Election Read Aloud Choices

Grace for President

Kelly DiPucchio -author

LeUyen Pham-illustrator

Disney-Hyperion -2012.

Vote for Our Future

Marilyn McNamara-author

Micah Player-illustrator

Schwartz& Wade, 2020.

While young elementary children are ineligible to cast a vote, they can be active participants and celebrants of the voting process each election. Ironically, a vast number of polling sites run on school premises, making active engagement of students highly accessible.

Since grades, 1-3 students are young readers and not yet involved in formal US government and detailed civics education, how can they become involved in a citizenship right they cannot yet exercise? Children’s authors have imaginatively tackled this challenge. Two in particular have produced with their illustrator partners, produced works that are highly captivating as narratives and boldly offer a slew of doable young reader citizen now options to be authentically a part of Election Day.

Grace for President

Topics: presidential powers, presidential role and responsibility, school government, Electoral college, political outreach, canvassing and campaigning, student voices, civics education.

Genres: student running for school election fiction (Yes, there is such a genre and ducks are included!), political campaign fictional narratives, school stories-fiction, class stories-fiction, educating for citizenship fictional picture books.

Grace for President, was published in 2008. Its timely depiction of a bright girl who immediately asks why there are no females on the large poster of all the male Presidents, struck a chord with the children’s book audiences. Not only did and has the book gone through multiple editions, but the author was approached to allow a stage version which has successfully toured the United States as a children’s theater piece. What is particularly useful for educators in immediately relatable narrative whose two key characters are personable female and male peers, is that the entire project of running a viable school Presidential campaign and election is instantly ready for class, grade or school implementation, no hidden costs or obstacles of bureaucracy or other issues? Even better, the story and the vibrant illustrations of LeUyen Pham basically offer teachers and students a template of the various tools and campaign materials, which have to be used. The illustrations model posters, rallies, buttons, canvassing, outreach, assemblies and beyond. All the school ready materials aspects of a bootstrap election. Most impressive is the author’s insertion of the electoral vote concept in action by assigning the school students states and their number of electoral votes. Since that number of elector votes cast versus the popular vote is the key to elections, infusing it meaningfully into this narrative is value added. The narrative subtly contrasts the campaign run by Grace, which is very focused on finding out what the voters need, want, and responsibly addresses that, with Thomas’s campaign, which assumes victory because of his popularity and makes promises that sound alluring but cannot be realistically achieved. The winners in a reading of this narrative are all students who get a look at the protocol of running respectful, meaningful campaigns for constituent votes and the extent to which every vote is meaningful. Spoiler alert students will love the tacos issue.

BEFORE THE READING:

1. Ask students what they think is involved in campaigning for the job of President, based on their experience of online, broadcast and print news. They list or hand illustrate on a chart, how the major candidates for this role are campaigning. Do not comment on what they suggest.

Given their age and grade, challenge them as to how at school they might prepare for this adult role, just as with their subject study each day-reading, mathematics, technology, science, health education- they acquire skills, they use as adults. Listen to them, but do not suggest a class or student election to them. Some may have had that experience or helped in sibling campaigns so they may come up with it.

DURING THE READ ALOUD:

1. Why does Grace raise her question? Do you feel this is a good question to ask? Should she not want to see herself or someone like her on the poster?
2. Is the decision to run a school two-class election for President, a quick one day homework project? How many products, activities and small group meetings have to go into the campaign? As we read, keep a list or drawing of each.
3. Which of the candidates, in your opinion, deserves to win because the candidate’s campaign is better and more honestly run? Choose one candidate and explain your choice with reference to at least two details of that candidates campaign.

AFTER THE READING- TAKE ACTION PROJECT:

Options:

1. Look at the issues and campaign slogans that both Thomas and Grace use. Which of those issues and slogans are relevant to your school? Come up with a list in small groups of at least three major realistic (do not take vast amounts of money school and teachers and students do not have like a pool or new auditorium or orchestra) changes in schedules or look or school menu or services, which would make the school even better than it already is. Create posters, a short video, or a letter to the school principal or PTA officers advocating for that change. Appoint one person from your group to be the spokesperson to present the ideas.
2. This book was with the author’s permission made into a successful children’s musical that has toured the United States. Share this rap with the students:

<https://images.app.goo.gl/76xcTjPbzXgbaQR36>

Challenge the students to do a podcast read-aloud where they have students voice the teacher, Grace, and Thomas and add in music or special effects. They can get a sense of a successful read aloud by listening to this one (there are many of this popular book): <https://youtube.com/watch?v=tPaJOMLEcos&feature=shared>

1. Kelly Dipucchio actually followed this book up in 2019 with Grace Goes to Washington. Challenge the students to come up with their own sequels, which might also include Thomas making a comeback run during the next class election or Grace leading a specific school improvement change.
2. Obviously, the very best take action project for this work would be the staging of a meaningful school culture appropriate election, but that of course would depend on the time needed to do it. Some schools have built in school leadership teams or student government or afterschool community projects/school improvement teams so this could meaningfully effect actual student experiences.

Additional teacher resources:

<Https://images.app.goo.gl/EoZ9BwdnAb5mCJ8y8>

Time Magazine Coverage of the book

<https://time.com/4079909/female-presidents-chidrens-book-hillary-clinton/>

Vote for Our Future

Topics: voting system, collateral materials and registration processes, balloting, absentee, and other ways to vote, get the vote out campaign, voter legislation, right to vote, consequences of not voting, student voices, civics education, public awareness

Genres: fictional narratives voting story, school stories, picture book narratives focused on voting , get the vote out fictional narratives,

Random House originally published vote for Our Future in 2020. Unlike other picture books or informational books for young readers, this work does not focus on their learning about the Presidential election or other elections by running their own peer school government campaigns. The premise of this book and one that is sorely needed to inculcate students as active engaged citizens is that these young readers cast their vote by getting out the adult eligible voters. What is immediately classroom ready about this book is that the author and illustrator show us diverse relatable young elementary students actually getting the vote out. We see them knocking on doors, talking to their families, making buttons, soliciting and handing out election flyers, registration guides, and accompanying family members to the polls or helping them find services and ways to vote that include absentee ballots and early voting. This fictional narrative makes the case for immediate- not delayed until junior high or high school –up front in its text by noting “kids have to live with adult choices.” Of course, non-voting eligible adults who choose not to vote also have to do that. If ever a fictional narrative offers young children a blueprint for immediate, no expenses, facilitated classroom citizenship now, this is one. Choosing this is a “vote for our future” with engaged participating citizen voters today.

BEFORE THE READ ALOUD:

1. Ask students if given their age, grade level, and ineligibility to vote, there is any action they as young citizens can take to be part of the election process, other than watching it online or reading about it. Have them think about this and list any actions they think they could do.

Keep the experiential chart or record of their ideas for reference after the reading.

Have the students list any words or terms connected with the election, they know. Try to get them to come up with 5 terms if not more.

DURING THE READING:

1. Have the students take notes of all the terms and voting materials the story introduces.
2. What objections and complaints do the adult voters voice to the students?

Note them down.

1. How is each voter complaint or objection answered by the students? In what ways do their answers and help with information get the vote out?

AFTER THE READING- TAKE ACTION PROJECT

Options:

1. The McNamara Story is focused on a fictional school, The Stanton School involving its students in spreading awareness of the upcoming vote and getting the vote out in a very real way. Would you want as a citizen now to be part of this GET THE VOTE campaign among your own family members, school community staff and neighborhood eligible voters? Explain why or why not. Getting the vote out is a process that involves many drawing actions or you can photograph yourself doing the research, downloading or handing out election materials or buttons. Create a visual or text or photo plan for your “getting the vote out.” This can include talking at home to family or sitting at the computer or visiting a public library to get voter guides or registration forms.
2. Before we read this book, we tried to brainstorm what we knew about voting words, forms, materials and other activities. Let us look at the list, based on our notes; can we create a Get the Vote out alphabet list? Let us work individually or in small groups. There is not published alphabet book focused on our getting the vote out as young citizens, let us try to develop one. Note to teachers: Four letters can be jigsaw style handed out to small groups and then products can be put together as whole class book.
3. One of the most delightful bonuses of voting is that after casting their vote, the voter and sometimes accompanying young family members are given a sticker that says, “I voted.” In the inset pages of Vote for Our Future, many voter button designs are shown. Students can use these as inspiration for a designing graphic placards or stickers or buttons to give the voters who they “get out to vote” after they cast their ballots. PTA or local neighborhood businesses can finance actual buttons or colorful I voted placards for the adult voters, with the students credited as designers.

Resources for teachers:

Read Aloud:

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=Dtm3ob3pmnw&feature=shared>