to stand up and share some of the groups they are a part of, saying "I am \_\_\_\_\_." Have others in the class stand with them if they belong to the group as well. As a class, applaud those standing up.

At the end of the activity ask your students some or all of the following questions:

- What was that activity like?
- What did it feel like to be applauded?
- What did it feel like to stand as a group?
- What did it feel like to stand alone?

The teacher can make the connection to the political campaign process by inserting the idea of elections and demographics, such as race, ethnicity, and gender. For example, the growing Latino population in the U.S. espouses different issue priorities and partisan

identification from the White or Black populations. Exploring the impact of demography on a political election is a worthy endeavor.

### *Activity Two- Marzano Vocabulary Study*

Students will become familiar with the term “political parties” by exploring the connotative and denotative meanings using Marzano’s vocabulary strategies. Middle school students have limited background knowledge of the essence of political parties. For that reason, coupled with the projected high LEP and EC populations in classes, students must explore the variety of meanings of political parties.

#### Marzano Vocabulary Card

Educational researcher Robert J. Marzano suggests teachers can help close the achievement gap by explicitly teaching subject-specific academic vocabulary to those students who are lacking the background knowledge to succeed in school. Marzano’s process for vocabulary acquisition includes the following steps for teachers and students: 1. The teacher explains the new word. 2. The students restate or explain the new word in their own words. 3. The students create a nonlinguistic representation of the word. 4. The students engage in activities to deepen their knowledge of the word. 5. The students discuss the word. 6. The students play games or engage in further activities to review the word. Marzano’s method spans the entirety of the unit as the term political party will be a constant in discussions and activities.<sup>ii</sup>

Students will brainstorm what they think they know about political parties and complete a Marzano’s Vocabulary Card by creating their own kid-friendly definition, adding personal associations with the term, and illustrating the meaning of political parties. They will then take a diagnostic quiz on their understanding of the two different parties. They will proceed to research the positions of the two major parties on a list of issues. After viewing and recording answers on a PowerPoint presentation on American political parties, students will examine Obama’s and Romney’s debates to determine common and differing positions on key issues. The latter information will derive from their current events and notes from viewing the debates.

In order for students to connect to political parties the teacher may briefly discuss as an opener or warm up the Democratic National Convention, Charlotte, NC, and the Republican National Convention in Tampa, FL. Why did the Democrats choose Charlotte? Why Miami? Do these urban/city choices reflect the party? The teacher may be prompted to discuss with the students the concept of “Swing States” and/or “Battleground States,” which states are

considered either and why, and the importance of these so-named states in a presidential election. In the 2012 presidential election North Carolina is not considered a Swing or Tipping State like Virginia or Ohio, but rather a Battleground State, where the “Ground Game” is critical, such as the registration of non-voters or the transportation of voters to the polls.

*Activity Three- Diagnostic Quizzes: Which Party Is Which? Which Party Are You?*

1. Marzano: Using vocabulary card graphic organizer to record answers, ask students to brainstorm all of the things they already know about political parties, especially the Democrats and Republicans.
2. Place their suggestions on the board. Have them identify which items are characteristics of Democrats and Republicans or of political parties in general.
3. Have students answer the following questions on their own paper by deciding if the idea related to the Democratic or the Republican Party. Students may use a compare/contrast graphic organizer for their answers.

Using a Vivitek or processed on a teacher-made handout, provide students with the following statements.

\*They are willing to raise taxes so that the government can provide needed services such as education and defense. (Democratic)

\*This party supports the expansion of business without government assistance or interference. (Republican)

\* This party calls for the reduction of big government and cutting the budgets of those agencies that have grown too powerful. (Republican)

\* This party controlled the presidency from the time of the Civil War until after the Stock Market crash, which signaled the start of the Great Depression. (Republican)

\*This party expanded the role of the federal government in the lives of ordinary people and in the economy when programs were created to fight unemployment and bad business practices during the 1930s. (Democratic)

\* This party's presidents were associated with every major military conflict of the 20th century. (Democratic)

\* This party supports restrictions on large insurance companies and health management organizations so that the poor and middle class Americans receive adequate health care. (Democratic)<sup>iii</sup>

The teacher will share the correct answers with the class and continue to build background knowledge on political parties by showing the videos "The Democratic Party" and "The Republican Party." Students will take notes on a Two-Column graphic organizer- Democrats and Republicans to further explore the parties' historical stances.

Students are now at a juncture when they are curious as to their party affiliations. Most middle school students are the "victims" of "reputational cascade," which simply means they support the political views of their families without question. A person's views on issues help determine where they fall in the political spectrum. Generally Republicans are conservative while Democrats are liberal. In order to minimize or even dispel that notion, students will take political party quiz on Pew (<http://pewresearch.org>). Students may want to further explore where they are on the partisan political spectrum by answering questions as part of a national survey (<http://www.people-press.org/political-party-quiz>).

#### *Activity Four- AllWrite Round Robin*

Students have familiarized themselves with political parties as well as identified the differences between the Democratic and Republican Parties, and affiliated informally with a major political party through on-line quizzes and surveys. Coupled with the on-going current events assignments and weekly class discussions, they are becoming more entrenched in the political issues of the 2012 Presidential Campaign Students will determine the common issues of the two major political parties using their notes and compile a list of reoccurring issues.

#### AllWrite Round Robin

Students are in cooperative groups of four and will take turns responding orally and then writing each contribution on their own paper. The teacher poses the question, "What are the major, common issues being addressed by the presidential candidates in the 2012 campaign?" Give the students think time before giving them the go-signal to begin. Students will take turns stating responses. I recommend that this activity is timed in order to ensure engagement

and accountability. When students have completed sharing, they will reach a consensus and indicate those recurrent issues addressed by the presidential candidates. The consensus will be shared by the group speaker for whole class consideration in order to create a class list of issues.<sup>iv</sup>

Possible Issues:

1. Economy: unemployment, jobs
2. Entitlements: healthcare, social security, Medicare
3. Education
4. Energy
5. Foreign Policy: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria
6. Taxes
7. Immigration
8. Defense: NRA, assault weapons

*Activity Five- Research*

Students will research issues using informational text and/or internet sites to ascertain political party stances on the previously identified issues. Students will take notes by paraphrasing or citing information. I recommend dividing the class into teams of four, two democrats and two republicans, to focus on their respective party view of the predetermined issues. Students may record their information on a teacher-designed template modifying the Research Tic-Tac-Toe format or use the Cornell Note-Taking format.

Cornell Notes

The Cornell method provides a systematic format for condensing and organizing notes. The student divides the paper into two columns: the note-taking column (usually on the right) is twice the size of the questions/key word column (on the left). The student should leave five to seven lines, or about two inches, at the bottom of the page.

Notes from a lecture, teaching, or even research are written in the note-taking column; notes usually consist of the main ideas of the text or lecture, and long ideas are paraphrased. Long sentences are avoided; symbols or abbreviations are used instead. In special instances,

graffiti notes could be incorporated using symbols or abbreviated illustrations. To assist with future reviews, relevant questions (which should be recorded as soon as possible so that the lecture and questions will be fresh in the student's mind) or key words are written in the key word column. These notes can be taken from any source of information, such as fiction and nonfiction books, DVDs, lectures, text books, etc.<sup>v</sup>

For research purposes students will write the Issue in the left hand column and the Democrat/Republican political party view in the right hand column. The five to seven lines at the bottom may be used for student questions or clarifications.

I would recommend the following two websites:

1. Generation Nation (<http://generationnation.org>) features the candidates' debates for the students to review and to think about the candidates. It also includes Curriculum and Activities such as a Debate Scorecard, Identifying Political Parties and Illustrating Ideas, Evaluation Cards to analyze candidates' qualifications, experiences, issue-based performances, Debates, and Political Ads. These Curriculum Suggestions and Activities are vertically aligned for grades kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and all resources can be downloaded without copyright permission.
2. ProCon (<http://www.procon.org>) features a conclusive and current listing of issue categories and sub-categories the student can select and view the Democrat/Obama and Republican/Romney stance on an issue. This is an engaging and colorful website that affords the students easy and instant access to political party views.
3. USA Today ([www.usatoday.com/interactives](http://www.usatoday.com/interactives)) is an educationally entertaining website, which allows the students to play a candidate match game in order to find out which candidate agrees with him/her more.

#### *Activity 6- Pairs Compare/Exit Ticket*

##### Pairs Compare

The pair of Democrats and the pair of Republicans within a group have a researched list of issues and respective party views. Pairs pair and compare their information with the other pair. The teacher provides think time and a time allotment. Pairs pair to RoundRobin their information. For each issue the face partner in the other pair adds his/her party viewpoint, and the issue is checked off until the list of political issues is exhausted.<sup>vi</sup>

To conclude the activity each group will be assigned one issue to record on chart paper the Pro Con findings for the Democratic and the Republican Parties. I would suggest the information is color-coded in blue and red respectively. These charts will be posted in the

classroom. Students will reflect on the issues, the candidates' viewpoints on the different issues, and consider if their alignment with a particular candidate may be influenced by who they are and where they live. In essence, does setting play a distinguishing factor in compliance with a candidate's platform? The teacher may use an Exit Ticket for students to record their thoughts.

### Exit Ticket

Before students leave for the day or switch classes, they must complete an exit ticket that prompts them to answer a question targeting the big idea of the lesson. Determine what question to pose on the exit ticket. Ask yourself: "If I've taught this lesson to my students well, what one question should they be able to answer to prove to me they got the big idea?" Once the big idea of the lesson has been identified, the question can be determined. When creating the question, remember that both students and teacher will benefit most from a question that requires a synthesis of newly and previously learned information and an application of new knowledge in relation to themselves.

1. Enter the question on the Exit Ticket template. This template can be the form of an actual ticket or assume the form of a test message. Be creative!
2. At the beginning of class distribute the Exit Ticket, and take a few moments to describe the directions and expectations for the Exit Ticket. Distributing the ticket at the beginning of class helps students to focus on the most important ideas of the lesson.
3. Give students time at the end of the lesson to complete their Exit Ticket.
4. Have the students line up at the end of the period and turn in their Exit Ticket on the way out.
5. Review the tickets and allow the data to inform future instruction.<sup>vii</sup>

### *Activity Seven- Teams-Stand-N-Share*

Classroom debates/discussions are exercises designed to allow a student to strengthen skills in the areas of leadership, interpersonal influence, teambuilding, group problem solving, and oral presentation. Debate/discussion topics and groups will be assigned. All group members are expected to participate in the development and presentation of information. The teacher has options to determine the winning side; however, in my opinion the teacher and the students should vote for the winner to promote student evaluation skills.

Due to large class sizes, time constraints, and the argumentative nature of middle school students I think a modification of a debate "Teams-Stand-N-Share" will be the better approach to discussion and the sharing of ideas.

The students will be divided into two groups Democrat and Republican based on their Pairs Share assignments. Depending on the size of the class, these two groups may need to be subdivided. In these bi-partisan teams the students will use their research findings to engage in an argumentative discussion of candidates' viewpoints. Students will be given time to review and conceptualize their research findings and to develop one master list from their research. The Democrat Team and the Republican Team will both have one list of issues with pro-con commentary from which to participate.

#### Team-Stand-N-Share

Teams will check off each idea/issue as it is shared by the other team, sitting down to show every team's ideas have been shared.<sup>viii</sup>

1. Both teams stand together.
  2. The teacher calls on a standing student to begin.
  3. The selected student states one idea from his/her list.
  4. The student in each team, who is holding the team list, checks it off.
  5. The opposing team follows the same procedure in steps 1-4.
  6. Students pass the team list clockwise to another teammate, and the process continues.
- Teams sit when all their items are shared. While seated they may add commentary to their list gleaned from the discussion.

#### Exit Ticket or Quick Write

Do your demographics influence your presidential candidate selection? In answering this question, consider your gender, education, ethnicity, economics, religion, and marital status or even that of your family. The battleground states of Florida, Texas, California, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, and North Carolina are "war zones" for a reason. Can you deduce why North Carolina status as a "battleground state" is based on its demographics?

#### *Activity 7- Argumentative Writing*

Students will return to the party issues for both political parties and decide which political candidate best represents him/her and why by composing an argumentative essay. The students should include in the introduction or conclusion how the sub/urban community directly or indirectly affects their presidential choice. My hope is that students are enabled to draw a conclusion that urban/suburban settings can affect voting patterns and why.

## Argumentative Writing

Students will follow the writing process: brainstorm, pre-write, draft, revise, edit, and publish.

1. Students will brainstorm which candidate they prefer and why. They may jot-list or use other graphics to sort their thoughts. After they make a decision, they will need to organize their thoughts in a graphic organizer. Write for the Future suggests color-coding the graphic organizer.
  - a) (Black) Box 1 Introduction: Hook, background knowledge, thesis
  - b) (Black) Small Box Counter-Argument
  - c) (Blue) Box 2 Body Paragraph one: Topic sentence (reason 1), supporting examples, “red bow” sentence, a concluding sentence restating the topic sentence
  - d) (Green) Box 3 Body Paragraph two: Topic sentence (reason 2), supporting examples, and “red bow” sentence
  - e) (Red) Box 4 Body Paragraph three: Topic sentence (reason 3), supporting examples, and “red bow” sentence
  - f) (Black) Conclusion: Restate thesis and emotional plea
2. Draft one
3. Revision
4. Editing
5. Publication

The teacher may opt for students to present their argumentative papers orally, which will allow for students to select the best paper or winning candidate. Ultimately, the teacher will evaluate the essay using the NC argumentative writing rubric.

### *Activity Eight- Vote*

For differentiation purposes, if deemed necessary for the struggling classes, I suggest the teacher read aloud “The True Story of the Three Little Pigs” by Jon Scieszka. The teacher will ask the class, “Why it is important to vote, to voice your opinion? Do you know what it

means to vote?" Struggling students need to understand that voting is a chance to speak up, to share an opinion, and to have an opinion counted as one of a whole group. He teacher can make connections by asking them to think of things that we voted on or about. Write any answers on the board. The teacher will then return to the stories that read to. The teacher asks, "Do you believe the wolf's side of the story or the pig's side of the story? Why?" The student will then cast a vote on a ballot.

As the unit draws to a close, the teacher will direct the students to return to The Great Gatsby or The Outsiders. The teacher will remind the students the setting of the novel affected the characters and their choices, actions, and reactions. Likewise the urban setting affected the political parties' presidential platform stances. Ultimately, the students' setting, including demographic attributes, affected their presidential candidate choice in the November elections.

Students will be given the opportunity to return to the computer lab and vote for their presidential candidate choice by revisiting Generation Nation and clicking the icon for voting. And the winner is....?

#### *Culminating Activity 9- "I Poem for Two Voices"*

Students will partner one Democrat and one Republican. Following the "I Poem for Two Voices" format, the students will create their own version of the poem substituting political party information and research data to complete the "line starters" for the ultimate purpose of comparing and contrasting the two presidential candidates or political parties. Students can access the poem template by accessing the following internet site.

[www.lesn.appstate.edu/fryeem/RE4030/Pirates/Peter/i\\_poem\\_for\\_two Voices.html](http://www.lesn.appstate.edu/fryeem/RE4030/Pirates/Peter/i_poem_for_two Voices.html)

#### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> *North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process*. Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Education, 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> Marzano, Robert. *Building Academic Vocabulary: Teacher' Manual*. Alexandria: Marzano Center, 2008. Print

<sup>iii</sup> "Election day lesson plans." *yahoo*. N.p., 29 Oct. 2012. Web. 29 Oct. 2012.  
<voices.yahoo.com/election-day-lessonplans-e-election-6965580.html?cat=4 >.

<sup>iv</sup> Kagan, Spencer, and Miguel Kagan. *Kagan Cooperative Learning*. San Clements: Kagan Publishing, 2009.

<sup>v</sup> "Study Skills Resources." Cornell.  
[lsc.cornell.edu/Sidebars/Study\\_Skills\\_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf](http://lsc.cornell.edu/Sidebars/Study_Skills_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf) (accessed October 29, 2012).

<sup>vi</sup> Kagan, Spencer, and Miguel Kagan. *Kagan Cooperative Learning*. San Clements: Kagan Publishing, 2009.

<sup>vii</sup> "WritingFix: Writing Across the Curriculum...Exit Tickets." WritingFix: prompts, lessons, and resources for writing classrooms. [http://writingfix.com/WAC/exit\\_tickets.htm](http://writingfix.com/WAC/exit_tickets.htm) (accessed November 16, 2012).

<sup>viii</sup> Kagan, Spencer, and Miguel Kagan. *Kagan Cooperative Learning*. San Clements: Kagan Publishing, 2009.

## Bibliography for Teachers

Fitzgerald, Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner, 1996.  
A 1920's novel set in New York explores the social issues among the East and West Egg and the Valley of the Ashes as well as human relationships.

<http://generationnation.org> (accessed October 29, 2012).  
This website features the presidential debates for the students to review and to think about the candidates. It also includes Curriculum and Activities such as a Debate Scorecard, Identifying Political Parties and Illustrating Ideas, Evaluation Cards to analyze candidates' qualifications, experiences, issue-based performances, Debates, and Political Ads. These Curriculum Suggestions and Activities are vertically aligned for grades kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and all resources can be downloaded without copyright permission.

Hinton, S.E.. *The Outsiders*. New York: Viking Press, 1967.  
A 1960's novel set in Oklahoma presents social and economic issues in the clashes and friendships between two gangs, the Greasers and the Socs.

"I Poem for Two Voices." App State.  
[www.lesn.appstate.edu/fryeem/RE4030/Pirates/Peter/i\\_poem\\_for\\_two Voices.html](http://www.lesn.appstate.edu/fryeem/RE4030/Pirates/Peter/i_poem_for_two Voices.html)  
(accessed October 31, 2012).

The poem template allows students to contrast two entities by completing the sentence or line starters with characteristics.

"Index of /." Index of /. <http://pewresearch.org> (accessed October 29, 2012).

Excellent site for students to take quizzes on political news, typology, and partisanship.

"Interactives." USA Today. [www.usatoday.com/interactives](http://www.usatoday.com/interactives) (accessed October 29, 2012). This website is an educationally entertaining website, which allows the students to play a candidate match game in order to find out which candidate agrees with him/her more.

Johnson, Melba, and Jane Buckner. *Write for the Future*. Cary: Thinking Maps, 2003. I prefer Write for the Future methodology for instructing students in all forms of writing at the middle school level. The step-by-step process includes a variety of color-coded thinking maps or graphic organizers along with mini lessons, such as transitional words, conventions, and word choice.

Kagan, Spencer, and Miguel Kagan. *Kagan Cooperative Learning*. San Clements: Kagan Publishing, 2009.

Kagan Cooperative Learning ensures engagement and accountability within learning groups. Kagan activities are thoroughly explained and categorized for utilization purposes, such as review, discussion, and brainstorming.

Mann, Thomas, and Norman Ornstein. *It's Even Worse Than It Looks*. New York: Basic Books, 2012.

This text is about America's two main political parties which have given up their traditions of compromise, endangering our very system of constitutional democracy.

Marzano, Robert. *Building Academic Vocabulary: Teacher' Manual*. Alexandria: Marzano Center, 2008.

This is a teacher resource which shows how to take students through a six-step process in order to learn academic vocabulary in depth.

*North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process*. Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Education, 2009.

This booklet from the NC Department of Instruction gives teachers detailed information regarding evaluation standards.

"Political Party Quiz | Pew Research Center for the People and the Press." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. <http://www.people-press.org/political-party-quiz-> (accessed October 29, 2012).

This site is an alternative to determine how much one knows about each political party.

"ProCon.org - Pros and Cons of Controversial Issues." ProCon.org - Pros and Cons of Controversial Issues. <http://www.procon.org> (accessed October 29, 2012).

This site lists issues and sub-headings for political and social issues and details each party's stance.

"SchoolVideos.com - Product Details." SchoolVideos.com - Official Website of 100% Educational Videos & SchoolMedia, Inc..

<http://www.schoolvideos.com/videos/SP595.cfm> (accessed October 29, 2012).

This video will inform students of the Republican Party and its perspectives.

"Study Skills Resources." Cornell.

[lsc.cornell.edu/Sidebars/Study\\_Skills\\_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf](lsc.cornell.edu/Sidebars/Study_Skills_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf) (accessed October 29, 2012).

This site gives background information about Cornell Notes, how to set up in notebooks, and how to utilize as a study technique.

Teixiera, Ruy. *Red, Blue, and Purple America*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institutional Press, 2008.

This text explains election demographics such as exurbs, suburbs, race, class, ethnicity, family structures, and other distinctions that possibly influence voters.

Scieszka, Jon, and Lane Smith. *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*. New York: Viking Kestrel, 1989. Print.

The wolf gives his own version of what happened when he tangled with the three little pigs.

"WritingFix: Writing Across the Curriculum...Exit Tickets." WritingFix: prompts, lessons, and resources for writing classrooms. [http://writingfix.com/WAC/exit\\_tickets.htm](http://writingfix.com/WAC/exit_tickets.htm) (accessed November 16, 2012).

Use this site for Exit Tickets as well as other clever ways to write across the disciplines to encourage writing fluency.

"election day lesson plans." yahoo. voices.yahoo.com/election-day-lessonplans-e-election-6965580.html?cat=4 (accessed October 29, 2012).

This site provides the test on political parties alluded to in Activity Three to determine what students know about political parties and the general issues.

"titles." aimsmultimedia. <http://www.aimsmultimedia.com/titles/title.php3?code=8332-EN-VID> (accessed October 29, 2012).

This site will inform students about the Democratic Party and its perspectives.

## **Reading List for Students**

### **Novels**

*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

*The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton

Picture Books

*The Three Little Pigs* by John Scieska

Web Sites

<http://generationnation.org>- Generation Nation features the candidates' debates for the students to review and to think about the candidates. It also includes Curriculum and Activities such as a Debate Scorecard, Identifying Political Parties and Illustrating Ideas, Evaluation Cards to analyze candidates' qualifications, experiences, issue-based performances, Debates, and Political Ads. These Curriculum Suggestions and Activities are vertically aligned for grades kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and all resources can be downloaded without copyright permission

<http://pewresearch.org>- surveys for political party and typology

<http://www.procon.org>- Students can instantly discover the Democratic and Republican views on a particular issue; features a conclusive and current listing of issue categories and sub-categories the student can select and view the Democrat/Obama and Republican/Romney stance on an issue. This is an engaging and colorful website that affords the students easy and instant access to political party views.

[www.usatoday.com/interactives](http://www.usatoday.com/interactives)- USA Today is an educationally entertaining website, which allows the students to play a candidate match game in order to find out which candidate agrees with him/her more.

[http:// voices.yahoo.com/election-day-lessonplans-e-election-6965580.html?cat=4](http://voices.yahoo.com/election-day-lessonplans-e-election-6965580.html?cat=4)- Where do you stand? Person's views on issues help determine where they will fall on the political spectrum. Eg. Conservative Republican and liberal Democrat; within parties people hold different opinions on social issues especially. Take a "test" to see where you fall.

## **Materials for Classroom Use**

Reading Log to record students' responses to literature

Current Events Template to record summaries and reflections of current events

Research Tic-Tac-Toe Board and Gathering Grid to record research of 1920's and 1960's

Marzano Vocabulary Card to explore the meanings of political party

2-Column Organizer to use for Democrat or Republican "quiz"

Research Template for Pro Con Party Issues

Cornell Notes to record pro or con for party views of issues

Exit Ticket for students to reflect on classroom instruction

Argumentative Writing graphic organizer for students to plan essay

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