

'24 vote: Prime time to educate

Not long ago, educators saw presidential elections as golden opportunities to initiate classroom discussions of candidates' strengths and weaknesses, asking students to back up their preferences with facts.

Things are more complicated now. Some classrooms have become political battlefields, with one of education's fundamental missions — teaching students to think critically — threatened by arguments over what can be discussed.

In a time when entertaining diverse viewpoints and encouraging inquiry and debate can lead to allegations of indoctrination, it's not surprising that teachers might opt to sidestep issues perceived as controversial. That's sad — tragic, in fact.

And what's so subversive about a robust exchange of informed opinions about current issues, including presidential candidates whose positions and policies are likely to impact the country in dramatically different ways? Dissecting a presidential election is ripe with teachable moments: about reason, thought, fairness, civility, citizenship, and of course democracy.

To those who say that these discussions don't belong in the classroom, I'd argue that there's no better place, especially at moments like this. While presidential campaigns have always had their rough-and-tumble moments, they have become even more chaotic, marked by fiery rhetoric, outlandish promises, charges and counter-charges, slick and deceptive advertisements, and half-truths (or worse) peddled as facts on social media.

To impressionable young people trying to make sense of it all, our election process can be hopelessly frustrating and bewildering — and maybe, some might conclude, not worth their time.

While teachers can't change the often toxic tenor of our politics, they can help students separate fact from fiction and note elections' importance. They can add a much-needed dose of common sense and even optimism, lessons students will hopefully carry for life.

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