Lesson Title: Know Your Vote

Subjects
U.S. History, U.S. Government, Civics

Suggested Time
Three to four 50-minute class periods (activities can be conducted individually)

Grade Level
7-12

Essential Question
How do you decide which presidential candidate to vote for?

Objectives
- Analyze liberal and conservative positions on government spending and balancing the budget
- Understand the issues surrounding health care costs
- Understand the issues surrounding funding higher education
- Understand the issues surrounding the preservation of Social Security
- Formulate an endorsement for a presidential candidate based on how they will address those issues

Overview
Every election year and for years after elections, there are several major issues that persistently trouble Americans. Every election year, politicians pledge that they will address these issues, and nearly every year they fall short of many peoples' expectations. This time may be different, but it will take an educated voting population to explain to politicians exactly what they want done to address the issues. In this lesson, we begin that process by examining problems surrounding health care costs, funding higher education, and preserving social security. Then, students look at how the current presidential candidates are proposing to address these issues, and formulate a short media presentation using Flipgrid (https://info.flipgrid.com/) or some other media presentation tool to endorse one candidate.

Materials
- *We The Voters* film, "Real Voters of the USA"
- *We The Voters* film, "Mission Insurable"
- *We The Voters* film, "Student Debt Roulette"
- *We The Voters* film, "The Future of Social Security"

- Copies of Student Handouts:
  - Handout #1: "Real Voters of the USA" Graphic Organizer
  - Handout #2: "Mission Insurable" Graphic Organizer
  - Handout #3: "Student Debt Roulette" Graphic Organizer
  - Handout #4: "The Future of Social Security" Graphic Organizer
  - Handout #5: Endorsing a Candidate

Procedure

Preparation: Before starting this lesson, you might want to familiarize yourself with Flipgrid, a video-based learning tool. Flipgrid allows teachers to set up topics for discussion online so that students can review and respond in an online presentation. If Flipgrid does not fit your needs, you can have students use another media presentation tool to complete the final activity.

Days 1-2 Opening Activity: Open the class by asking students to describe the political climate and the state of political discussion in the nation today. Most will say that it is polarized, or that no one listens or compromises, or that it's just bad. Round out the discussion by stating that the problem we face is that there are many complex and increasingly difficult problems to solve and we don't always address these issues in positive, forward-thinking ways.

Film Viewing: Tell students that the first film they will view is called "Real Voters of the USA" and is a parody of the television program "Real Housewives" with a political twist. Students will see a perfect example of the current political climate and some possible avenues for change.

Divide the class into small groups of 2-3 students and distribute Handout #1: "Real Voters of the USA" Graphic Organizer. Have students view the film, possibly more than once, and complete the graphic organizer. When they've finished taking notes, review the first three questions with the entire class. Then place them back in their small groups and have them discuss the possible actions in question 4. Have groups report their findings.

Days 1-2 Main Activity: Now tell students they're going to explore three pressing issues—health care costs, funding higher education, and preserving social security—and examine proposed actions for resolving these problems.

Keep students in their small groups or reorganize them into new groups. Distribute handouts 2, 3, and 4 and have them view the three films, "Mission Insurable," "Student Debt Roulette," and "The Future of Social Security," possibly more than once, and complete the graphic organizers for each. Bring the class together and debrief the films with the following questions:

"Mission Insurable"
- What did you learn about health care that you didn't know before watching?
- What questions do you have after watching the film?
- What was your most memorable moment from the film?

"Student Debt Roulette"
Answers to Question 2: A, C, F, E, D, B
- Describe the problems students face trying to get a better education with the high cost of college.
- Why have higher education costs gone up so much?
- Which of the possible solutions mentioned in the film do you think are the best and why?

"The Future of Social Security"
- What is Social Security and how does it work?
- What are some of the main concerns young people have about Social Security?
- Which of the possible solutions mentioned in the film do you think are the best and why?

Day 3: By now, students should have a good understanding of these three issues. The next activity has them explore what the current candidates' positions and policies are regarding these issues.

Keep students in their small groups or reorganize them into new groups. Distribute Handout #5: Endorsing a Candidate. Have students go to the candidates' websites and other sources to find where the candidates stand on these issues and what ways they plan to address them if elected. Have them record their findings on the handout. Then have them discuss their findings and in their small group identify which candidate they feel best addresses each of the three issues. Then have them formulate an overall endorsement of a single candidate and explain their reasons. Have them document their results in an endorsement spot for media using Flipgrid. (https://info.flipgrid.com/) or another media presentation tool.

Extension Activities
1. Have students identify other issues that are important to them. Have them research these issues to gain an understanding of what they are, the problems associated with the issues, and possible ways to address them. Then have them research a current political candidate running for president or any other office (governor, senator, state representative, mayor, etc.) and formulate an endorsement campaign for that candidate.

Consider using a website like Project Vote Smart (http://votesmart.org/) to help students gather information on local candidates and issues.

2. Have students conduct a voting survey in their school or community on an issue they feel is important. This could be completed with an online voter survey tool like Survey Monkey, Zoho Survey, or QuickSurveys.com. Have them tabulate the results and summarize how the survey respondents feel about the issue.

Additional Resources
- Pew Research Center, "Millennials overtake Baby Boomers as America's largest generation" http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/
- Healthcare Finance, "Top 10 healthcare issues to watch in 2016 http://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/top-10-healthcare-issues-watch-2016
- US News, "Debt and No Degree" http://www.usnews.com/opinion/knowledge-bank/articles/2015-12-29/the-student-loan-debt-problem-is-overblown
- Time, "Why the Student Loan Crisis is Even Worse than People Think" http://time.com/money/4168510/why-student-loan-crisis-is-worse-than-people-think/
- Social Security Administration, "The Future Financial Status of the Social Security Program https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n3/v70n3p111.html
- Forbes, "Social Security Could be in Worse Shape than We Thought" http://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiehopkins/2015/02/18/social-security-could-be-in-worse-shape-than-we-thought/#512933da75a6
- The New York Times, "Social Security, Present and Future" http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/31/opinion/sunday/social-security-present-and-future.html

Standards
Common Core State Standards
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards
D2Civ.2.9-12 Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system.
D2Civ.5.9-12 Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.
D2Civ.9.9-12 Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings.
D2Civ.14.9-12 Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education)
Standard 9: Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs, and principles of American constitutional democracy.
Standard 11: Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society
Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life
Standard 19: Understands what is meant by "the public agenda," how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media
Standard 21: Understands the formation and implementation of public policy
Standard 27: Understands how certain character traits enhance citizens' ability to fulfill personal and civic responsibilities
Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals