Navigating Difficult Conversations: Strategies for Engaging Students in Social Issue Discussions

Part I

Welcome!

Please use the chat box to introduce yourself and where you teach.

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Navigating Difficult Conversations: Strategies for Engaging Students in Social Issue Discussions

Part I

Introductions

Please use the chat box to introduce yourself and where you teach.

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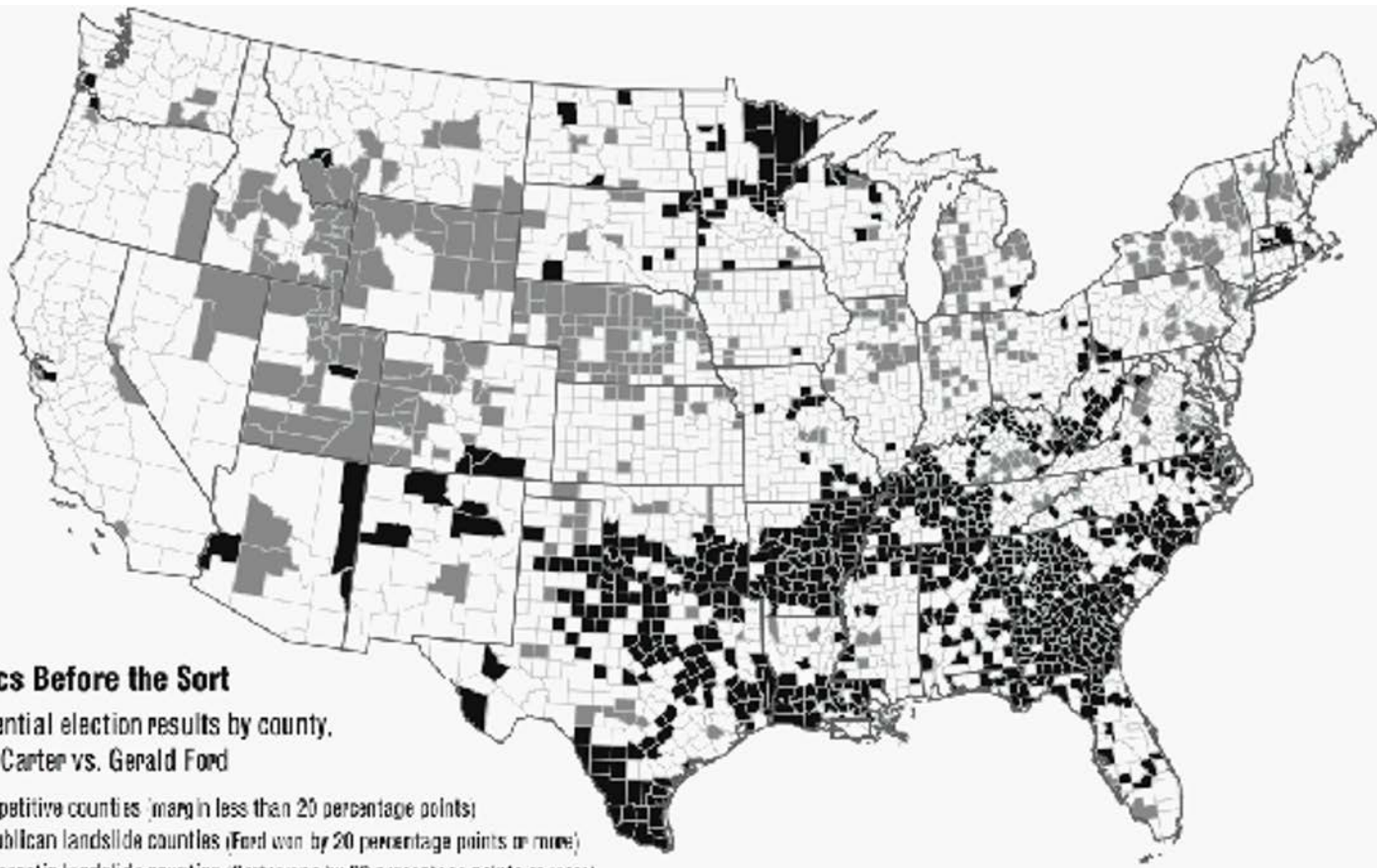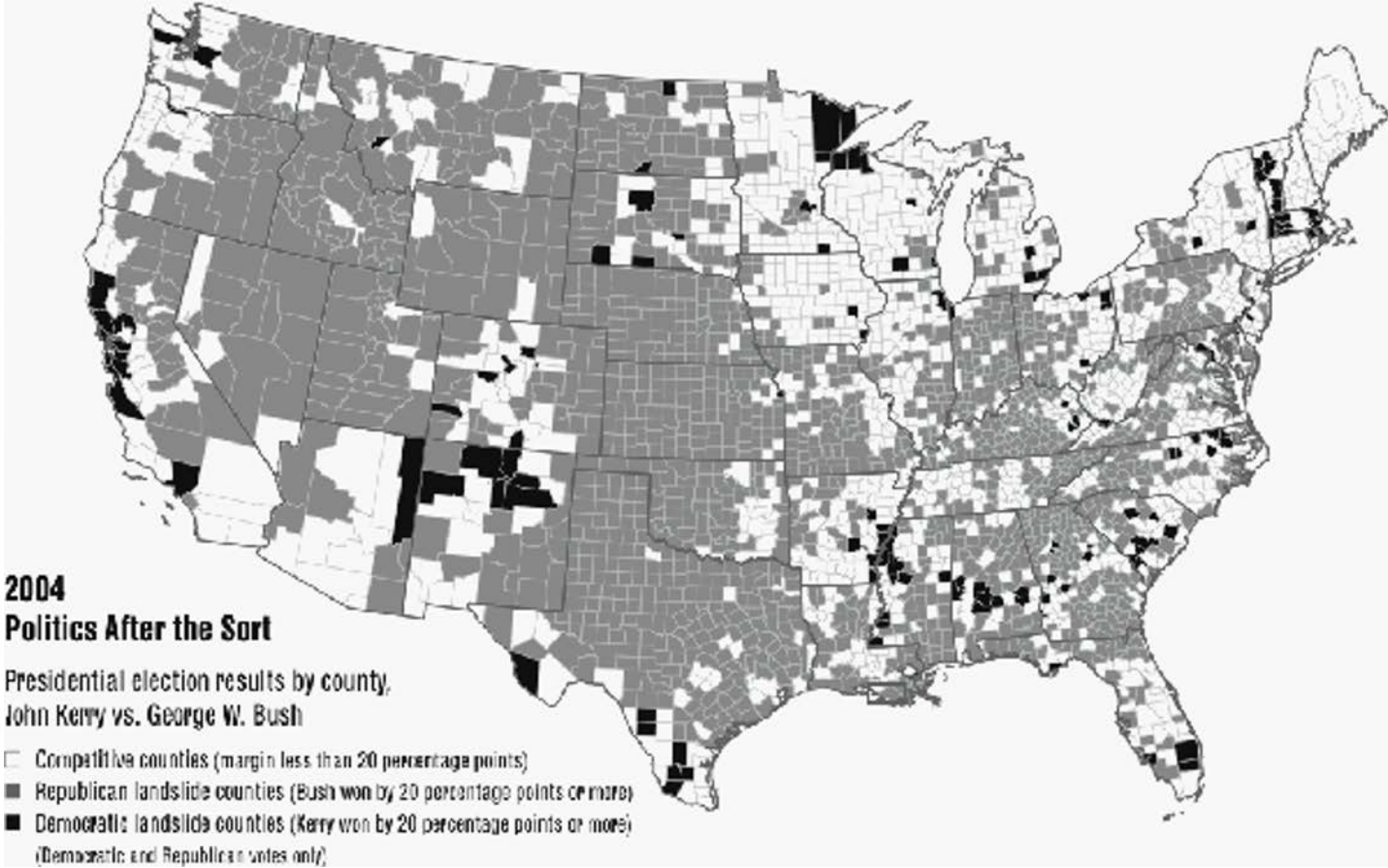North American Association
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Forty-four years ago, local political heterogeneity reigned…

1976

Politics Before the Sort

Presidential election results by county.
Jimmy Carter vs. Gerald Ford

☐ Competitive counties (margin less than 20 percentage points)

■ Republican landslide counties (Ford won by 20 percentage points or more)

■ Democratic landslide counties (Carter won by 20 percentage points or more)
   (Democratic and Republican votes only)

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Nowadays, we are fairly evenly divided in aggregate, but more homogeneous by zip code

THE BIG SORT
WHY THE CLUSTERING OF LIKE-MINDED AMERICA IS TEARING US APART
BILL BISHOP

2004
Politics After the Sort

Presidential election results by county,
John Kerry vs. George W. Bush

☐ Competitive counties (margin less than 20 percentage points)
■ Republican landslide counties (Bush won by 20 percentage points or more)
■ Democratic landslide counties (Kerry won by 20 percentage points or more)
  (Democratic and Republican votes only)

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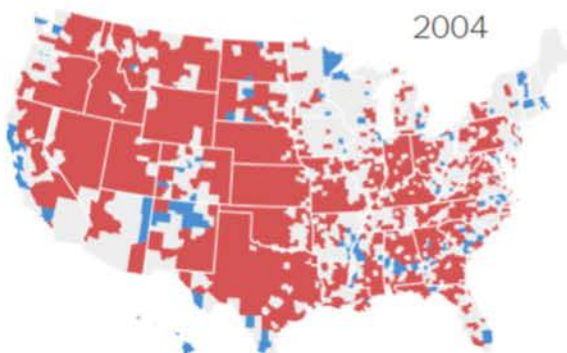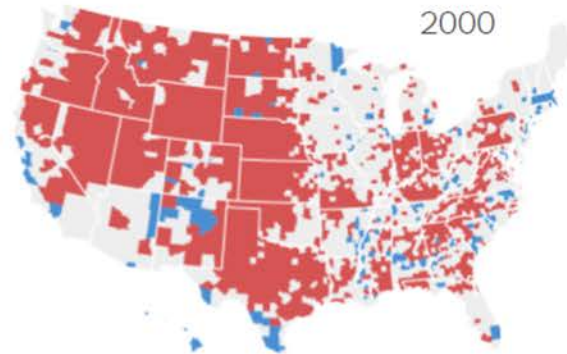
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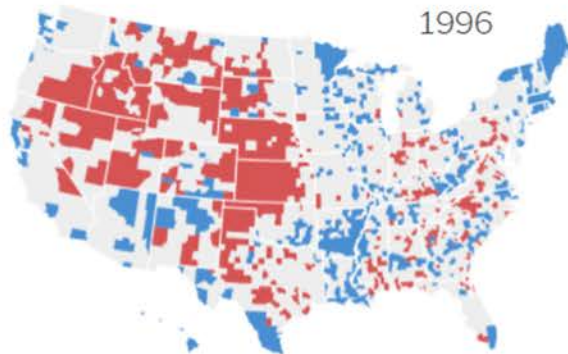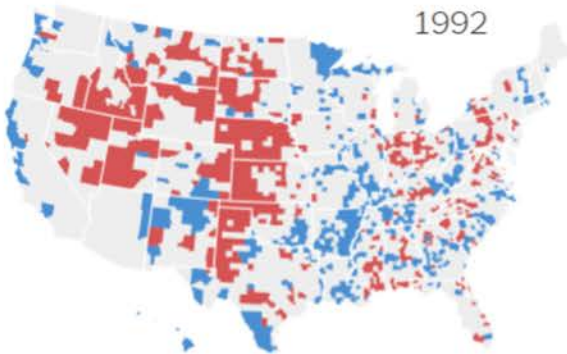for Environmental Education

Landslide counties proliferated in the last quarter century

Counties where presidential candidates won the two-party popular vote by more than 20 percentage points

+20   +30   +40   +50
R
D

1992   1996   2000
2004   2008   2012

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Source: FiveThirtyEight.com, 2017

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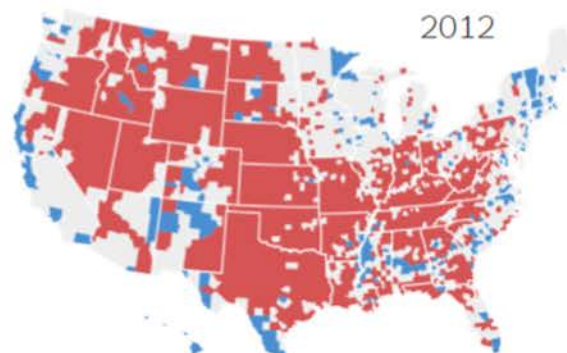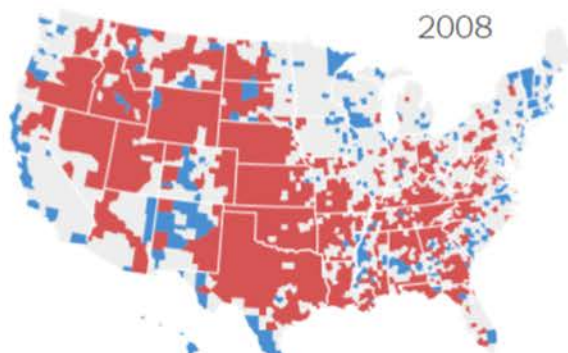
60% of counties were of landslide variety in 2016

2016
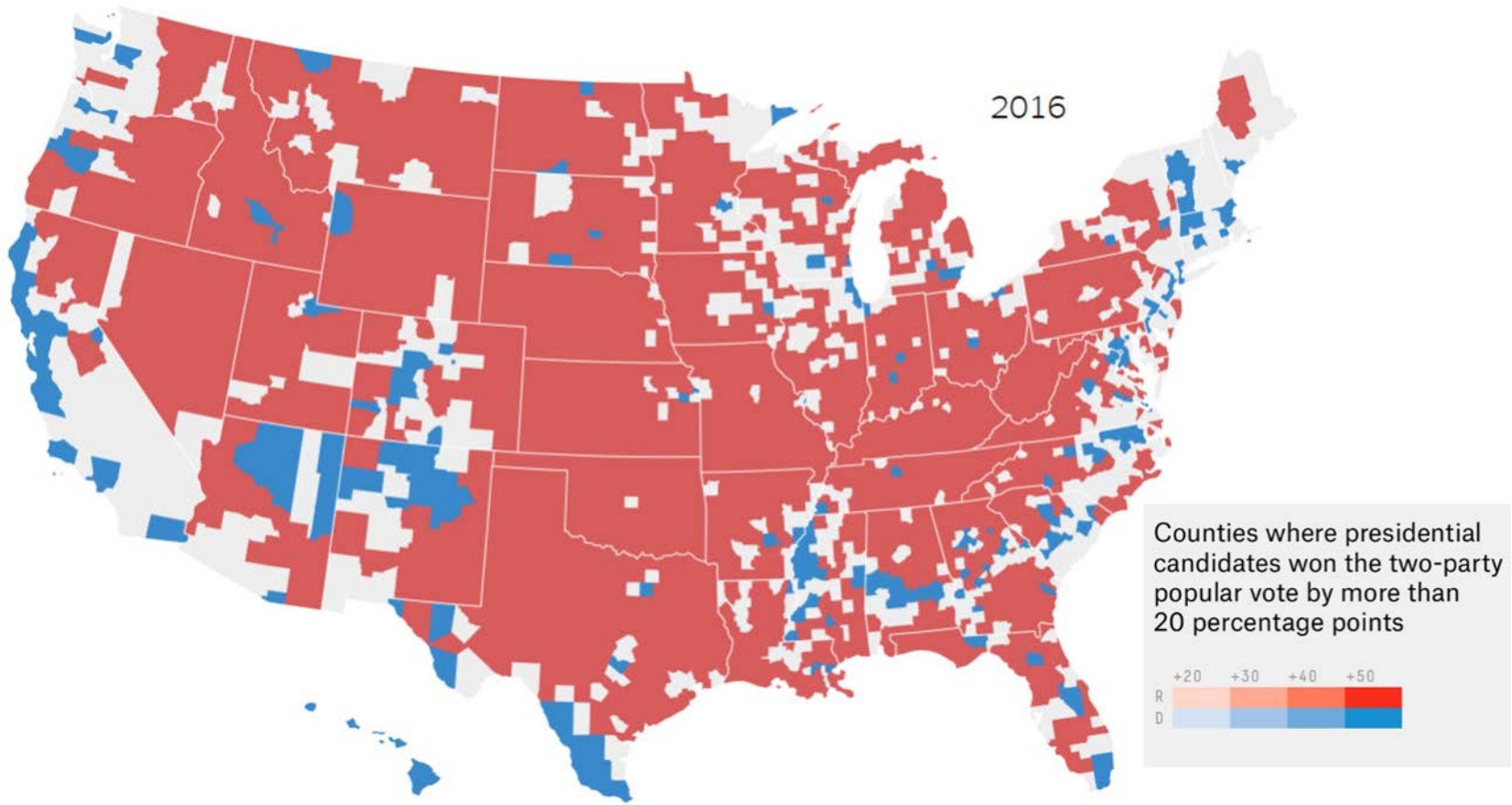
Counties where presidential candidates won the two-party popular vote by more than 20 percentage points

+20 +30 +40 +50
R
D

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Source: FiveThirtyEight.com, 2017

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Political polarization is rampant among elites

Source: Voteview.com, 2020

Political polarization is rampant among elites

Source: Voteview.com, 2020

But the general public is increasingly reflective of political elites

1994

Median Democrat

Median Republican

Consistently liberal

Mixed

Consistently conservative

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But the general public is increasingly reflective of political elites

Source: Pew Research Center, 2017

But the general public is increasingly reflective of political elites

2014

Median Democrat

Median Republican

Consistently liberal

Mixed

Consistently conservative

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Source: Pew Research Center, 2017

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But the general public is increasingly reflective of political elites

2017

Median Democrat

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Source: Pew Research Center, 2017

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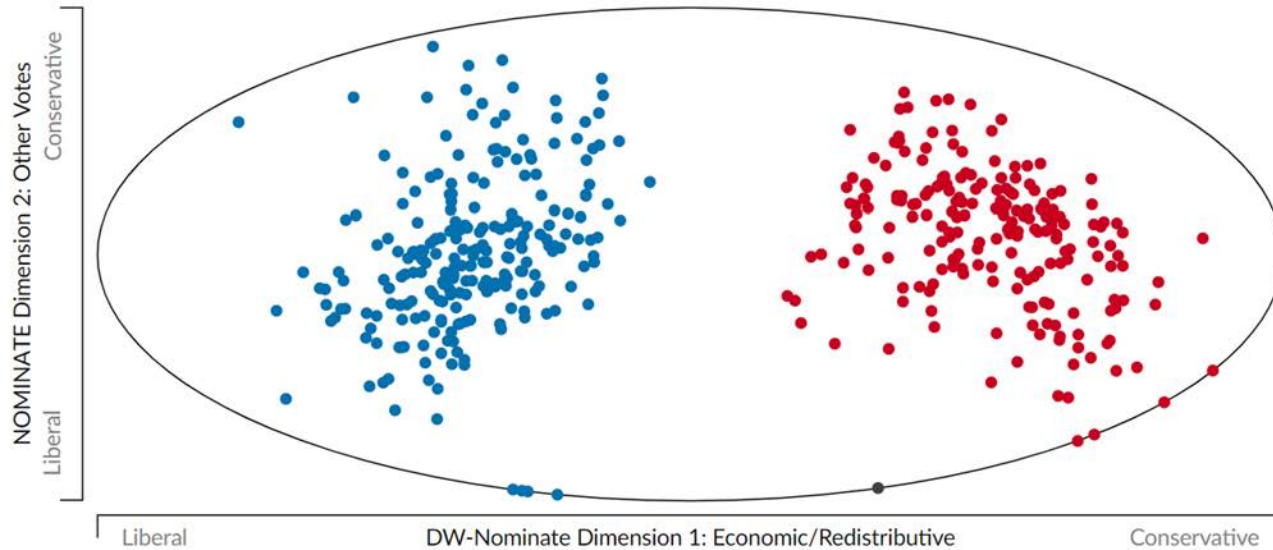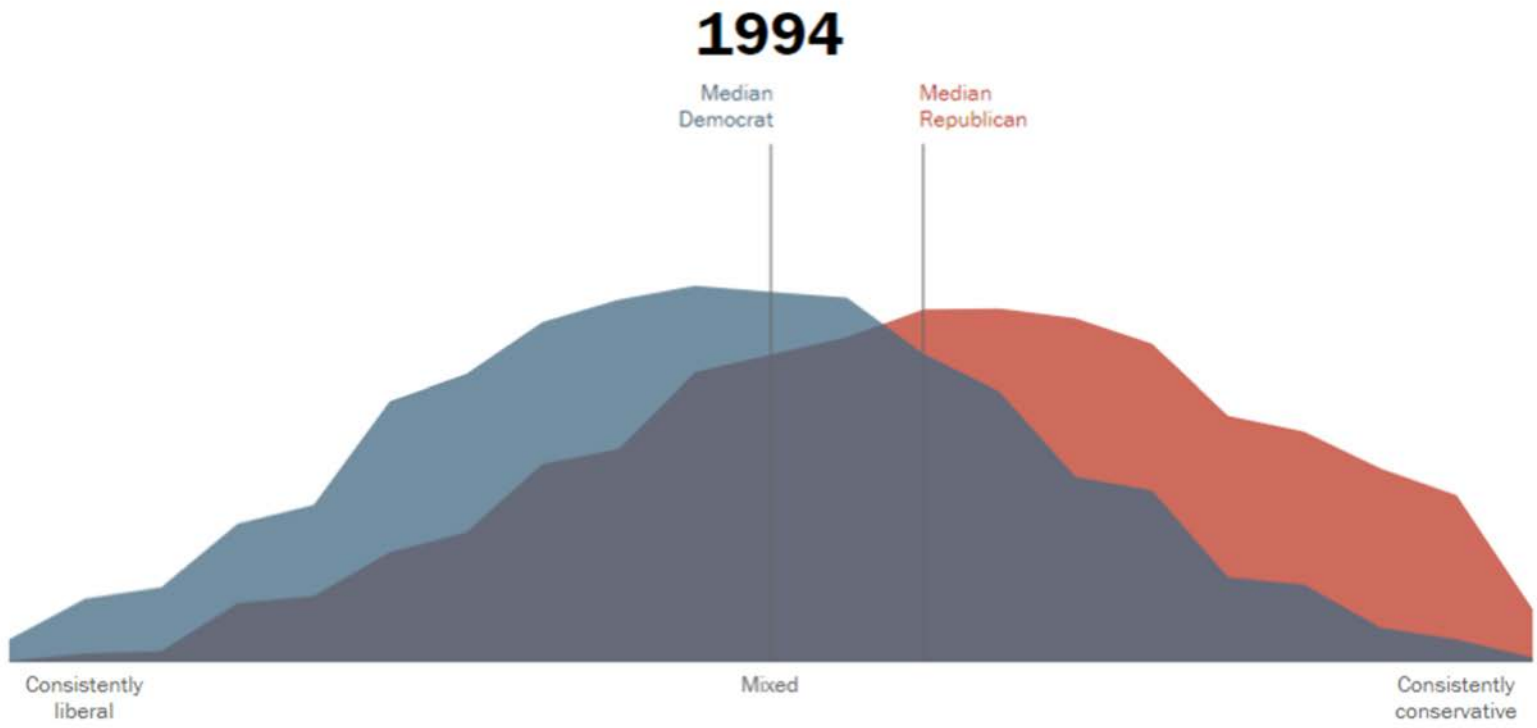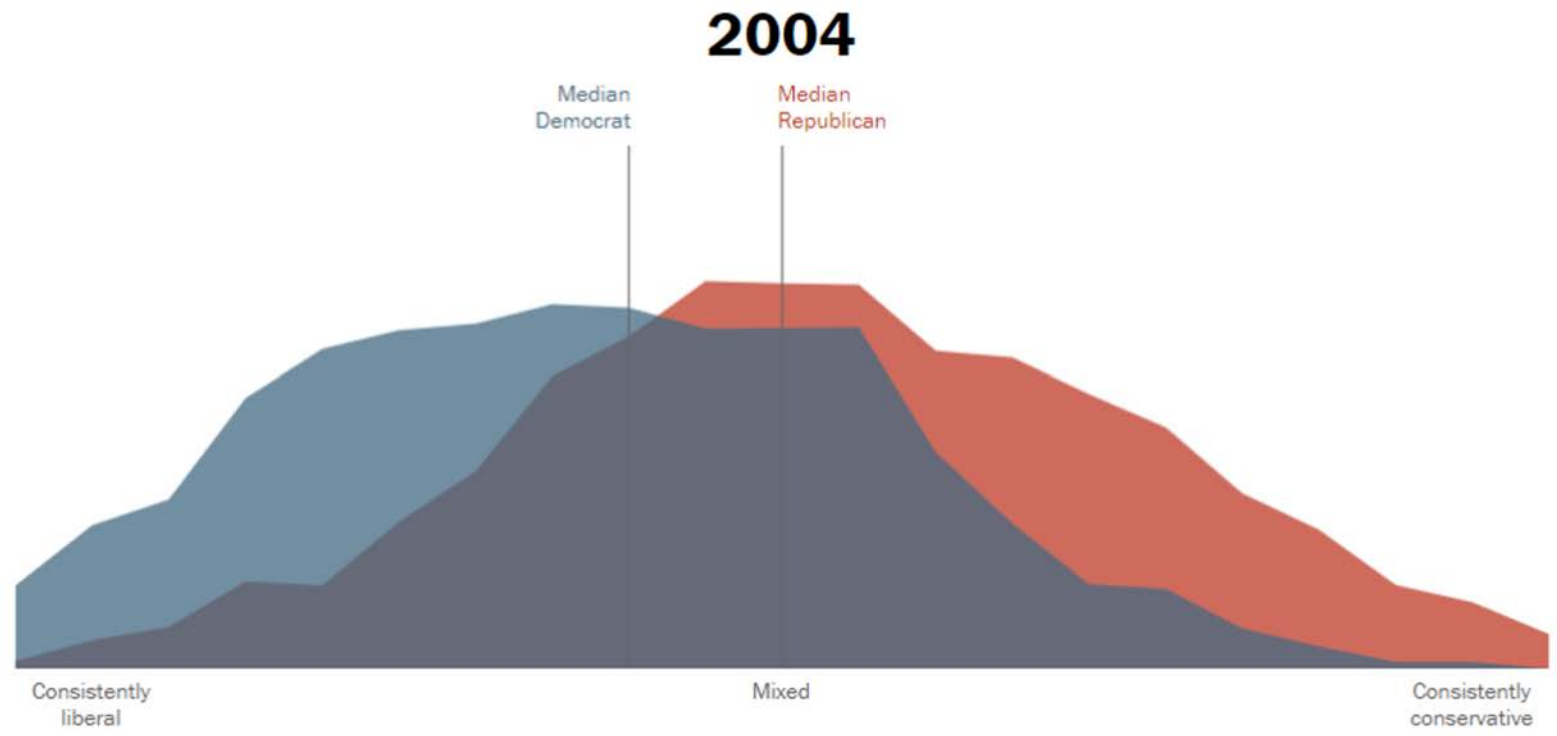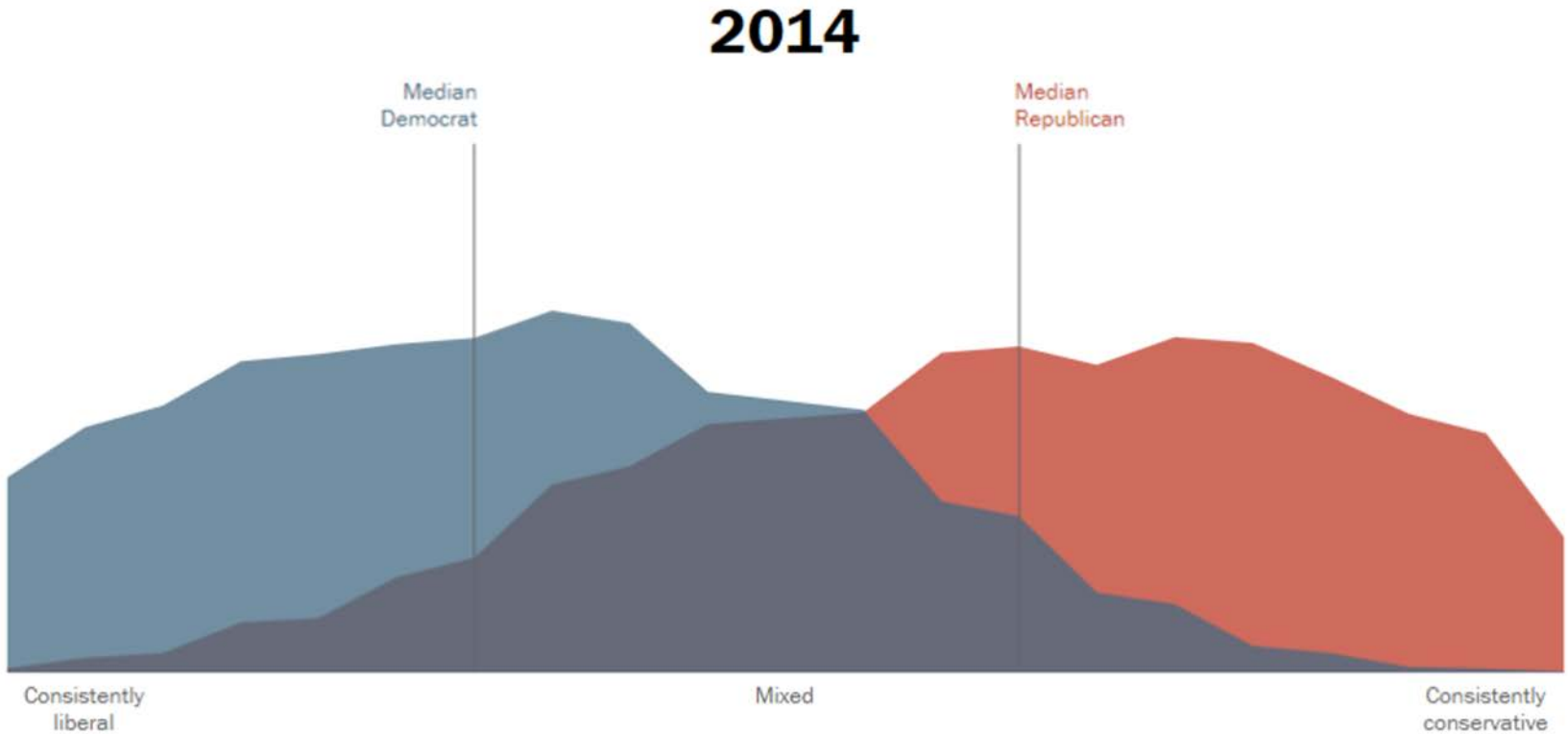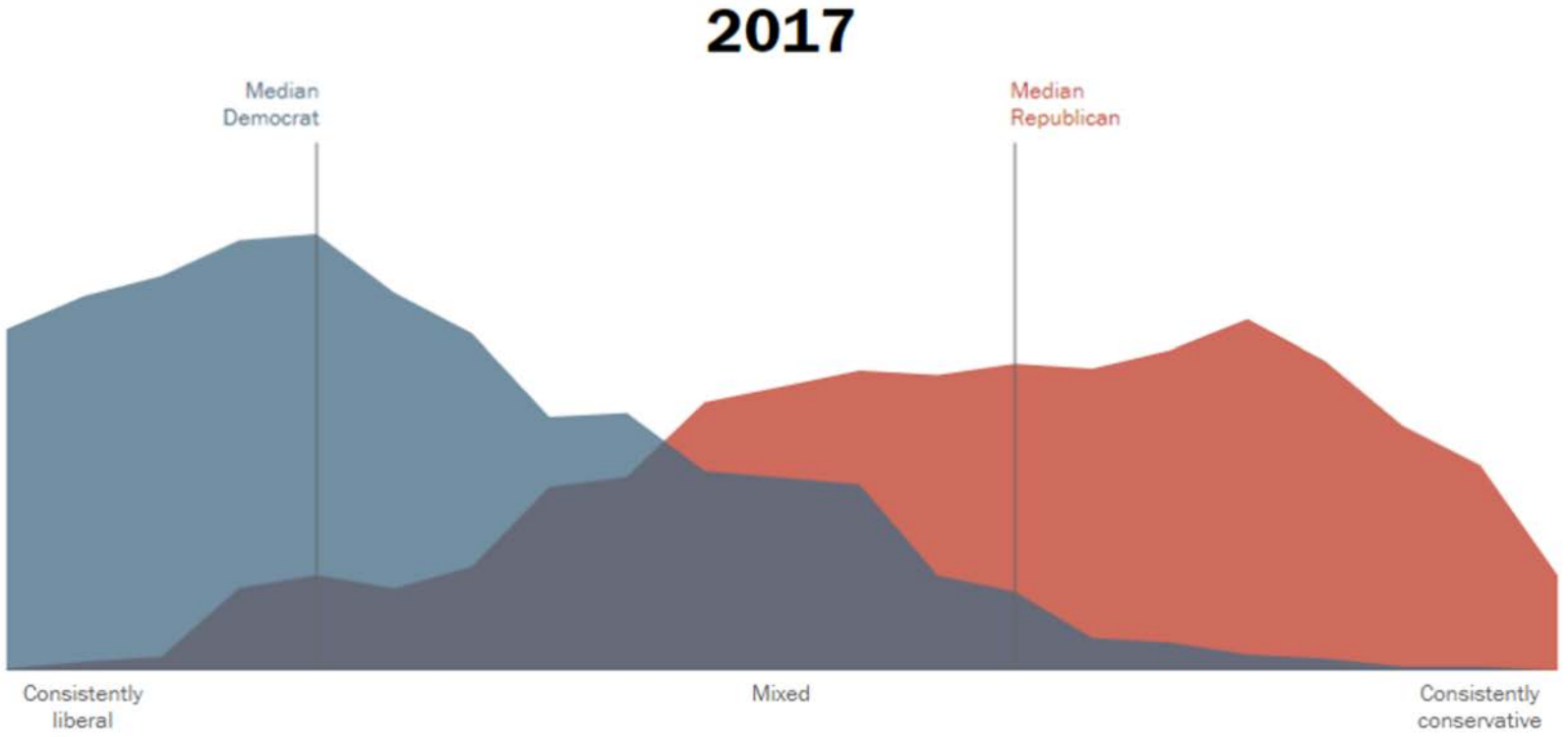
We were taught not to talk politics in polite company, and to the extent that we do, it's with our ideological soulmates
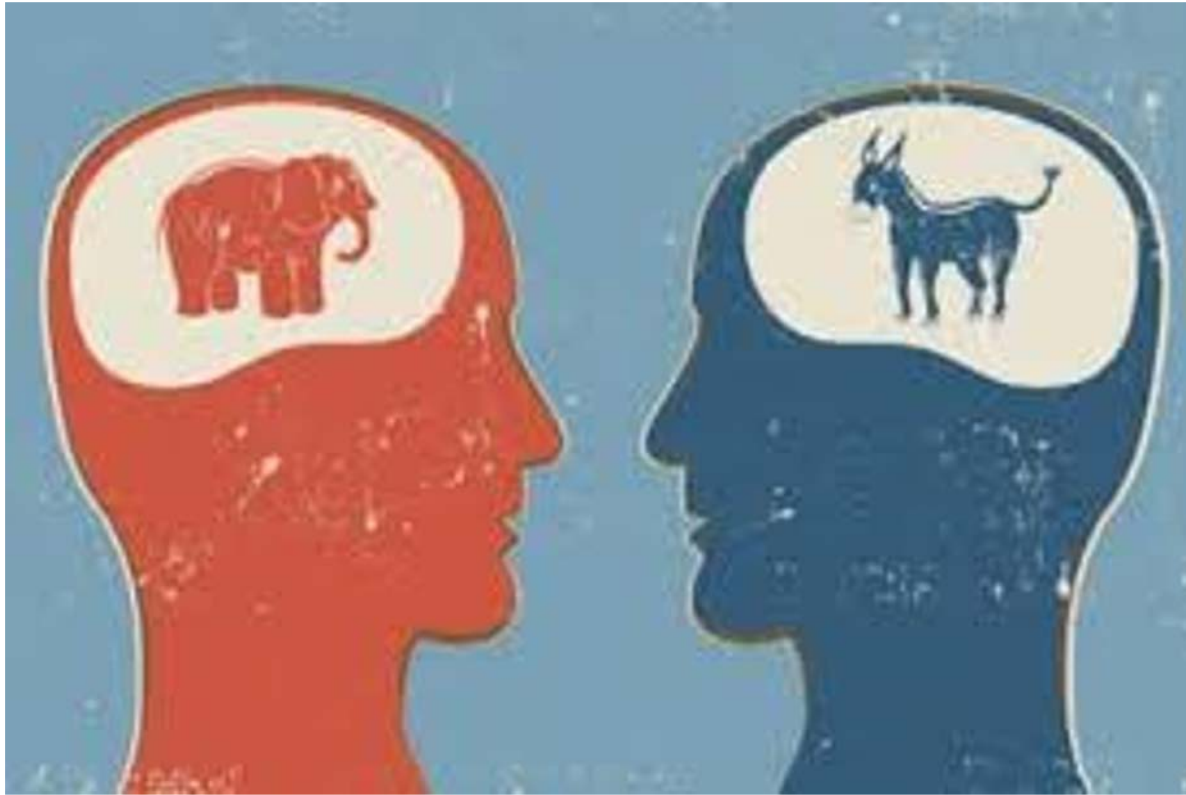
Source: Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side*, 2006

Classrooms are thus critical venues for building skills to talk across difference
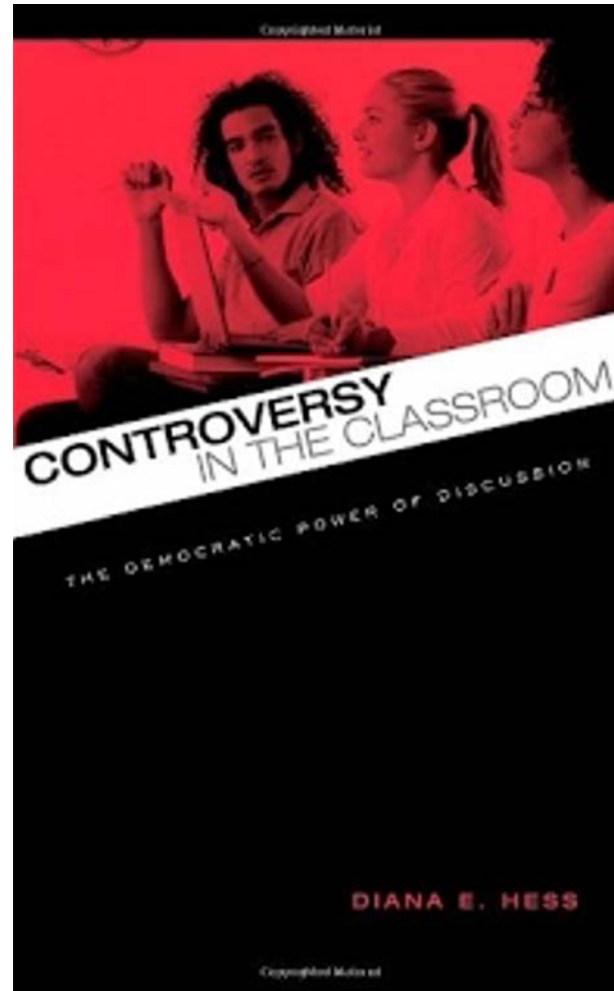
What does an engaging and productive social issue discussion look like, feel like and sound like?

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What is your comfort level with social issue discussions in the classroom? Respond in the chat box with the letter and a BRIEF explanation.

A

B

C

D

How do we create a community, in person or virtually, to engage student voice for societal issue discussions?

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Reflect on the Past to Inform the Present

*Take time to have students **reflect** on their experiences, have a voice in **recalibrating** classroom practices to create routines for success and engage in a collective **renewal** of goals for the \ Then, **repeat** throughout the year.*

When I think about discussing….I feel … because…

Visible Thinking Routines from Project Zero

- [Compass Point Reflection](#) has students identify something that is worrisome, exciting, a need to know, and a suggestion for moving forward.

- [Color, Symbol, Image](#) students share and discuss color, a symbol and an image they think represents online learning.

- [3-2-1 Bridge](#) can be used to have students identify 3 ideas they have about online learning, 2 questions they have about online learning, and 1 idea they have for improvement.

- [Claim, Support, Question](#) can be used to have students make a claim about online learning, support it with evidence from their past experiences, and ask questions they have about online learning.
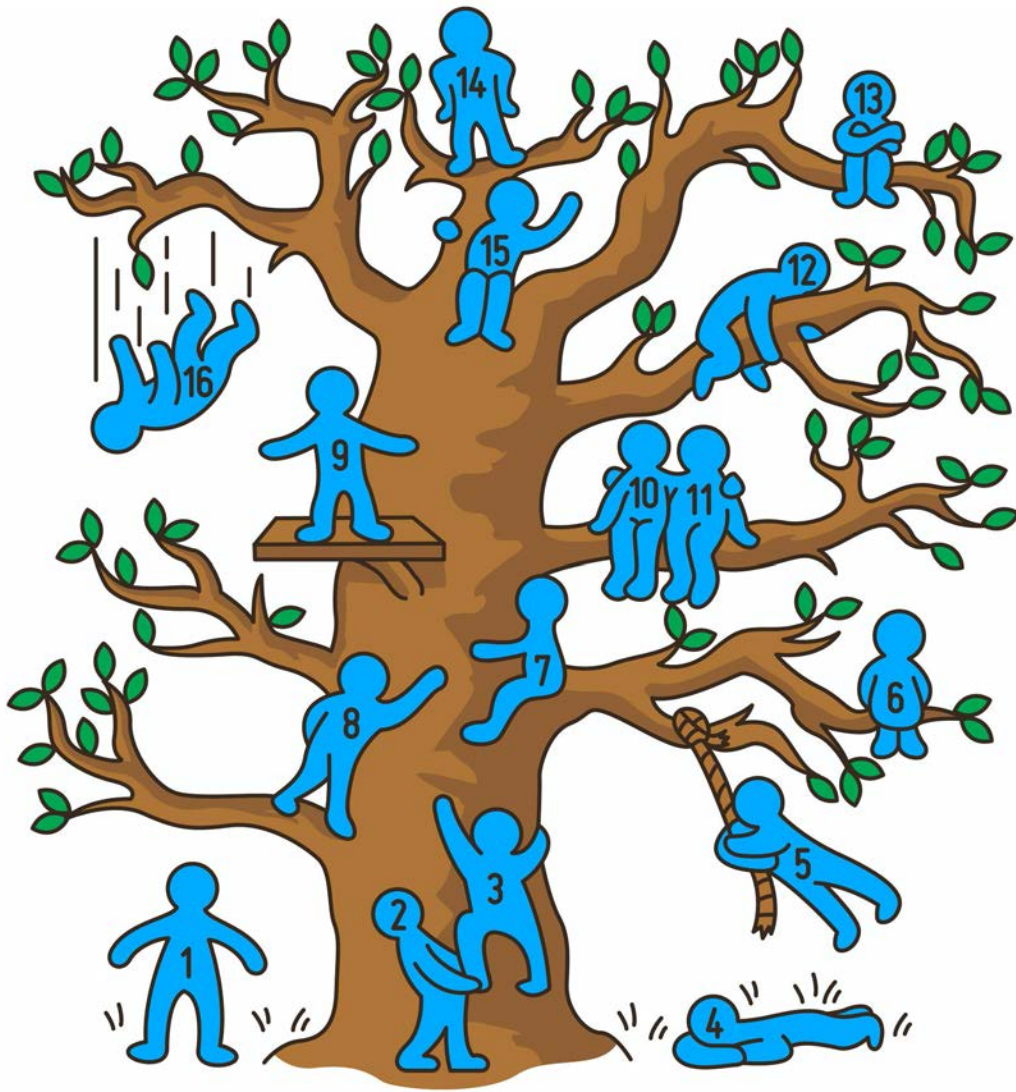
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The
Blob
Tree

Digital Four Corner Reflection

A

B

C
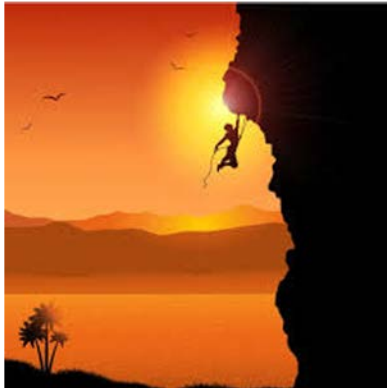
D

"Thermometer to Thermostat"

- Collect the responses and display them in a chart or word cloud.
- Discuss the responses.
- Engage in a proactive conversation about what can be done to address past issues and create new routines.

Where to start...

- [Teach civics from the inside out](). Acknowledge how our own lived experiences shape our behaviors before we engage students in this work.

Create a Safe Space in Troubling Times

When current events take center stage, help students process, curate information and answer questions. It is NOT the time for debate.

Where to start...

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Civics Course Implementation Blog

Be Present, Listen and Refuse to be Silent

by Mary Ellen Daneels, Civics Instructional Specialist

The events of this past week surrounding the murder of George Floyd in police custody and the public outcry that followed has many of us grappling with what we can do to be part of the solution and be an upstander for justice, equity, tolerance, and progress. This is a lot for students to process, especially in isolation during a pandemic fraught with its own uncertainty and fears. Whether your school is still in session or has dismissed for the year, students may reach out to you with questions, concerns, anger, frustration, and grief.

As I struggle to process these unfolding events in our nation and how to best serve our youngest community members, I wrestle with a feeling of inadequacy. In this, I find a glimmer of hope in what I can do as an educator reflecting on a conversation I had with one of my administrators, who is a former student. We were chatting a bit after his post-evaluation conference of my teaching when he reminisced about being in my classroom after September 11th. He shared how he remembers how I came into class in the days that followed, shared what I knew to be true, listened, empathized with student concerns, and answered questions. He also said he could tell I was upset, but he reflected, "That was okay because it made me feel that it was okay to be upset and scared, too."

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Create Safe Spaces in Troubling Times

Educators do not need to tread these waters alone. There are many civic learning partners that have created supports in these turbulent times.

- "Let's Go There: Making a Case for Race, Ethnicity and a Lived Civics Approach to Civic Education" is a report in which the authors Cathy Cohen, Joe Kahne, and Jessica Marshall make the case that, "civic educators and advocates must ensure that attention to race, identity, and the lived experiences of youth are central elements of civic education efforts — what we call Lived Civics."
- The Visions of Education podcast has an episode, "*Teaching Racial Literacy and Controversial Issues with Genevieve Caffrey*", about her co-authored *Social Education* article, A Pathway to Racial Literacy: Using the LETS ACT Framework to Teach Controversial Issues.
- Scholastic published "Resources for Responding to Violence and Tragedy."
- Teaching Tolerance has recently published a blog with resources called, "Affirming Black Lives Without Inducing Trauma."
- Facing History and Ourselves has strategies and resources for Fostering a Reflective Classroom and has published a response to recent events.
- "Your Kids Aren't Too Young to Talk About Race" resource round-up to support discussions around race at any age.
- NCTE published There Is No Apolitical Classroom: Resources for Teaching in These Times.
- The National Museum of African American History and Culture just published their "Talking About Race" web portal.
- Subscribe to the News Literacy Project's newsletter The Sift to get weekly updates to help you sort through rumors, hoaxes, and other misinformation about current events.

For educators seeking a deeper dive into facilitating current and controversial issue discussions in the classroom, consider participating in the June cohort of our Guardians of Democracy Microcredential. Information can be found on the Guardians website.

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Engage Students Voice in Creating Norms

How should we live together?

Looks Like, Feels Like, Sounds Like

Look 👁 like...	Sounds 👂 like...	Feels ✋ like...

Google Doc
Padlet
White Board

Words
Images
Emojis

What does an engaging and productive social issue discussion look like, feel like and sound like?

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Guidelines to Follow for Productive Discussions

1. Stay engaged by participating
   * Be respectful & pay attention when others are speaking
2. Be patient - wait for your turn
   * Let others finish before you speak
3. Stay focused on the topic
   * Add to what has already been said
4. Be prepared so you know what you're talking about
   * provide evidence to support your ideas
5. Speak the truth, just don't be rude about it
   * assume good intentions
6. Be respectful of others' opinions
   * "agree to disagree"
7. Namecalling / personal attacks are unacceptable
   * If you have nothing nice to say, say nothing

Creating a Safe Inclusive Classroom Space

Curriculum Design Toolkit

Public Act 101-0254 requires a semester of civics in grades 6, 7, or 8, employing direct instruction, discussion of current and societal issues, service learning, and simulations of democratic processes. The class will become a requirement at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

IllinoisCivics.org has created this Curriculum Design Toolkit to support the implementation of the civics requirement designed to prepare ALL Illinois students for college, career, and civic life.

This summer, IllinoisCivics.org will host a series of FREE one-hour webinars to explore each element of this toolkit. Illinois educators may choose to earn two hours of Professional Development for completing an application activity through the **DuPage Regional Office of Education**.

Visit our **Professional Development Calendar** for more details and to register.

GETTING STARTED
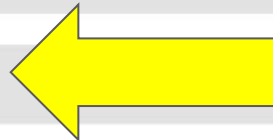
Review the Requirements of the Civics Mandate ⊕

Conduct a Civics Audit of Your Current Curriculum ⊕

Create a Climate for Civic Learning ⊕

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Create a Safe Inclusive Space

RESOURCES TO HELP ENHANCE YOUR CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIC LEARNING

- **Confirmation and Other Biases** from Facing History and Ourselves helps students understand how bias affects all of us.
- Teaching Tolerance shares the importance of creating a **Classroom Culture** to foster respect for oneself and others and uses **What is your FRAME?** to encourage students to reflect on their own backgrounds and enlarge their perspectives.
- **Project Implicit** from Harvard provides online tests to discern biases.
- **Lessons in Personhood: How to Truly Lead Your Classroom** from Cult of Pedagogy provides ideas of how to model best practices for students.
- Edutopia has **10 Powerful Community Building Activities**.
- Teaching Tolerance has strategies to foster **civil discourse in the classroom.**
- Facing History and Ourselves has a video to demonstrate **class contracting** and resources to **foster civil discourse**.
- **Question Formulation Technique** provides a simple protocol to have students develop, revise, and use questions in civic inquiry.
- **The Q Matrix** provides question starters at various Depths of Knowledge.
- **Visible Thinking** strategies from Project Zero provides question strategies including **See-Think-Wonder** and **Think-Puzzle-Explore.**
- Facing History and Ourselves has **Reflection and Action for Civics Participation** and **Big Paper Talk** to help students process civic learning.
- Visible Thinking has reflection protocols including **I used to think, now I think...** and **What makes you say that?**
- generationOn has a list of reflection activities organized by length and type. David Wees, Formative assessment specialist, New Visions for Public Schools has a list of **56 Formative Assessment Tasks**.

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Build Your Classroom Community with Intention

#MaslowBeforeBloom

Tools for Building for Community

- [Lessons in Personhood](): 10 Ways to Truly Lead Your Classroom, from Cult of Pedagogy

- [Icebreakers that Rock](), from Cult of Pedagogy

- Cult of Pedagogy has a **[4-Part System for Getting to Know Your Students]()**

- [10 Powerful Community-Building Ideas](), from Edutopia

- [Classroom Culture]() from Teaching Tolerance

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Tools for Building Online Community

- Ditch That Textbook shares **50 Back to School Activities for the Remote Learning Classroom**
- Dave Stuart Jr. has great tips on **How to Humanize Your Classroom or School When You're Teaching from a Distance: Principles and Practices**
- Award-winning educator Pernille Ripp responds to the questions, **But How Do We Build Community? Ideas for Virtual and Hybrid Learning**

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Breakout/Small Groups

"I see you."

IllinoisCivics.org — Civics Education Resource Site

Resources ^   **Calendar**   **Blog**   **Partners**

General

Illinois Civic Education Laws and Standards

Civic Education Implementation Plan

Civic Empowerment Gap

Press Resources

Illinois Democracy Schools

For Teachers

Curriculum Design Toolkit

Lesson Plans and Toolkits

Remote Learning Toolkit

Civic Education Organizations

Instructional Coaches

Newsletter Archives

For School Administrators

Guidelines for Administrators

For Parents and Students

Why Civics?

Anti-Racism for Parents

#CivicsIsBack!

THE LATEST | **INFO FOR**

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Teach for Cooperation & Collaboration

Teach the Language of Collaboration and Cooperation

For Questioning

- The Question Formulation Technique (QFT)
- The 5 Whys
- The Q- Matrix

Teach the Language of Collaboration and Cooperation

Discussion Transitions

Created by Candace Fikis, Community High School, West Chicago, Il

Proficient Transitions

Rooting Ideas in the Text
1. Your comment reminds me of [quote, idea]...On page...
2. A related idea/question/comment is...
3. Where do you see that in the text?
4. I would like to (re)direct our attention to the [text]. On page...

Transitioning to a New Topic
1. So far we have discussed [summarize discussion]. I would like to transition us to a new question/topic...

Developing Ideas Further
1. A related idea/question/comment is...
2. I am unsatisfied with our discussion of [idea] because...
3. I agree/disagree with the notion that...because...
4. Building off of [person's] idea...
5. I have a clarifying question for [person]. Are you asking...
6. I would like to return to our previous discussion of [idea] because...
7. I would like to elaborate upon [person's] idea...

Inviting Someone
1. I'm interested in hearing your thoughts on this question, [person]
2. Thank you! I'm still thinking. Can you come back to me?

Advanced Transitions

Synthesize
1. What I am hearing X, Y, and Z say is... These ideas raise the greater question... because...
2. According to both X and Y, _____. These ideas suggest that...because...
3. Based on X, Y, and Z's comments...it seems that we are wrestling with...This is important because...

Going Even Deeper
1. According to both X and Y, _____. Although I agree with these ideas up to a point, I cannot accept the overall conclusion that...because...
2. Even if we accept... we cannot overlook the ambiguity of...because...
3. While I concede that....I still disagree with the notion that...because...
4. I think we might be overlooking [author's] assertion that...because...
5. Even though on first read it may seem that...a closer reading of the passage suggests that...
6. X's claim that...rests upon the assumption that... which is questionable because...
7. I am not convinced that the text suggests... Let's go back to the passage where...in order to consider...
8. By focusing on..., we overlook the deeper problem of...because...

For Discussion

- 26 Sentence Stems for Higher Level Conversations in the Classroom
- Secondary Discourse Sentence Starters
- Discussion Transition Statements

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Teach the Language of Collaboration and Cooperation- Discussion Boards

Choose and complete **at least 3** of the following question starters using your "wonderings" highlighted in blue from the article.

- I wonder about...
- I am confused about...
- What does it mean when the author says...
- Do you think that...
- How does this connect to...
- Another thing I would like to know is...
- Create your own.

Teach the Language of Collaboration and Cooperation- Discussion Boards

After you have created your initial post, please respond to **TWO** of your peers by:

- Corroborating their question. Share why this is also something you wondered about or something that was pointed and new to you as well.
- Replying to their questions. Perhaps the idea of the article they question is one that you highlighted because it was reaffirmed in your thinking or prior experience.
- Asking a follow-up question to clarify your understanding of their perspective and the context of their experience.

When I think about engaging student voice in societal issue discussions, *<u>I used to think….but now I think…</u>*

Take a moment to think about your response and complete the underlined portion of the sentence in the chat box.

Engaging Student Voice with Formative Assessment will be IMPERATIVE for Remote Learning to be successful

Ideas for Formative Assessment

- [75 Tools to Improve Student Learning](#) - Stefanie Wager, Iowa DOE
- [Reflective Writing and Thinking](#) -UTM Experiential Education Office
- [Visible Thinking: Harvard University Project Zero](#)
  - [I used to think, now I think…](#)
  - [What makes you say that?](#)

Ideas for Formative Assessment

- [56 Formative Assessment Ideas](), curated by David Wees, Formative assessment specialist, New Visions for Public Schools
- Edutopia- [53 Ways to Check for Understanding]()
- [Formative Assessment Tools]()
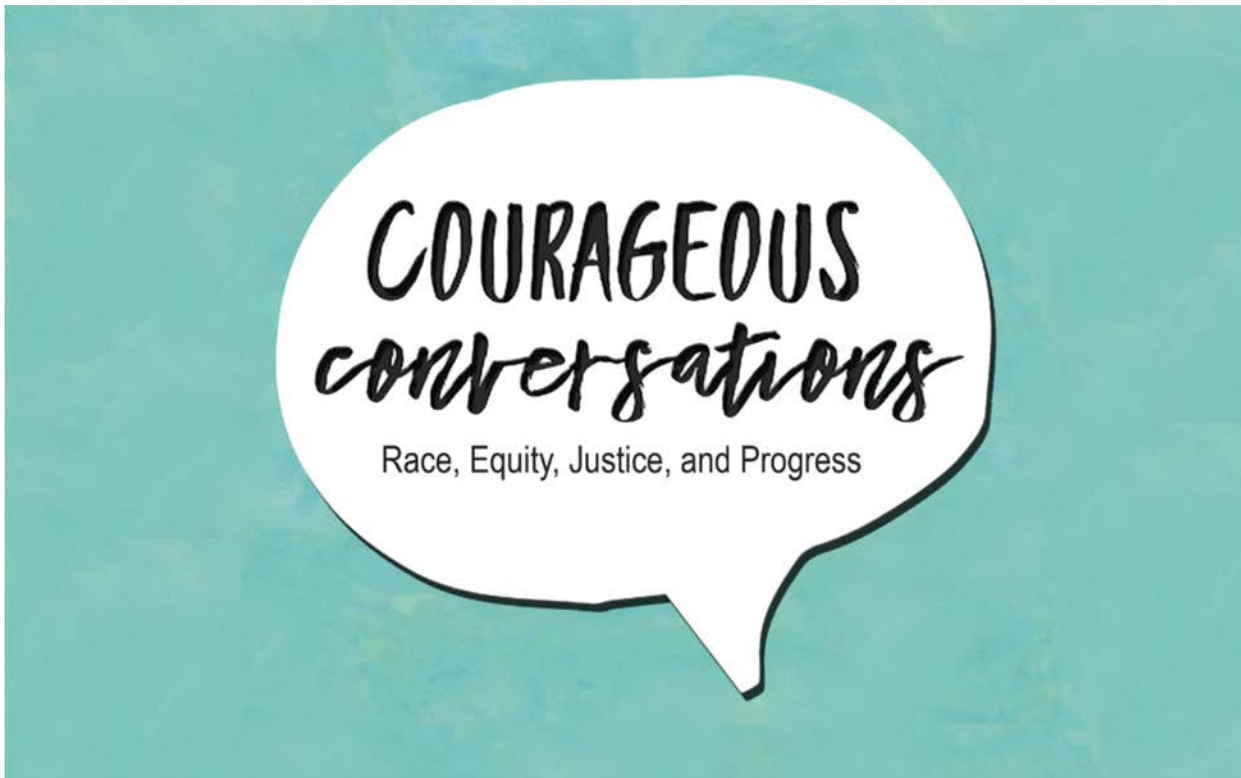
How to Raise a Social Conscious, Anti Racist Kid

A School-wide Approach to Centering the Lived Experiences of our Students

Culturally Responsive Teaching to Promote Anti-Racist Classrooms

GUARDIANS OF DEMOCRACY

★ **Current and Controversial Issue Discussions**

  ★ Module 1- Orientation
  ★ Module 2- The What and Why
  ★ Module 3- The How
  ★ Module 4- Overcoming Obstacles
  ★ Module 5- Create a Plan of Action

★ Model Best Practices in Online Learning

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When I think about engaging students in current and controversial issue discussions in the classroom, I used to think it scared me and made me nervous, but now I think I am prepared and confident.

6-12 grade department chairperson from suburban school district

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When I think about engaging students in current and controversial issue discussions in the classroom, I used to think that there were a plethora of landmines to be concerned about, but now I think that with the right combination of establishing a classroom environment and well-thought-out, specific strategies, landmines can be avoided and phenomenal discourse is bound to happen.

6-8 grade AVID teacher from urban district

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When I think about engaging students in current and controversial issue discussions in the classroom, I used to think about it more generally in terms of why it's important to have students engage in current and controversial issues discussions, but now I think about it very specifically and linked to different learning/skills outcomes for students depending on which strategy is used for the discussion.

PD Provider from national civic organization

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When I think about engaging students in current and controversial issue discussions in the classroom, I used to think I'm never going to be able to do it properly and cause a huge chaotic controversy in my small rural school, but now I think it's doable and no matter where I'm teaching I'll be able to handle the conversation using strategies from Guardians of Democracy: Current and Controversial Issues Discussions.

1st year teacher from small rural high school

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guardiansofdemocracyteachers.org

Lingering Questions?

Navigating Difficult Conversations: Strategies for Engaging Students in Social Issue Discussions

Part I

Thank You!

Mary Ellen Daneels, Instructional Specialist, Illinois Civic Mission Coalition

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