

## Watching Presidential Debates Guide

### 2012 Presidential Debate Dates

**(as of this printing & check local listings for broadcast information)**

October 3<sup>rd</sup> – Domestic Policy (Denver, CO)

October 11<sup>th</sup> – Foreign & Domestic Policy (Danville, KY)

October 16<sup>th</sup> – Town Hall Meeting, Foreign & Domestic Policies (Hempstead, NY)

October 22<sup>nd</sup> – Foreign Policy (Boca Raton, FL)

### Guide Contents:

Debate Basics Essay

Activities

- ★ Debate Bingo Activity



### Web Resources to prepare for debate watching

<http://www.publicagenda.com/>

**Public Agenda's Issues Digests** are a gold mine for teachers planning a secondary school classroom debate; includes "Issues Overview," "Fact File," a digest of recent news stories, and "Framing the Debate: 3 Viewpoints" for each topic.

<http://www.c-spanclassroom.org/>

**C-SPAN CLASSROOM** provides resources for teaching civics and government, including campaign video clips to use in the classroom.

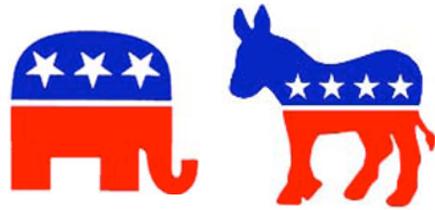
<http://www.politics1.com/issues.htm>

**Politics1.com's Directory of Political Debates and Issues** contains hundreds of online resources for debates on many popular issues, all from online magazines, newspapers and journals.

<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/politics/index.html?8qa>

**The New York Times Politics** pages include the latest poll information, the candidates' stand on issues, candidate profiles and recent articles, as well as an Electoral Map with the latest predictions.

# Introduction



## What is a Debate?

A debate is a formal, oral contest between two individuals or team presenting arguments to support opposing sides of a question. Debates follow a set of rules so participants can state their positions and attack their opponents' views in a fair and orderly manner.

**Political debates:** These are often less formal in structure. For instance, since 1960 presidential candidates have engaged in debates on television for the purpose of discussing their differences on the major issues of the election.

## Debate Watch 2012:

Voters typically identify candidate debates as the most influential source of information received during a campaign. Because of their importance, this essay describes commonly used debate formats, questioning techniques, and guidelines for viewing a debate. It is designed to be useful in viewing state and local debates as well as presidential.

## The Structure of Debates

Debates use a variety of formats. Since 1992, the general election presidential debates have featured multiple formats including a town hall meeting with citizen questioners.

Most debates:

- ★ impose time limits on answers to ensure that all candidates have equal opportunity to respond
- ★ focus on a wide range of issues or,
- ★ focus on a particular theme such as education, the economy, etc. or
- ★ divide the time between foreign and domestic topics.

Candidates may have an opening and a closing statement. A moderator may introduce each candidate and begin questioning immediately.

Questions guide the content of debates. There are three types of questions.

- 1) **Initial questions** get the debate started by asking candidates to explain or defend a position or compare it to an opponent's. Many initial questions are hypothetically in the form of, "What would you do if...?"
- 2) **Follow-up questions** are directed at a candidate after an answer is given. Their purpose is to probe the original response by asking for elaboration or clarification. Some follow-up questions are on an unrelated topic. Follow-up questions may be asked immediately after an initial response is given or after all candidates have answered the initial question.
- 3) **Cross-examination questions** are questions that one candidate addresses to another. A separate time can be set aside for cross-examination questions or they may be included as follow-ups.

## How to get the most out of a political debate

Focus your attention on a few key points. Know what it is you want in an office holder, then watch and listen to see which candidate best fits your ideal. The following suggestions will help you focus:

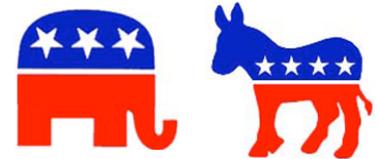
- ★ Set aside your partisan views. Use the debates to learn as much as possible about all candidates and their positions.
- ★ Pay close attention to the candidates when they talk about how to solve problems. Listen carefully for comparisons candidates make between or among their programs and their opponents'.
- ★ Identify the candidate's debate strategy. Does the candidate speak directly to the issues, provide specifics, and present new policies or information? Or does the candidate evasively interpret questions to suit his/her agenda?
- ★ Identify the images in which candidates try to create for themselves. Most candidates try to portray themselves as leaders and identify themselves with cherished American values while suggesting that their opponents lack these qualities. What in the responses supports their claims?
- ★ Be aware of the technical limitations of televised debates. Television works by showing action. To create action and minimize monotony, directors sometimes include "reaction shots" to show one candidate's response to an opponent's statement. This can distract your attention on what is being said. It is wise to remember the role of action shots when watching the debates.
- ★ Consider the questions asked by the panelists. The essence of the debate is comparison and contrast. Did the panelist's or moderator's questions encourage alternative viewpoints? Observe and evaluate the questions asked and determine if you are genuinely adding to the content of the debates.
- ★ Don't watch a debate to determine a winner or loser. All candidates have goals for a debate; as a result, all could claim victory if winning is defined as achieving goals set by campaign or media. Focus on the question, "Who would make a better president, senator, governor, legislator, county clerk?"

### OBJECTIVE

- ✓ The students will be able to identify issues discussed in a presidential debate.
- ✓ Students will make informed and reasoned decisions by accessing and using information effectively.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- ✓ What is the purpose of a Presidential Debate?
- ✓ What does it mean to be an informed voter?



### MATERIALS

Debate Bingo cards

### GET READY

Duplicate a Debate Bingo page for each student.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Handout a Debate Bingo to each student to take home to watch a Presidential Debate with his/her family.

Read the topics listed on the debate bingo card with the students. Define each topic briefly.

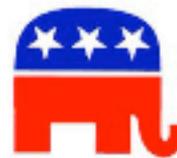
Teachers may choose to copy the bingo card with two or three spaces blank and ask the class to brainstorm topics to fill in the blank.

Instruct students to bring the bingo cards in the day after the debate to share results and reactions with the class.

### ASSESSMENT

- ★ Written and/or oral reflections

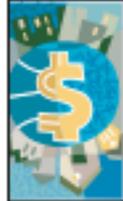
# Debate Bingo



Debate Bingo is a great way to watch a political debate with your family. See who can get five in a row first and who can black out the card.

Listed are phrases, words, and or topics that will be covered in the debate.

Cross a box out when either Candidate mention or say something within the box.

 <p><b>Global Warming</b></p>	<p><b>The candidates shake hands.</b></p>	 <p><b>Economy</b></p>	 <p><b>Health Care</b></p>	<p>A candidate says "God Bless America."</p>
 <p><b>Taxes</b></p>	 <p><b>Gun Control</b></p>	<p>A candidate calls the other candidate "Liberal."</p>	 <p><b>Immigration Issues</b></p>	<p>A candidate says something <u>positive</u> about the other.</p> <p><b>+</b></p>
 <p><b>Financial Crisis</b></p>	<p>A candidate says something <u>negative</u> about the other.</p> <p><b>-</b></p>	<p><b>FREE SPACE</b></p> <p>Check this space off for watching the debate!!</p>	 <p><b>Terrorism</b></p>	 <p><b>Energy Crisis</b></p>
<p>A candidate calls the other candidate "Conservative."</p>	 <p><b>Crime</b></p>	<p>A candidate mentions Pres. Bush.</p>	 <p><b>Religion</b></p>	<p>A candidate talks about <b>YOUTH.</b></p>
 <p><b>Education</b></p>	<p>The audience asks a question.</p>	 <p><b>War</b></p>	<p>A candidate cuts the other candidate off in the middle of a sentence.</p>	 <p><b>Environment</b></p>

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<p>The audience asks a question.</p>	 <p>Environment</p>	<p>A candidate says "God Bless America."</p>	 <p>Health Care</p>	 <p>Terrorism</p>
<p>A candidate cuts the other candidate off in the middle of a sentence.</p>	 <p>Crime</p>	<p>A candidate mentions Pres. Bush.</p>	 <p>Immigration Issues</p>	<p>A candidate says something <u>positive</u> about the other.</p> <p>+</p>
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