



Module 4 - The People Have Spoken—What Did They Say?

This series of lessons gives students the opportunity to conduct their own post-mortem on the election that they just observed and analyzed. Students are asked to consider the implications of the voters' decisions on the possible direction of future public policy. Students also will try to understand the insights on voter attitudes that the results provide.

Lesson 1: What Do Election Results and Polls Indicate About Voters' Choices of Candidates?

Understanding Goals: What conclusions can be drawn about issues, polls and voters' opinions from post-mortem election analysis?

Introduction:

Time Span: 3-5 days

Resources Needed:

- Exit poll data from chosen election (check *Student Voices* Web site for election links)
- Election results from chosen election (check *Student Voices* Web site for election links)
- National Election Pool, Exit Poll Data, <http://www.exit-poll.net/index.html>. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and links to earlier exit polls are provided.
- Pollster.com, Questions About Exit Polls, <http://www.pollster.com/blogs/FAQ.php#8>
- *Student Voices* Speak Out, *Participating in the election*, <http://www.student-voices.org/SpeakOut.aspx?Id=620>

Skill sets: Analysis, interpretation

Performances of Understanding:

1. Students analyze available exit poll data. A class discussion ensues that explores some (or all) of the following questions:
 - a. What issues were most significant in influencing voter decisions?
 - b. How closely do the exit polls mirror actual results? Are there risks associated with projecting a winner based on these polls alone?
 - c. What are exit polls all about? Why conduct them?
 - d. How do pollsters decide what questions to ask voters?
 - e. Do the polls and election outcomes match your expectations?
2. In pairs, students compare actual election results to their own pre-election predictions and analyze reasons for the outcomes. They then individually report their discoveries on the class blog or wiki.

Procedures:

Begin class by giving students an overview of the purpose of exit polls and describe how they differ from other types of polls. Both the Pollster.com site and the National Election Pool site provide background information.

Provide students with exit poll data from a recently concluded election. Lead a class discussion with the following prompts for students:

- What issues were most significant in influencing voter decisions?
- How closely do the exit polls mirror actual results? Are there risks associated with projecting a winner based on these polls alone?
- What are exit polls all about? Why conduct them?
- How do pollsters decide what questions to ask voters?

When the class discussion reaches an endpoint, ask students to work in pairs to analyze the election. Students may want to compare outcomes to their own predictions prior to the election. All students should post an important finding to the class blog or wiki.

Students should be encouraged to extend the discussion online, with their *Student Voices* peers. The Speak Out *Participating in the election* also contains a brief streaming video report.

Assessments:

Informal assessment by teacher

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways:

As a comparative study, students may wish to examine <http://www.pollster.com/> or one of the many other polling data sites (such as Gallup or AP-Ipsos) to analyze the polls conducted in the time leading up to the election and the major focuses of these polls (who will you vote for, what issue is most important, etc.). Students might examine how closely earlier polls mirrored exit polls for similar questions, and draw conclusions based on how representative this polling sample was of the real voting population.

- Do polls reflect public opinion or do they help shape public opinion?
- How do pollsters create questions? Does the question matter?
- How successful were polls in identifying likely voters?

Students write or discuss their views as to how they see voting either influencing or indicative of wider voting trends.

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard II.C. What is American political culture?

Lesson 2: Peaceful Transfer of Power and Candidates' Responses to the Choices of the People

Understanding Goals: How do candidates – both winners and losers – promote the continuation of democratic traditions with their responses to election results?

Introduction:

Time Span: 2-3 days

Resources Needed:

- Candidates' victory and concession speeches from chosen election. These can be found in newspapers and online news sources.

Skill sets: Analysis, interpretation

Performance of Understanding:

After reading or listening to a variety of candidates' victory and concession speeches, students undertake an analysis of the words used and the sentiments expressed in the speeches. Students may focus on how the post-election speeches compared to the language used in the campaign, or on the common themes expressed by a variety of candidates. Students should also reflect on the meaning of the election. Do the results suggest a broad mandate for change? Or do they reflect a divided electorate uncertain about how to proceed?

A short collaborative paper (250 words) on the purpose of post-election speeches is written on the class wiki by each research team.

Assessments:

Informal assessment by teacher

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways:

1. Eagleton Institute of Politics, 2000 Presidential Election, <http://www.eagleton.rutgers.edu/e-gov/e-politicalarchive-2000.htm>. The controversial 2000 presidential election between Al Gore and George W. Bush provides a fascinating case study of post-election politics. This Web site provides an overview of the saga and links to additional resources. One potential discussion point is the impact of Vice President Gore conceding the election early in the morning the day after the election and then rescinding the concession after late returns showed the results narrowing in Florida.
2. A study of presidential speeches may be undertaken at

PresidentialRhetoric.com, <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/>. This Web site showcases speeches from campaigns, inaugurations and State of the Union addresses for those interested in the study of the presidency from a rhetorical perspective. Various presidential speeches can be used in a comparative study of how issues are addressed and how politicians speak to different audiences.

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard II.A. What is the American idea of constitutional government?

Standard II.D. What principles and values are basic to American constitutional democracy?

Standard V.D. What civic dispositions or traits of private and public character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy?