

# Growing Voters and Election 2016

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## Activity Title: **Class Online Column Covers Election News**

**High School** (could be scaled for other grades)

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### Overview

News media coverage of the presidential election is arguably the most prominent aspect of the entire election. Everyone across the country is blasted with news from every available source. The news cycle is 24 hours a day for 7 days a week online, on mobile phones, print, TV, and radio. Throughout the primary campaign season, the summer political party conventions, and the main fall election campaigns, election news is ubiquitous. Students can transcend being only consumers of the news by creating coverage of their own.

Use this activity for students to **contribute to** election coverage. A class (or a grade level within a school) can produce and post a running column (or opinion articles) reporting and analyzing aspects of the election, the campaign, issues, public opinion, the news media itself.

It is a powerful learning vehicle when students grapple with their own analysis of electoral issues and are in a position to make their views known to others. Online resources are valuable tools for collaboration and sharing across classes, schools, and communities. There are available blog sites which are free, safe and easy to use. Each student-published column or news article can then be tweeted or shared on other social media sites.

Tools could be a simple Word doc, use of a free blog site (i.e. Blogger.com), a Padlet to put words and pictures online, or a variety of social media outlets. (See tools link on GrowingVoters.org website.)

### Activity

1. The students work in pairs to research and list issues that are being debated by the candidates in the presidential election. The GrowingVoters.org Resources lists a number of useful websites to support this research.
2. Student pairs (or other size groups) should identify the issues that they feel are the most important.

**Teach the Presidential Election:** A range of technology-infused classroom activities, resources, and tools are **available for free** at [GrowingVoters.org](http://GrowingVoters.org), a non-partisan educational effort to enliven and motivate student engagement in the political process. Professor Jo-Anne Hart is the project creator with support from *Lesley University* Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA: [Hart@Lesley.edu](mailto:Hart@Lesley.edu)

3. The class can then brainstorm and divide up the issues among groups interested in taking responsibility for each selected issue cluster (or sub-divide them as necessary). The students will include the candidates' stance on each of the selected issues.
4. The class can divide up the tasks within their groups based on functions for news coverage:
  1. **Writers**
  2. **Editors**
  3. **Photographers/Graphics**
  4. **Publishers**(All can serve as distributors of the finished paper.)
5. “Publisher” students can work with the instructor to set up the online publishing space itself to simulate online newspaper coverage. The selection of tools and design can be in consultation with the rest of the class, time and interest permitting.
6. The student issue groups (the writers and editors) plan their newspaper entries. If desired, the teacher can have each group briefly present their main ideas to the class. If there are to be artwork – photos or graphics to support the articles – deadlines should be established for when the products must be ready.
7. Each issue group provides to the “publisher” their column / article based on their research, analysis and opinion on the key election issue or candidate to be posted online.
8. The class distributes the web address (url) to another class, to friends, to another school, etc. as decided by individual class circumstances and preferences. Teachers can also arrange for this process in advance. The GrowingVoters.org national Facebook page is an available option for wide dissemination.
9. Class discussion (or written assignment) on the interaction and commentaries from readers outside of class: what surprised them about the process? What kinds of reactions did they get? What are the key ingredients of election coverage? Is it subjective or objective when reporting the news?

Variation 1: Continue the newspaper columns and reporting election coverage throughout the campaign with the polls, forecasts, predictions and then compare with what actually occurred when the results in November become available. Students can ask what aligned with expectations or did not and WHY? Newspaper columns can also be used to cover the transition to the new administration.

Variation 2: Students make podcasts or videos of their election coverage to simulate TV or radio newscasts instead of newspapers. Various online tools' sites are suggested on the GrowingVoters.org website.

Select Assignment Scope:

The teacher should also decide whether this can be an **ongoing assignment** over the semester, to follow the transition, the inauguration, the new President starting in the White House, the beginning of the new administration choices and his/her policies, etc. Or if this is to be a one-time Special Issue newspaper or magazine.

**\*easily adaptable to grades** by making the newspaper coverage more or less extensive, on-going assignment or a one-time post.