

Hail to the Chief: Electing a President

Linda Holt, WVPT

Overview

Topic: Election Issues. This lesson is a WebQuest. Students will be asked to assume the role of a supporter for a presidential candidate for the New Millennium Party as well as serve as a key player in the development of a party platform that will attract voters from a variety of groups. Each student will focus on a key political issue and develop a position statement on that issue for his/her candidate. Working with the candidate's campaign committee, the student will assist in developing a presentation designed to convince other party members to adopt the candidate's positions on the key political issues. Finally, each committee member will work with his/her counterpart on the other candidates' committees to develop a compromise position for the new Millennium Party platform. While this lesson is designed for the Year 2000 election, it can be adapted for any local, state, or national election. This project encourages the development of the following skills: critical thinking, problem-solving, creative production, teamwork, and compromise.

Length of Lesson

6 90-minute blocks

Video/Technology Hardware & Software

copy of WebQuest on diskette
 computer with Internet access
 browser (either Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer)
 PowerPoint or HyperStudio
 any word processor
 desktop publishing program such as Printshop or PrintMaster
 camcorder
 audiocassette recorder/player
 Websites: see Focus for Technology

Web Applications

The Web is used in this lesson primarily for Information Collection/Analysis.

A WebQuest will be provided by the teacher to guide the student through the project and to lead students to appropriate research sites.

Note to teacher: The links which are included in this WebQuest are current as of March 1, 2000. Websites often disappear and/or move, so you will want to verify and update links prior to doing the lesson.

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- identify the constituencies whose interests affect decisions made by political parties
- analyze public issues and develop party platform positions that are based on these issues
- communicate clearly and convincingly his/her positions on public issues
- use details, illustrations, statistics, comparisons, and analogies to defend his/her position
- identify, evaluate, and synthesize information in order to support a thesis



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- present information in a logical, well-organized format.
 - edit for correct capitalization, use of language, punctuation, and spelling in final copies.
 - cite sources of information using a standard method of documentation.
 - communicate ideas to an intended audience.
 - work collaboratively and cooperatively to come to an acceptable compromise.
- (The lesson addresses Va. SOLs Social Studies 12.6, 12.11, 12.13; English 12.1, 12.2, 12.7, 12.8)

Materials and Teacher Preparations

Divide students into heterogeneous groups, ideally with 5 students per group. These groups are the campaign committees.

- 1 copy per student of the group and issue assignments. Each student in the campaign committee is assigned the role of expert for one of the five key issues: Social Security and Medicare, Crime and Society, Women's Issues, Economy, and Education.
- 1 copy per student of the definitions page.
- 1 copy per student of the timeline and due dates for each project.
- blank diskettes to store documents and presentations.
- To access the WebQuest either on individual diskettes, on a network, or on a website:
 - open your browser
 - click on file
 - scroll down to open or page
 - click on choose file
 - select the 3 1/2 floppy drive
 - open the WebQuest folder
 - open the index.html file
- alternative resources (such as local databases and library resources) in the event that Internet access is temporarily unavailable.

For current information on how to get a copy of the WebQuest, contact: Linda Holt, Virginia Department of Education, P.O. Box 2120, Richmond, VA 23218-2120, 804-786-5149, lholt@pen.k12.va.us.

Preparatory Activities

Prior to any election, events dictate the issues that will define the campaign focus for candidates and political parties. Pose the question: What are some of the events that you have read about or seen on news broadcasts that you think will become important issues in the upcoming Presidential election? Allow students to suggest what these issues might be. Have a student go to the blackboard to record student suggestions.

Follow up this brainstorming session, by asking students to consider how candidates prepare their campaigns and how political parties determine their platform positions.

Focus for Technology

Begin the discussion of the WebQuest in class, not in the computer lab. This will enable you to get the students to focus on the structure of the WebQuest and the task. Using a computer which is attached to a large monitor, LCD panel, or data projector, describe the purpose of and process for completing the WebQuest.

Say to the students: Today we will begin a WebQuest that deals with the year 2000 Presidential Election. During this project you will work within groups to study some of the major domestic issues of the campaign and to define and recommend strategies for addressing these issues. This project will be part of both your Government and English class assignments, and you will receive a grade in both classes for the quality of your completed projects. We will look at how your projects will be graded in a few minutes. Let's begin by looking at the WebQuest.

Online Activities

Click on the link to the Introduction. Read the Introduction to the class.

Say to the students: Let's look at the Task.

Click on the link to the Task.

Read the Task, pointing out that they will be using a variety of resources to research and complete their projects.

Now click on the link to the Process. Read the introductory process statement to the class, emphasizing each of the projects which must be completed.

Say to the students: Before you receive your committee assignment, we need to define some terms and answer some focus questions. Your journal assignment for today is to answer the following questions.

Scroll down to Step One.

Allow students sufficient time to address each of these questions in their journal.

Say to the students: Now that you have had an opportunity to think about some of the terms we will be using, it is time for you to meet with your group to compare your answers to the answers of others on your committee.

At this point, hand out the group/issue assignment sheet.

Say to the students: Now that you have your committee assignment, meet with your committee and share your responses to the focus questions which you answered in your journal. Each of you is expected to share your answers and to contribute to the group discussion. Choose a committee reporter who will report your committee's answers to the class at the end of the discussion period.

Allow students time to discuss the answers to the questions in their committees. Circulate from group to group making sure that students are on task. When each committee has had an opportunity to discuss all of the questions, call the class back together as a whole. Allow each group reporter to share his/her committee's answers to the focus questions. Either write the answers on the blackboard, use the word processor on the computer, or

use an overhead to record the ideas which have been generated by each committee.

Now hand out to each student a copy of the definitions page. Make sure that every student is familiar with the terminology before going on to the next step.

Say to the students: Now that we have defined our terms and talked about the WebQuest task, it is time to begin your research.

Click on the link to Step Three.

Say to the students: Each of you has been assigned one of the five key issues. You will become the expert on the issue which has been assigned to you. You need to find as much information as possible on your issue and then to decide what the position statement for your candidate will be. Be sure to consider the issue from the perspective of different interest groups. Be sure as well to find enough facts to defend the position that you take. You will begin your research at Policy.com.

Click on the link to Policy.com in Step Three.

Say to the students: Be sure to read the background information for the issue assigned to you. Why is this issue important? What are the major concerns related to this issue? What special interest groups are concerned about this issue?

Say to the students: You will print out and use the Data Sheet to identify your resources as well as to record any information you collect to support your position.

Click on the Data Sheet link and demonstrate to students how they will print out copies of the form.

Click on the Rubric.

Say to the students: By clicking on the link to the rubric, you will be able to determine how your work will be evaluated. Consult the rubric frequently to make sure that you are meeting the requirements of the assignments.

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Hand out copies of the timeline and due dates for each project. Review all of the due dates and the suggested timeline for the students.

Say to the students: From this point on, you will follow the steps in the WebQuest in the order that they are listed. Remember, you are part of committee. The success of each committee depends upon the efforts and cooperation of each group member.

Sites Used by the WebQuest are:

- <www.policy.com/issuewk/1999/0719-84/index.html>: This site identifies key issues that will be important in the 2000 Presidential election. Rationale is given for the choice of these issues, and additional linked sites are provided.
- <www.votesmart.com>: Project Vote-Smart.
- <www.camelect.com/bandwagon/>: Campaign and Elections Online. The Website of the Campaign and Elections magazine is a good introduction to the political campaign business.
- <allpolitics.com>: CNN/Time All Politics. This site is updated daily with news from Washington, the states and the campaigns.
- <www.democrats.org>: Democratic National Committee. Here you can find out everything the Democrats are doing.
- <www.reformparty.org/>
- <www.lp.org/lp/>: Libertarian Party Headquarters. This site is dense with Libertarian issues and positions.
- <www.sjca.edu/~cgillen/lighthouse.html>: The Political Lighthouse. A comprehensive linked index to most of the major political parties in America today.
- <www.rnc.org>: The Republican National Committee.
- <www.inform.umd.edu:8080/EdRes/Topic/

WomensStudies/>: InforM Women's Studies Database. The searchable database contains information on women's issues.

- <www.feminist.org/>: Feminist Majority Foundation Online. This site contains information on government actions for and against women.
- <asa.ugl.lib.umich.edu/chdocs/womenpolicy/womenlawpolicy.html>: Internet Resources for Women's Legal and Public Policy Information. This guide is intended to assist individuals seeking information related to women's and feminist legal, public policy and political issues.
- <www.now.org/>: The National Organization for Women (NOW) The home page for NOW offers press releases, issues, and articles representing the organization's interests.
- <www.westga.edu/~wandp/w+p.html>: An academic journal published at West Georgia College in Carrollton, GA whose goal is to foster research and the development of theory on women's political participation, the role of women in society, and the impact of public policy upon women's lives.
- <wlo.org/>: Women Leaders Online. This site contains information about Women Leaders Online and a variety of other women-related issues.
- <www.igc.apc.org/womensnet/>: WomensNet. A non-profit computer network for women, activists, and organizations using computer networks for information sharing and increasing women's rights.
- <www.yale.edu/lawnfem/law&fem.html>: Yale Journal of Law and Feminism. This site publishes pieces about women's experiences, especially as they have been structured, affected, controlled, discussed, or ignored by the law.
- <www.3pc.net/index.html>: Third Party Central. Provides information about the third-party movement in American politics. Links to each party's site are included.

<www.ssa.gov/>: Social Security Online. Links are available to press releases, congressional testimony, and President Clinton's State of the Union Message on the topic, "What Is the Future of Social Security?"

Post Online Activities

As outlined in Step Five of the WebQuest, students write a position statement for their assigned issue.

Following the guidelines in Step Six, students prepare a campaign consisting of brochures, flyers, video and audio campaign ads, and a multimedia presentation designed to convince other party members to adopt their candidate's positions on the five issues addressed in the WebQuest.

Moving on to Step Seven and Step Eight of the WebQuest, students work with their counterparts in the other committees to develop a platform statement for the party related to the issue assigned to them. The reporter for each issue-related committee reports the position statement he/she has developed, providing a rationale for the position taken. All members of the committee will answer questions related to their position statement.

In Step Nine of the WebQuest, students reflect on their experiences as they worked through the projects and answer the questions outlined in this step in their journal.

Assessment

At the conclusion of this project, students will have had the opportunity to look at some of the major issues which will be addressed in the 2000 Presidential election. They will have studied an issue in-depth, have made a case for their position, and will have had an opportunity to experience the need to work cooperatively with others to address issues in a way which is acceptable to the majority. There are a total of 100 points for this project. Grades will be based on the rubric included in the WebQuest. Some assignments are individual projects and some

involve participation in group work. Since each student is responsible for the success of the group, students will receive grades based on their group work as well as their individual effort. Total possible points which can be assigned for each assessment is stated in the score column.

Action Plan: Culminating Activities

1. Have students write letters or correspond via e-mail with political candidates asking questions related to the issues they have researched.
2. Arrange to have a member of the board of supervisors visit the class to answer questions related to the campaign issues researched.

Extensions

Have students publish their position statements and multimedia presentations on the school server for access through the school intranet.

Have students develop a newsletter (either in print form or in html format) that identifies the key campaign issues and discusses the actual candidate positions related to those issues.

Have students create a Yahoo club at <www.yahoo.com> for the purpose of sharing campaign information or for debating topics. This club could continue beyond the actual project until the actual election takes place.

Adaptions for Special Needs Students:

- If there are students with special needs, groups might have more than one student per issue to accommodate those needs.
- Utilize the capabilities of the computer to address special needs, such as increasing the size of the font, using available adaptive technology, and utilizing voice recognition software.

About the Author

Linda R. Holt

Linda Holt is currently an Instructional Media and Training Specialist for the Virginia Department of Education. Her previous 27 years of experience in the educational field have been spent in the Caroline County and Greene County public school divisions. From 1971 until the spring of 1976, Linda taught English 9 and 12 as well as Spanish I-IV at Bowling Green High School. After a year of graduate study at James Madison University, she became a library media specialist at William Monroe High School in Greene County. Linda has also served as an adjunct instructor for Piedmont Virginia Community College. During her employment in Greene County, Linda served as the Division Technology Training Coordinator and RSCPC representative to WVPT. In 1998, she was named the VEMA Regional Library Media Specialist of the Year for the Shenandoah Region. She was also an active member of the Shenandoah Valley Technology Consortium. Linda received her BA from Longwood College in 1967 and a M.Ed. from JMU in 1977.