

ELECTING THE PRESIDENT: A GUIDE TO THE ELECTION PROCESS

Thank you for joining our series about the election of our president and other leaders. Running twice a week through mid-October, this series will help students in the classroom — as well as citizens of all ages — understand the election process.

DAY 7: BECOMING AN INFORMED CITIZEN

In a democracy, people are the ultimate source of power. Citizens of our country elect the president and vice president, who run the executive branch of government. They also choose senators and representatives in Congress, who make the laws. But with the power to elect the country's leaders comes responsibility. To make the best use of their voting power, citizens need to educate themselves before they mark their ballots.

That's not always an easy task. Voters these days get bombarded with information: pamphlets and flyers; newspaper, radio and TV ads; emails; blogs; YouTube videos; and tweets. To help you sort out this information, and decide for yourself, the League of Women Voters offers this step-by-step guide:

STEP 1

Make a candidate report card. List the qualities you would want in a candidate (examples: experience, honesty). List the issues you believe are most important (health care, terrorism, education, taxes). Then rate the candidates on their leadership qualities and on how closely their views match yours.

STEP 2

Take a good look at campaign literature for each side. Does it tell you where the candidate stands on the issues? Does it tell you about the candidate's qualifications? Is it designed to appeal to your emotions, or does it offer reasonable and truthful information about the actions and policies of the candidates?

STEP 3

Learn how other people view the candidate. But do check the source of polls, endorsements and ratings; is it an organization you can trust? Look carefully at polls. What questions were asked and how were they asked? How many people were interviewed and how were they chosen?

STEP 4

Rate the candidates on how they campaign. Are they open and honest? Do they answer questions or evade them? Do they talk about issues? Or do they just try to stir up your emotions?

STEP 5

Examine the candidate's campaign finances. Is the candidate using personal funds? Getting large donations from a few people or from corporations, or small donations from many people? Are political action committees (PACs) and super PACs, groups formed to raise and distribute money, playing a big role? Is the candidate open about who is funding the campaign?

STEP 6

Look for reliable sources of information. Check out websites run by nonpartisan political organizations such as the League of Women Voters. Consult newspapers and other media. Check with the political parties. By going to a variety of sources, you'll have a broader and more reliable perspective.



LEARN MORE

Do something! Now that you have tools to make an informed choice, talk to your friends, classmates and co-workers about how they can learn more and participate. Ask tough questions at meetings and rallies, and of campaign workers. Write letters, send emails or blog — and let candidates, newspapers and party leaders know how you feel about issues. If you see unfair campaign practices, speak out. Encourage people who say they don't know enough to vote to learn more and vote!

WEB SITE DIRECTORY

The League of Women Voters' nonpartisan resource for election and voting information: VOTE411.org

C-SPAN's campaign web page: c-span.org/campaign2012

Nonpartisan site checks the accuracy of political ads and allegations: Factcheck.org

Federal Election Commission
– government agency that regulates campaign finance: fec.gov

League of Women Voters
– national: lww.org, state: lwwwa.org, and King County: seattlelww.org

The Center for Responsive Politics
– nonpartisan site on money in U.S. elections: opensecrets.org

Nonpartisan resource on trends in public opinion: PollingReport.com

Nonpartisan resource for judicial elections in Washington state:
votingforjudges.org



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