

## Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Debate/Critical Thinker Academy

During this week’s audio lesson, we switch gears from introducing new critical thinking concepts to:

- Applying the critical thinking techniques we have already learned to specific aspects of the Presidential race; and
- Introducing a guest speaker with experience studying or teaching critical thinking to provide commentary on their approach to the subject, as well as their perception of the candidates and voters participating in the election

This week, we reviewed the first Presidential debate, focusing on how the format of that debate forced the candidates to directly engage with one another while also constraining which persuasive tools they could use in the process of debating. Some key observations from that analysis included:

- A discussion of who are the “real” audiences for a televised Presidential debate and how this impacts debate dynamics
- How the format of the debate limited the effectiveness of pathos-based appeals that work better during stump speeches than in the type of personal exchanges required during the debate
- How each candidate made use of strategic rhetorical devices to try to neutralize key criticisms being directed at them by their opponent
- That both candidates used Argumentation from Authority to try to give their economic plans weight with the audience

We were also joined by Kevin deLaplante, founder of the Critical Thinker Academy, who discussed his approach to the teaching of critical thinking which he breaks down into the following six “pillars:

- Logic
- Argumentation
- Rhetoric
- Background Knowledge
- Creativity
- Character

Our guest also provided insight into why a political campaign should not necessarily be judged by the same standards you would use to review a formal logical argument and what dynamics are required to get people to think critically and potentially change their minds about important personal beliefs.

# Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Debate/Critical Thinker Academy

## ***Terminology***

Important vocabulary terms used in this lesson include:

- Argumentation from Authority
- Managing expectations
- Normative behavior

## ***Goals***

The goal of this lesson is to give students an understanding of:

- How to determine who are the actual audiences for political events (such as a Presidential debate) and how the nature of the genuine audience impacts candidate behavior
- How the structure of a debate can place constraints on which modes of persuasion and persuasive tools candidates can use during exchanges
- How the use of strategic rhetorical devices (such as humor and innuendo) can be used to neutralize attacks
- The difference between argumentation and rhetoric\*
- The role of creativity and character in critical thinking\*
- How all forms of persuasive speech (including political campaign material) cannot be judged by the standards of pure logic and argumentation\*
- That information delivered via any media (including an audio podcast) may not reflect the actual words or sequence of exchanges that occurred during an interview or news event
- How to manage expectations to try to define the standards by which an audience judges your work

## ***Primary Resources***

The following resources are available at the [www.criticalvoter.com](http://www.criticalvoter.com) web site to support this lesson:

- **Critical Voter Podcast 010 – Debate and Interview with Kevin deLaplante:** A 30 minute audio lesson that reviewed the first Presidential debate and included an interview with the founder of the Critical Thinker Academy
- **Quiz** – A short quiz designed to determine if someone has listened to and understood the podcast.
- **Blog Entries** – The Critical Voter blog contains multiple blog entries dealing with the issues covered in the podcast (look for entries the week of October 7, 2012)

\* As discussed during the interview with Kevin deLaplante from Critical Thinker Academy

# Critical Voter Lesson Plan – Debate/Critical Thinker Academy

## ***Additional Resources***

Links to additional information can be found on the [Critical Voter Resources page](#).

## ***Suggested Activities***

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Notes on this activity</b>
Have students listen to the podcast and answer the quiz questions to ensure they have listened to and understood the concepts covered in the lesson.	The podcast can be played in class or assigned as homework.  The quiz is made up of four questions which were designed to be easily answerable by anyone who has listened to the podcast lesson in its entirety.
Review another political debate (either the next debate in the current campaign sequence, a debate between local candidates, or an historic debate) using the example that begins this week’s podcast to model how to analyze the dynamics of the candidates’ debate performances.	Analysis and discussion of a debate should focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What constraints are placed on the candidates by the debate’s format</li><li>• Which audiences a candidate is targeting while engaging in debate</li><li>• How a Presidential debate might differ from other sorts of persuasive communications (such as an argument in which friends trying to convince each other of something, or a courtroom where opposing lawyers are trying to convince a judge or jury).</li><li>• How the candidates make use of logos vs. pathos vs. ethos-based appeals</li><li>• How the candidates make use of linguistic or strategic rhetorical devices</li></ul>
Review the resources on the <a href="#">Critical Thinker Academy</a> website to determine which lessons may be applicable to the subject of using the Presidential election to study critical thinking, and which may be applicable to further study beyond this current project.	Students can also use the <a href="#">Critical Voter resources page</a> to review other sources that provide material for studying critical thinking, or perform their own research (using the Information Literacy techniques discussed in previous podcasts) to discover additional teaching material applicable to this subject.