

Teacher's Guide to 2008 Presidential Election Issues – Elementary School Level

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INTRODUCTION

This Teacher's Guide is intended as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, the 2008 Teachers Guide to the National Student/Parent Mock Election Issue Forum. The Secondary Issues Guides to the Economy, Energy, War, Health Care, and Education contain far more information and suggested activities, and should be used in conjunction with this one as resources for the teacher.

This guide uses the same questions as those in the National Student/Parent Mock Election board game, the **Election Connection**, in the context of a more traditional lesson as subjects for discussion. The topics are open-ended, intended to provoke thought rather than elicit "right" answers. They are also intended to provoke discussion. The teachers may wish to break up the class into committees tackling each of the questions and presenting the points of view pro and con.

The issues overviews from the 2008 Teacher's Guide to the National Student/Parent Mock Election Issues Forum have been condensed and rewritten to be more understandable to upper elementary level students, although their readability level is still approximately grade 10, so teacher assistance may be necessary.

For Web links related to the issues and candidates, see the Teacher's Guide to the 2008 National Student/Parent Mock Election Issues Forum.

The National Standards for Civics and Government related to those issues are online at:

<http://www.civiced.org/index.php?page=stds>

The most important lesson for the elementary grades teacher to teach is the lesson of civic discourse in a democracy, respect for opinions that differ from our own, and the importance of the civic engagement that will protect our democracy for generations to come.

OVERVIEW: The Economy

Voters are worried about the American economy. High gas prices, fewer jobs, and people losing their homes and savings are making news across the country. Americans are looking for a change.

Most problems with the economy began with people borrowing money to buy houses they couldn't afford. The payments were often low to start, but went higher after a few years. Also, due to countries like China buying more oil and food, prices rose for those and other things people need.

That caused more problems as banks and investors faced huge losses and had to cut their lending to save what money they had left. Some big banks and insurance companies on Wall Street failed when they couldn't borrow any more money or pay their customers. The government either let them be sold or taken over at cheap prices, or took over the loans itself, making taxpayers responsible for paying them. Today, it is more difficult to get a loan for any purpose, even if you have good credit. There is less demand for cars, homes and other consumer products, resulting in a slowdown in manufacturing and lost jobs.

Taxes are always a campaign issue. Should we cut taxes or increase them, and for who? The future of programs such as Social Security, welfare and educational reform are tied to the federal tax policies and the health of the nation's economy. Economic issues will be at the forefront of the candidates' campaigns as they explain how they plan to preserve the standard of living Americans have come to enjoy.



"The Congress shall have power to... borrow money on the credit of the United States; to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes...." -- U.S. Constitution, Section 8

"Gross national product measures neither the health of our children, the quality of their education, nor the joy of their play. It measures neither the beauty of our poetry, nor the strength of our marriages. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories and the safety of streets alike. It does not include ... the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. GNP measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile." -- Senator Robert Kennedy (1968)

Subjects for Discussion:

Explain how you would create more jobs for people.

Give your reasons why the federal government should or should not help people who can't pay their mortgage loans.

Give your reasons why the federal government should or should not help banks that are losing money because people can't pay their loans.

Explain why you do or don't want to cut federal taxes.

Explain why the U.S. should or should not allow more cheap products to be imported.

Explain why the U.S. should or should not increase Social Security payments to senior citizens.

Explain why the U.S. should or should not increase the federal minimum wage.

Explain why the federal government should or should not help pay for child care.

Explain why you believe the U.S. President can or can't change the direction of the U.S. economy.

Explain why the U.S. should or should not help U.S. farmers or fishermen.

Explain why the federal government should or should not make families earning over \$100,000 per year pay higher taxes.

Explain why the federal government should or should not allow rent deductions from income taxes, like deductible mortgage payments.



OVERVIEW: Energy

World energy prices have increased dramatically as countries like China and India join the United States to use more of the world's oil. The consequences are both global and local. Budgets are strained while the country argues about a national energy policy that benefits the environment and develops new energy sources to replace our addiction to oil.

Other reasons for the high price of oil compared to years past are: a) a weak U.S. currency, which requires more dollars to buy the same amount of imported oil as before; b) political uncertainties in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere that could limit the supply of oil in the future; c) a weak American stock market as money flows into commodities like oil, searching for better investment opportunities.

The candidates in the presidential election will most likely focus on long-term solutions to our energy crisis, as little can be done to bring down the cost of oil in the coming months. These policy prescriptions fall into three categories: reducing our demand for oil, reducing the amount of foreign oil we use, and investing in alternative and renewable energy resources. Until these new technologies and policies are established, we will continue to pay more for oil.



"I have no doubt that we will be successful in harnessing the sun's energy... If sunbeams were weapons of war, we would have had solar energy centuries ago."
-- Sir George Porter

"'The age of cheap oil is over' is a cheap comment." Dr. Lee Raymond, former chairman and CEO of ExxonMobil

Subjects for Discussion:

Explain why drilling for oil in Alaska will or won't lower oil and gasoline prices.

Explain why drilling for oil offshore is or is not worth the environmental risk and the risk to fisheries.

Explain why the federal government should or should not help pay for electric cars.

Explain why the federal government should or should not pay more for new railroads and less for new roads.

Explain why the federal government should or should not help pay for a solar power system on your house.

Explain why the federal government should or should not release oil from the National Petroleum Reserve when the price goes over \$100/barrel.

Explain why you believe drilling for more oil or energy conservation is more important.

Explain why the federal government should or should not help pay for new nuclear power plants.

Explain why governments should or should not require oil companies to drill in areas they have already leased before they can lease new ones.

Explain why the federal government should or should not sign treaties about global warming.

Explain why the federal government should or should not tax oil companies more when their prices are high.

Explain why the federal government should or should not help pay for biofuels like corn ethanol.

Explain why the federal government should or should not pay companies for research on cleaner fuels or cars.

Explain why the federal government should or should not charge high taxes on incandescent light bulbs.



OVERVIEW: War

Most Americans are clamoring for a policy change about the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. America's involvement in Afghanistan, alongside NATO, has not faced the same opposition here at home as the Iraq war has. But, our military forces in Afghanistan lack enough troops, and the Iraqi government is not yet ready to control its country.

There is much debate about troop levels and how long the U.S. should keep our military forces in Iraq. What is actually in the best interests of the United States, and are our best interests the same as Iraq's and its people?

Other political and military issues related to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are:

- a) The importance of Iraq and its Middle Eastern neighbors as major oil producers and transportation routes
- b) Iran's desire to become a nuclear power despite opposition from world opinion
- c) The security of our close ally Israel, especially with Iran threatening it.

Candidates are trying to convince Americans that their war plans are preferable. Often specific current events in Iraq, Afghanistan and their neighbors affect public opinion in America.



"The Congress shall have power to... declare war... raise and support armies... provide and maintain a navy...." -- U.S. Constitution, Section 8

"Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote." -- Benjamin Franklin

"After the war, the plan is to divide Iraq into three parts ... regular, premium, and unleaded." -- Jay Leno

Subjects for Discussion:

What do you believe "half in jest, all in earnest" means? What do you believe Benjamin Franklin was really saying? Jay Leno?

Explain your plan for getting the U.S. out of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Explain why you do or don't believe the U.S. should have invaded Iraq and Afghanistan instead of other countries with dictators.

Explain why you do or don't believe the U.S. invasion of Iraq has helped to fight al-Qaeda.

Explain why you do or don't believe the U.S. President should be able to invade another country without a declaration of war from Congress.

Explain why you do or don't believe the U.S. should give answers in the World Court to charges of violations of international law and war crimes.

Explain why the federal government should or should not be allowed to spy on U.S. citizens without a warrant in cases of suspected terrorism.

Explain why you do or don't believe the federal government is keeping you safe.

Explain why the federal government should or should not draft everyone into the military at 18.

Explain why you do or don't think Americans who support the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are more patriotic than those who don't.

Explain why the federal government should or should not allow the military to arrest civilians in the U.S.

Explain why the federal government should or should not arrest people protesting the wars in front of military facilities.

Explain when you believe the U.S. President should be allowed to use nuclear weapons.

OVERVIEW: Health Care

Presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama agree that the health care system in America is broken. Health insurance costs too much for families and employers, 47 million Americans are not insured at all, and many people have poor health despite the amount of money we spend on health services.

The United States is unique in the developed world because our health care system is not entirely provided by the government, such as in Britain or Canada. In those countries, every citizen receives free health insurance directly from the government, paid for by taxes. In general, they spend less money, but their health care is as good as or better than ours, although there are still problems. For example, people in Britain and Canada often live longer than those in the U.S., even though we spend almost twice as much on health care as Great Britain.

U.S. health care is a mixture of public and private insurance. Most Americans get their health insurance from their employers, with others covered by the federal government by way of Medicare or Medicaid (lowest incomes), and still others from state governments with programs like CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program). Quality varies among many types of insurance or having no insurance at all. We need a new national health care strategy, but our two major political parties approach the problem in different ways. Democrats want laws to require that people buy their own insurance if they can, and provide government help if they can't. Most Republicans believe in a limited government role in the nation's health care system, and favor reduced taxes for employers that provide insurance for their employees.



The real fight is about what should be in the marketplace and what should not. Should education be a marketable commodity? Should health care?-- Susan George

"The art of healing is like an unroofed temple, uncovered at the top and cracked at the foundation." -- Dr. Benjamin Rush, Declaration of Independence signer and the "father of American psychiatry"

Subjects for Discussion:

Explain why the federal government should or should not provide health care for everyone.

Explain why the federal government should or should not provide dental care for everyone.

Explain why the federal government should or should not allow importing prescription drugs.

Explain why the federal government should or should not require all employers to help pay for health care for their workers.

Explain why the federal government should or should not make all medical and health insurance costs tax-deductible for everyone.

Explain why the federal government should or should not require health insurers to cover everyone who applies for and buys insurance.

Explain why the federal government should or should not require health insurers to cover experimental treatments.

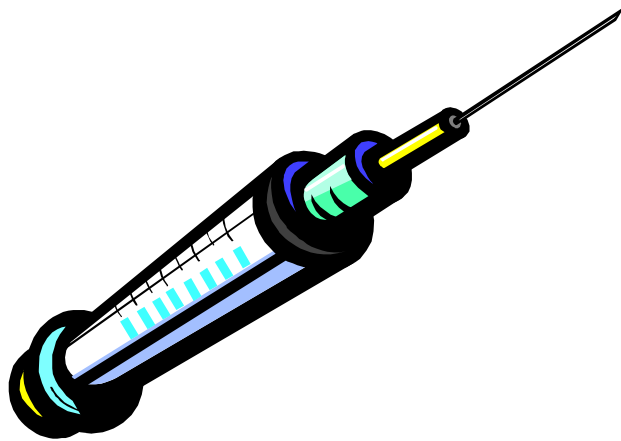
Explain why the federal government should or should not test all children for lead poisoning.

Explain why the federal government should or should not require all teachers to be trained in first-aid and CPR.

Explain why the federal government should or should not provide health care for pets.

Explain why the federal government should or should not require schools to serve only healthy foods.

Explain why the federal government should or should not require health clinics in elementary schools.



OVERVIEW: Education

How to improve America's education system will be an important campaign issue in the 2008 presidential election. Only 70% of students graduate from high school in the U.S. American teenagers are lagging behind those in other countries in many subjects, from reading and science to mathematics. The quality of our public schools is crucial to the health of our economy, our ability to compete with the rest of the world and the future of millions of students nationwide. Candidates will have to explain their plans for better public education in America.

Since the signing into law of the 2001 education bill No Child Left Behind, the debate has mostly been about using testing as a tool for improving public schools. Critics argue that testing reduces the amount of classroom time that can be used for teaching traditional subjects such as English and science. Too much time is used preparing students for a test that has little practical value. It is also unclear if the federal government paid for everything the law tells schools to do. Schools that fail to improve face strict penalties, such as losing students who would be allowed to enroll in other schools. Critics argue this only shifts the problem elsewhere without any actual solution.

The sharp increase in the cost of higher education, especially in public universities, is also likely to be an important campaign issue. Since 2003, the cost of attending college has risen nearly 40%. The average college graduate goes nearly \$20,000 into debt. Many students can't afford this. This raises questions like: Do all Americans have a right to a quality education? Do all American students have a right to free or low-cost college educations? Candidates will have to explain their answers.



"If I ran a school, I'd give the average grade to the ones who gave me all the right answers, for being good parrots. I'd give the top grades to those who made a lot of mistakes and told me about them, and then told me what they learned from them."
-- Buckminster Fuller

"A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car; but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad." -- Theodore Roosevelt

Subjects for Discussion:

What do you believe Buckminster Fuller and Theodore Roosevelt meant? Were they serious or speaking "tongue in cheek"?

Give your reasons why education should or should not be paid for by the federal government.

Explain why the U.S. should or should not give all students across the country the same tests for the No Child Left Behind law.

Explain why governments should or should not help pay for a college education.

Explain why governments should or should not help pay for private schooling.

Explain why governments should or should not help pay for preschools.

Explain why the federal or state government should or should not help pay for higher teacher salaries.

Explain why governments should or should not require all students to stay in school until age 18.

Explain why governments should or should not require schools to teach children how to be good workers for employers.

Explain why governments should or should not require schools to teach children how to think for themselves about issues like religion or sex.

Explain why governments should or should not require schools to have classes at night for the children of parents who work nights.

Explain why governments should or should not require schools to stay open all year.

Explain why governments should or should not require schools to provide a computer for every student.

Explain why governments should or should not require that teachers receive a certain kind of training.

Explain why governments should or should not specify how many students teachers may have in a class.

Explain why governments should or should not provide vouchers that permit parents to send their children to any school they wish.