GENERAL ELECTION
WHAT MATTERS MOST?

60 MINUTE ACTIVITY
Introduction
PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 29TH 2019

These resources were produced by The Economist Educational Foundation, an independent charity that was set up by The Economist magazine. We combine The Economist’s journalistic know-how with teaching expertise, and we specialise in supporting teachers to facilitate high-quality classroom discussions about the news.

About this resource
This resource challenges students to think about how best to make decisions when faced with a general election. It encourages them to make the most of what they already know and recall events in the recent news to support their opinions. However, in-depth knowledge of politicians, parties and policies is not a prerequisite. It can be used at any point in the run-up to this year’s general election on December 12th 2019.

This resource helps to develop the following skills:

BEFORE THE SESSION YOU NEED TO HAVE:
- The Teacher content: What is a general election?
- The What matters most? cards cut up, enough for one set per group of three
- If running the bonus activity, the Questionable campaigns cards cut up, enough for one set for each group of three

Let us know about any interesting discussions you have!
@Econ_Foundation
#newsthinking #econfoundation #newsliteracy
What is a general election?

Resources
Refer to the Teacher content: What is a general election? for guidance.

Activity instructions
Ask students to share with a partner what they know about the upcoming general election. Ask them to focus on the most important information - encourage answers about the process of an election, who the leaders and parties involved are and why this one has been called.

Challenge and clarify any misinformation, and try to steer the discussion away from anecdotes and trivial stories. Ask for feedback and add relevant information to the board.
Members of Parliament, or MPs, are politicians who are voted in by the public. Being an MP means you have a seat in Parliament and can take part in decisions there. Each MP represents a different part of the country, which is called their “constituency”.

During a British election, people vote for the MP they want to represent their local area. People from different political parties compete against each other to be an MP. Whoever gets the most votes wins.

Any party that wins 326 seats or more becomes the government and its leader becomes the prime minister. If no party wins enough seats on its own to form a government, different parties can agree to work together in what is known as a coalition government.

**Why are we having an election now?**

Prime Minister Boris Johnson doesn’t currently have enough support to push through his Brexit plans and pass new laws. By holding an election, he hopes the number of Conservative MPs will increase, making his goals easier to achieve.

We were due a general election in 2022, but Parliament has agreed to hold an early election this December.
20-MINUTE ACTIVITY

What matters most?

Resources
The What matters most? cards cut up

Activity instructions
Split your students into groups of 3-4 and give each group a set of the What matters most? cards.

Point out that due to rolling news coverage, and the availability of information at the touch of a button or the tap of an app, people have greater access to politicians and parties than ever before. There’s a lot of information to process, and voters have many different things to think about before they make their final decision.

Explain that although the students are too young to vote, they still have a voice and this is a chance for it to be heard. If they were voting, what would matter most to them?

In their groups, students should order the cards from “matters most” to “matters least”.

Encourage them to take each card individually, discuss it, and place it on the spectrum once there is agreement. Challenge them to bring in specific evidence from the news to support their opinions. Remind students that their order does not have to be one long, straight line, as they might decide two or more cards should be on the same level.

There is one blank card to allow them to add a factor of their own.

CHALLENGE TASK
Once groups have put their cards in order, choose one or more of the following tasks to push their thinking further:

Give me 5 reasons
When groups are finished, challenge them to rehearse their reasons for the two that matter most, the two that matter least, and one they have placed around the middle. Remind them that events from the news can be used to support their opinions.

Hardest to place
Ask groups to identify the card which is hardest to place and to justify why this is so. Challenge them to give reasons for why it matters, and why it does not, with the aim of placing it somewhere with greater certainty.

Reveal, regroup, reflect
Get groups to turn to their neighbouring group, with each student pairing up with an opposite number. Challenge each to explain to their partner why they ordered the cards in this order. After a few minutes, ask the original groups to “regroup”, share what they heard, and reflect on whether they wish to rearrange their order.
What matters most?

- How trustworthy the party leaders are
- What the parties say about Brexit
- How far we can trust parties with handling the UK’s economy
- The balance of men and women within the parties
- The personal lives of politicians
- How far a party goes to discredit and attack the other parties
What matters most?

- What the parties promise to do on creating a more equal society
- What the parties promise to do on the environment
- How far parties prioritise the NHS
- How the parties handle crime and punishment
- How likeable their local MP is
15-MINUTE ACTIVITY

Shift your perspective

Resources
The What matters most? cards cut up

Activity instructions
Assign a new perspective to each group from the list below. Ask them to re-order the cards from this new standpoint. You can give all groups the same perspective at once, or you can assign a different perspective to different groups.

1. Someone who has been unemployed for over five years
2. An owner of a multinational business
3. A university student voting for the first time
4. Someone on minimum wage living in a big city

Before moving on, hear students' feedback to these questions:
- How easy is it to order from someone else's perspective?
- Are there any reasons why their ordering may be inaccurate?
- What other perspectives have been missing from today’s activity?
Final discussion

Resources
The *What matters most? cards* cut up

Activity instructions
Ask students to gather in a circle with a set of the cards placed in the middle. Open up a general discussion about what matters the most in the upcoming election. Ask students to give their opinion, back it up with reasons and then choose the next speaker.

Depending on group size, there may be some who do not get a chance to speak in this discussion. Give everyone a chance to show their thinking by taking the 4-5 cards that seem to matter the most, and place them around the room. Ask students to stand next to the one they think matters the most, and share the reasons for their choice with someone nearby.

If you have time, get representatives from each card to argue their case and invite others to move if they hear something that has convinced them.
Questionable campaigns

Resources
The Questionable campaigns cards cut up, enough for one set for each group of three

Activity instructions
One of the cards in the previous activity focused on how far parties go to discredit and attack their opposition. This bonus activity gets them thinking about what’s acceptable, and what’s unacceptable, in the world of election campaigns.

Put students into new groups of 3-4.

Explain how parties and politicians do not just campaign with their own promises and policies, but also spend a lot of time talking about opposition parties. Convincing voters not to vote for someone else can be just as important as convincing them to vote for you. This is generally called “negative campaigning”.

Hand out a set of the “Questionable campaigns” cards - each with a form of negative campaigning.

Ask students to separate them into “acceptable” and “unacceptable”. Challenge them to express their reasons before placing them in either pile.

If pupils ask for more specific context for cards, let them create their own context and decide where it should be placed based on that.

Once they have placed their cards, ask each group to work out where they draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable, and then open up a class discussion on where this line is.

CHALLENGE TASK
If you have time, ask your students:

• Should parties pledge not to criticise their opponents?
• How should news organisations report on negative campaigning?
• Does negative campaigning make it easier, or harder, for voters to make up their minds?
Questionable campaigns

- Publishing a campaign leaflet to look like a local newspaper that is reporting unfavourably on another politician or party
- Editing a video of an opposition politician’s interview to make them look tongue-tied
- Paying for search-engine adverts that show negative information when someone searches the opposition party’s name
- Making jokes about another party at a campaign rally
- Performing a mocking impression of another party’s leader
## Questionable campaigns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calling another party’s plans “rubbish” in a TV debate</td>
<td>Designing a billboard that suggests another party is not fit to govern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing a billboard that suggests another party is not fit to govern</td>
<td>Collaborating with a party that has similar values, to criticise a party you both dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with a party that has similar values, to criticise a party you both dislike</td>
<td>Using an opposition politician’s educational background to criticise them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using an opposition politician’s educational background to criticise them</td>
<td>Talking about the governing record of an opposition party, picking out only the things you think were failures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Want more news literacy resources?

The Economist Educational Foundation offers a range of programmes to help teachers and students have inspiring, in-depth discussions about current affairs whilst developing their critical thinking skills.

Find out more at economistfoundation.org

**Burnet News Club**

Everything you need to run a weekly current affairs club in your primary or secondary school

**Inquiry**

A six-session scheme of resources each half term, perfect for PSHE

**INSET**

Develop critical thinking, oracy and independence through heaps of practical activities to embed the news within your curriculum

**Workshops**

Students dive into an issue over the course of a day, exploring a range of perspectives and having their say

**Agora 2020**

An immersive, one-day event that puts students at the heart of a breaking news story

“I feel more confident now with having challenging discussions with children and allowing them to form their own opinions on matters.”