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“The Battle for Congress: Midterm
Elections 2010”
Social Studies Lesson Plan

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**A daily news broadcast for High School and Middle School students
now under development by MacNeil/Lehrer Productions**



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“The Battle for Congress: Midterm Elections 2010” Social Studies Lesson Plan

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Spring, 2010

Dear Educator,

the.News online video reports for *the.Gov* provide middle and high school students with a valuable exercise in social studies and language arts with this **7:00** minute video report on “The Battle for Congress: Midterm Elections 2010” at www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thegov. Correspondent, Antonio Neves takes an in-depth look at the outlook and predictions for the 2010 midterm elections.. Lessons for social studies and language arts are available to support this video in the “For Educators” section of the website. All videos and curricula have been informed by *the.News* instructional design that can be found on the website www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews. The curriculum includes content-based standards, discussion questions, student activities, vocabulary and primary reference sources. A complete transcript of each video report includes time codes to assist in isolating specific segments of the video and to augment the instruction of media literacy and multimedia production. All of this material is presented as options to fit teachers’ instructional needs.

References to Larry Bell’s “The 12 Powerful Words” are highlighted in **bold** in the lesson plans, in the “thought starter” questions on the home page and educator’s page, and in the transcript (to denote where they are used in the video segment).

We have also added general topics to correlate to the lessons and video as well as concept based curriculum examples.

We welcome our partners at the Omaha Public Schools who have joined *the.News* in a special pilot project during the 09-10 school year. We are also developing a new authoring tool for students called *YOU.edit*, to launch in spring 2010. It will give students an online tool to remix the content of *the.News* reports, so they can create their own multimedia presentations. This editing tool will reside on our website so that it will be available to all students with an internet connection. It will be password protected so that it can serve as a viable educational asset that allows classroom teachers to assign multimedia projects within the security and content safety of *the.News* website.

Answers to **student “thought starter”** questions listed below the video.

- #1. Lost
- #2. health care
- #3. selected by students from examples in vido

Sincerely,

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The Battle for Congress: Midterm Elections 2010

This lesson was designed to support *the.News* video “The Battle for Congress: Midterm Elections 2010” The video can be found online at www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thegov

Omaha Public Schools

<http://www.ops.org/District/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Hbqyrrg2ydM%3d&tabid=912&mid=2006>

Social Studies U.S. History Grade 8

Standard 04: Citizenship/Government: Describe the structure and function of government, the expanding role and responsibilities of the citizens in a representative democracy, and compare and contrast these elements with those of other societies.

Social Studies Government Grade 12

Standard 04: Describe the factors that influence government policy and decisions.

Conceptual Lens: Beliefs and Values

Enduring Understanding: The values, beliefs, and ideals of a country are reflected in their laws and political documents

Grade Level: 7-12

Concept Areas: Social Studies, Language Arts, Government/Civics

Key Concept(s)

This lesson contains a series of activities that look at key issues and tossup races likely to be significant during the 2010 midterm elections. It focuses the possibility of a change in party majority in one or both houses of Congress. Students will identify key issues and projections on candidates’ chances for success in the upcoming election. Students will then develop campaign briefing papers for these candidates stating their recommendations.

Key Objectives:

The student will:

- Identify key issues likely to be discussed and debated during the 2010 midterm elections
- **Describe** the importance of the 2010 midterm elections
- **Explain** the challenges facing both political parties during this election
- **Analyze** the issues surrounding tossup races in both the House and Senate
- Predict the impact of possible majority changes in either house of Congress on President Obama’s political agenda
- **Formulate** briefing papers for candidates in tossup states during the 2010 midterm election



Key Vocabulary:

- **faction:** a group or clique within a larger group, party, government, organization, or the like
- **slur:** a disparaging remark or slight; an insult
- **majority party:** a party or faction in the most members
- **midterm elections:** elections held at the mid-point of a presidential term for members of the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate
- **partisan:** a strong supporter of a person, group, party, or cause; showing biased or emotional allegiance.
- **evangelizing:** to preach or try to convert to a religion or point of view
- **epithets:** a word, phrase, or expression used invectively as a term of abuse or contempt, to express hostility, etc.
- **recession:** A significant decline in activity spread across the economy, lasting longer than a few months.
- **rhetoric:** speech or writing that communicates its point persuasively
- **strident:** having a harsh sound; a grating sound that has an irritating quality or character
- **stimulus package:** an action, usually in the form of legislation, that pumps money or opportunity to improve a sluggish economy

Source: Dictionary.com

McRel (www.mcrel.org)

Civics

Standard 1: Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government.

Level III (Grades 6-8)

- Understands how politics enables people with differing ideas to reach binding agreements (e.g., presenting information and evidence, stating arguments, negotiating, compromising, voting)
- Understands major ideas about why government is necessary (e.g., people's lives, liberty, and property would be insecure without government; individuals by themselves cannot do many of the things they can do collectively such as create a highway system, provide armed forces for the security of the nation, or make and enforce laws)
- Understands competing ideas about the purposes government should serve (e.g., whether government should protect individual rights, promote the common good, provide economic security, mold the character of citizens, promote a particular religion)

Level IV (Grades 9-12)

- Understands how politics enables a group of people with varying opinions and/or interests to reach collective decisions, influence decisions, and accomplish goals that they could not reach as individuals (e.g., managing the distribution of resources, allocating benefits and burdens, managing conflicts)



Materials:

- “The Battle for Congress: Midterm Elections 2010” www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thegov
- Internet access
- Student Handouts
 - Analyzing the 2010 Midterm Elections
 - Campaign Briefing Paper
- Pens, paper, pencils

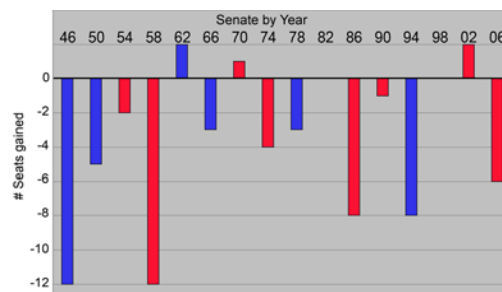
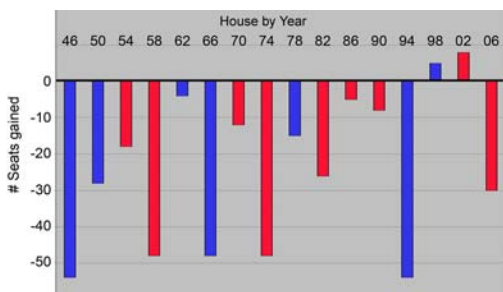
Time Frame: 3-4 class periods plus research time

Background

The Constitution provides that elections in the House of Representatives occur every two years and in the Senate every six years. In the two-year election cycle in the years the president is not up for election, each member of the House and one third of the Senate face elections. These elections are called “midterm elections” because they take place at the mid-point of the president’s four-year term in office. While not as dramatic as the presidential elections, midterm elections are nonetheless important because they can determine the **majority party** in Congress and can and often do set the course for the country.

Traditionally in midterm elections, the party of the president nearly always loses a substantial number of seats in both the House and Senate. Only twice in nearly fifty years has the party of the president gained seats in Congress (in 1998 and 2002 in the House and in 1962 and 2002 for the Senate). There are different explanations for this: how much momentum the president carried in the last election, any international events or domestic conditions that might reflect favorably or poorly on the party in control of either house of Congress, or even the president’s favorability ratings near the election period. But one overarching explanation seems to be that the American people seem to feel the government governs best when there are different parties in the executive and legislative branches.

Source: World Press.com <http://iggydonnelly.wordpress.com/2010/03/18/looking-back-in-history-at-midterm-elections/>



McRel (www.mcrel.org)

Civics

Standard 14: Understands the issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political life

Level III (Grades 6-8)

- Knows why political and social ideals are important, even if they cannot be fully achieved.
- Knows how various individual actions, social actions, and political actions can help to reduce discrepancies between reality and the ideals of American constitutional democracy,

Level IV (Grades 9-12)

- Knows discrepancies between American ideals and the realities of American social and political life (e.g., the ideal of equal opportunity and the reality of unfair discrimination)



McRel (www.mcrel.org)

Civics

Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals

Level III (Grades 6-8)

- Understands how participation in civic and political life can help bring about the attainment of individual and public goals (e.g., personal goals such as living in a safe and orderly neighborhood, obtaining a good education, living in a healthy environment; public goals such as increasing the safety of the community, improving local transportation facilities, providing opportunities for education and recreation)
- Understands why becoming knowledgeable about public affairs and the values and principles of American constitutional democracy and communicating that knowledge to others is a form a political participation

Level IV (Grades 9-12)

- Knows the many ways citizens can participate in the political process at local, state, and national levels, and understands the usefulness of other forms of political participation in influencing public policy (e.g., attending political and governmental meetings, demonstrating, contacting public officials, writing letters, boycotting, community organizing, petitioning, picketing)



Generally, the public has not shown as much enthusiasm for midterm elections as they have for presidential elections. Midterm elections traditionally have lower voter turnout than the general elections and voters tend to focus on local races for governor and other state office holders. But the upcoming 2010 midterm elections might prove different. The political climate in the United States over the past 20 years has become increasingly **partisan** and the level of **rhetoric** increasingly **strident**. Since the election of President Barack Obama, the political divisions seem to have solidified and the act of compromise seems almost nonexistent. Political news and analysis was replaced with political **evangelizing**. During the health care debates, it seemed both political parties' spokespersons were locked in battle to out-sensationalize the other with claims of "death panels" and "killing grandma" and in the closing days before the health care bill passed, racial **epithets** and anti-gay **slurs** were thrown at Congressional leaders.





The economy first showed signs of trouble about the time Obama declared his candidacy for president in 2007. By the time of the presidential debates in the summer of 2008, it was clear the country was already in a severe economic **recession**. One month before the November general elections it looked like the country would slip into a depression equal to one during the 1930s. After the election, Democrats controlled both houses of Congress and the White House. In the first few months of President Obama's term Congress passed massive financial legislation in the form of a **stimulus package** and an auto industry bail out. These measures were controversial as they added much to the already large national debt and to many these actions looked like a government takeover of the economy.

The health care legislation passed in March, 2010, and became the defining moment in President Barack Obama's first year in office. Though Democrats enjoyed comfortable majorities in the House and Senate, the bill was passed only after great debate and compromise. The vote in the Senate was along strict party lines and in the House, 34 Democrats voted against the bill. Democrats rejoiced in having passed a major piece of legislation amidst their exhaustion. Republicans claimed the bill and the stimulus package passed in March, 2009, had scared and angered the public enough that they are poised to vote for *another* "change they can believe in" come November, 2010.

Out of all this has emerged a greater awareness and concern on the part of the public regarding the actions of government. No other example better personifies this than the emergence of the Tea Party movement. This large, loosely organized coalition of citizen organizations was a grassroots response to concerns over the size of the 2008 auto industry bailout, the 2009 stimulus package, and a general concern over government intrusion into the economy. Tea Party activities have been most visible through a series of public protests facilitated by social networking and conservative media that promote their events. Most Tea Party members identify themselves as Republicans calling for limited government, free market capitalism, governing on Constitutional principles, and protecting personal freedoms. However, frequently, Tea Party spokespersons claim many Republican office holders have strayed from these principles. There is serious discussion within various **factions** of the Tea Party movement to oppose these officials when they run for office. This would be a concern for Republican candidates because a Tea Party candidate might possibly split the vote and allowing Democratic contenders to win.



Tea Party Flag

As the political parties and the public look toward the November elections all parties believe the number one issue will be the economy. Republicans feel they have the upper hand claiming the stimulus package hasn't worked the way the Democrats said it would, i.e. provide more jobs. Republicans also claim the recently passed health care legislation did not reform and will cost too much. Democrats counter that the stimulus package is a success because it has provided some jobs, saved millions of others and the health care legislation will actually reduce the deficit in the long run. The biggest challenge for Republicans will be to convince the American people that the Democratic recovery plan has failed and health care will bankrupt the country in order to



win as many Congressional seats as they can. The challenge for Democrats will be to sell its health care program as needed reform of health care and that the economy is getting better with the programs they've put in place as they and hope to retain or possibly gain seats in Congress.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills (<http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/>)

Civic Literacy

- Participating effectively in civic life through knowing how to stay informed and understanding governmental processes

Creativity and Innovation

- Use a wide range of idea creation techniques (such as brainstorming)
- Elaborate, refine, analyze and evaluate their own ideas in order to improve and maximize creative efforts

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Reason Effectively:

- Use various types of reasoning (inductive, deductive, etc.) as appropriate to the situation

Make Judgments and Decisions:

- Effectively analyze and evaluate evidence, arguments, claims and beliefs
- Analyze and evaluate major alternative points of view
- Interpret information and draw conclusions based on the best analysis

Communication and Collaboration

- Articulating thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively through speaking and writing
- Listen effectively to decipher meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes and intentions
- Utilize multiple media and technologies, and know how to judge their effectiveness a priori as well as assess their impact

Lesson Plan

To better facilitate this lesson, distribute the background essay above before you start this unit. That way, students will have read the content and be prepared for the activities below.

Opening Activity

Divide class into groups of four students. Have the groups brainstorm 6 to 8 issues they believe will be important during the 2010 midterm elections in November. Then have them pick their top three and be prepared to justify their reasoning. After each group has developed their list, have a spokesperson from each group announce their three issues and explain why they placed these as the top three. Finally, create a list of these on the front board to be used later in the lesson. Depending on how extensive the final list you might want to add other possible issues such as



finance reform, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorism, immigration, global warming/energy policy, or education.

News Segment Viewing Activity

1. Divide the class into viewing groups of 2-3 students.
2. Distribute the student handout “Review Questions for the News segment.”
3. Show the video “The Battle for Congress: Midterm Elections 2010”
www.pbs.org/newshour/thenews/thegov or have students watch the video as homework.
4. Discuss with students the following areas from the news segment:
 - a. **Describe** the importance of midterm elections in general. Why might the 2010 midterm elections be important?
 - b. What is likely to be the number one issue for voters at the 2010 midterm elections? What other issues might be in play?
 - c. **Describe** the separate challenges for the Democratic and Republican parties in the upcoming midterm election.
 - d. **Evaluate** whether the recent passage of health care bill helped the Republican or Democratic party. **Support** your reasoning.
 - e. **Compare and contrast** issues important to older and younger people in the upcoming midterm election?
 - f. **Analyze** the effect on President Obama’s agenda if Republicans are able to gain a majority in one of the houses of Congress.
 - g. **Predict** what you feel will be the impact of the Tea Party movement on the upcoming midterm election. **Support** your reasoning.

Main Activity

Part 1: Analyzing the Stakes for Republicans and Democrats

In this activity, students will examine several 2010 midterm election maps from neutral sources to determine which Congressional seats are likely to change and how this change will affect the makeup of the House and Senate. Depending on when you conduct this lesson, be sure to give students some perspective as to the accuracy of the data and their predications.

1. Distribute the handout, “Analyzing the 2010 Midterm Election” to all students. Review the Background and Directions with students
2. As a practice, you might consider filling out the home state Senate and/or House race section as a class.
3. Assign each student one of the tossup states in the Senate or House races. These can be found on the CQ Politics or the NY Times sites listed on the Handout “Analyzing the 2010 Midterm Election”. You can also have students work in pairs and assign more than one tossup state in either the House or Senate to each pair.
4. Have students do their research in class or for homework. Then meet as a large group to discuss the following questions. Set up two charts like the ones below on the front board to track the students’ findings.
 - Ask each student to review their graphic organizer and discuss the status of candidates for the Senate and/or House in their state.



- Ask each student:
 - (1) to review the candidates the researched in the tossup states by identifying the state, candidates' names, party affiliation, current status and polling data. Then ask for their prediction as to the candidates' chances in the 2010 November midterm election.
 - (2) how many seats are the two parties predicted to gain/lose in the House?
 - (3) how many seats are the two parties predicted to gain/lose in the Senate?
 - (4) to forecast the changes you feel will occur in the House and Senate if your predictions come true.
 - (5) to describe what effect you think this change will have on the rest of President Obama's term in office.

Democrats Gains/Losses in Senate (+/-)	Republican Gains/Losses in Senate (+/-)

Currently: Democrats 57 Seats; Republicans 41 Seats; 1 Independent Democrat; 1 Independent

Democrats Gains/Losses in House (+/-)	Republican Gains/Losses in House (+/-)

Currently: Democrats 275 Seats; Republican 178 Seats

Part 2: Campaign Briefing Paper

Explain to student that they will be developing briefing papers for candidates in the tossup states (they can also do this for candidates in their home state). They will either choose or be assigned an issue and a candidate (this could be one of the candidates they researched in part 1 or assign them a different candidate.)

1. Have students go back to their brainstorming lists from the opening activity and examine the issues they identified.
2. Form small groups to develop the briefing papers.
3. Assign or have students choose one issue they want to develop for the party of their choice. (Or, to make it more challenging, have students develop briefing paper from the opposite political party closest to their view).
4. Assign or have students choose one of the candidates in one of the tossup states.
5. Distribute the Campaign Briefing Paper handout and review the instructions.



Assessment

- For News Segment Viewing Activity, students can turn in their notes from their viewing of the *NewsHour* segment.
- For Main Activity, Part 1, evaluate students based on the completeness of their graphic organizers and the supporting evidence they supply for their predictions.
- For Main Activity, Part 2 Activity 2, evaluate students' campaign briefing papers based on the content requirements listed in the student handout.

Resources

- Democratic Party www.democrats.org
- Republican Party www.gop.org
- Tea Party Patriots <http://teapartypatriots.ning.com/>
- Free Republic.com <http://www.freerepublic.com/home.htm>
- the Independent Voter <http://www.independentvoting.org/index.html>
- PBS NewsHour "Public Anger Continues to Hammer Congressional Incumbents" http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june10/washington_02-16.html
- Roll Call <http://www.rollcall.com/>
- U.S. House of Representatives <http://www.house.gov/Welcome.shtml>
- U.S. Senate <http://www.senate.gov/index.htm>

Activity Designer:

Greg Timmons is a former social studies teacher now freelance writer and educational consultant.



Student Handout: Analyzing the 2010 Midterm Elections

Background: In this activity, you will examine several 2010 midterm election maps from neutral sources to determine which Congressional seats are likely to change and how this change will affect the makeup of the House and Senate.

Directions:

Fill out the graphic organizer below on Congressional candidates in your state and one candidate in a tossup state with information from these websites. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.

- Politico.com <http://www.politico.com/2010/maps/#> (click “Senate” and “House.” Also look at the “Latest Polls” (<http://www.politico.com/2010/pollingcenter.html>) for the latest information on how “tossup” candidates are doing. These polls are updated very frequently.)
- New York Times <http://elections.nytimes.com/2010/senate> (click “House Races” and Senate Races.” Also, use the “detail box” on the House page to see House races in greater detail.)
- CQPolitics.com <http://innovation.cq.com/atlas/home> (Click “Senate” and “House.” Also, click on the tossup states or Congressional districts for further information.)
- Real Clear Politics <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/polls/> (check Senate and House 2010 Polls in left hand column.)

House and/or Senate Midterm Election Race in your State

Name of Senate Candidate and Party up for election in your state (N/A if not applicable)	Current Status of Candidate (factors that help or hurt candidates chances for election/reelection)	Recent Polling Data on November election
Incumbent		
Main Challenger		
Name of House Member and Party in your Congressional District	Current Status of Candidate (factors that help or hurt candidates chances for election/reelection)	Recent Polling Data on November election
Incumbent		
Main Challenger		



Empty rectangular box for student information

Based on your research from page 11, **predict** the incumbent’s and challenger’s chances for reelection or election. **Support** your reasons.

Four horizontal lines for writing the response

House or Senate Midterm Election Race in Tossup State

Name of Senate or House Candidate, Party and State in tossup state	Current Status of Candidate (factors that help or hurt candidates chances for election/reelection)	Recent Polling Data on November election
Incumbent		
Main Challenger		
Name of House Member in tossup state	Current Status of Candidate (factors that help or hurt candidates chances for election/reelection)	Recent Polling Data on November election
Incumbent		
Main Challenger		



Based on your research from page 12, **predict** the incumbent's and challenger's chances for reelection or election. **Support** your reasons.

Student Handout: Campaign Briefing Paper

Directions: In this activity, you will develop a briefing paper for one of the candidates in the tossup states (or in your home state) on a topic that will likely be at issue during the 2010 midterm election. Follow the directions below to complete your briefing paper.

Issue you are examining _____

Candidates _____

1. Briefly **describe** the main points of the issue. Describe the central problem of the issue. For further research, review news articles from the newspaper, periodicals, or the internet. Initially, look at neutral sources.
2. **Explain** your position on the issue and actions you would take to address the issue.
3. **Describe** the position of the political party you were assigned on the issue. Go to
 - www.gop.org for the Republican Party or
 - www.democrats.org for the Democratic Party
4. **Describe** the position of the two candidates from the tossup races or your home state on this issue.
 - Visit the candidates' campaign websites. Use an Internet browser to locate this information.
5. **Compare** your position with that of the two opposing candidates.



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6. **Explain** why you agree or disagree with the opposing candidates' position on the issue and what you would advise your candidate to say about the issue.

7. **Formulate** your briefing paper containing all the above information.