**THE ELEPHANT (AND DONKEY) IN THE ROOM:**

**THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN HS**

**Location:** United States **Time Period:** Current Events **Grades:** 8-12

**Essential Question:** How do we approach difficult and unsavory topics with our students in ways that are meaningful and pedagogically useful?

**Objectives:**

Students will place this election within the context of historic understanding about the role of choice available to the electorate

Students will consider the power of narrative in determining how events are framed in election campaigns

Students will investigate the changing nature of truth itself

**Common Core Standards**

English Language Arts: Anchor Standards: College and Career Readiness for Reading, 8-12

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.1

8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

English Language Arts: History/Social Studies: Key Ideas and Details, 9-12

RH.9-12.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

RH.9-12.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

**Massachusetts Curriculum Standards:**

US History 1: Revolution to Reconstruction

Basic Framework of Democracy and Concepts of American government

US History 2: 1877-2001

America’s Growing Role in International Relations

Contemporary America

Impact of Sectionalism on American Life and Politics

Explain the basic function of the government in the US economy

Government elective

LESSON 2A TEACHER SHEET, P. 1

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

The two individuals who have captured their parties’ nominations are truly unlike any in US history. And not only because one of them never held political office and the other is the first woman and presidential spouse. Their personalities and histories are as much at issue as are their policies, perhaps even more so. Each candidate generates passion from their supporters and dread from their opponents.

How do we make sense of these candidates and this election season as educators and as citizens?

We suggest two broader contexts into which you might consider the candidates to help you approach this topic with your students:

* the role of choice
* the power of narrative

A final concern, regarding the nature of truth itself, highlights two issues of this election cycle. One is the integrity of the candidates. The other is agreement upon common factual elements, an increasingly difficult and rare occurrence in the highly partisan climate in which the candidates operate and often perpetuate.

**Procedure**

1. Begin with the role of choice—history is about choices—what choices exist, who gets to make them, and what are the repercussions of the choices made. Both candidates went through an intense primary season. What were the choices they represented when compared to their primary opponents? Divide the class into groups and have them complete Part I of the Student Sheet. The primary party candidates listed are just a suggestion. Please add or substitute as you see fit.
2. What are the choices we face as a nation in this election? Help students brainstorm here. Also be sure to explore how different segments of American society have different priorities so identify what issues matter to which segments of the population. Sites like Polling Report and Pew Research give snapshots as well as information by issue and person: <http://www.pollingreport.com/index.html>

<http://www.people-press.org/2016/07/07/4-top-voting-issues-in-2016-election/>

Given the choices we have to make as a society, help them consider how each candidate represents a distinct option. You may use the candidate’s websites, tweets, speeches, campaign rallies. Limit and/or expose your students as sensibilities allow. Complete Part II of the Student Sheet, either in small groups or as a class.

1. Well beyond the issues are the two individuals. Part III of the Student Sheet allows you to approach what they have done and who they are. To access how they speak and are spoken about, have students watch an hour on MSNBC or Fox News. Their websites both contain clips from their speeches. All of the major news outlets have ongoing political coverage. Please guide your students in ways that feel comfortable to you and your school community.

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4. Presidential campaigns rely on strong narrative elements. Watch this clip <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/18/opinion/how-to-win-an-election.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share>

with your students and have them complete Part IV of the Student Sheet. You may want to divide the class and have each group be responsible for one of the six ‘boxes’ in the graphic organizer. Keep track of candidate behavior and language as we get closer to November 8. Does the content change? Does the method of communication affect the message?

5. Truth seems to be a mutable concept in the current political landscape. And the ability to agree on the facts a diminished endeavor. Both candidates have had their integrity questioned and long before this election season. You might want to watch Stephen Colbert’s 2005 introduction to the Word, Truthiness, with your students. Complete Part V of the Student Sheet.

**Time Allocation:**

Part I: 10-15 minutes to introduce; research and presentation time will vary

Part II: 10-15 minutes to introduce; research and presentation time will vary

Part III: 10-15 minutes to introduce; research and presentation time will vary

Part IV: 15-20 minutes

Part V: Daily Check-ins 5-10 minutes

**Materials:**

Colbert’s Original Word, October 17, 2005

<http://www.cc.com/video-clips/63ite2/the-colbert-report-the-word---truthiness>

Michael P Lynch March 9, 2016, *Googling is Believing*

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/09/googling-is-believing-trumping-the-informed-citizen/?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share>

*The Age of Post-Truth Politics***,** William Davies, August 24, 2016 <http://nyti.ms/2bheLgr>

Fact Checking Websites:

[www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com/settleit)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker>  
<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/elections/fact-check.html?ref=politics&_r=0>

Up to date polling, Polling Report and Pew Research

<http://www.pollingreport.com/index.html>

<http://www.people-press.org/2016/07/07/4-top-voting-issues-in-2016-election/>

The Candidates and the Issues:

<https://www.donaldjtrump.com/positions>

<https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/elections/candidates-on-the-issues.html>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/issueengine/issueengine.html>

Constructing Political Narratives:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/18/opinion/how-to-win-an-election.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share>

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**Assessment Criteria**

Did students place this election within the context of historic understanding about the role of choice available to the electorate?

Did students consider the power of narrative in determining how events are framed in this campaign?

Did students investigate the seemingly changing nature of truth?

**Enrichment Activities**

1. There are many who are not happy with the choices we have in this election. While it is usual to have opponents from other parties, this campaign season has seen opposition within parties. Have students research and present opposition from within each party to its own candidates.

2. Other times in American History have witnessed venomous campaigning— thePresidential Elections of 1800, 1828, 1860, 1884, and 1928 were pretty nasty by any metric. Have students research the issues and personalities involved. Compare those campaigns to 2016 and note similarities and differences.

3. There are strong objections to both candidates. Are the criticisms valid? Are the objections equal? Explore the notion of false equivalencies with your students and see if it applies to the 2016 Presidential Election Campaign.

LESSON 2A STUDENT SHEET, P. 1

The two candidates running for President are unlike any in our nation’s past. One has never held political office. The other is the first female candidate from a major party as well as the spouse of a former president. Yet these details are not what make them unique. The way they speak and are spoken about represents a new low in American politics. Differences are magnified and accelerated in rapid fire thanks to the use and misuse of media. How can we make sense of this campaign?

**Part I:** CHOICES

Both candidates faced serious opposition in their primary races.

1. What were the other choices for the voters besides Clinton and Trump?
2. Your teacher will assign your group one of the following:

Ted Cruz, Bernie Sanders, John Kasich, Marco Rubio, Ben Carson

1. What were his positions on the issues? Each has a website. There are videos of their debate performances and speeches in front of voters. When did he agree with the person who got the party nomination? On what issues did he disagree? Why do you think he did not get his party’s nomination? Be prepared to present your findings to the rest of the class.

**Part II:** MORE CHOICES

1. The candidates have staked out strong positions on many issues. Use their websites or others to determine what they would do as President.

<https://www.donaldjtrump.com/positions>

<https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/elections/candidates-on-the-issues.html>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/issueengine/issueengine.html>

Be sure to site the source of your information. It would great to have hard evidence, e.g. a speech they gave on the subject. Youtube is a great resource here. Compare what you find there to videos on the candidates’ websites

2. How does each candidate represent a distinct choice on all or any of the following?:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ISSUE\* | CLINTON | TRUMP |
| Immigration |  |  |
| Education |  |  |
| National Security/Fighting Terrorism |  |  |
| The Economy |  |  |
| Health Care |  |  |

\*Please substitute issues that are important to you. These are just suggestions

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**Part III**: EVEN MORE CHOICES

It is the candidates’ personalities and pasts, not their policies, that seem to represent the most distinctive choice. Most Americans (more than 50%) dislike both candidates, <http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/pollster>

1. What are the objections to each candidate? Watch either candidate speak or listen to a round table on one of the cable news networks.
2. What is the source of these objections, i.e. actions and language of the candidate her/himself or what others say and do?
3. How do their supporters respond to these criticisms?

Use the two graphic organizers below to help organize this information

Hillary Clinton

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **OBJECTION** | **SOURCE** | **DEFENSE** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

Donald Trump

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **OBJECTION** | **SOURCE** | **DEFENSE** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

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**Part IV: Stories**

All campaigns try to tell a story, both about their own candidate and their opponent. Watch this video and answer the following questions: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/18/opinion/how-to-win-an-election.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone&smid=nytcore-iphone-share>

1. Who is the person speaking in the video? Why is he a good source to learn about presidential campaigns and stories?
2. How do stories shape/affect campaigns?
3. What is the story Secretary Clinton is trying to tell about herself? About Mr. Trump?
4. What is the story Mr. Trump is trying to tell about himself? About Secretary Clinton?
5. Who else participates in the telling of these stories for and against the candidates?
6. How do we know whom to believe?
7. We live in an ever changing world regarding technology. What role have these changes played in this campaign? How have the candidates use of social media affected their ability to convey their message as well as those who oppose it? Both campaigns take to twitter, instagram, Facebook as well as more traditional methods of campaigning in person.

*How does the medium affect the message?*

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**Part V: What is the Truth?**

According to Politifact.com, 70% of Donald Trump’s statements contain some element of untruth. And an NBC/Wall St. Journal poll in July sited 67% of Americans found Hillary Clinton untrustworthy <http://graphics.wsj.com/wsjnbcpoll/>

What does this data reveal about both the candidates and the American electorate?

Between now and November 8, watch what the candidates say and do. Keep track of how each item other supports or refutes the story they are trying to tell. You may also go back and watch and read other things they have said this year and in the past.

Use this graphic organizer to keep track:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| WHAT CLINTON SAYS ABOUT HERSELF | WHAT TRUMP SAYS ABOUT CLINTON | WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY ABOUT CLINTON |
| WHAT TRUMP SAYS ABOUT HIMSELF | WHAT CLINTON SAYS ABOUT TRUMP | WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY ABOUT TRUMP |

To check the accuracy of what they are each saying, please consider consulting these websites:

[www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com)

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/elections/fact-check.html?ref=politics&_r=0>