

Teaching in Today’s Political Climate: A Guide

1. Identifying what the political climate is and how it manifests in class:

The “Political Climate” in Class	
Distrust of Media	<i>The increasing democratization of information and distribution of information has created a distrust with the notion of truth. With so many different accounts, how can we trust the information in front of us? This can often result in listening to information that confirms one’s own views, rather than the “facts.”</i>
Political Instability	<i>The increased polarization of parties within the federal government has heightened tensions students feel already in politics and has also created more uncertainty about what will happen (i.e. North Korea, healthcare, etc.)</i>
Impacts of Technology/Social Media	<i>The use of social media increases the distrust of media as discussed above. Moreover, it creates an information overload for students. With so much information coming from so many different sources, it is hard for students to keep track of everything that is going on or to have enough time to process the ever-increasing information circulating in the digital sphere.</i>
Federal Policy & Marginalization of Students	<i>The tightening of immigration policies as well as the increasing rhetoric of “Law and Order” creates greater uncertainty for already marginalized communities, specifically black and brown students whose families are most affected by these policies. The tension of police and ICE officers with communities of colors has become more and more combative and problematic and has, in some instances, discouraged students from attending school, or feeling safe outside their homes.</i>
Increased Presence of the Present in Classes	<i>Combining all the examples listed above, there has been an increased presence of the present in classrooms. The events of Charlottesville and Las Vegas shooting demonstrate this. With the media covering these events non-stop, students, even if they want, cannot avoid the larger events take place and the differing interpretations of those events.</i>
Teacher Positionality	<i>While teachers have always tried to maintain an effective neutrality, the increased polarization of politics in the country has made this even more difficult. Teachers, wanting to stand up for what they believe, while also not indoctrinating students, are questioning what they can and cannot stand. This level of uncertainty compounds the disorder created by the previous descriptions of the “political climate.”</i>



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2. Developing solutions and protocols to teach in today’s political climate.

The “Political Climate” in Class	
Reflect before Teaching	<p><i>The ever intensifying political climate that we live in can make it our hard to process information, including for teachers! Before teaching or discussing this work in class, it is helpful to process information or events to better speak with students. Try this simple debrief:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>What happened?</i> ● <i>How do I feel about what happened? Why do I feel that way?</i> ● <i>How might my students feel about this? Why might they feel that way?</i> ● <i>How can I support students? Where is that support appropriate?</i>
Provide Space for Discussion	<p><i>This step is often the most difficult, how and when do you provide space for discussion, especially when you have other material you need to cover and subjects you need to teach. As a teacher it’s a good idea to work with your administration to find the appropriate places to help students digest everything that is going. To do this, you may want to consider the following questions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>How much time do we need for this discussion?</i> ● <i>Should it be in class? Advisory? After-school?</i> ● <i>How should I frame this discussion so that is an inclusive conversation?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Where could the conversation go awry? How could I respond?</i> ● <i>When are you having this conversation? In the moment? A week after?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>How does the conversation change if it is a processing conversation or a follow up?</i> ● <i>What additional supports do you need to help support students?</i>
Establish Norms around Social Media	<p><i>The influx of information on social media is overwhelming for kids. Help them by establishing a protocol for sifting through information on social media.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>After reading a story, check to see if it has been published anywhere else.</i> ● <i>Check the validity of the source.</i> ● <i>If using social media for new sources, selects news sources that you have determined to be valid. But, always! double check their validity!</i> ● <i>If unsure, ask an adult to help.</i> <p><i>Remember, kids are learning how to process the world they live in as they are living in it. With information sources constantly evolving, it’s hard to keep track. Without a defined way for navigating social media, kids are burdened with figuring everything out on their own. Despite not being part of classroom work, norms around social media and information sources are one of most invaluable resources for kids!</i></p>

