Intro - Project Vote Smart Scavenger Hunt

Standards: National Council for the Social Studies
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
NCSS 5: Individuals, Groups and Institutions

Objectives:
SWBAT (students will be able to) describe and give examples of what partisan and nonpartisan mean.
SWBAT summarize a US senator's speech and explain if they agree with his/her position.
SWBAT research a US senator and find non-partisan information.
SWBAT form opinions on political issues and defend them in writing.

Subject Matter:
Nonpartisanship, Project Vote Smart, Web Navigation, US Government, Special Interest Groups, Campaign Funding

Materials:
- Laptops/computers/access to internet
- Scavenger hunt worksheet
- Chalk board/white board
- Pen/pencil

Procedure: (1 hr - 1 hr 30 mins)
Set:
1. The teacher will write the word "nonpartisan" on the board and ask students to define the word.
2. If students cannot define the word, ask them to look up the definition on their phones or in a dictionary.
3. Ask students to write synonyms or related words on the board around the word "nonpartisan".

Lesson Essential Question: What are some advantages or disadvantages of being nonpartisan?

Jesse Fischer, 2016

PVS Web Scavenger Hunt:
1. Pass out the Project Vote Smart Scavenger hunt worksheet to students.
2. Explain to students they will be working in pairs (every student still has to turn in a worksheet) in order to become familiar with Vote Smart's website by working through the scavenger hunt.
3. Ask students to go to votesmart.org. From here prompt students to follow the directions on the worksheet to complete the scavenger hunt.
4. The teacher will monitor student progress by walking around the classroom and answering questions/making sure students are on task.

Class Discussion:
1. When the majority of students are finished, go over the worksheet as a class. Ask students if they think the website is useful - why or why not? Ask students about their senators and what interested them most about the site.
2. Ask students if they think the website is nonpartisan - why or why not?
3. Explain to students how the website tries to be nonpartisan. It is because the organization only uses primary sources from the candidates themselves. They do not put a 'spin' on any of the information, and do not use secondary sources.
4. Ask students if they can think of other nonpartisan organizations. If not, ask them to look some up.
5. Compare Vote Smart to other nonpartisan organizations by comparing and contrasting them on the board.

Close:
1. Ask students what it means to be nonpartisan, and ask them why that is important.
2. Explain that it is helpful to receive unbiased information so that people can get an accurate portrayal of events, information, and the world around them. It is also important to see multiple perspectives on one issue in an unbiased way to form your own opinion and reach your own conclusions.

Assessment:
Collect student worksheets for a participation grade.

Self Reflection:

Project Vote Smart Scavenger Hunt

Name:_____

Date: _____

Directions: You and a partner will be given about 30 minutes to work through this scavenger hunt. You will be exploring a website that collects data on public officials and people running for office in the United States. Start out by going to votesmart.org.

1. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and under 'Government and Officials' select the link 'Offices & Officials'. Under 'Office Type', select *Congressional.* Then select the state you live in, and under the 'Chamber' drop down select *Upper.* Who are your Senators?

A. _____ B. _____

Circle the senator above that you would like to research. Then click on that senator on the website. Now you are on your senator's profile. From here find the following information:

    A. What is your senator's Washington D.C. office address?

    _____

    B. What is his or her office phone number?

    _____

    C. What kind of social media sites does s/he have?

    _____

    D. Click on the link to your senator's Washington D.C. website, find what committees s/he currently serves on, and list 3 of them here:

    1. _____ 2. _____3. _____

Now Click on the folder marked 'Bio' at the top and answer the following:

      1. What is the highest degree your senator has achieved (GED, Bachelor, Masters, Doctorate)? What university or high school did s/he get it from?

      _____

      _____

      2. List one other interesting fact you found on the 'Bio' page:

      _____

At the top of the page, click on the 'Votes' folder and answer the following questions:

      1. What was the most recent bill your senator has voted on? Please include the bill title and bill number.

      Number: _____

      Title: _____

      2. In your own words, and in a sentence or two, what is this Senate bill about?

      3. Did this bill pass in the Senate? What was the vote count?

            Yes or No (circle one)
            Vote Count: _____

      4. How did your senator vote on this bill? Do you agree with his/her decision? Explain in a sentence or two.

Now click on the 'Positions' folder at the top of the page.

      1. You will see a series of questions. Pick two that are important to you and describe the position of your senator on these issues.

            Issue: _____

            Issue: _____

      2. In a sentence, describe why your senator supports, or doesn't support, the issue:

Click on the 'Ratings' folder and use the drop down menu to pick one issue that is important to you.

      1. What issue did you select? _____

      2. Name at least two special interest groups (SIGs) that rated your senator on this issue.

      _____

      _____

      3. What rating did these groups give your senator?

      _____

      4. Explain what these ratings mean to you. Why do you think SIGs exist?

Click on the 'Speeches' folder at the top of the page, then using the drop down menu, choose one issue that is important to you:

1. Choose one of the speech transcripts that sounds interesting to you, read it, and summarize the speech in a paragraph with at least 4 sentences.

2. Do you agree with what your senator said? Why or why not? Explain in 2 to 3 sentences.

Finally, click on the 'Funding' folder and answer the following:

1. How much money did your senator raise in the most recent election listed?

_____

2. Who were the top contributors to his or her campaign? List the top 3 and what those companies or contributors are/do.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Do any of the contributors surprise you? Why or why not?

4. What industries contributed the most? List the top 3.

_____ _____

_____

5. Why do you think the top industry funds so much of their campaign? Explain in 2 to 3 sentences.

Click the link that says "Data provided by OpenSecrets.org" and answer the following:
1. Scroll down to the graphs 'Total Raised vs. Average Raised' – In which years was the most money raised? Why is the amount of money raised in some years more than others?

2. Just below that, there is a pie chart. Which type of donor gave the largest contributions? Who is paying for the most of this political campaign?

3. On the right hand side there is a section titled 'Fundraising Events' – what kind of events does this campaign use to fundraise?

4. What Political Action Committees (PACs) contributed to this campaign? How much did they contribute? How does that compare to other contributions that aren't from PACs? Do they contribute more or less?

Do you think this information is useful to voters? Why or why not? Explain in a few sentences.