



POLITICAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

(30 minutes out of class; ten minutes in class)

OBJECTIVE

Students interview an adult to learn firsthand about the American democratic experience.

MATERIALS

Political History Interview Questions handout

GET READY

- ✓ Make a copy of the *Political History Interview Questions* for each student participating.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Ask students, *How can we best learn about American democracy and our country's history?* Students may respond with ideas like books, films, etc. If they don't mention it, say: *People are the greatest resource in our country. Could you imagine what a 100-year-old American could tell you? What do you think are some of the experiences he/she could talk about?* Listen to responses.
- ✓ Inform your students that they will be conducting primary research by going right to the source to learn about American democracy. Explain to them that they will be conducting interviews.
- ✓ Have your students interview an adult at least 50 years old, but older if possible. Preferably this person is from their own family.
- ✓ Have your students choose a predetermined amount of questions from the handout, and then write down or tape-record the answers from the interviews.

- ✓ Students should consider the responses given to them by their interviewee and present them in written form. They can transcribe their interview if they have it on audiotape. They can write a story representing one of the best responses they heard (they can ask their interviewee for help in capturing the details of the story). Additionally, they may document the contents of the interview in a written summary.
- ✓ Students can share their documents with the class.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *What did you learn about your interviewee's experience in America?*
- ★ *What did you learn about America?*
- ★ *What were you surprised to learn from your interviewee?*
- ★ *Did you hear anything that made you feel proud?*
- ★ *How do you think your political history will be similar to the person you interviewed? Different?*



POLITICAL HISTORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

From *To Our Children's Children*, Bob Greene and D.G. Fulford

- ★ Which president did you admire most in your lifetime? Which president who lived before your time?
- ★ Do you have a strong party alliance? Have you ever worked on a campaign? Have you ever worked at a polling place?
- ★ Which domestic problems are utmost in your town today? How have you noticed them first-hand? Do homeless people populate the library or doughnut shop? Are there a lot fewer help-wanted ads in the newspaper than there used to be?
- ★ Where do you go to vote? Do you see the same people every year?
- ★ What have been your causes over the years? How have you worked for them?
- ★ What do you do about issues that bother you?
- ★ Did you ever wear campaign buttons or use bumper stickers? Which campaign slogans stick in your mind? Which ones do you remember from your growing-up years?
- ★ Have you ever gone against popular opinion or beliefs politically? Has this caused you any problems?
- ★ Have you ever seen racial injustice firsthand? Have you ever been the target of prejudice?
- ★ What do you see as our country's most pressing problem today?
- ★ Is there a government policy that you strongly disagree with? Do you think the welfare system is run correctly? Are your Social Security benefits what you think they should be?
- ★ Do you follow the local goings-on in city government?
- ★ Are you on first-name terms with any of the local politicians? Are they bright and knowledgeable? Are they as capable as the people who used to run local government?
- ★ Has there been a case of corruption or scandal that has rocked your town? Were you surprised when it came to light?
- ★ Did you ever run for office? Did you win? How did you campaign?
- ★ Do you own a flag? Do you display it?
- ★ Do you mostly vote for losers or winners?
- ★ Did you like Ike?
- ★ Did you ever march for or against anything? Was this acceptable to your family? What finally made you decide to take your stance?
- ★ Where were you when Franklin Roosevelt died? When John F. Kennedy was shot? Robert Kennedy? Martin Luther King, Jr.?
- ★ Do you feel the same way about politics and politicians as you did when you first became old enough to vote?
- ★ What do you think was America's grandest national moment in your lifetime? America's lowest national moment?
- ★ Have you ever seen a president in person? Where? What was it like?
- ★ What direction do you think the country is going in today? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the nation's future?
- ★ How does being an American feel different from the way it felt 40 years ago?