

As a presidential election campaign enters its final stages, it offers many teachable moments. This issue of *Social Education* presents insightful articles on teaching about the upcoming election and the underlying principles of democracy and civic engagement that we need to emphasize in the classroom, as well as a fascinating set of historical and contemporary features on other social studies topics.

University professor Allan Lichtman has successfully predicted the winner of all presidential elections since 1984 with the historically based Keys system, which uses 13 important variables to forecast the outcome of the election. In the opening article of this issue, he judges that the events of this year have turned the Keys in favor of a Democratic victory in November, and explains the reasons for this development.

Teaching about the election is an important component of social studies instruction this fall, but Wayne Journell points out that it can be difficult to teach about a contest that is divisive and vicious. He reviews the best strategies for teachers, and offers advice on whether they should disclose their own political beliefs to students as part of an approach of “committed impartiality.”

One important lesson of history is that we cannot take democracy for granted. Kenneth C. Davis warns that “democracy can die quickly” (277) at the hands of a would-be dictator if we do not work and sometimes sacrifice to preserve it. He analyzes the vulnerability of democratic systems in an excerpt from his latest book, *Strongman*, which studies the rise of five dictators and their authoritarian playbooks.

The United States is distinctive among Western democracies because of its Electoral College system, in which citizens vote for statewide slates of electors who are pledged to a presidential candidate. In an interview with Isabel Morales and Dan Rothstein, Alex Keyssar examines why this system has endured despite many attempts to reform it. He points to a consistent pattern in which supporters of white supremacy have favored the Electoral College.

Young people hold the key to the future of our democracy. Although there is a widespread perception that our youngest voters are politically apathetic, Sarah Andes and Abby Kiesa maintain that this is not the case and that the main reason that they vote at lower levels than older adults is their lack of knowledge of how the voting system operates and how they can cast a vote. Teachers can do a lot to change this.

Our Teaching the C3 Framework column asks how teachers can “engage students in political discussion without inviting the vitriol of polarization into the classroom (290).” The authors (Paula McAvoy, Arine Lowery, Nada Wafa, and Christy Byrd) recommend the creation of an informal environment for discussion to help promote civic conversations among people with different opinions. They present suggestions for organizing informal events that offer important learning opportunities.

In the Lessons on the Law column, Catherine Hawke examines cases resolved by the Supreme Court in its 2019-2020 term.* Although there were “perceived ‘wins’ for more liberal court advocates” (296) in cases related to immigration, Native American land ownership, and LGBTQ employment rights, these decisions were legally nuanced and reflected the pursuit of the middle ground by the Court. All eyes will be on the Supreme Court in its upcoming term, when it will review controversial cases dealing with unlawful seizure, a challenge to the Affordable Care Act, and LGBTQ rights.

Teachers can convert student interest in the presidential election into an exploration of the rich online historical collections of the papers of past presidents. In the Sources and Strategies column, Lee Ann Potter and Cheryl Lederle delve into the Library of Congress’s collection of the presidential papers of 23 presidents, showing how they offer a useful window into the reaction of the public to historic events ranging from the assassination of President James Garfield in 1881 to the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912 and Charles Lindbergh’s flight across the Atlantic in 1927.

In the Teaching with Documents column, Ricardo A. Serrano Denis examines a little known project of the New Deal era—the establishment of the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration in 1935 and its subsequent Slum Clearance Report. Using photographs and excerpts from the report as his primary sources, he describes its shortcomings and suggests activities that may give students better insights than the report’s authors into the aspirations of Puerto Ricans living in poverty at that time.

There are important ways in which social studies instruction can promote the literacy skills of students. Dianna Townsend, Ashley Baxter, Annie Keller, and Hannah Carter show how to expand students’ vocabulary through the strategic design and use of word walls that display conspicuous links between key social studies concepts and sets of related vocabulary terms.

In the Research and Practice column that concludes this issue, Christine Baron suggests that we should use three layers of analysis to study historic places—their natural and built environment, the ways in which humans interact with places in this environment, and the significance that different people impute to those places. She offers detailed guidelines for historic building analysis, and suggests a framework that teachers can use to study their own school building.

As always, the editors of *Social Education* welcome the comments of readers on any of the contributions to this issue at socialed@ncss.org. 🌐

*The column was written before the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and a future Lessons on the Law column will examine the impact of the appointment of a new Supreme Court Justice.