

## Candidate Evaluation

**Time Needed:** One Class Period

**Materials Needed:** Student worksheets

**Copy Instructions:**

Reading Pages (*double-sided; class set*)

Activity pages (*one-sided; class set*)

Review (*double-sided, class set*)

**Learning Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- establish, explain and apply criteria useful in selecting political leaders
- evaluate candidates based on their qualifications, experience, speeches and advertisements
- examine candidates' promises and how they align with the offices they seek and their voting records
- evaluate information and arguments from various sources
- identify stands taken by candidates on issues

### STEP BY STEP

- DISTRIBUTE** brainstorming half-sheet to students. Have them check off all the things they think are helpful when making a decision about a candidate. Discuss students' results.
- DISCUSS** the steps to evaluating a candidate with the transparency. You may call on students to provide examples, or opportunities to complete these steps.
- READ** through Step One and allow the students to list issues and qualifications. Share and discuss as a class.
- READ** Step Two, assign the students to select their top three sources and share.
- READ** Steps Three through Five with the students, stopping to answer or ask questions along the way.
- INTRODUCE** the first page of the activity sheet and read through each candidate's messages.
- SELECT** students to read the radio announcements of the candidates aloud.
- ASSIGN** the second activity to the students to complete.
- REVIEW** students' answers to the candidate comparison.
- ASSIGN** the review sheets to the students.

**Note to Teachers**

There are a number of websites you may find useful when teaching this lesson.

- Smart Voter: Nonpartisan candidate information source created by the League of Women Voters. [www.smartvoter.org](http://www.smartvoter.org)
- Open Secrets: Nonpartisan site that tracks the money that goes into American political campaigns and the effects it has on elections. [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org)
- Project Vote Smart: Another helpful and interactive site that allows you to get down to the local levels and compare personal values with those running for office. It also gives voting records and information on elected officials. [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org)

This lesson plan is part of the *Politics and Public Policy* series by iCivics, Inc. a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing civic education. For more resources, please visit [www.icivics.org/teachers](http://www.icivics.org/teachers), where you can access the state standards aligned to this lesson plan. Provide feedback to [feedback@icivics.org](mailto:feedback@icivics.org).

©2011 iCivics, Inc. You may copy, distribute, or transmit this work for noncommercial purposes if you credit iCivics. All other rights reserved.

# Candidate Evaluation

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



How do voters decide between candidates on election day? There are many different things that people consider when voting; some seem silly and some make sense. Check the things YOU would do or want to know about the candidates before making your final decision in the voting booth.



- Listen to both candidates' speeches.
- Find out what kind of pet he/she owns.
- Watch a debate between the candidates.
- Decide how you feel about the issues.
- Find out...
  - the candidates' favorite sport
  - if the candidates have kids
  - what the candidates did before he or she ran for office
  - the candidates' voting records
- Ask friends and family what they think.

Pick ONE thing that you checked and share why you think it is helpful in choosing a candidate.

Pick ONE thing that you did not check and share why you think it isn't helpful in choosing a candidate.



Preview

# Candidate Evaluation

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



How do voters decide between candidates on election day? There are many different things that people consider when voting; some seem silly and some make sense. Check the things YOU would do or want to know about the candidates before making your final decision in the voting booth.



- Listen to both candidates' speeches.
- Find out what kind of pet he/she owns.
- Watch a debate between the candidates.
- Decide how you feel about the issues.
- Find out...
  - the candidates' favorite sport
  - if the candidates have kids
  - what the candidates did before he or she ran for office
  - the candidates' voting records
- Ask friends and family what they think.

Pick ONE thing that you checked and share why you think it is helpful in choosing a candidate.

Pick ONE thing that you did not check and share why you think it isn't helpful in choosing a candidate.



Preview

# Grading the Candidates



REPORT CARD				
GRADING PERIOD	1	2	3	4
READING				
WRITTEN COMMUNICATION	A			
MATHEMATICS	A			
SCIENCE/HEALTH	C			
SOCIAL STUDIES	B			
ART	B			
MUSIC	A			
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	C			

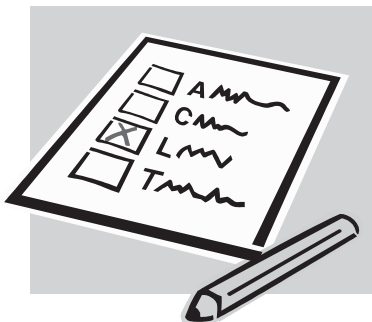
## The Steps

Responsible voters usually go through five steps before they are ready to vote. Once you understand the steps, you are ready to go out there and have your opinion heard on election day!

What do you think about things?



Research the candidates' positions on issues.



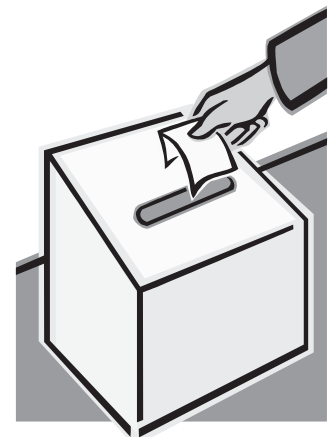
Learn about the candidates leadership skills & qualifications.



Find out what other people think.



Grade the candidates & decide.



# Candidate Evaluation

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Step One: What do you think?** It is hard to evaluate where a candidate stands on an *issue*, or topic, if you don't know what you stand for! Comparing your opinions with the opinions of the candidates is a great way to get started. Check *three* issues you care about on the first page of notes and three qualities you look for in a candidate on the second sheet.

Three issues I care about:

- Education
- The Environment
- The Economy
- Crime
- Healthcare
- Taxes
- Children's Issues
- Animal Rights
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Three qualities I look for in a candidate:

- Good Communicator
- Brave
- Intelligent
- Creative
- Experienced Leader
- Cooperative
- Honest
- Trustworthy
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Step Two: Research the Candidates** Create a 'library' of information on each candidate. This information can be found in many different places! Below is a list of some good sources to consider. Circle the *three* that you would be most likely to use.

## The Candidates

Each candidate has a team that works on his or her campaign. Their job is to inform the public about the candidate and work to get the candidate elected.



**Positive:** you can get information about the candidate directly  
**Negative:** the material is only going to focus on what is good about the candidate and bad about the opposition

### Examples:

- Campaign websites
- Campaign mailings
- Town Hall meetings
- Campaign ads on the TV/radio

## The Media

Most of the information people get about an upcoming election is on some form of media (TV, internet, radio, newspapers, magazines).



**Positive:** there are lots of sources available for you to choose from  
**Negative:** watch out for bias in reporting and know the difference between *facts* and *opinions*

### Examples:

- News reports
- Recorded candidate interviews
- Candidate speeches
- Candidate debates

## The Public Record

If a candidate has been in a public office before, there are records of how they voted. This information is gathered on nonpartisan (doesn't take sides) websites for voters to check out.



**Positive:** these sources tend to be the least biased and really useful for making comparisons  
**Negative:** some candidates may not have a voting record, and comparison websites may not cover every election

### Examples:

- Nonpartisan voter websites
- Candidates' voting records
- Civic organizations

# Candidate Evaluation

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Step Three: Learn about leadership skills & qualifications** How can you tell someone will be a good leader or if they are qualified for the job? Here are two places to look and some questions to ask.

## Background

- What kind of jobs have they held?
- Do they have a good reputation in your area?
- What kind of education do they have?
- Do they have any skeletons in their closets, or secrets, they want to keep hidden?

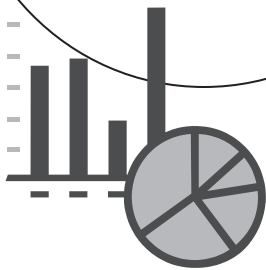


## Campaign

- Do they speak to a variety of groups?
- Are they willing to participate in a debate?
- Do they answer hard questions, or dodge them?
- How do they act in press conferences?

**Step Four: Find out what other people think** Hearing the opinions of others can help you clarify your own views on the candidates. Asking people you know about what they think and why they think it is helpful, but here are some other ways to learn about others' opinions that you may not have thought of.

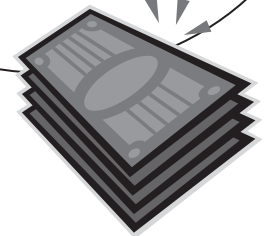
**Opinion polls** show who is leading in the race at any one time and can influence voters. Where do these numbers come from? Look out for how and where the polls were taken. Good polls cover a large number of people and are done by neutral organizations.



APPROVED

**Endorsements** are a way for interest groups and organizations to give an official 'thumbs up' to a candidate. These can clue you in to the issues and groups that the candidate supports. Look at what these groups stand for and why they endorse the candidate.

**Follow the money!** How do the candidates pay for all those advertisements, mailings and travel? Most of the time **contributors** donate money to the campaign through fundraisers. The sources of money can influence how a candidate acts in office.



**Step Five: Grade the Candidates and decide!** After you have done all the research it is time to pull all the information together. Here are some BIG questions you can use to help you make sense of it all.

Which candidate's view on the issues do you agree with the most?

Who ran the fairest campaign?

Who will best represent me and serve my community?

Which candidate showed the most knowledge on the issues?

Which candidate has the leadership qualities you are looking for?



# Candidate Evaluation

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Compare Candidates.** During the election season voters are flooded with messages for and by the candidates. Take a look at the messages from the two candidates and discover where they stand.



## Candidate Stevens

**Radio Announcer:** Vote for change this election day! Candidate Stevens believes in bringing a new perspective to the office of president! His experience as the mayor of Hilltown gives Candidate Stevens insight into how a government should be run! He will balance our budget, improve schools and end US involvement in foreign wars.

**Candidate:** I am Candidate Stevens, and I approve of this message.



## Candidate Garner

**Radio Announcer:** A vote for Candidate Garner is a vote for progress! As a senator, Candidate Garner helped pass laws to lower taxes, protect our borders and supported our troops fighting in our wars abroad. She promises to limit government spending, support growing businesses and limit our need for foreign oil.

**Candidate:** I am Candidate Garner, and I approve of this message.



## Personal Appearances

- August 2– Met with supporters at a minor league baseball park
- August 30– Guest speaker at a workers' rally in Detroit
- September 6– Spoke at Green Energy Plant about the environment



## Personal Appearances

- August 17– Guest speaker at a dinner for small business owners.
- September 11– Met with first responders in New York City
- September 29– Held a town hall meeting in her home town



## Voting Record

- Should we increase public school funding? ✓
- Should we increase taxes? ✓
- Should we close our borders? ✗



## Voting Record

- Should we increase taxes? ✗
- Should more troops be sent to fight? ✓
- Should we increase drilling for oil in the US? ✓



## Endorsements & Contributors

- American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- Immigrant Rights Groups



## Endorsements & Contributors

- National Rifle Association (NRA)
- National Oil Companies

# Candidate Evaluation

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

After looking at these different sources of candidate information, answer the questions below.

1. Which candidate is more likely to appeal to parents with school-age kids?  Stevens  Garner  
Give at least two reasons you selected this candidate.

Reason 1:

Reason 2:

2. Who would be most likely to support these issues? Put a **S** for Stevens and a **G** for Garner.

Oil Exploration     Increase in Teacher Pay     Increased Military Spending  
 Immigration Reform     Cut Taxes     Peace Talks with Enemy Nations

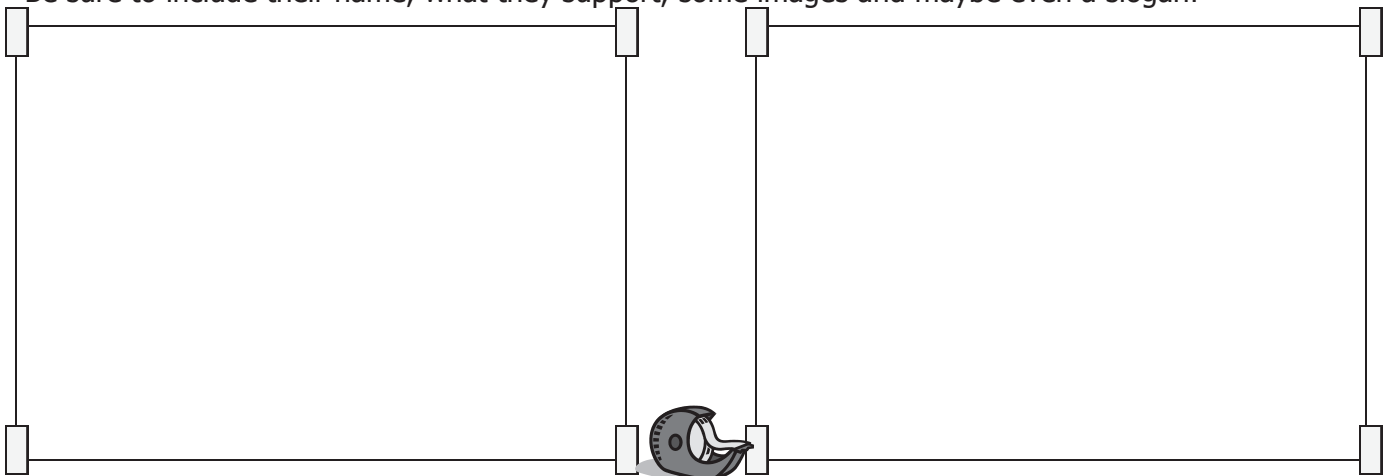
3. Out of the four examples of candidate messages, which source would be most (**M**) and least (**L**) useful to you?

Radio or Television Ad     Personal Appearances     Voting Record     Endorsements

Why is this the **most** helpful?

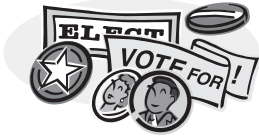
Why is this the **least** helpful?

4. Based on what you have learned about the two candidates, create a campaign poster for each.  
Be sure to include their name, what they support, some images and maybe even a slogan!



# Candidate Evaluation

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



**Vocabulary.** select the correct word to complete each sentence.

- A) endorsements
- B) opinion polls
- C) issues
- D) contributors
- E) nonpartisan

- \_\_\_1. During a debate, candidates discuss their views on various \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_2. One way to see how other people plan on voting is to check out the most recent \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_3. Fundraising dinners try to raise money from \_\_\_\_\_ to use in the candidates' campaigns.
- \_\_\_4. The League of Women Voters is an example of a \_\_\_\_\_ organization, one that does not support one political party over another.
- \_\_\_5. Candidates seek \_\_\_\_\_ from large organizations, celebrities and other big name companies.

**The Steps.** Put the steps you have learned about in the correct order!

- \_\_\_ Find out what other people think.
- \_\_\_ Research the candidates' positions on the issues.
- \_\_\_ Grade the candidates and decide!
- \_\_\_ Learn about the candidates' leadership skills and qualifications.
- \_\_\_ What do you think about things?



**Resources.** Match the information with the source! (Each source will have more than one piece of Information.)

## The Candidate



## The Media



## The Public Record



- A) Evening news story on the upcoming election
- B) Page on a candidate's website that talks about the candidate's qualifications and skills
- C) Record of a candidate's voting history when he or she was in office
- D) Prime-time television debate between the top two candidates
- E) Postcard from the candidate's campaign team outlining where the candidate stands on the issues
- F) You get the chance to speak to a candidate at a town hall meeting and ask a few questions
- G) Visit a nonpartisan website that compares the two leading candidates before an election
- H) The candidates are interviewed on a very popular morning talk show



# Candidate Evaluation

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Now that you know what it takes to evaluate a candidate, jump in and use that knowledge! Read each speech and do the following:

- Circle qualifications
- Cross out unnecessary facts
- Underline promises



## Candidate 1:

What are his qualifications?

What promises did he make? (Put a ☆ next to the ones that he might be able to deliver.)

*My fellow Americans, I speak to you today about why you should elect me as your next president. To start things off, I want you to know that I love puppies! They are the best kind of pets and everyone should have one. I promise to give every child in the United States a puppy of their very own!*

*As the president, I would use my experience as a city mayor to lead the country. Being a mayor required me to be a good speaker, honest and good at listening to the needs of the public. I know how to run a city- so how much harder could it be to run a country?*

*I graduated top of my class and went to one of the best colleges in the country. I have three kids and they love me a whole lot. My favorite vegetable is broccoli and I do not like carrots at all! I really hope that you vote for me so I can be the next President!*



## Candidate 2:

What are her qualifications?

What promises did she make? (Put a ☆ next to the ones that she might be able to deliver.)

*Welcome, everyone! I am here today to talk to you about why I think I would make the best president ever. I studied government in college, and really understand all of the jobs that the president is required to do. I have served in the Senate for the last six years and all of my fellow senators love me. They even threw me a surprise birthday party last year!*

*If elected, I promise to do the following: outlaw all yucky foods that kids hate, require teachers to assign video games for homework, and decrease taxes. I also plan on claiming the moon for the United States so no other country can go there.*

*Before I was elected to be a senator, I worked as a teacher and learned to be creative, patient, and to be a good listener. I love cheese and pickles, and I have two cats. Please vote for me on election day!*

# Candidate Evaluation

Name: **\*\*TEACHER KEY\*\***



**Vocabulary.** select the correct word to complete each sentence.

- A) endorsements
- B) opinion polls
- C) issues
- D) contributors
- E) nonpartisan

C 1. During a debate, candidates discuss their views on various \_\_\_\_\_.

B 2. One way to see how other people plan on voting is to check out the most recent \_\_\_\_\_.

D 3. Fundraising dinners try to raise money from \_\_\_\_\_ to use in the candidates' campaigns.

E 4. The League of Women Voters is an example of a \_\_\_\_\_ organization, one that does not support one political party over another.

A 5. Candidates seek \_\_\_\_\_ from large organizations, celebrities and other big name companies.

**The Steps.** Put the steps you have learned about in the correct order!

- 4 Find out what other people think.
- 2 Research the candidates' positions on the issues.
- 5 Grade the candidates and decide!
- 3 Learn about the candidates' leadership skills and qualifications.
- 1 What do you think about things?



**Resources.** Match the information with the source! (Each source will have more than one piece of information.)

**The Candidate**

B E F

**The Media**

A D

**The Public Record**

C G

- A) Evening news story on the upcoming election
- B) Page on a candidate's website that talks about the candidate's qualifications and skills
- C) Record of a candidate's voting history when he or she was in office
- D) Prime-time television debate between the top two candidates
- E) Postcard from the candidate's campaign team outlining where the candidate stands on the issues
- F) You get the chance to speak to a candidate at a town hall meeting and ask a few questions
- G) Visit a nonpartisan website that compares the two leading candidates before an election
- H) The candidates are interviewed on a very popular morning talk show

# Candidate Evaluation

Name: \*\*TEACHER KEY\*\*

Now that you know what it takes to evaluate a candidate, jump in and use that knowledge! Read each speech and do the following:

- Circle qualifications
- Cross out ~~unnecessary facts~~
- Underline promises



## Candidate 1:

What are his qualifications?

*Former city mayor, good speaker, honest, good listener, can run a city, graduated top of class, went to a good college*

What promises did he make? (Put a ☆ next to the ones that he might be able to deliver.)

*-every child in the U.S. gets a puppy*

☆ *-will use experience as mayor to run the country*

My fellow Americans, I speak to you today about why you should elect me as your next president. To start things off, I want you to know that I love puppies! They are the best kind of pets and everyone should have one. I promise to give every child in the United States a puppy of their very own!

As the president, I would use my experience as a city mayor to lead the country. Being a mayor required me to be a good speaker, honest and good at listening to the needs of the public. I know how to run a city so how much harder could it be to run a country?

I graduated top of my class and went to one of the best colleges in the country. I have three kids and they love me a whole lot. My favorite vegetable is broccoli and I do not like carrots at all! I really hope that you vote for me so I can be the next President!



Welcome, everyone! I am here today to talk to you about why I think I would make the best president ever. I studied government in college, and really understand all of the jobs that the president is required to do. I have served in the Senate for the last six years and all of my fellow senators love me. They even threw me a surprise birthday party last year!

If elected, I promise to do the following: outlaw all yucky foods that kids hate, require teachers to assign video games for homework, and decrease taxes. I also plan on claiming the moon for the United States so no other country can go there.

Before I was elected to be a senator, I worked as a teacher and learned to be creative, patient, and to be a good listener. I love cheese and pickles, and I have two cats. Please vote for me on election day!

## Candidate 2:

What are her qualifications?

*Studies government in college, served as Senator for 6 years, liked by other Senators, was a teacher, is creative, patient, and a good listener*

What promises did she make? (Put a ☆ next to the ones that she might be able to deliver.)

*-outlaw yucky foods*

*-make teachers assign video games*

☆ *-decrease taxes*

*-claim the moon for the U.S.*