

THE SIXTH FLOOR MUSEUM
AT DEALEY PLAZA

Lesson Plan: Debating the Issues in the 1960 Campaign

Subjects: History, US Government, Civics

Grade Level: 7th -12th

Estimated Time: Two – Three class periods

Objective: To analyze issues in historic and current presidential campaigns and practice research and formal debate procedures.

Overview: Students will watch the first televised presidential debate from September 26, 1960, and then hold a debate of their own focusing on the 21st century versions of the major issues that emerged from the 1960 debate. Debate teams of 4x4 students will compose arguments based on one of the issues and practice debating. On debate day, the class members not debating score the debate teams and choose the winning side of each argument.

Procedure:

Before the debate:

1. Pass out the [1960 Presidential Debate Guide](#); explain that taking notes using this sheet will help them focus on the substance of the debate instead of just the style.
2. Encourage the students to write down each question and how candidates answer it. These notes will be useful when the students are asked to defend who they think won the debate. Remind the class the entire debate is online, so they may watch it again if they want to replay key exchanges.
3. Suggest that the students refrain from reading “analysis” of the 1960 debates until after they have watched the debate and made up their own mind.

Debate: Watch the first 1960 Presidential Debate between Senator John Kennedy (D) and Vice President Richard Nixon (R):

- Sept. 26 <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/Can>

(For those students interested in the following 3 debates in 1960, they can be found on the same website, www.c-span.org.)

After watching the debate:

1. Go over the notes the class took. Are the notes the students took consistent or not? Who do the students feel won the debate? Students can discuss their thoughts and use



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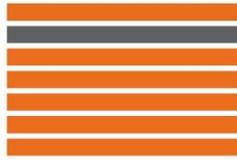
a transcript of the debate to defend their arguments.

(<http://debates.org/index.php?page=september-26-1960-debate-transcript>)

2. If they haven't already been covered in the discussion, review the following questions as a class or in pairs:
 - Do you think Nixon's physical appearance hurt him in the debate? Explain.
 - What was your impression of John F. Kennedy during his exchanges with Nixon? With the reporters asking the questions?
 - Do you think the manner in which candidates answer questions affects what the public thinks of them?
 - How should we judge a presidential candidate's debate performance? Should candidate image play a role? Explain
3. Ask the students what they thought the biggest issues were in the 9/26/60 debate? Write those on the board.
4. Have the students discuss what the modern equivalent of the 1960 issue would be. For example:
 - USSR/Russian Federation
 - Lack of Political Experience/Political Veteran
 - Pay for or cut Gov't programs and Federal Debt
 - minimum wage
 - Bi-partisanship vs. party loyalty
 - Communism/ISIL

Write those on the board next to their 1960's counterparts.

5. Have the students frame the 21st century issue as a positive resolution. (Example: "The government's decision to keep some troops in Afghanistan will result in greater stability for the region," NOT, "The government's decision to keep some troops in Afghanistan will not result in greater stability for the region.") The resolution will be written onto the [Debates Format and Evaluation Sheets](#).
6. Divide up the class into teams of 4 x 4 (4 students on each side of the argument) and have them research the topic according to the debate format on the handout. (This can be done in class, adding an extra day to the plan.)
7. Each group of 8 students debates both sides of the issue. While not debating, the rest of the class evaluates the debates and determines the winner of each issue.



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Common Core Standards and Relevant National Standards:

CCSS.ELA/LITERACY.SL.7.4

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA/LITERACY.SL.8.4

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA/LITERACY.SL.910.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA/LITERACY.SL.1112.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

TEKS and Texas College and Career Readiness Standards:

There are several areas where a debate falls under the TEKS (ELAR, Speech, Drama, and a variety of Social Studies subjects). Even more so, debating meets many of the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards, which can be found here:

www.thecb.state.tx.us/collegereadiness/crs.pdf.