



SEARCHLIGHTS AND SUNGLASSES

LEARNING LAYER

Voting and social media

Voters in the election of 2008 inhabited a vastly different social media world than those who went to the polls only eight years earlier. When George W. Bush was elected, Wikipedia, YouTube and Facebook were not yet publicly available.

Witness social media expert Clay Shirky's TED Talks about the influence of digital media on politics: "[How the Internet will \(one day\) transform government](#)" and "[How social media can make history.](#)"

Activities for students on three levels:

Flashlight: Pick three digital or social media innovations that were invented or released between 2000 and 2008. Here is a [timeline of social media innovations](#) and [another social media timeline](#). Students share their findings with the class, including answers to these questions: When was each of your media released or invented? How many users does each currently have? Do you think any of your media had an impact on the presidential election of 2008? Explain fully.

Spotlight: Media is not the only thing to change in the last two centuries. What are some other major changes in American society that correspond to the increases in presidential voting? Explore youth voting data in the 2012 election collected by [The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement](#). Discuss in class what other factors may influence youth voter turnout.

Searchlight: [PolitiFact](#) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning website that rates the accuracy of claims by American politicians. Its journalists, Tampa Bay Times staff members, research statements and rate their accuracy on the Truth-O-Meter. The largest falsehoods earn the rating "Pants on Fire." Have students explore the site. How could student media create their own campus or community PolitiFact? Brainstorm as a class.

Extra credit: Ask students to read "[The Presidential Campaign on Social Media](#)," by Jenna Wortham. Is Obama's preference for social media over press interviews a danger to balanced news coverage? Why? Compare statistics on social media influence on voting between U.S. and other countries such as France during the recent French elections. How are tech savvy journalists

making use of digital tools there? Blog your answer to this question: Is social media creating a better democracy?