Learning Activity #1: Where Do You Stand?

Focus Areas: Civics, Government, Current Events, Visual Literacy

Grades: 9-12th

Objective(s):  
- Define key political vocabulary.
- Analyze political cartoons within the context of political vocabulary.
- Analyze the 2008 presidential candidate’s positions using political vocabulary.
- Identify and describe our own views using political vocabulary.

Preparation:  
- Prepare index cards for Step 2. Make a separate card for each vocabulary word and for each definition (definitions are from www.onelook.com).

Vocabulary/Definitions:
  - Conservative: Favoring traditional values or views; traditional or restrained in style; moderate and cautious
  - Liberal: Not strict or literal; generous in amount; not limited to or by established and traditional views
  - Socialism: A political system of communal ownership that is generally identified as the stage between capitalism and communism on the Marxist scale, where the means of production and distribution are controlled by the people and operated according to principles or fairness rather than the market
  - Communism: A classless political system in which all property and wealth is owned equally and controlled by all members of society
  - Democracy: Government by the people, exercised directly or through elected representatives.
• Prepare a chart (with 5 rows) on the board for class activity in Step 2. The chart should look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Vocabulary</th>
<th>Definition/Notes/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Reserve computer lab for Step 5 (this step could also be done as homework if the lab is unavailable; however, students must have computer access at home)

• Obtain large chart paper for Step 6 and 7 (up to eight pieces)

• Photocopy Related Resources:
  - Political Cartoon Analysis Handout
  - Political Cartoons (Note: Teacher must obtain these. See tips in Step 3)
  - Candidates and Issues Handout
  - Internet Pathfinder for Research: Resources for Candidates and Issues

**Reflection Prompt:** Anna writes, “I also learn the difficulties of the French political system, as the battle between the more conservative mindset, and more socialist approach continues.”

**Procedure:**

**Step 1:** Have students individually define the words “conservative” and “socialist” and then have a brief discussion about them as a class. This could also be done as a word association activity where students write words they associate with each term rather than a more formal definition. In the class discussion, try to ascertain whether there was any consensus about what the words meant or how they could be used as descriptors.

**Step 2:** Give each student (or pairs of students, if you have a large class) an index card with *either* a vocabulary word or a definition (listed in preparation section). Terms and definitions should be on different colored cards or written in different colored text to simplify the next directions. Have students with vocabulary cards place their terms appropriately on the chart on the board. When the students are done placing the terms on the board, have the students with definition cards place their definitions in the appropriate places. Discuss the chart – are the placements correct? Prompt the students to discuss whether the definitions and placements are static or dynamic. Do the placement and/or definitions depend at all on personal opinion or other factors?
Step 3: (Now that the terms (conservative, socialist) that Anna introduced us to in the reflection prompt have been defined and discussed, the discussion and class activities will turn to a conversation about the terms “liberal” and “conservative.”)

Distribute the Political Cartoon Analysis Handout (this is a 2-page sheet) for students use. Have the students fill in the definitions from the board chart for conservative and liberal, and then hand out the several (4-8) Political Cartoons.

*NOTE on choosing political cartoons: Obtain political cartoons reflecting positions typically regarded as more liberal-leaning or conservative-leaning. Teachers should use their judgment about students’ ability and interests, relevant community issues, and important current events of the day to help choose cartoons for this activity. In addition to hard copies for the students, try and provide overhead of LCD images of the cartoons for whole class discussion in Step 4.

Some suggested online sources of political cartoons are:
- [http://caglecartoons.com/](http://caglecartoons.com/) (categorizes the American cartoons as liberal or conservatives and also has world cartoons and is searchable)
- [http://editorialcartoonists.com/index.cfm#top](http://editorialcartoonists.com/index.cfm#top)
- a cartoon analysis guide from the library of congress - [http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/cag.html](http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/political_cartoon/cag.html)

Students will examine the political cartoons, recording them either on the conservative or liberal side of the paper. As they are doing this, they should identify both the issue and the position that is expressed by the cartoonist. Space has been created on the chart for this analysis.

*NOTE on instructional strategies: This part of the activity can be done in a variety of ways, depending on class size, resources, and student readiness. The teacher should model political cartoon analysis with the first cartoon and then have students deconstruct the remaining cartoons independently or in groups:
- students work independently, analyzing each of the cartoons on their own.
- students work independently, analyzing an assigned cartoon, and then coming together with the class to fill in the entire chart.
- students work in groups, analyzing each of the cartoons together in their group.

Step 4: When this individual or small group analysis of the cartoons is completed, the students should come together as a class and discuss their findings. The goal of the discussion is to formulate new political definitions for the terms conservative and liberal based on their analysis of the issues and policies within the cartoon pages. There is space for this on the second page of that student handout.
Step 5: Students will then use their understanding of these terms to examine the 2008 primary and presidential election. Divide the class into groups and assign each a political candidate from the list below. You may choose fewer than all 8, depending on your goals for this lesson, but be sure to choose a balance between the Republican and Democratic candidates. It will also be interesting to research candidates within parties who are more or less liberal or conservative on the issues.

- John McCain
- Mitt Romney
- Mike Huckabee
- Rudy Guliani
- Hillary Clinton
- Barack Obama
- John Edwards
- Dennis Kucinich

As a class, choose 3 issues from the list below:
- Immigration
- Abortion
- Health Care
- Iraq War
- Social Security
- Education
- Iran policy
- Tax policy
- Gay marriage
- Free trade
- Stem cell research
- Campaign finance reform

In the computer lab (or for homework), student should examine and summarize their assigned candidate’s position on each of the three chosen issues, recording it on the Candidates and Issues Handout. Another related handout is an Internet Pathfinder for Research on the candidates and issues. If you would prefer that your class do more independent research, simply copy the first page of the handout.

Step 6: When this research is completed and the students are back in class, the group should transcribe the information onto a large piece of chart paper, which should include the candidates name, party, and stance on the three issues. While the students are working, the teacher should draw a “political spectrum” on the board represented by a line with arrows at either end with the word “liberal” on the left and the word “conservative” on the right. When each group has transcribed their information to the chart paper, you are ready to move onto Step 7.
Step 7: Students will then very briefly report each candidate’s position on the issues to the group (it is recommended that you present issue by issue, rather than candidate by candidate). When the reporting is completed, students should begin debating and discussing where each candidate should fall on the political spectrum. This activity should be prefaced by a brief discussion that the placement may depend on which issues the class chose – remind students of your initial discussion of whether these terms are static or dynamic and urge them to let their decision be guided by your definitions of the terms conservative and liberal, not by their personal opinions. Lively debate should be encouraged!

Step 8: When consensus has been reached (to the extent that it is possible) or the discussion has died down, you can wrap-up the lesson with a personal reflection. This reflection could be done as a “madman” activity, where students write for 5 minutes without stopping, or could be assigned as a more structured, formal writing assignment. In the reflection, students should place themselves on the liberal-conservative continuum they have created as a class. It is up to the teacher to, either limit the students to the three chosen issues, or to open it up to other political issues that were not examined in class. This writing piece can be discussed or collected and graded.

Possible writing prompt: “On the political spectrum from liberal to conservative, my personal views are...”

Checking for Understanding:
- **Step 1 and 2**: Students will demonstrate understanding through their participation in the activity and discussion.
- **Step 3 and 4**: Students will demonstrate understanding of the political concepts and terms through completion of the cartoon analysis.
- **Step 5, 6, 7**: Students will demonstrate understanding through completion of the Candidates and Issues handout. The brief presentation of the issue summary will indicate their understanding of the research and issues. Students will demonstrate understanding of the political vocabulary through class discussion and creation of the political spectrum continuum.
- **Step 8**: Students will demonstrate their understanding of the terms conservative and liberal through their written reflection.

**Global Action Activity**: The right of political expression is not universally enjoyed. In many parts of the world, political dissidents – citizens and politicians alike – are threatened for speaking their minds. Visit the Amnesty International Website (http://www.amnesty.org/) to get involved in campaigns and appeals to support freedom of expression around the globe.
Extension Activities:

- Challenge students to examine whether Anna’s quotation from the reflection could be applied to other places around the world by examining international news sources. There is an excellent list of international news sources (many of them are available in English) at http://www.theorator.com/worldnews.html.
- After examining international news sources mentioned above, have a student discussion about political issues worldwide – to what extent were the issues international? What issues are national or regional? How and why do issues become global in scale?

Additional Resources:

- The Opposing Viewpoints Series (available as a database through subscription or as a print series) would be an outstanding resource for this project. Information can be found at http://www.gale.cengage.com/.
- For web resources, please refer to the student Candidate and Issues Handout.

Related OWEd Resources:

- **Unit Resource 1**: Previewing the Experience (France)
- **Unit Resource 2**: Understanding the Experience (France)
- **Unit Resource 3**: Culture Cube (France)
- **Unit Resource 4**: Reviewing the Experience (France)
- Where Do You Stand? Political Cartoon Analysis Handout
- Where Do You Stand? Candidates and Issues Handout
- Where Do You Stand? Internet Pathfinder for Research: Resources for Candidates and Issues