

KidsPost and the 2012 Election

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KIDSPOST

Presidential debates



ILLUSTRATION BY ANDY WARD

What are President Barack Obama and his opponent, Mitt Romney, doing this weekend? They probably are studying for one of the biggest tests of their lives: the debates between the two candidates for president.

Debates — where people running for office are asked a lot of tough questions — have a long tradition in elections. Obama, a Democrat, and Romney, a Republican, will each try to make the case that he is the best candidate to be elected president on November 6.

Think of it as being like when you and your mother disagree about eating your peas. Each of you tries to

make an argument that supports your position and persuades the other person to see it your way. But the candidates won't be discussing vegetables. Instead, they will be asked about a lot of important issues, including the environment (science), the economy (math) and world governments (social studies). And all of this will happen on live television!

How do you win?

There is no easy trick to winning a debate of this kind. Debates have rules that both candidates agree on. For example, a moderator, who is kind of like a referee, will ask questions and Obama and Romney will only have a minute or two to respond. ▶▶▶

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On top of all of this, the millions of voters watching the debate are the judges. Once the debates are over, they can decide which candidate is better and vote for that person on Election Day. In that way, watching a debate can be like watching "American Idol."

Many people listen to the way the candidates answer the questions to see whether they agree with them. But voters also react to how each candidate makes them feel. People vote for a lot of reasons. And it has been said that when Americans choose a president, they are picking the person they would most like to have in their homes (via television) for the next four years.

To win, Romney and Obama have to give smart answers and also get voters to like them as people.

Debate disasters

In a debate, neither candidate wants to make a big mistake. In a 1976 debate, Gerald Ford, who was president at that time, said that the Soviet Union, then one of the most powerful countries in the world, was not bullying the countries near it. Most experts disagreed with Ford, and some people think he lost the election because of that one statement.

In 1980, Jimmy Carter, who was trying to win a second term as president, said that he had talked to his 13-year-old daughter about the biggest problems in the world. "I had a discussion with my daughter, Amy, the other day, before I came here, to ask her what the most important issue was," Carter said. "She said she thought nuclear weaponry, and the control of nuclear arms." Many people weren't comfortable with the idea of the president getting advice from his teenage



On Oct. 28, 1980, President Jimmy Carter, left, and candidate Ronald Reagan shake hands in Cleveland, Ohio, before debating before a nationwide television audience.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

daughter — even if she was right.

People who follow politics think one of the best debaters was Ronald Reagan, who often found ways to turn negative questions into jokes. When asked in a 1984 debate whether at age 73 he was too old to be president, Reagan said: "I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience." Even his opponent, former

Vice President Walter Mondale, who was 56 at the time, smiled. Reagan won the election easily.

Historic debates

Debates can be important historically. You will learn about them in social studies. For example, the Lincoln-Douglas debates refer to the debates between Abraham Lincoln and his opponent, Stephen Douglas, when both were running for the U.S. Senate in 1858. In those debates, Lincoln argued that slavery was wrong. (You might find this interesting: Lincoln lost the Senate election, but he was elected president in 1860.)

Obama and Romney will have their first of three debates Wednesday at 9 p.m. The two candidates for vice president (Democrat Joe Biden, who is currently the vice president, and Paul Ryan, a Republican congressman) will have one debate.

You may want to ask your parents to stay up late to watch at least one of the debates. Who knows? In the future, other kids may be reading about these debates in their history books.

— Krissah Thompson

September 30, 2012

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Hold Your Own Debate

You don't have to be a presidential candidate to have a debate. You can stage a debate of your own in your classroom or even your own home. Pick an issue where there are two clear sides. (For example: Should there be homework on weekends? Should middle schoolers get recess time? Do you always have to eat all your vegetables in order to get dessert?)

Before you start your debate, ask your classmates (or family members) how they feel on the issue. After the debate, see if they hold the same position or if they've changed their minds.

Here are some tips that might help make you a winning debater.

- Research the issue. If, for example, you're going to make the argument that middle schoolers should have recess because they need the exercise, make sure you can talk about the benefits of exercise and the problem of childhood obesity.
- Guess what the other side will say. In a debate, the idea is to convince people that you have the correct position. If you think that the anti-recess side will argue that the time could be better spent learning math facts, you will be able to claim that 20 minutes of exercise is more valuable than 20 more minutes in the classroom.
- Use humor. It's important to have the facts, but people may be more likely to support your position if they like you. Making them laugh is a good way to make them like you.

Some Debatable Words

Argument: The point of view or side of the issue that a debater takes.

Contradict: Presenting an opposing point of view. This might be introduced with phrases such as: "I have to disagree with your point," "Although our opponent makes a vigorous argument, we disagree," "There's no proof that ...," "On the contrary."

Debate: Respectful, well reasoned argument over opposing points of view

Moderator: The individual who presides over a debate or forum. This person asks the questions to be answered, makes sure the rules are kept, insures each person receives equal time to present his or her ideas, and maintains order in the audience.

Opponent: The person with the opposite point of view or from the other political party

Persuade: Cause someone to believe or accept your point of view through reasoning or argument. In political debates, this ability could result in a vote.

Position: The argument or point of view taken

Think About Debate

Read “Presidential Debates” and answer the first four questions.

1. How many debates will President Obama and his opponent Mitt Romney have?
2. If you were the moderator of one of the debates, what three questions would you ask both Mitt Romney and President Obama?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. How many debates will be held between the candidates for vice president?
4. Why is it important to get to know the candidates for vice president?

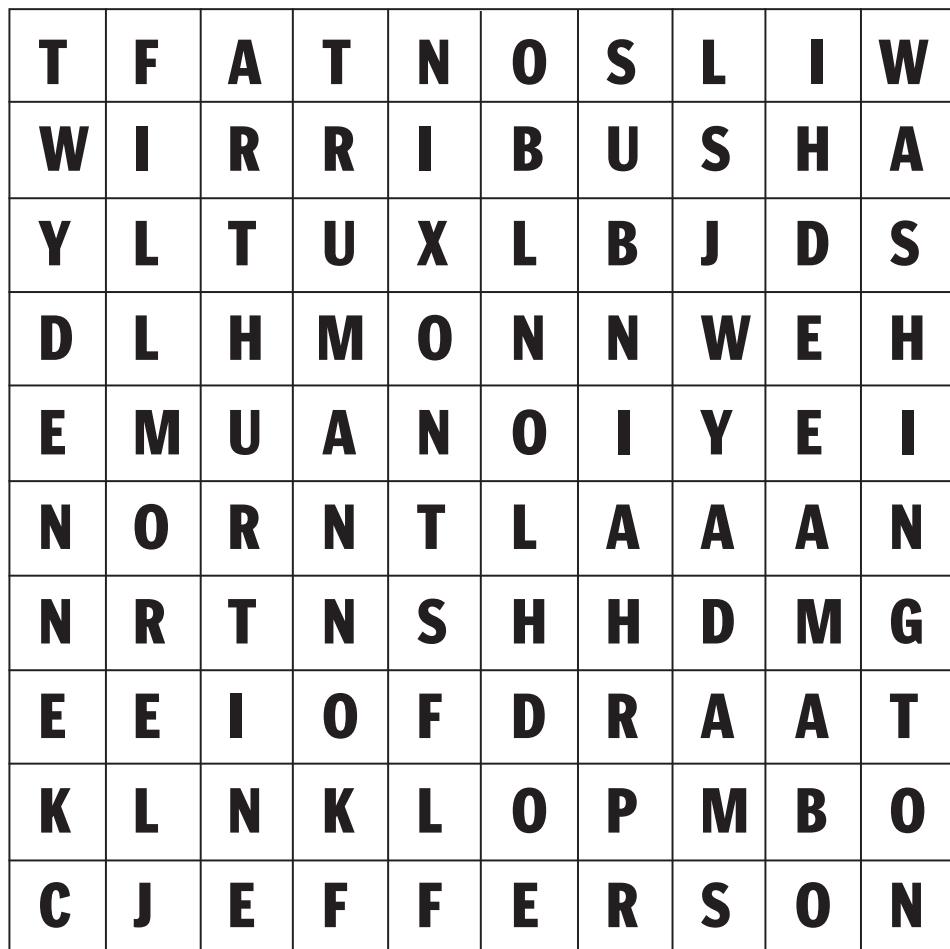
Read “Hold your own debate.”

5. Using the three suggestions that are given, how would you handle the arguments for one of these topics:
 - a. Our school needs more computers.
 - b. Recess time should be longer.
 - c. New students need a “Big Sister” or “Big Brother” assigned to them.
 - d. Should a committee of students handle disrespectful student behavior?
 - e. Are political candidates wise to invest so much money in campaign ads?
 - f. Does signing an anti-bullying pledge help to stop bullying?

Find the President

United States voters have elected presidents, from George Washington to Barack Obama, to lead and serve this country. You are to find 20 names and initials related to some of these American presidents. They are found reading left to right, right to left, up and down and on the diagonal. Some of the words share letters.

Adams	FDR	LBJ	Polk
Arthur	Fillmore	Jefferson	Taft
Bush	Ford	Kennedy	TR
Clinton	Hayes	Nixon	Truman
DE	HH	Obama	Washington



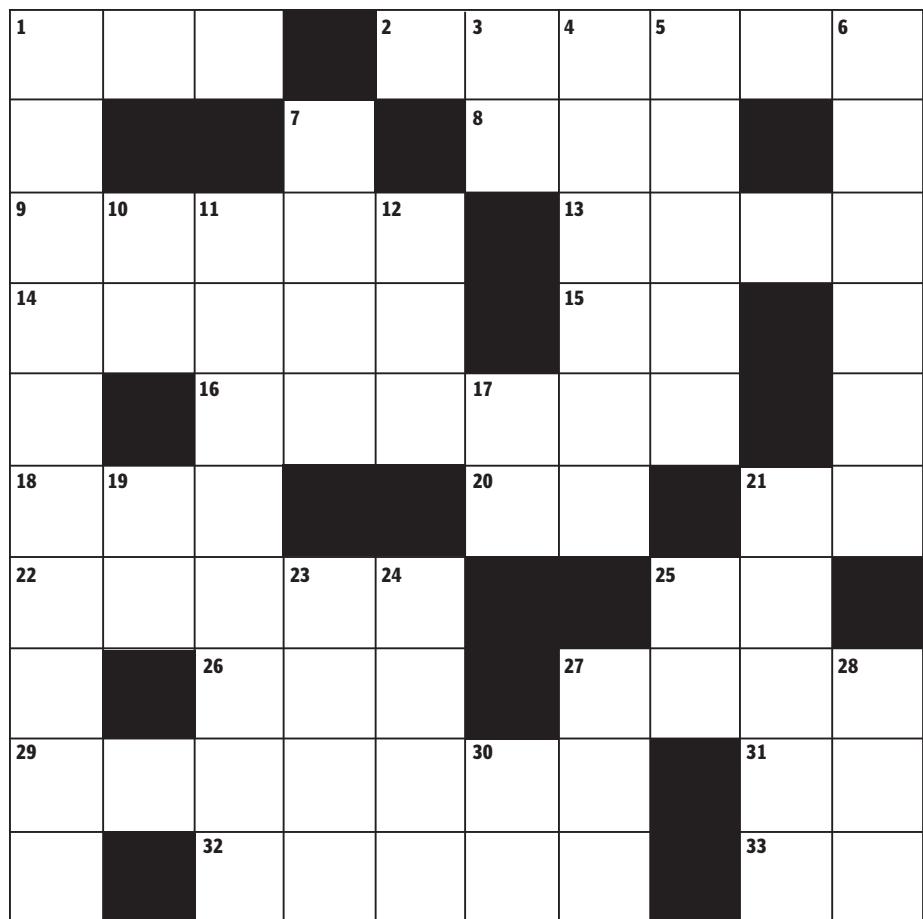
BONUS: Find the president who was elected in 1912.

Running for Office

Many of the terms in this crossword puzzle are related to elections. See if you can make the connection. After you have completed the crossword, use six or more of the words in a short piece about running for office.

ACROSS

1. There are blue states and _____ states.
2. Direct the policies and affairs of a country.
8. A reliable Internet source for data is _____.
9. The person who contributes to a campaign.
13. A political party that wants to attract people with diverse points of view is said to gather them under a big _____.
14. Internet message sent to voters
15. FDR's wife and first lady
16. Presidents are included in the Library of Congress's American _____ project.
18. Prefix meaning three
20. Four generations who were a vice president, U.S.
21. When asked if she would run for office, she said, "I'm _____."
22. Speaks in a loud or aggressive way
25. _____ Grant, general and U.S. president
26. Area of Interest (abbrev.)
27. Assistant (abbrev.)
29. Person who is born in or naturalized by a country
31. Unlimited Access (abbrev.)
32. Choose someone by a vote
33. Environmental Protection (abbrev.)



DOWN

1. Act of redrawing the boundaries of jurisdiction after each census
3. Outgoing (abbrev.)
4. People who elect someone to office
5. All or each member of a group
6. A community of people who live in a defined territory, organized under a single government
7. Really like someone
10. Opposite of off
11. Suggest someone for an elected office
12. Rapid eye movement (abbrev.)
17. Office of Administration (abbrev.)
19. Research Assistant (abbrev.)
21. Topic of concern or debate
23. Work
24. Amount or scope; count the _____ of a rally
25. United States, initially
27. Industrious insect
28. To select or appoint someone for office
30. Executive Committee (abbrev.)



A Word About Elections

When you elect a student body officer or class president, you are exercising a practice that goes back to early Greece and Rome. Public and religious leaders such as popes and Holy Roman emperors were elected to their offices. Elections as we know them with public engagement happened much later when representative governments were formed.

The etymology of “election” goes back to Middle English. The words “elect” and “election” (*electen*) are from the Latin *eligere* that is formed from *legere-*, meaning to gather, select or read. To the root add the prefix *ex-* to form elect (*ex- + legere*) meaning to choose from or to select out. Elections today are organized events with rules in which people are chosen to hold public office.

During primaries, citizens are deciding for whom to vote. They are looking for an electable candidate as well as someone who shares their political views. This is the person who has the qualities that make one a good choice for public office.

If you give someone your vote, you hope to elect your choice for student government officer or to a public office. If the winners are not installed in office yet, they are a secretary-elect or president-elect.

MATCHING. The root word “elect” is found in verbs, nouns and adjectives. It is used in common and proper nouns. Below are some of the words formed with the root word elect. Pair the term in the left column with its definition found in the right column.

- ____ 1. Election Day
- ____ 2. Electioneer
- ____ 3. Elective
- ____ 4. Elector
- ____ 5. Electoral College
- ____ 6. Electorate

- A. All officially qualified voters within a given country or area or for a given election
- B. Chosen by a vote; concerned with voting; optional rather than compulsory
- C. The day designated by law for the purpose of electing people to public office. In the United States, it is the Tuesday after the first Monday in November in even-numbered years.
- D. In the U.S., the formal body elected by voters to choose the President and Vice President
- E. Somebody who votes or is entitled to vote in an election; a member of an electoral college or the Electoral College
- F. To take an active role in an election campaign; to attempt to win votes in an election by being insincere and unscrupulous (negative connotation and denotation)

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TOM TOLES



September 7, 2012

thumbnails | *Photographs Tell a Campaign Story*

Photographers and reporters attempt to capture campaign events and the candidates' ideas and expressions — vocal and visual. The words and images appear on the printed page and on television, in photo galleries, websites and blogs, and campaign ads.

Carefully look at the four photographs. What do they reveal about the event? Who is present? What is the story that each photograph captures?



NIKKI KHAN/THE WASHINGTON POST



MARVIN JOSEPH/THE WASHINGTON POST



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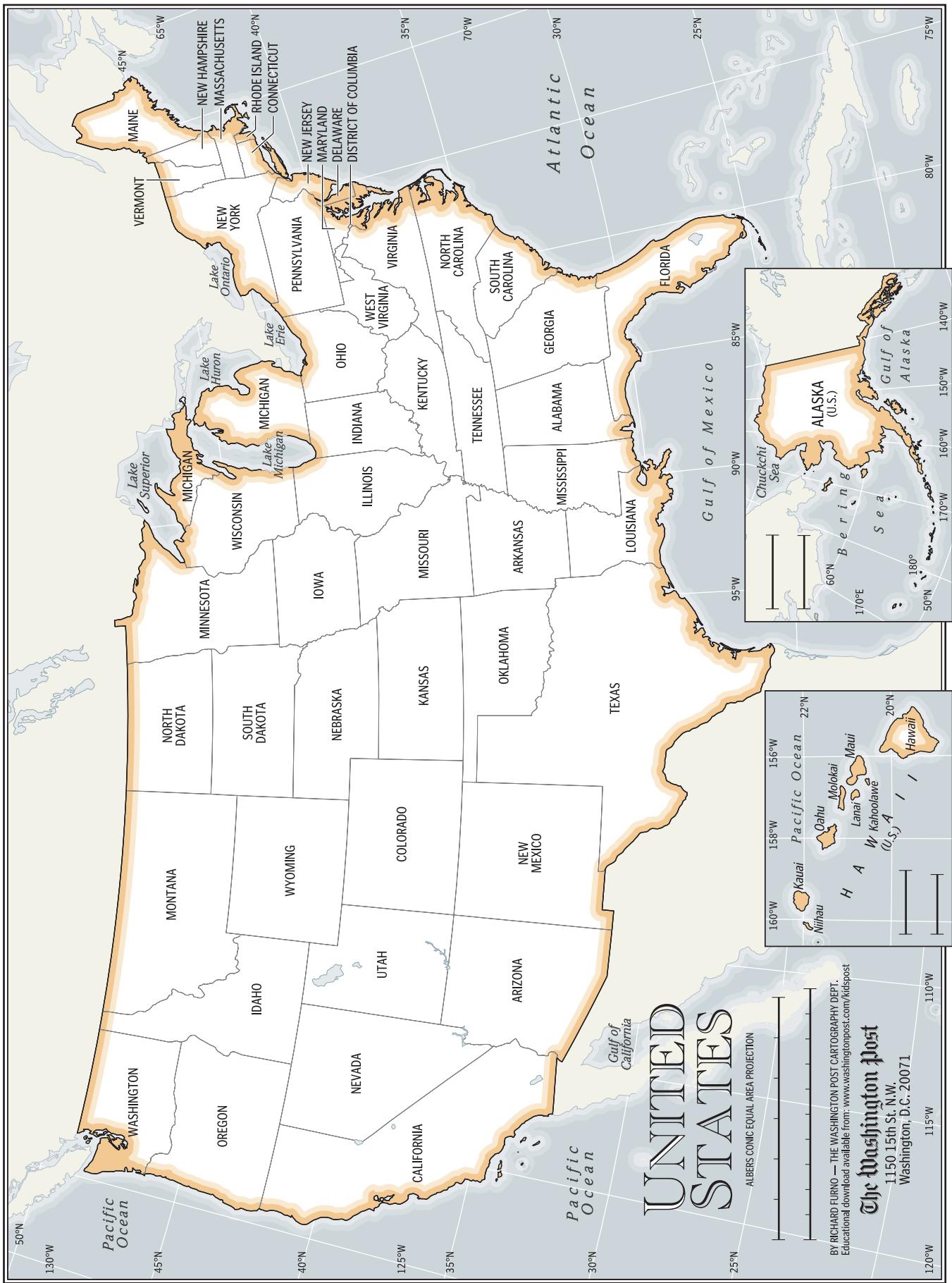
COURTESY MITTROMNEY.COM



Use the e-Replica thumbnail feature to view all the photographs in one day's issue of *The Washington Post*. Identify the pictures that cover election events and the candidates.

- How many election photographs are in that day's *Washington Post*?
- How many are of Republican candidates? How many are of Democratic candidates?
- How many are candid photographs? How many are portrait or head shots?
- Select a photograph that best relates the story. Write a paragraph that explains what the story is and how the photographer captures it well.

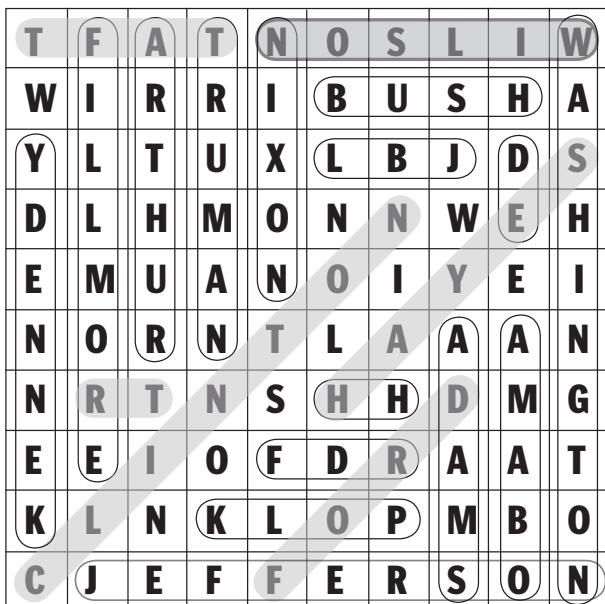
Name _____ Date _____



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ANSWERS. *Think About Debate*

1. Three debates will be held between President Obama and Mitt Romney.
2. Answers will vary.
3. One debate will be held between vice presidential candidates Paul Ryan and Joe Biden.
4. Answers may include: The vice president has constitutional duties, advises and assists the president perform duties, and represents the United States. If something were to happen to the president, the vice president would become president.
5. Answers will vary. See that students understand that facts should be included when possible. For example, where will they put the computers and who will pay for them. Acknowledging the opponent's position and countering is a good strategy. Share examples of the use of humor.

ANSWERS. *Find the President***ANSWERS.** *Running For Office*

BONUS: Woodrow Wilson was elected in 1912.

ANSWERS. *Photographs Tell a Campaign Story*

Photograph 1: The usually formal GOP presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, dresses down at a rally in South Carolina. This illustrates relating to one's audience. Also illustrated is the use of endorsement by well-liked local politicians; in this case, Gov. Nikki Haley. Note the American flag and abundant apples.

Photograph 2: September 26, 2012, President Obama at a rally in Ohio, a battleground state. He is at Kent State University; illustrating the importance of getting younger voters in a swing state. Note his rolled-up sleeves and U.S. flag.

Photograph 3: Sixty-nine-year-old Joseph Biden meets at a senior center in Florida, a swing state. Although he wears his suit and dress shirt, he has removed his tie for a respectful yet informal talk. Note the American flag remains a consistent symbol at these rallies.

Photograph 4: At a rally, the youthful vice presidential candidate, Paul Ryan, does not wear a tie and rolls up his sleeves. "Believe in America" encapsulates the Romney-Ryan Plan for Jobs and Economic Growth.

ANSWERS. *A Word About Elections*

1. c; 2. f; 3. b; 4. e; 5. d; 6. a