

# ***The Politics of Parties:***

## ***The American Political System***

**Organizing Topic:** Elections, Parties, and Pressure Groups (CE.5 a)

**Course Level:** Civics and Economics (Block Schedule-2 Sessions)

**Overview:** Students will investigate the role of parties in the American political system. The activities in this lesson are designed to allow students to participate in a hypothetical political party in preparation for a mock campaign and election.

**Related Standards of Learning:** (CE.1c, CE.1d, CE.1e, CE.1f, CE.1g, CE.3d)

### **Objectives:**

The students should be able to

- describe the functions of political parties
- identify the role of political parties in government
- explain how political parties provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process
- explain maps, diagrams, tables, charts, and graphs as they pertain to political parties
- analyze political cartoons, advertisements, pictures, and other graphic media
- review information for accuracy, separating fact from opinion.

### **Materials needed**

- Textbook – Holt *Civics and Economics* (VA Edition)
- *Anticipation Guide* Handout
- *Unit Vocabulary* Handout
- Pictures of major candidates and the current Chairpersons of each party
- *Building a Platform: Creating a Political Party* Activity Sheet
- *The Role of Political Parties* Graphic Organizer
- Poster board and markers

### **Instructional activity**

#### ***Content/Teacher Notes***

In order to understand the election process as a whole, students should understand the individual pieces that make up that process. The first of these pieces is recognizing that the American political system is based on the existence of two political parties that support a spectrum of beliefs and ideals called a platform. During this lesson students will begin to understand the role of political parties in the electoral system.

**Introduction**

1. Explain to students that they will be studying the role of political parties in American Government. They will be using different sources to find out what political parties are, how they function, and the effect that they have on the election process in the United States.

**Procedure**

**Activity 1 – Anticipatory Guide**

1. Students will receive an anticipatory guide at the beginning of class. This is strictly based on the student’s opinion and their own prior knowledge. These questions are intended to introduce the entire unit. Students will keep this in their journal and will have the opportunity to reflect on the answers at the end of the unit.

<b>Anticipatory Guide</b>
<p><b>State whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.</b></p> <p>Joining a political party is the only way that a person can influence the government.</p> <p><b>Agree/Disagree</b></p> <p>Voting procedures today differ from those in the past.</p> <p><b>Agree/Disagree</b></p> <p>Presidential elections involve many preliminary steps.</p> <p><b>Agree/Disagree</b></p> <p>Political Parties are an essential part of the American political system.</p> <p><b>Agree/Disagree</b></p>

2. Take a brief poll of student answers.

**Activity 2 – Just What is a Political Party?**

1. As a class, brainstorm possible definitions of a political party. Write these on the board, overhead, or Smartboard.
2. Distribute Unit Vocabulary List – Part One

<b>Unit Terms – Political Process (Part One)</b>	
<b>Political Process</b>	
<b>Political Party</b>	
<b>Nominate</b>	
<b>Candidate</b>	
<b>Two-Party System</b>	
<b>Multiparty System</b>	
<b>Third Parties</b>	
<b>Coalition</b>	
<b>Platform</b>	
<b>Conservative</b>	
<b>Liberal</b>	

3. Divide class into groups of two or three and assign each one of the terms above. Give them five minutes to construct a thorough definition of that term to be shared with the class. They can use their text or any of the other resources in the class. The students should be able to provide an appropriate example to represent their term, whether a person, issue, etc.
4. While students are working, put pictures of current candidates, as well as pictures of the chairpersons of both the Republican and Democratic parties on the board/overhead/Smartboard.
5. After students have come up with their definitions, have them share with the class. As each definition is discussed, students should fill in the definition in the appropriate place on the Terms List. Use this time to clear up misinformation and make sure that the students have an appropriate definition.

**Unit Terms – Political Process (Part One)  
Teacher Answer Guide**

<b>Political Process</b>	The organization or system through which the elections take place within a system of government.
<b>Political Party</b>	An organization of citizens who have similar views on issues and who work to put their ideas into effect through government action
<b>Nominate</b>	To select candidates to run for public office.
<b>Candidate</b>	People who run for election to public office.
<b>Two-Party System</b>	A political system with two strong political parties.
<b>Multiparty System</b>	A political system in which many political parties play a role in government.
<b>Third Parties</b>	Minor political parties in a two-party system.
<b>Coalition</b>	An agreement between two or more political parties to work together to run a government.
<b>Platform</b>	A group of issues that are supported by either a political party or an individual candidate during the election process.
<b>Conservative</b>	A political philosophy that supports the idea that the government should have limited power.
<b>Liberal</b>	A political philosophy that supports the idea that the government should be involved in creating progressive policy.

### **Activity 3 – Who are These People?**

1. Ask the students if they recognize any of the people in the pictures that you have displayed on the board. Some students will be able to identify the candidates, particularly during a presidential election year. (Chances are, they will have no idea who the party chairpersons are.)
2. Identify for the students any unknown people. Ask why they think it is that they are familiar with the candidates, but not with the others. This will be used as a springboard to understanding what a candidate is and how a political party creates a platform and candidacy.

### **Activity 4 –Building Parties and Constructing a Platform**

1. In this activity, students will be given the opportunity to create their own political parties, determine a list of issues, and how they will stand on those issues. These issues can be of national importance or ones related to school life. Students will select a name, a symbol or mascot associated with their party, and a list of 5 issues that they find most important.
2. Divide students into four groups. Each of these groups will develop their own political party and platform. Distribute the activity sheet: Building a Platform: Creating a Political Party. Review the guidelines with the class. Each group will receive a piece of poster board and markers with which to create their party symbol.
3. Students will have about 45 minutes to work on their project.

**Constructing a Political Party**  
**Building a Platform**  
(Student Handout)

During this activity, you will work with a group to create a new political party. In order to establish your new party, you must create a name, symbol, decide which issues are most important to you, and create a platform based on those issues. You and your group will present your new political party and its platform to the class.

**Essential Terms**

Political Party  
Political Process  
Coalition  
Issue  
Platform  
Electorate  
Nominate  
Candidate

Use this checklist to make sure that you have everything that you need to establish your new party.

- Party Name
- Party Symbol/Mascot
- Issue 1  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Issue 2  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Issue 3  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Issue 4  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Issue 5  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Summary of what method your group used to decide on the issues included in your platform.

**Project Tip!**

Spend time at the beginning deciding how you might divide up the work. Remember, this is a cooperative project!

**Activity 5 – Summary**

1. At this point, students should understand that political parties are responsible for recruiting candidates and establishing issues that the candidates will promote. Political parties have other responsibilities as well at the local, state, and national levels.
2. After passing out the graphic organizer, *The Role of Political Parties*, model the activity by identifying Recruiting and Nominating Candidates as one of the four major functions of political parties. (See example.)
2. Using the appropriate pages in the text, students will work in pairs to fill in the graphic organizer, *The Role of Political Parties*.
3. After students have completed the graphic organizer, the class will discuss the results. The completed organizer should emphasize the points as seen in the example below. Review of the graphic organizer will serve as a summary for the lesson. Students will retain the completed sheet for review for final chapter assessment.

<b>The Role of Political Parties</b>			
Function 1	Function 2	Function 3	Function 4
Recruiting and nominating candidates.			
<b>Is this a local, state, or national responsibility?</b>			
Local, State, and National			
<b>Provide an example.</b>			
State delegates and senators, local school boards, and presidential candidates.			

The Role of Political Parties (example)			
Function 1	Function 2	Function 3	Function 4
Recruiting and nominating candidates.	<i>Educating the electorate about campaign issues.</i>	<i>Helping candidates win elections.</i>	<i>Monitoring actions of office holders.</i>
Is this a local, state, or national responsibility?			
Local, State, and National	<i>Local, State, and National</i>	<i>Local, State, and National</i>	<i>Local, State, and National</i>
Provide an example.			
State delegates and senators, local school boards, and presidential candidates.	<i>Parties produce different media, such as newspapers and magazines that present their views on issues.</i>	<i>Parties help candidates discover weaknesses in other parties and their candidates.</i>	<i>Parties ensure that public officials do a good job so that voters will re-elect them.</i>

### ***Observations and Conclusions***

1. Students should understand that political parties play an integral role in the American political process. They should start becoming familiar with the terms associated with this part of the unit. The project done in class will be used in the next lesson to demonstrate how and why political parties are formed; what their function is once they exist; and how to recognize similarities and differences between parties.

### **Sample assessment**

- **Informal:** Students responses will be assessed during unit term definition sharing (**Activity 2**). Additionally, the teacher should monitor and observe students during the Political Party creation (**Activity 4**) for understanding of both the topic and the assignment. The teacher should also note student participation in the group environment.

- **Formal:** Students will receive a class work grade based on the Political Party activity. A rubric will be used to assess each group, which will be based on the checklist include on the student activity sheet.

<b>Construction a Political Party Building a Political Platform Rubric</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Party Name (1 point)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Party Symbol/Mascot (1 point)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Issue 1 (2 points)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Issue 2 (2 points)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Issue 3 (2 points)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Issue 4 (2 points)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Issue 5 (2 points)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Summary of what method your group used to decide on the issues to include in your party's platform. (3 points)</li> </ul> <p>Notes:</p>
<p>Group Members:</p> <p style="text-align: right;">_____points out of 15</p>

### **Extension and Remediation**

- Read and review relevant material in the text.
- Students can create a crossword puzzle using unit vocabulary terms.
- Find out who the leaders are in your local political party offices. Interview them to find out what they do in their daily jobs.
- Invite a local party representative to visit the class to discuss their position and the role of political parties.
- Find publications or websites that have an affiliation with one of the major political parties. What type of information can be found on these sites?

## Resources

- *Civics and Economics* (VA Edition), Chapters 10-11
- *Virginia Standards of Learning: Civics and Economics Curriculum Framework*. Virginia Department of Education.
- *Civics and Economics Enhanced Scope and Sequence*. VA Department of Education.
- *Virginia Standards of Learning Resources: Everyday Civics*. Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) <http://civics.pwnet.org/CE/CE.3.3.html>
- *Virginia State Board of Elections* <http://www.sbe.virginia.gov/cms/>
- *Elections...the American way*. Library of Congress American Memory Collection. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/learn/features/election/home.html>.

## Fiction and Non-Fiction Literature

- Christelow, E. (2004). *Vote!*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Cronin, D. (2008). *Duck for president*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Facts on File. (2005). *Ferguson's careers in focus: Politics*. New York: Ferguson.
- Giddens-White, B. (2005). *National elections and the political process*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Goodman, S. (2008). *See how they run: Campaign dreams, election schemes, and the race to the white house*. New York: Bloomsbury USA.
- Gorman, C. (2003). *Dork on the run*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Kallen, S. (2006). *Are american elections fair?* Farmington Hills: Gale Group.
- Landau, E. (2001). *2000 presidential election*. New York: Scholastic.
- Ring, S. (2004). *The official nick guide to electing the president*. Little Rock: Chronicle Books.
- Sergis, D. (2003). *Bush vs. Gore: Controversial presidential election case*. Berkeley Heights: Enslow.
- Steins, R. (1994). *Our elections*. Minneapolis: Lerner.

- Teague, M. (2008). *Larue for mayor: Letters from the campaign trail*. New York: Blue Sky Press.