

Growing Voters and Election 2016: Grades: 9-12

Activity Title: **Common Ground Candidate Debate**

Students will participate in a classroom debate between two candidates representing two political parties. Instead of highlighting their political differences, in this debate the commonalities between the candidates will be identified. This activity also engages respectful listening, even in disagreement.

“The Chinese word to listen is made up of character for “eyes,” “ears,” “heart,” and “undivided attention.” All of these are required in respectful listening. The process of listening impacts both the person being listened to and the listener. New understanding and connections are made that can bring resolution to animosity and conflict.” (from [American Friends Service Comm.](#))

Overview

To be an informed voter requires that we critically listen and analyze the information in the debates, speeches, and commercials of each candidate to insure we make an informed decision when we cast our votes. This as an adversarial contest in that one candidate will prevail in the election itself. Governing, however, takes collaboration and the knitting together of goals and policies. Therefore the electoral process and the candidate campaigns can also afford valuable learning opportunities for finding common ground. Students can play the role of the political parties / candidates and debate in order to find out the areas they agree on.

Essential Questions

1. Where do interests and values of each candidate overlap?
2. What areas of agreement between the candidates can be highlighted for media use?
3. What would media coverage be like if it focused also on the commonalities of the candidates?
4. What is the process by which we listen to find common ground with each other even in political contests?

Objectives

Students will understand that choice between two candidates can also include common ground.

Students will understand the role and issues of each party, including where they agree.

Students will identify for themselves the issues that require the voters' decisions.

Students will role-play influential individuals in the current political arena, but instead of highlighting differences, they will listen to find common ground.

Students will understand the media's attention emphasis on adversarial approaches to political policy.

Students will experience respectful listening.

Activity Instructions:

Procedure

1 Students will become a member of a political party in the United States through a teacher selected selection process. Suggestion: students will pick a REP or DEM party card out of a hat or teachers will assign students to a political party.

Students will further be put into teams divided accordingly based on class size and teacher preferences for activity purposes:

1. A Democratic Party Prep Team to prepare and support Hillary Clinton in the debate. One student will role-play the candidate herself.
2. A Republican Party Prep Team to prepare and support Donald Trump in the debate. One student will role-play the candidate himself.
3. A Common Ground Analysis Team to listen for common ground and comment on the overlapping interests and goals of both candidates.
4. (optional) Media Crew Team to use webcams or video camera or audio recorders to film/record debate plus analysts interviews.

Preparation for Debate:

1. Students will research, create, and turn in a list of 10 resources about their representative party
2. Students will peruse primary source documents from prior presidential election debates, including online video footage and editorial commentaries.
3. Students will familiarize themselves with a Common Ground approach. See http://www.sfcg.org/resources/resources_terms.html
4. Students will familiarize themselves with tips for [how to disagree](#).
5. The class should talk together about [respectful listening](#).
5. Students will generate debate questions on the major issues affecting their party and its platform and practice listening for common ground from the other candidate.

Specific team play**:

Each **candidate prep team** selects a student to play each Presidential candidate (either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton). Each complete team must work together to prepare their candidate before the debate:

Identify key issues and where the candidate stands (and where the opponent stands)

Identify key points of potential agreement with the other

Put the candidate through a practice session with the other team members playing the part of the opponent and the journalists posing questions to the candidates.

Practice listening for and highlighting common ground.

The **Common Ground analysis team** members should look up the common ground process to discover means of listening and posing questions which highlight overlapping interests and positions. For example, http://www.sfcg.org/resources/resources_terms.html
The team then works to prepare for their interpretive work following the debate. They may have the opportunity to give interviews or they may put together an analysis for the whole class.

Video or Audio Crew team (optional) prepares a) to record/ film the debate itself; b) to capture individual interviews (or summary analysis) with common ground analysts following the debate; and c) organizes what would be news coverage of debate. The video team needs to decide who is behind the camera, who is organizing the shots, who is directing the filming, who is the technician, etc.

For a radio, podcast version: use similar advance organizing – who to record, where to put the microphone(s), are photos needed for thumbnails

**Note that advance preparation can be (homework) outside the classroom and consider using a BLOG for each team to keep track of their questions and their work.

Resources:

GrowingVoters.org Resources: http://www.ikeepbookmarks.com/Growing_Voters

http://www.sfcg.org/resources/resources_terms.html

Magazines Newspaper TV

[Respectful listening](#) sources

[Tips for How to Disagree](#)

Activities:

1. Prepare candidates with Debate Camp practice.
2. Stage a debate between the candidates.
3. Have journalists pose questions during the debate in common ground format
5. Film or record debate and post-debate analysis
7. Put video and news analysis on blog and continue the discussion, collaborate outside classroom.
8. Show video / play radio podcast to other classes.

Additional Ideas:

1. Do common ground candidate debate activity with **Vice-Presidential** Candidates

Common Ground Teaching:

The election brings up conflict and argument. It is a good time to talk to students about finding commonalities and help guide them in active and respectful listening and respect for different perspectives. Not only in a formal debate, but in several Growing Voters activities, there are rich examples to work with students on tolerance of dissent and respect for the opinions and perspectives of others. Seeking common ground supports the ability to work together in civil and political society. It forms a solid basis of discussion about citizenship and democratic norms.