

## Lesson Plan: Analyzing Third Party Platforms

By Rachel Roberson

### Lesson opener

#### Quick write prompt:

Should there be more than two major political parties in the United States? Why or why not? What motivates Americans to join third parties and vote for their candidates, even though those candidates are almost never elected?



(Democracy Chronicles/Flickr)

*A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.*

### Objectives

- Students will compare and contrast platforms of America's three largest third parties, and discuss how those platforms differ from the Republican and Democratic parties.
- Students will identify issues they agree and disagree with, and develop arguments based on their own views.

### Essential Question and Lesson Context

**How do the views of the third parties differ from the two major parties? Where do the third parties stand on issues I care most about?**

Thanks in part to the overall lack of enthusiasm for this year's Republican and Democratic presidential candidates, some third party contenders are getting a bit more attention than usual. In this lesson, students will examine excerpts from the platforms of America's three biggest third parties - the Libertarian Party, the Green Party and the Constitution Party – learning where each party stands on major issues, and how those views differ from the positions held by the Republican and Democratic parties. Excerpts from each party platform are laid out in [this Lowdown post](#). Additionally, see [this side-by-side comparison](#) of Democratic and Republican stances on the same set of issues.

## Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Endorse (v.)	To formally support a candidate or an opinion, viewpoint or idea
Free market (n./adj.)	Refers to an economic system that is free from government rules, in which the prices for goods and services are determined by supply and demand. It is usually associated with more conservative economic views.
Intervention (n.)	The act of stopping an action or inserting one thing between another
Regulation (n.)	A rule or directive made and maintained by an authority.
Staunch (adj.)	Strong committed in attitude; typically used to describe a belief or viewpoint

## Activity

- Working in groups or individually, students choose one issue they care about, and read where each of the three third parties stand on that issue, either using the excerpts included in the Lowdown post or the platform document itself (also linked to in the post). Students then compare what they learned about the third parties to [the Democratic and Republican platforms](#).
  - Model:** As a class, browse The Lowdown’s platform summaries to see where each party stands on the issue of education. Model how you want the students to prepare for the upcoming discussion. For example, you may want students to write a one-sentence summary of each party’s stance on the issue.
- In writing or by annotating the documents online, students work in small groups to prepare sharing their responses to the following questions.

## Discussion questions

- Why did you choose your particular issue?
- Did any of the political party positions surprise you? Explain and cite examples to support your answer.

- Which party do you most agree with on your chosen issue? Cite examples from that party platform.
- Which political party would you join if you were registering to vote today, or would you choose “no party preference”? Why?

*Circle chats, small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.*

### Extension activities

- **Primary source annotation:** If they haven’t already, students explore the full sub-section of each party’s platform related to an issue of their choice. Using annotation platforms like [Hypothes.is](#), have students annotate the relevant sections of each party’s platform with their comments and suggestions. Get a [quick teacher tutorial](#) and [further resources](#) on the Hypothes.is site.
- **A national platform for your students’ voices:** Students make their voices heard on issues they care about by participating in [Letters to the Next President 2.0](#). This national initiative gives youth a platform to express their opinion about election issues that matter most to them. Teachers must sign up and get a group code that students can use to upload letters. For more resources and examples, see also KQED’s student video project, [My Backyard Campaign](#).

### Common Core standards

<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1</a>	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7</a>	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
<a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9</a>	Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take