



The following mock election activity is provided by Civics First Connecticut.

ELECTION GAME

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: RUN A SIMULATED SCHOOL-WIDE CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION FOR ANY OFFICE WITH STUDENTS ROLE-PLAYING ACTUAL CANDIDATES AND CAMPAIGN STAFF.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Election Game is to create a total political campaign experience that is enjoyable and parallels the real world of politics. Experience in this area has shown that through widespread participation in the Game, all players, including those participating as the electorate, experience first hand American electoral politics. The fundamental rule of the Game is KEEP IT REAL! The Game works as a teaching tool ONLY if all players play their roles seriously and participating teachers insist that all players mirror, as closely as possible, actual campaign roles. The Game is most effective when played at the same time as an actual election campaign.

WHO CAN PLAY

Since 1996, the election simulation Game has been giving students the chance to ‘play politics.’ Its efficacy as a teaching tool has been clearly demonstrated for high school students and it has also been successfully adapted for use with middle school students and even first and second graders. The Game can be played with sophisticated technologies, including computer graphics and video editing equipment, or you can play effectively with the most basic technology or none at all. The freedom to compete within a rigorous structure excites students and leaves them wanting to play more. What students learn about politics from playing the Game is considerable. What they learn about themselves is staggering.

BENEFITS TO THE STUDENTS

Players of the Game get first-hand introductions to the world of American electoral politics. They develop deeper understanding of the components of an election, the influence and importance of money and the roles of special interest groups and national political parties. Their skills in research, writing and public speaking are honed as they begin to master the techniques of persuasion. Students learn the importance of teamwork and leadership. Confronted with realistic, ethical dilemmas, they learn to plot effective strategies. In short, players learn life lessons along with academic ones.

BENEFITS FOR THE ENTIRE SCHOOL

The benefits of playing the Game accrue on a number of different levels. The class(es) running the activity take the candidate and campaign team roles. They can also take media roles or media classes can get involved on that level. Finance classes can get involved as the Election Commission. Art and media classes can be part of paid advertising companies. The possibilities are endless. The remainder of the student body becomes the electorate. These students have a unique opportunity to experience what it means to be a voter. Directly exposed to campaigns and to the media's coverage of them, they learn first-hand what it takes to be an educated voter. They learn to discriminate as consumers of media and political messages. They learn lessons of great significance usually not acquired from traditional classroom approaches. The spirit engendered throughout the duration of the Game permeates the entire school community. The lively campaigns, colorful posters, boisterous rallies, interesting television and radio programs all help to create a wonderful sense of spirit. If the Game campaign teams are upperclassmen, a good way to get the underclassmen more involved is to give them more voting power so that upperclassmen have to campaign to them. This works in any grade scenario.

HOW TO PLAY

The key to teaching a campaign class is organization. The class takes on the organizational structure of a campaign. It is the teacher's role to keep students on task and in role throughout the campaign.

ROLES AND COMMITTEES

This list of roles is geared to the most elaborate version of the game. Some roles can be eliminated if class sizes are smaller. You can have as many different campaign teams for different candidates as you think your class can handle. You should at least choose one office up for election and have a candidate and campaign team for at least two candidates running for that same office to create a competition. These roles can be filled for each candidate your class is campaigning for. You certainly don't need all of these roles. You can simplify it even more by having simply a candidate, a campaign manager and some media people for each candidate's team.

- **Management Team:** The management team consists of the candidate, spouse, possibly a running mate and spouse and campaign manager. This group is ultimately responsible for the day-to-day operation of the campaign. This group either makes or approves each and every decision affecting the campaign.

- **The Candidate:** The candidate is the most visible member of the campaign. The candidate must be affable and knowledgeable. He/she is the public face of the campaign.
- **Spouses and Possible Running Mates:** These are also very public roles. Each will be called upon to accompany the candidate at various campaign functions and represent the candidate when he/she is unable to attend.
- **Campaign Manager:** The campaign manager is the person most directly responsible for the operation of the campaign. The campaign manager must keep the members of the campaign focused. He/she must be able to delegate responsibility. All campaign business goes through the campaign manager.
- **Media Team:** The media team is responsible for all phases of the creation and production of advertisements for the campaign. The campaign's ad campaign must be a coordinated effort of print ads and posters (along with radio and television spots if feasible). The media team must effectively get the candidate's message to the voters. The campaign should strive to create an original campaign or recreate/model the real candidate's campaign. You should choose one or two students to be in charge of the media team as media coordinator(s).
- **Appointment Secretaries:** Responsible for maintaining the candidate's schedule; coordinates with outside agencies to arrange appearances. (Dependant upon how involved your activities get but at least gives someone a special role with organizational skills.)
- **Policy Analysts:** The policy analysts are responsible for conducting research on the issues. The campaign needs to know the candidate's position on all relevant policy issues as well as those of its opponents. The analysts' primary responsibilities are to provide the campaign with all the information necessary to conduct a winning campaign. These students will be gathering information about what the real candidate's position is on various topics through whatever forms of research you feel they can do or even as simple as collecting and gathering and keeping the information you provide to them. It is another opportunity to give some students specific special roles even if you give them most or all of the information.
- **Speechwriters:** (If possible) writes for the candidate, spouse and running mate. Speeches are necessary for rallies, press conferences, public appearances and debates. They work closely with the management team and policy analysts as they prepare a number of speeches for the campaign's public figures.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

Each campaign has many options to complete a variety of campaign activities. The goal of each activity is to win votes for the candidate. The following is a list of suggested activities.

Campaigns are not limited to the activities on the list, nor are they limited to one of each.

Obviously the more activities you can accomplish the more involved your class and school will be in the Game. Below are the suggested activities for lower elementary grades intended to create exciting and enthusiastic participation by as many students as possible.

- **Rally: This can be the most fun and exciting event of the campaign!!!** This should be loud, colorful and fun!!! It should be an event to kick off the campaign. The rally should be staged in an area where there are lots of voters around. You can have a big auditorium rally with specific classes in attendance or mini rallies in the cafeteria during lunch periods or the front of the building at dismissal. A large auditorium rally should have classes in attendance make signs to bring to support their candidate of choice. There should be speeches, intro music and lots of cheering!!! – Definitely a must to build excitement and enthusiasm in the campaign. This should be the candidates' first public appearances.
- **Public Appearances:** This is the classic hand-shaking event. The candidate can appear anywhere large numbers of voters are likely to pass. Campaign staff should use this opportunity to distribute campaign literature to prospective voters. Kids can have A LOT of fun with this one. They should get into their roles and introduce themselves to the other students as their candidate person.
- **Television, Radio (if feasible), and Print Ad Campaigns:** Ad campaigns contain different types of ads and develop throughout the campaign. The first spot should be designed to introduce the candidate to the voters. It should include a slogan or something that viewers will associate with the candidate throughout the campaign. The next spots should focus on reasons why viewers should vote for the candidate. They should provide viewers with information about the candidate's stand on the issues as well as the candidates' record. They should be upbeat and positive. Negative ads may also be useful if they contain honest, issue-based reasons why voters should not vote for the opposition.
Remind students that they are talking about the candidate, not the student playing the role!!
- **Speeches:** Speech making is the politician's stock-in-trade. The candidate should make at least one speech, apart from those delivered at rallies. Speeches are given in classrooms and should be set up by appointment with the teachers of particular classes.

A speech should not exceed 5 minutes. An entourage should accompany a candidate. The entourage may include the campaign manager, spouse, appointment secretary, or other members of the campaign. Make sure the candidates keep their appointments!! You will want to make sure your “candidates” are not the “shy” type!! I would recommend them doing at least one speech in front of their own class. But again, you can eliminate this if you feel the students can’t handle it.

- **Candidate Debates:** You may want to have your candidates try one just in front of their own class if you think they can pull it off to your satisfaction. Debates should have pre-chosen topics. Media students should be chosen to ask the pre-written and teacher-approved questions. The debate requires each candidate to make opening and closing statements, answer a series of questions posed by a panel of reporters, offer rebuttals to opponents’ answers and respond to rebuttals, but of course this can also be simplified as much as necessary. You could just do one or two pre-planned questions. Questions may also be taken from the audience in the style of a town hall meeting. A debate host should be chosen from a media class or other non-campaign team class. The host is responsible for coordinating the efforts and acting as a master of ceremonies. Questions and topics should mirror those in actual real-life debates. Ground rules should be set in advance for the debate which must be distributed to all participants in the debate.
- **Election Day:** The final major event of the Game is Election Day. This is your school’s mock election and will need to take place prior to the actual election day. You will need people either from your class, other older classes or teachers to run the election. If you can do a school wide election then you would want people sitting at tables checking off names of voters and then people to count the votes whether you make ballots or get access to actual voting machines – we may be able to set you up with some.
- **Election Party:** As a culminating activity you should have a party to celebrate the end of the campaign for all participants whether their candidate won or lost the mock election. Winners should be announced over the PA if possible.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM LESSON PLANS

The campaign class takes on a life and momentum of its own as the game progresses. The campaign teacher’s role will be to keep the campaign focused on the tasks at hand and also on the tasks yet to come. Time should be set aside during each classroom session to speak to the class as a whole in the manner of a coach motivating his/her team. Both formal and informal status reports are included on a weekly basis. A formal approach requires the head of each

committee to stand and deliver a brief statement as to what the committee has done that week and plans to accomplish in the following days. An informal approach would take the form of private updates given to you by the members of each committee.

There are several opportunities to get other classes involved through creation or advertisements, rallies or public appearances. If you're going to do a school wide election you want your candidates to be visible and your ads to be displayed for the whole school. The art teacher can help design posters. Other specialty teachers can get involved in any way you find for them too. The best game utilizes the whole student body of the school. Some other classroom teachers may want to have their kids make posters to support their candidate or signs to display at a rally in support of their candidate, etc. The possibilities are limitless. Most of all, your students should have fun while learning about the people they are pretending to be.

- To increase level of difficulty in presidential election years, have a finance committee that counts the electoral votes and assign specific amounts of electoral votes to different classes or grades giving more electoral votes to the groups that you want the candidates to be sure to pay attention to.
- To increase level of difficulty create accounting system for spending campaign finances and doing fundraising.