



Diversity in the National Curriculum - Citizenship

Using the American election '08 to inform Citizenship learning and teaching

Citizenship education is about the political empowerment of young people. It is about building their sense of agency to influence and impact on the world around them – challenging and changing the institutions that govern it. Deptford Green School, specialist school for Citizenship, 2008

Rationale



The 2008 American presidential elections have just taken place. We have therefore chosen to focus this month on the teaching of diversity through Citizenship, because Citizenship depends upon harnessing relevant and

contemporary events of political significance to enable students to question, investigate and, if appropriate, change their worlds.

Students are interested: they know about the US elections because, more than anything, they know about Barack Obama – a figure who has transcended boundaries of traditional politics and brought it into common consciousness. Because of this, his campaign, the election race, his election as the first Black-American President of the United States, and the American context in which it is embedded provide great stimulus to explore many of the themes that underpin the secondary curriculum for Citizenship in the UK.



The intention of this article is to provide stimuli for teachers looking to teach diversity through Citizenship education.

What's happening?

The 2008 American election and the inauguration of Barack Obama as President of the United States of America is a hugely historical development with massive global significance offering insights into politics, power and race in the 21st century.



The Barack Obama 'phenomenon' has been described as a feat of 'political entrepreneurship' that has seized the moment and built a

'movement' the like of which has never been seen in American, or indeed international, political history. It is the number of people actively involved in this campaign that is truly groundbreaking.

Evidence of this groundswell of participation can be found in record-breaking attendance at rallies, the number of newly registered and early voters, and unprecedented fundraising success based on the small contributions of many.

The Obama campaign has generated support from across America's political, socio-economic and racial spectrum. But how much does Obama's 'post-racial candidacy' really tell us about racial progress in America today? Particularly when the modern realities of America's racial landscape are evident in the media and the negative-campaigning of some.

What themes and aspects are useful? The following are suggested access points for investigation in the Citizenship classroom.

Diversity of ideas, beliefs, cultures and identities

- **Evaluating 'nationalism'**. Nationalism is a common theme during elections in both the USA and the UK, and many important learning points can be explored. Suggested questions include: Is nationalism a good thing? Can nationalism be used as a guise for xenophobia and hate? Are there examples of this in history? Why is the labelling as 'other' so powerful? What do people/political groups stand to gain from it? The negative campaigning of both parties, particularly the 'pro-American' labelling from Sarah Palin provides rich resource for such discussion. Such 'politics of division' are, claims Joe Biden, vice-President elect, designed to polarise Americans into a 'with us or against us' dichotomy, the implicit message being that those voting for the





Democrats are somehow less patriotic and somehow less American. Questioning how the media can be harnessed to achieve such campaign ends can develop students' understanding of the role of the media in society. Students

could be asked to create their own negative or positive campaigns using a range of media to demonstrate understanding.

- **Assessing racism in the US and the UK.** The American elections give us an opportunity to investigate racial progress in the USA as a comparison to the UK. Questions you could explore with your class include: Could a story similar to that of Barack Obama happen in the UK? Could the UK have a black prime minister? What would be the challenges?



- **Redefining Identities.** Obama's speech on race in America (18 March 2008, Philadelphia) - www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrp-v2tHaDo - was seen by many as a triumphant attempt to explain



the roots and complexities of America's racial landscape, bearing testimony to his own, and the nation's, multiple identities. He invoked the self-confessed racism of his white grandmother and spoke of the sometimes bigoted dis-

course in African-America's barbershop subculture. According to journalist Andrew Sullivan, 'he was not merely being white and black; he was being ghetto black and Ivy League black, upscale black and downscale black, middle-class black and underclass black.' The 2008 elections and the successful candidacy of Barack Obama, raise many interesting questions about race and identity including; How important is being mixed-race to his success? Has Barack Obama changed the common conception of 'Blackness'? What is 'Blackness'?

- **Investigating the impact of race on participation.** Much has been written about the divergent levels of engagement across different groups in society. Using evidence from the USA to complement and contrast to the UK could lead to interesting discussion and learning. Questions could

include: Who is more likely to vote for whom? Why? What does Barack Obama mean when he claims to have run a 'post-racial candidacy'? Is this possible in either the UK or the USA? Why did he use this language? (Some have questioned whether his racial identity and claims to a 'post-racial candidacy' mean that now he is elected he will ignore issues around race – leading to speculation that he may not be 'black-enough'.)

- **Evaluating the context.** There is considerable debate both in America and across the world as to how important the contextual factors in current American and global history are to Barack Obama's success. Events do not happen in a vacuum and students should be encouraged to assess within context. Suggested questions include: Why was it considered the right time for Obama to be running as the democratic nominee? Have economic problems overridden racial concerns? How much does this election tell us about racial progress in America today?

Democracy and government

- Rights and responsibilities of citizens.

Participation in a democracy is a political, legal and human right in both the USA and UK. Voting is one form of action individuals can take to influence decisions affecting their communities at a local, national and global level.

Democracy is a key concept and features in the range and content for KS3 & 4 Citizenship.

- Comparing systems of election in the USA and UK.

A comparative study between the key features of democratic systems in two countries can aid understanding.

Possible questions include: What does it take to win the US election/UK election? What are the similarities and difference between Presidential and Parliamentary systems of democracy? Which is 'fairer' and why?



- **Evaluating the importance of participation.** Possible questions to stimulate discussion of the importance of participation include: When have a 'few votes' made a difference? Draw out examples of past close elections (e.g. USA 2000, New Mexico 2004). What is a 'marginal' constituency/state? Why

is so much emphasis placed on these key constituencies/states during an election campaign? Barack Obama's campaign spent huge sums of money on advertising as a way to encourage voter participation, particularly in traditionally Republican strongholds.

- Analysing voter turnout in the USA and UK



It is believed that more than 130 million Americans voted - more than in any election since 1960. Suggested questions for comparative analysis of the UK

and USA include: Which country has the higher percentage voter turnout? What is the breakdown of voters in both countries in terms of gender/race/age/socio-economic/geography? Why might this be the case? What could this tell us about the country and its people?

The media and society

The 2008 American election has generated a media frenzy; few events in recent times have been so widely covered at a global level. Consequently there are rich resources available for analysis of the role of the media in informing and influencing public opinion and holding those in power to account. Analysis of the media provides interesting insights into public opinion in the USA and across the world, and coverage of the American elections demonstrates how the media can be accessed and utilised by those with power. There has been particular emphasis on race and identity in the media coverage during the run-up to the election which can be used in the teaching of diversity through Citizenship.

- Investigating the influence of the media.

Possible questions include: How can the media be used to represent identities? How can the media be used to motivate an emotional response, particularly



feared. The front cover of *The New Yorker*, entitled 'The Politics of Fear' (www.newyorker.com/online/covers/slideshow_blittcovers) depicting Obama as a Muslim terrorist and his wife as a black panther, is a contentious learning resource that could be used to open discussions around why the media has cho-

sen to represent the characters in this way and what impact it may have had on public opinion?

- Exploring media ownership in the USA and UK. It is crucial that students understand the political nature of the media and are able to explore the connection between opinion and ownership.

Suggested questions include: How 'politicised' is the media? Who 'owns' the media? Which media groups align themselves with which political parties? How does this affect their coverage of events? And how far do Rupert Murdoch's political persuasions influence this broadcaster, and media outlets in the UK.

Much of the 'liberal' mainstream media in the USA has been supportive of Obama's race for the Presidency and for the last few months many have been suggesting that the only reason he wouldn't win would be racism on the part of the American voting public. This approach raises a number of questions pertaining to influence: To what extent could this have made people feel they had to vote for Obama or risk being labelled as racist? Another interesting point to examine is whether the American media was 'too subjective' in their support for and coverage of Obama, and to what extent this could affect the media's ability to effectively hold the newly elected President to account.

- Exploring editorial news values. An appreciation of the motives behind editorial decisions adds depth and sophistication to students' understanding of the media in society.



Access is offered by the following questions: What stories are (and are not) used/published? For example, the 'terrorist fist-jab' coverage from Fox News. Why are certain stories chosen? What impact can they have on public opinion? How does this tie in or reflect the political allegiances of the media?

The election of Barack Obama as the President of the United States of America will have a profound impact on the US. Justine Webb of the BBC claims the American people have made two fundamental statements about themselves: that they are profoundly unhappy with the status quo, and that they are slamming the door on the country's racial past. In the words of the President-elect: 'It's been a long time coming, but tonight... change has come to America.'



We will watch with interest how this change impacts on America's relationship with its own people and the rest of the world.

still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer. Barack Obama, 4 November 2008

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who

Ruth Fairclough
Citizenship Teacher

Additional Resources

The **Real Histories Directory** has a number of resources that might be of help to teachers wishing to introduce more diversity to their teaching of Citizenship.

The British Library's **21st Century Citizen** site (<http://21citizen.co.uk/live/citizenship/>) provides a stimulating and contemporary collection of online resources to support the new Citizenship curriculum for students aged 11-16 in the UK. The Library invites teachers and secondary school students to participate in shaping the website by trialling the resources and contributing material of their own. Opportunities to contribute include taking part in polls and surveys, sharing ideas through the Showcase and Case Study areas and writing topical editorials. The Library's **Food Stories** interactive site (www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/foodstories/index.html) is aimed at KS3 and KS4 Citizenship and Geography students. You can use it to trace the amazing changes that have taken place in the UK's food culture over the last century. Play with colourful animations and listen to audio interviews from the British Library Sound Archive to investigate the ways in which food relates to identity, cultural diversity, the environment, technology, farming, shopping, travel and much more.

The **Citizenship Foundation** (www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk) aims to empower individuals to engage in the wider community through education about the law, democracy and society. It focuses particularly on developing young people's citizenship skills, knowledge and understanding.

The Runnymede Collection Teaching Resource (www.mdx.ac.uk/runnymede/teaching/Home.htm) has been designed to support the Citizenship Curriculum, Key Skill levels 3 and 4, and for those with an interest in Black history. The material used is drawn from sources in the Runnymede Collection at Middlesex University.

An Oxfam Global Citizenship Guide, **Teaching Controversial Issues** (<http://publications.oxfam.org.uk/>) is full of strategies and activities to help teachers tackle controversial issues in the classroom.

Citizenship Education: The Global Dimension (www.dea.org.uk/uploads/4453d22a64a184b4f76a113996448fcf/dea_citizenship_education.pdf) is a practical guidance booklet exploring what is meant by the global dimension across all areas of the Citizenship curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4. It sets out a global dimension to the new Citizenship programmes of study, looks in depth at the three strands of citizenship: political literacy, social and moral responsibility, and community involvement. It also discusses teaching and learning methods and provides teaching ideas and starting points for teachers and pupils.

Jcore's **Educational Postcards: Equality, Justice, Prejudice and Generosity** (www.jcore.org.uk/) is a series of ten postcards designed for use by years 5 and 6. They can be used to stimulate a wide range of activities that link the QCA schemes of work. They can be used to discuss active citizenship and ways to promote understanding and making the world a better place. The postcards can be ordered with teachers' activities on the back or blank. The postcards directly relate to the QCA PSHE units 5 and 7: Living in a Diverse Society and Children's Rights - Human Rights. Each postcard has suggested activities accompanying it and there is a list of activities which can be used with the whole set of postcards.

Video ART Postcards is a joint initiative of the Runnymede Trust and Manifesta designed to demonstrate links between contemporary and historical struggles against racism and related injustice, and looks in particular at the legacy of slavery and the abolitionist movement. The lesson plans contained in the **Teacher's Guide** (www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/projects/vap/VideoARTPostcards-TeachersGuide2008.pdf) have been devised by two experienced teachers and curriculum writers. All of the lesson plans use relate to the QCA Curriculum Guidelines for Citizenship, KS 3 and 4.



The Real Histories Directory

The **Real Histories Directory** (www.realhistories.org.uk) has been created as a resource tool for teachers, parents, pupils and the wider community to support them in their teaching and learning about cultural diversity in the UK. The website helps you to locate **resources** in your and other LEAs, such as storytellers, dual language books, culturally diverse toys and relevant **events** taking place in the UK. There are also items of **news** that may be of particular interest to schools and teachers.

You can also submit resources that you would like to include in the directory free of charge by visiting the site, clicking on 'Submit an entry' and following the on-screen instructions.

As well as the varied resources available, each month a new **Topic of the Month** is added with suggestions for using the Directory in the classroom and at home.

We are interested in hearing your views on our Topics and the Real Histories website. You can email comments and suggestions to: realhistories@runnymedetrust.org.