The following lesson is lesson #1 from a set of five lessons released by the New York Times during the last week of August 2012 to assist teachers in teaching about the 2012 United States Presidential Election.

See the following website for detailed information on how to incorporate this lesson in your teaching of the election to your students along with finding links to the other lessons and vast amount of resources provided.

http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/28/2012-election-unit-who-are-the-candidates/

Who Are the Candidates?

Common Core Anchor Standards, 6-12

Reading
1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Writing
1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on specific questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and then integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Speaking and Listening
1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning and use of evidence and oratory.
4. Present information, findings and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

Essential Question: Who Are the Candidates?

Project: Candidate Research Team Presentations

Goal: Students will know basic information about the major party candidates running for U.S. President in 2012.

Objectives: Students will be able to discuss and elaborate as to at least THREE characteristics of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney.

Overview: For this lesson, students become candidate researchers (and opposition researchers). Their task is to learn as much as they can about the candidates so they can create an accurate candidate profile that will appeal to youth voters.

K/W/L Activity: In this opening activity, use a K/W/L chart to take stock of what the class already knows about the candidates and what it wants to know. Complete a K/W/L for each candidate. For the "L" column, you may want to read an introductory article about the candidates, or have students return to the column at some later point in this unit. Here is a sample handout, although of course teachers might create their own. Click on the image to download the PDF version.

Campaign Research Team: Next, break the class into small groups to research the two major candidates. If you plan to carry this unit through to the end and will be holding a mock election in your school, you may want to consider having students stay with one candidate throughout the whole unit. That way, students will both deepen their knowledge of the candidate through successive activities and, in a sense, recreate the energy of a true campaign race.

Working in small groups, students are now members of a candidate's campaign team. Their primary job is to craft a new candidate profile directed at the youth vote. The following handout might be helpful for students to keep track of their research and sources on areas such as the

candidate's background, experience and appeal to youth.
http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/blogs/learning/pdf/2012/CandidateResearchTeam.pdf

Alternatively, create a Google document or Wiki in which groups can compile research findings together.

To start their research, students should visit the NY Times Topics pages on Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, as well as two useful Times infographics loaded with photos and videos: the Interactive Timeline of Barack Obama's Life and Career and the Interactive Timeline of Mitt Romney's Life and Career.

Another source that might be particularly helpful for students, especially those without a great deal of background knowledge, is The New York Times Upfront Magazine's article "What's at Stake."

For more advanced research, students could explore the entire New York Times for both current and past content by using the advanced search option.

In addition, students may want to read the official candidate profiles on the campaign Web sites: Barack Obama profile and Mitt Romney profile.

Project | Candidate Profile: For this activity, students come up with a way to present their candidate in the best possible light to youth voters.

The profile can take different forms, depending on the technology the teacher has available, the time the teacher has to dedicate to the project, the skills the teacher wants students to practice, and the amount of choice the teacher wants to give students.

Students could create a photo slide show about the candidate with a written narrative. They could write a brief candidate biography. They could create a brochure or campaign leaflet about the candidate. They could even create a candidate Facebook page using an online Facebook template, or invent another kind of social media campaign. The whole class could be required to use the same format, or students could be able to choose which format would serve them best. Students should take special care in any medium, however, to create the candidate image that they think would be most attractive to young people.

One way to hook students into this project might be to make the project handout sheet look like an urgent campaign memo:

Election 2012
URGENT MEMO
TO: Youth Campaign Research Team

FROM: _____ Campaign
SUBJECT: NEW CANDIDATE PROFILE TARGETING YOUTH VOTERS

We must quickly respond to the new voting age now that millions of youth are able to vote in the November election. The campaign needs you to create a candidate profile that will appeal to youth voters.

Going Further: If you are interested in taking the project further, groups could also prepare a memo for the campaign headquarters about possible vulnerabilities, both of their own candidate and of the opposing candidate. This information could be especially helpful when students prepare their campaigns for the mock election if you decide to do this as a culminating activity.

Presentations: If your class is holding a mock election in school at the end of the unit, then students could present their profiles at the election. For example, if they created brochures about the candidates, then they could distribute them to potential voters at the mock election. Similarly, if they created a slide show or a Facebook page, they could present their candidate profile at the event. If, however, you're forgoing a mock election, then students should present their projects in class. Students could provide peer feedback for each presentation using the following handout.

http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/blogs/learning/pdf/2012/CandidateProfilePeerFeedbackLN.pdf

Vocabulary: Democratic party, Republican party, candidate, campaign, potential voters, profile.

Related:

The following Learning Network lesson plans from the New York Times might help you and your students go deeper:

- 2011 | "Character vs. Characterization: Examining How Candidates and Politicians Are Defined"
- 2007 | "When the Personal Becomes Presidential"