Parties in the USA: Understanding Today’s America

What are the differences between Republicans and Democrats? Why is there such a fuss about immigration? Who is the Tea Party? And what does the government actually do with my (parent’s) money?

If you’ve ever asked these questions, this is the class for you! We’ll be exploring the current political landscape of the United States, discussing how different groups and events have impacted politics, and debating some of the most polarizing issues in the news today. This class has two main objectives: to deepen the student's understanding of modern America--its strengths and its challenges--and to provide students with the opportunity to discuss complex issues with peers.

Syllabus

Note: This syllabus is subject to change depending on the student interests and questions.

* Week 1: Introduction to Political Parties
  + What are political parties?
  + Why do we have parties?
  + Why do we (essentially) have a two-party system?
  + What are the differences between Republicans and Democrats?
    - The matching game
  + How did the Republican and Democratic parties develop over time? (and other history of the parties)
  + What parties exist in America today *besides* Republicans and Democrats?
  + MAKE SURE TO TAKE A LIST OF THEIR QUESTIONS
* Week 2: Elections, 2010, and the Tea Party
  + What are red states and blue states?
  + Who votes Republican, and who votes Democrat?
  + What is the electoral college, and why do we have it?
  + Why are there two houses in Congress?
  + Do we have equal representation?
  + Where does the money come from in campaigns?
  + How do parties and elections work in other democracies?
* Week 3: Taxes and Civil Liberties
  + Why do we pay taxes?
  + Does everyone pay the same amount in taxes?
  + What are civil liberties?
  + What does the Bill of Rights say?
  + What are entitlement programs?
  + What does the Second Amendment mean?
  + History: States Rights and federalism
* Week 4: Social Issues
  + Gay rights
  + Feminism
  + Reproductive rights and abortion
* Week 5: Immigration and Race in America
  + What is the law in Arizona?
  + What is affirmative action?
  + What is the history of immigration in America?
* Week 6: Kids Issues: Schools and Health Care
  + What are charters?
  + What are vouchers?
  + What’s merit pay?
  + What’s single payer health care?
* Week 7: Wrap-Up
  + Anything we didn’t get to; possibly watching some footage of various things; questions that the kids still have; etc. (maybe have them write letters)