# Election 2020: Building school community through conversation

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GIVE BACH

A Concert Series for Change

# Wednesday, Nov. 9, 2016

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# Timeline

Early 2017- Summer 2019 == Strengthen our “community” (Community Programs, DEI work)

Fall 2019 == Head of School initial charge

April 2020 == Workshop - *Election 2020: Creating Environments for Civil Discourse and Dialogues Across Differences*

Mid-May 2020 == Green light from our Head of School, Major scaffolding work began

June-Aug 2020 == Faculty/Staff AND student-only Community Conversations, Role-playing for Faculty and staff, Brainstorming Events, Preparing Community

Aug 2020 == Commitment from Head of School during Convocation, launched “WHE The People!” student group, program website went live, introduced commitment to families

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# Goals of Initiative

- ★ Vow to not be in the same place we were after Election Day 2016
- ★ Create a space for students to connect with their peers
- ★ Train faculty to engage in “the work”
- ★ Implement a program to engage in dialogues across differences around the intersection of issues and the upcoming election
- ★ Create community in a virtual world around a shared interest
- ★ Develop skills for our students to become leaders around these topics
- ★ Build confidence in our faculty to engage in dialogues

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# Advisor & Student Roles

ADVISORS:

- Remain non-partisan
- Create space
- Foster Growth
- Find balance between challenge and support
- Encourage dialogues
- Support students and their initiatives

STUDENTS:

- Ownership of spaces
- Lead/facilitate events
- Communicate with the greater community
- Uphold group norms

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ELECTION 2020
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# Student Group

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."
- Nelson Mandela

"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."
- Coretta Scott King

*Group Atmosphere*

+ Encourage student leadership
+ Open space for all
+ Risk taking
+ Every voice matters
+ Students from all majors, grades, and countries
+ Varied political backgrounds
+ Club for all students who are interested in politics and civic activism

*Weekly Meetings*

+ 7:30pm ET
+ Hot Topics/Current Events
+ Changes in the Election
+ Two Breakout Rooms
  + Mock Election
  + Hot Topics
+ Average group size ≅ 35

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# Group Norms

- ★ Challenge the idea, not the person
- ★ Do your part in creating our brave & safe space
- ★ Take time to listen to others
- ★ Don’t be afraid of disagreements (ok, to agree to disagree)
- ★ Be more curious than certain (every question is a good question)
- ★ Think before you speak
- ★ Assume the best intentions

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- ★ Sharing Air Time
- ★ No interrupting
- ★ Make people feel included
  - ○ Listen to understand rather than listening to respond
- ★ Expect non-closure

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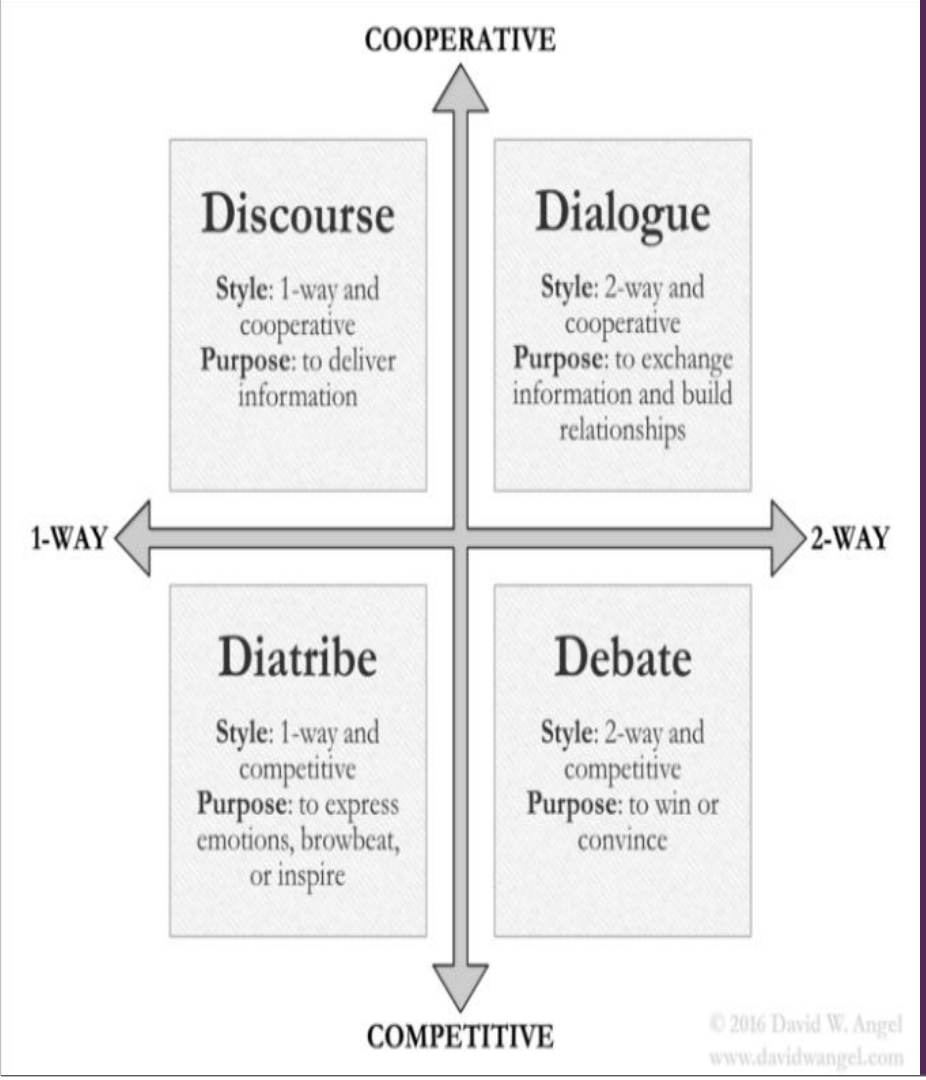
# Discourse & Dialogue Training

## Debate and Dialogue

| DEBATE | DIALOGUE |
|---|---|
| • Assuming that there is a right answer, and you have it | • Assuming that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they craft a new solution |
| • Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong | • Collaborative: participants work together toward common understanding |
| • About winning | • About exploring common ground |
| • Listening to find flaws and make counter arguments | • Listening to understand, find meaning and agreement |
| • Defending our own assumptions as truth | • Revealing our assumptions for re-evaluation |
| • Seeing two sides of an issue | • Seeing all sides of an issue |
| • Defending one's own views against those of others | • Admitting that others' thinking can improve on one's own |
| • Searching for flaws and weaknesses in others' positions | • Searching for strengths and value in others' positions |
| • By creating a winner and loser, discourages further discussion | • Keeps the topic open even after the discussion formally ends |
| • Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position | • Discovering new options, not seeking closure |

Synthesized and adapted from the work of:
The Public Conversations Project, National Study Circles Resources, Educators for Social Responsibility
by Mark Gerzon and Rachael Kessler, Mediators LTD.
For further information or permission to duplicate, contact: MarkGerzon@aol.com




# Discourse & Dialogue Training

# Discourse & Dialogue Training

**Powerful Questions**

*Clarification*

Can you say more? What do you mean?

*Elaboration*

Can you tell me more? What other ideas do you have about this topic?

*Example*

What is an example? Like what? Such as? What would it look like?

*History*

What caused it? What lead up to it?

*Options*

What are some other possibilities? How else might…?

*Prediction*

So what do you think will happen if they do? What do you think will happen if they don't?

# Mock Election

- This was Walnut Hill's first mock election!
- A similar ballot structure to that of an eligible voter in Natick, Massachusetts was created.
- Many considerations were reviewed in an attempt to provide as authentic of an experience as possible for our student community.
- Community-specific question was included (in our case, a "fun" question.)

*We are in the final stages of coordinating our plan to announce the results to our community and ensure an awareness of diverse political thought.*

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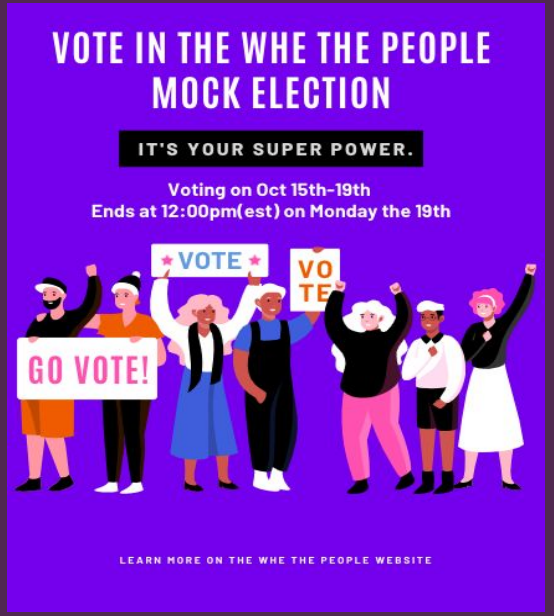
# Process of sending Mock Election out

- As a group we looked for ways to send emails that would catch people's eyes
- Our end goal was to inform people in a way they wouldn't find it boring
- We took into account the day to day emails they received
- With that in mind we had two ideas a video and posters

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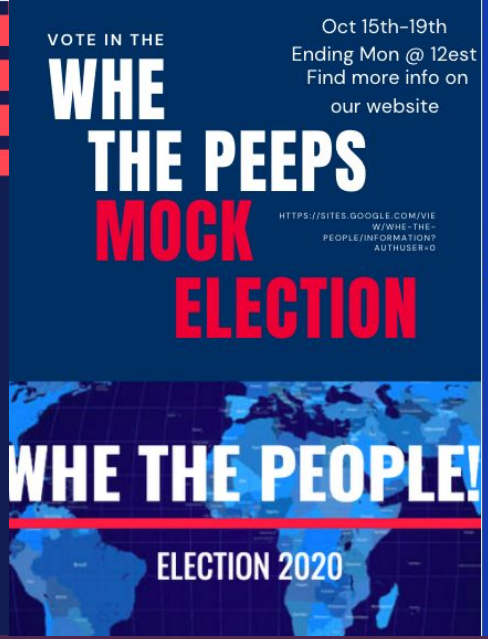

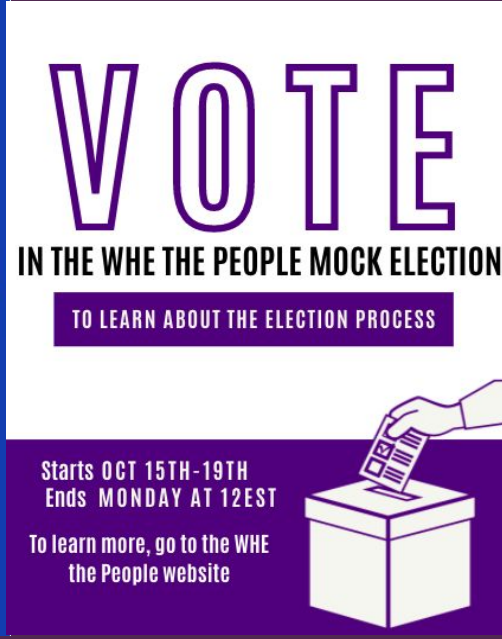


By: Madi

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# Electoral College

- Realistic as possible
- Electors per “state”
- Importance of your vote

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# Hot Button Convos

- Group discussions about topics we strongly care about or are on the rise in our society.
- We encourage our students to bring forth topics too!
- Held in a space where everyone is welcomed with an open mindset.
- May be open-ended discussions, or two-sided discourses.
- Good opportunity where we implement our group norms.
- Something we will continue post-election.

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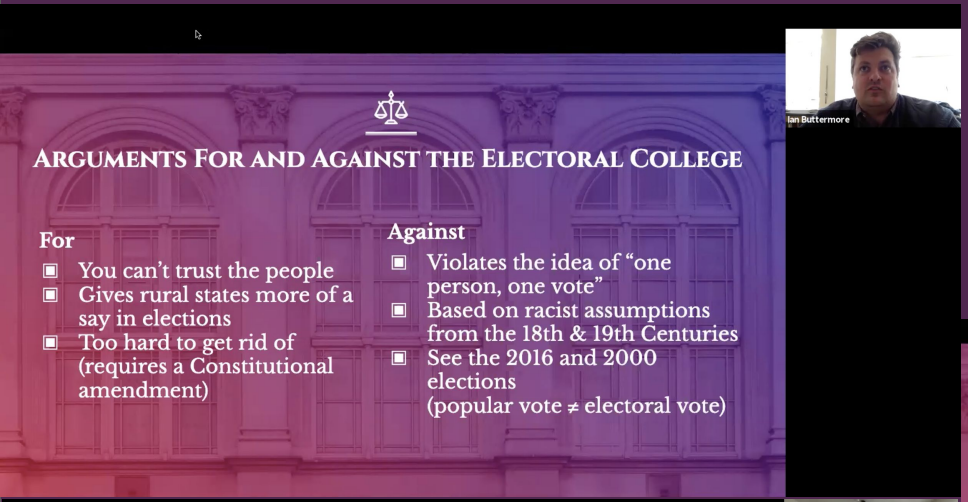
# Debate Watch Parties

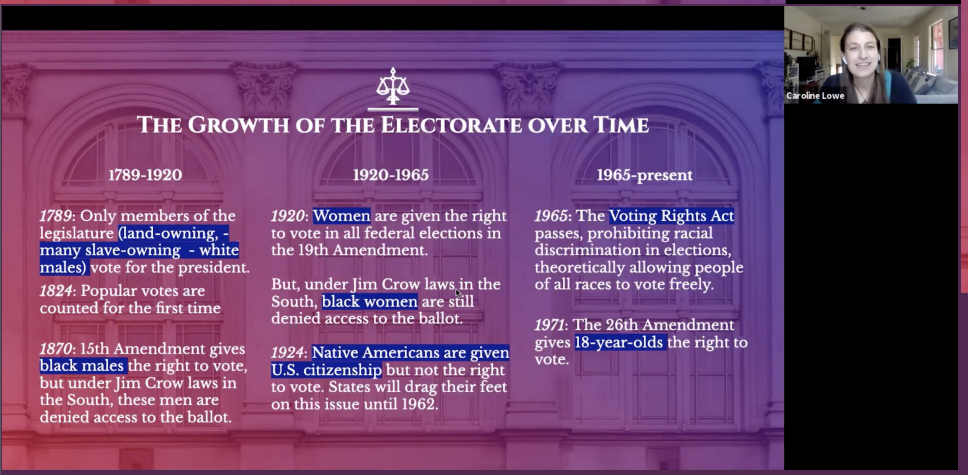
- Goal-Oriented Events
- Held Virtually through Zoom Meetings
  - Uses the chat feature to make observations + offer online resources to watch debate
  - Discussion time afterward to debrief
- Experiences with Watch Parties

# Assembly Presentations



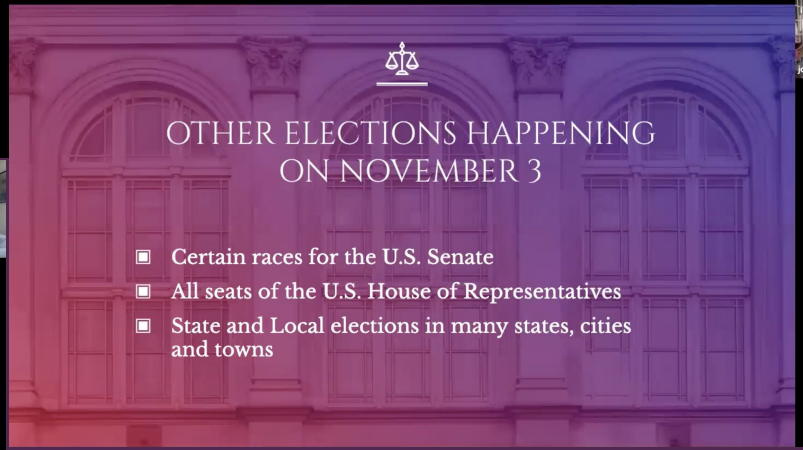












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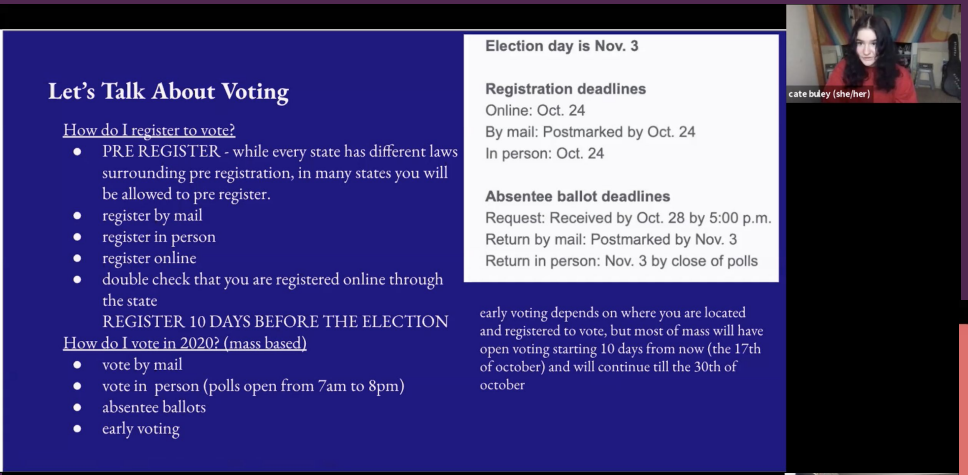
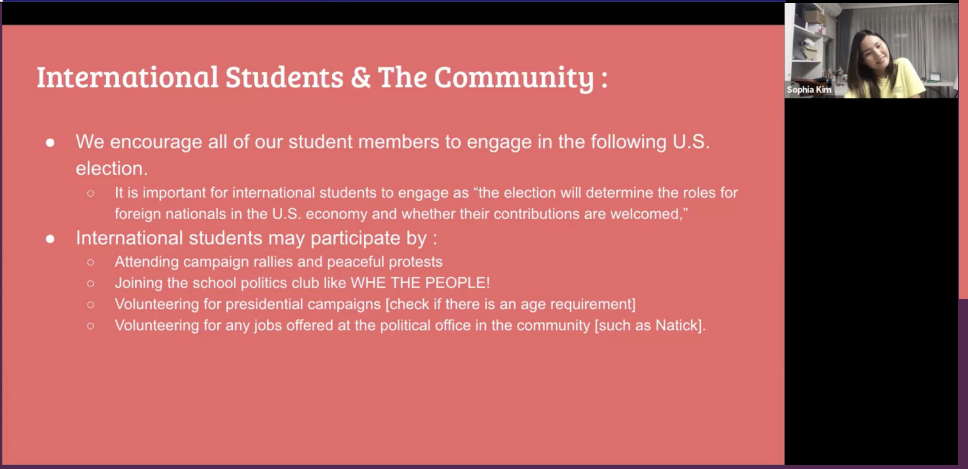
# Student-Run Presentation









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# International Students & The Community

- Our club encourage all of our student members to engage in the U.S. election.

- International students may participate by :
  - Joining the school politics club (such as WHE The People!)
  - Attending campaign rallies and peaceful protests
  - Volunteering for presidential campaigns.
  - Volunteering for any jobs offered at a political office in the community.

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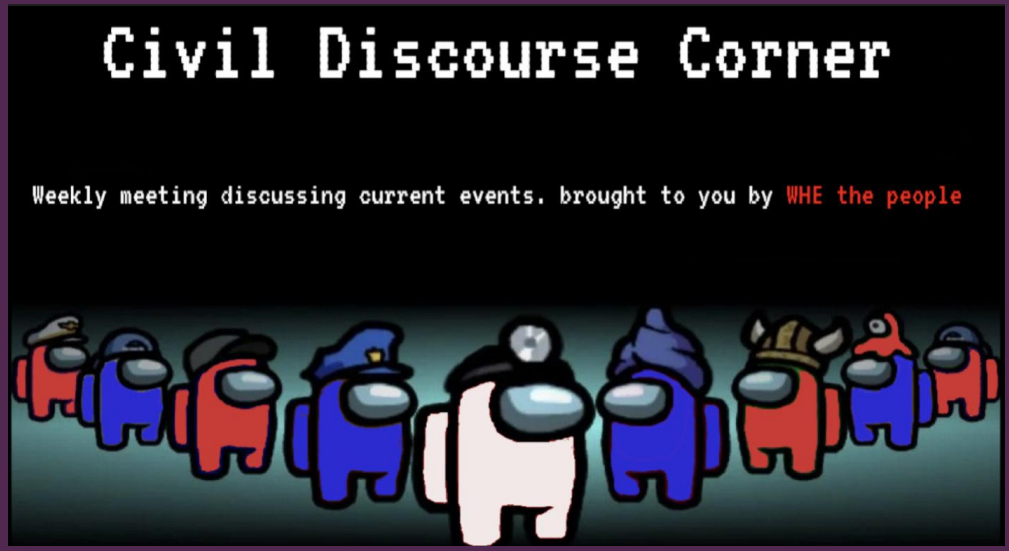
# Politics In The Classroom

- To be a student engaged in politics
- To be an educator involving students
  - -how to gain student interest
- Student organizations / initiative
- Norms and guidelines to help create a safe and non partisan environment.

Example of student engagement may look like ↓




This is a student made graphic, with customized characters from the popular video game *Among Us*. In WHE The People we use this graphic for the student organized Civil Discourse Corner, which had the first official meeting this past saturday.

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# Us and Art

## VISUAL ARTS

**Huffingtonpost**

Art and Activism: 1930's - Today

10 Best Political Art Pieces and Their Creators

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## THEATRE

**5 Musicals That Make Strong Political Statements**

The Odyssey Online

**News Flash: Broadway has always been political.**

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/broadway-has-always-been-political_n_58332cf6e4b030997bc088f8

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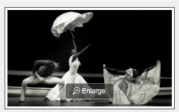
## DANCE

Martha Graham Dance Company's 'Political Dance Project'




Marc Enguerand, photographer. Judith Jamison (center) and members of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Ailey's Revelations, 1974. Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress (009.00.00)

**Politics and the Dancing Body**

The Library of Congress

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## WRITING, FILM, MEDIA ARTS

**POLITICAL CARTOONS/COMICS**

**Go Comics - Web Comics**

Political Comics

Read political comics and cartoons online at GoComics.com, the world's largest comic strip site for online classic strips like Calvin and Hobbes, Dilbert, Non Sequitur, Get Fuzzy, Luann, Pearl Before Swine, 9 Chickweed Lane and more!

**Go Comics - Political Cartoons**

Political Cartoons

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## MUSIC

**50 Best Protest Songs of All Time**

Paste Magazine

**5 Moments when classical music met politics**

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/arts/music/5-moments-when-classical-music-met-politics.html

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# Working with Faculty & Staff

- DEI Community Conversations began Summer 2020
  - #BlackLivesMatter
  - Black@
  - Health and wellbeing of adult community
  - COVID and our Community
  - Politically-themed scenarios for our community
- Faculty Brainstorming Sessions
  - 3x during Summer 2020
- Resources on our “WHE The People!” website
- Cross-Collaborations
- Remain non-partisan while still engaging in conversations!
- Commitment from top-down!

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# What else are WHE planning for OUR communities

Ongoing Events and Activities

- Continuing Civil Discourse Corner
- Training faculty and staff to engage conversations
- Guidebook for families

On Election Day

- Encouraging members of our community to vote if they haven't already
- Hyflex watch parties between students on and off-campus.
  - Looking to continue that community feeling

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# What else are WHE planning for OUR communities (cont.)

Day(s) after the election:

- Morning meditation session for faculty to prepare for the day
- Holding an all-school assembly
  - Recognizing outcome
  - Acknowledging our diverse political ideologies
  - Promoting ways to get/stay involved
  - Utilizing our resources to share out about "what comes next"
- Affinity spaces for our students, faculty and staff
  - Existing affinity spaces
  - Politically specific spaces

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# Two Weeks From Election Day!

- Create norms in your classroom, school or student organization/club
- Create affinity spaces for members of your community to gather and discuss relevant topics impacting one another
- Offer resources to faculty/staff/advisors around navigating topics in their respective settings.
- Engage in conversations with your students!
  - Many of us joining in today ARE educators!
- Acknowledge the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of your community leading up to and after the election.
- Implement role playing for your adult community.
  - Time to "look raggedy"

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# Thank you!

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# Workshops Attended

*Election 2020: Creating Environments for Civil Discourse and Dialogues Across Differences*

April 30, 2020 - Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE)*

*Empowering Political Discourse Dialogues in Your School*

July 21, 2020 - Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE)*

*Navigating Challenging Conversations*

August 18, 2020 - National Network of Schools in Partnership

*Election 2020 Teach Meets*

October 27, 2020 - Institute for Social and Emotional Learning

* denotes membership

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# Additional Resource

Leadership+Design has created an Election Week experience that will leave educators feeling confident and prepared to facilitate critical civil discourse with students.

Design for Election Week offers experiences for students that build empathy, stoke civic engagement, and celebrate our democratic republic.

https://www.leadershipanddesign.org/design-for-election-week

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