

Title of Session: Social Studies Forum - My 2 Cents for Change

Moderator: Michael Hutchison

Guest Speaker: Sarah Shapiro

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MichaelH: Welcome to tonight's social studies forum

MichaelH: tonight, we've got a cool topic that is very current events oriented... Sarah's here to discuss some great resources we can use with our middle and high school students

MichaelH: I don't want to give too much away, so I'll let her do most of the discussion

MichaelH: but first, let's introduce ourselves. Would everyone tell us who you are, where you're located geographically, and what you teach?

MichaelH is a social studies teacher in southwestern Indiana

UnaR: I am a Principal in W.NY

KathyLL: Kathy - Library Director - Southern New Hampshire

DavidTo: I am a fifth grade teacher in Southern Illinois.

ClaireR: 4th grade teacher, Illinois

BarbaraAD: I am a special ed teacher in middle school in Peoria, IL

YvonneF: Yvonne is an 8th grade self-contained sped teacher in Illinois who teaches US History.

MeghanCon: My name is Meghan and I teach Civics and History of the Performing Arts in CT - also have an education website and teach online

AbbyGst6: Abby, I'm actually a colleague of Sarah's in Washington, DC

MichaelH: cool... glad to have you with us, Abby

AbbyGst6: thanks

MichaelH checks to see if anyone else wants to say hello...

MichaelH: as I mentioned, Sarah (and Abby) will have some great resources to share...

Sarah, would you like to introduce the site and tell us a bit about the resources?

SarahSha: Absolutely!

SarahSha: First of all, thank you so much for having me tonight.

MichaelH: glad to have you here, Sarah!

SarahSha: I'm very excited to share our website and resources but also to find out what additional materials and resources we can provide

SarahSha: to teachers like you across America

SarahSha: To begin, my name is Sarah Shapiro and I am based out of Washington, DC

SarahSha: I am here to share a website called My2CentsforChange (www.my2centsforchange.org)

SarahSha: It's a site for teens, ages 13-17, who are not yet old enough to vote but want to play a role in the upcoming presidential election

SarahSha: It was designed to be a fun, interactive way for teens to make their voices heard on the issues that are being talked about by the presidential candidates

SarahSha: For those more tech savvy, it's a Flash site - fun, colorful, dynamic - all what today's teens are used to!

SarahSha: A quick run down of what the site does:

SarahSha: A teen can visit the site, pick an issue from one of our 11 "issues wells" (it has a wishing well motif)

SarahSha: And then "add their 2 cents" to the well by writing a message about how they feel on a particular issue

SarahSha: Not only do these "2 cents" get posted to the site but the teen is also able to select which presidential candidates they'd like to receive the message

BJB2: very exciting!

DavidTo: Can younger students use it?

SarahSha: Every 6 weeks, we'll bundle the messages and send them off to the candidates to let them know that the teens of America are united in sharing their opinions on issues from war, genocide, health care, etc.

KathyLL: the wishing well is a great hook

SarahSha: Due to internet safety laws, to contribute to the site, students must be at least 13

SarahSha: However, you can still use many of the resources and concepts for younger students

MichaelH: could a teacher send messages in behalf of younger students, Sarah?

ClaireR: I could enter for my students?

SarahSha: That could potentially work

ClaireR: But I could pass this on to the junior high teachers

KathyLL: I'm assuming that students don't give any personal information

UnaR: I think this is great for grades 8 up

SarahSha: Absolutely! And like I said, many of the resources I'll be sharing are adaptable for younger students

ClaireR: Even 10 year olds have strong opinions

YvonneF: Is this site designed for in-school time or just introduce students to it and they continue their contributions at home?

ClaireR: good

SarahSha: The site can serve both purposes

SarahSha: The site itself can easily be a take home for students to explore at home, share with friends, etc.

DavidTo: I can see our Jr. High and High School teachers using it.

SarahSha: However, the site has the power to serve as a catalyst for some really exciting in class discussions

SarahSha: As we've already had some popping up all over the country

BarbaraAD: Can students suggest topics they want discussed?

SarahSha: And hope to see more and more as the election approaches

KathyLL: How long has the site been in existence

SarahSha: The topics are broad enough that students can add their feedback on more specific issues within topics and we've also included an "other" well so a teen can add their opinion on any topic

SarahSha: The site was launched on Super Tuesday - so about 8 weeks

DavidTo: Is it totally free?

SarahSha: Totally free

KathyLL: Is anyone in New Hampshire using it that you know of

SarahSha: and all the resources are free and I'm happy to send some additional materials to help spread the word

ClaireR: It's a good way to give students an idea of the issues

SarahSha: Exactly

MichaelH: Sarah, you might mention who is sponsoring the site, etc.

SarahSha: We've found in our discussions with teens that the issues are the piece they connect to - not necessarily the process as a whole

KathyLL: I think there is great credibility for students knowing the information is sent to candidates

SarahSha: they can internalize the issues - and explore how they are affected by them

ClaireR: It might also make sense for adults

SarahSha: Let me go into the sponsors:

SarahSha: The site was created by the organization I work, BBYO, a teen leadership organization specifically for Jewish teens committed to uniting teens of ALL backgrounds to be involved in the upcoming election

SarahSha: We're partnered with several Youth Empowerment organizations for this project

ClaireR: This election has caught lots of interest

YvonneF: I think it would be a great way for teens to get their feet wet in the political arena. They would be more likely to stay involved in the process as adults if they get

involved early. Maybe we could avoid the apathy that so many adults are affected with.

SarahSha: including Youth Service America, DoSomething.org, Youth Noise...

KathyLL: Teens working for teens

ClaireR: Maybe it might get people to vote

SarahSha: 18 in 08, Declare Yourself, Generation Engage, Project Vote Smart

UnaR: Are the teens you work with in public school

SarahSha: Each of these organizations bring something unique to the table and provide some incredible resources on the issues, politics, etc.

SarahSha: Many of our teens are in public schools across the country (we have a network of about 25,000 teens)

SarahSha: And as teen leaders are very engaged in their local communities (including schools)

SarahSha: They eager to get their classmates talking about the election and the issues and we thought bringing it to teachers like you would be a great way to help spread the word about what our coalition of organizations is trying to accomplish

SarahSha: Yvonne was exactly right - our goal is to get teens thinking about the elections BEFORE they can vote so when it comes time to vote, they're already invested

MeghanCon: So students sign up on their own?

KathyLL: Yes how does this all happen?

SarahSha: Now I want to share some of the resources we've put together that may guide how you can use this in the classroom

SarahSha: The site is open for all students, 13-17, to "add their 2 cents"

SarahSha: but to make it even more meaningful, we think that it can be used as an educational tool and the start of some very interesting discussions

SarahSha: So, at the most basic level, you can direct students to the site to "add their 2 cents" and send their thoughts to the candidates

SarahSha: But, we think it has more potential than that which is why we put together some materials which can be found at www.bbyo.org/my2cents

MichaelH: Sarah, what kinds of responses have you received from candidates who get student messages, and how is that shared on the site?

SarahSha: Great question. We actually just got our first response from a campaign the other day (From Hillary Clinton) and in addition to posting the letter to the site, we'll be sending an email copy to all the teens who sent their 2 cents to Clinton.

SarahSha: Again, this was only the first batch of "2 cents" - about 1,500 comments in total - but we hope to send more and more as the election gets closer

ClaireR: Now that's exciting, it should keep them involved in the process

SarahSha: Is everyone able to bring up the link to the My2CentsforChange Resources?

SarahSha: I'd like to point out a few that are particularly interesting

BarbaraAD: Are all the responses open ended or are some multiple choice type opinions

DavidTo: yes

SarahSha: They're all open ended

YvonneF: Yes, I have the site.

ClaireR: yes, I have it opened

SarahSha: And you should all feel free to go through the My2Cents site as if you were a teen to submit your 2 cents - just be sure to put your real age so I know to suppress the message!!

SarahSha: So, back to the resources...

DavidTo: Does someone censor all of the messages?

SarahSha: You'll see several resources - from logos and fonts and flyer templates to actual program guides, videos, issues one pagers, etc.

ClaireR: so you are aiming only for that specific age group?

SarahSha: Yes, we're aiming for the 13-17 -- the "teen audience" per se

SarahSha: But, like I said, some of these resources can be adapted for a younger audience and may be helpful to you even if you work with younger students

SarahSha: (and can also be shared with teachers in your school who work with the older students!!)

MichaelH: I wonder, Sarah... any thought of the college crowd... those who are over 18 but might not yet be registered to vote?

SarahSha: I think the non-registered college crowd is hugely important and many of our partners are devoted to getting them registered, informed, and involved

SarahSha: including Declare Yourself, 18 in 08, etc.

SarahSha: We specifically picked the pre-voter age because so little is done for them

ClaireR: Good age to target

SarahSha: there's lots of talk about the "Youth Vote" but few resources are put into getting the pre-voting age kids interested in the election!

KathyLL: hopefully you are encouraging a lifelong habit

ClaireR: and it's up to classroom teachers, this site should help a bit

SarahSha: With the resources - I want to point out the Give Your 2 Cents in the Classroom Teacher/Facilitator Guide

ClaireR: I will forward it to our jhs and hs teachers

SarahSha: This was designed by one of our teen leaders as a way of using the concepts of the website for an in-class discussion

SarahSha: It challenges students to become advisors to the President and determine what you want the president to know (and care about) when it comes to each particular issue

KathyLL: I noticed that you had fact sheets regarding many issues

SarahSha: It gives students the opportunity to connect to the issue they care about most and then discuss with others what they think and how that is similar and different than the rest of the group

SarahSha: Yes, those are the "Issues One Pagers"

KathyLL: Those could spark some very interesting discussions and debates

SarahSha: and these can be used in conjunction with the Give Your 2 Cents in the Classroom or separately

ClaireR: Can they see the candidates' opinions on issues?

SarahSha: Exactly! The point is not that they tell a student everything they should know - but that the door on issues is open

SarahSha: One of the projects I recommend for the classroom is challenging your students to use the internet to determine where the candidate's stand on each issue

SarahSha: this can be accompanied by a mock debate on an issue

KathyLL: Now I really like that

ClaireR: research!

YvonneF: I find my 8th grade students are very eager to discuss many of the issues but have little knowledge or understanding of others. This could broaden their horizons in a painless way.

SarahSha: Another idea is using the statements the students are making on the website and seeing if your class agrees

SarahSha: Using the document called "Our 2 Cents" you can read off a statement and do a poll or "barometer" to see if people agree or disagree with the statement

SarahSha: and then discuss the spectrum of opinions

SarahSha: What's fascinating about the "2 cents" added to the site is the varied opinion of the teens

SarahSha: Just as adult voters views run the spectrum, so do teens - they don't all believe in the same things

KathyLL: It would be great to see some passionate debate in the classroom about the real issues facing all of us

SarahSha: And since each teen's "2 cents" is accompanied by an age and city, state - you can also examine how political climate in different areas (red state/blue state) may influence their opinions

KathyLL: wow I'd like to see that

ClaireR: you can really cover lots of learning objectives by using this site

SarahSha: Now that we're getting close-ish to the end of the session, I'd really like to turn it over to you to find out how you think you might use the site as well as additional resources we can provide to help you in the classroom (and spread the word to more teachers across America)...

SarahSha eagerly awaits your response!

MichaelH: I could definitely see an opportunity here to interact with other students across the nation... finding out their views

MichaelH: especially looking at geographic areas as to who has what opinion in which part of the country

ClaireR: I use CNN student news in my classroom, this could go with it to broaden discussion

BarbaraAD: I think just having information on specific issues is something I can use.

KathyLL: I am not in a classroom and sometimes I regret it when I see all the great resources for classroom teachers but I will pass on to our social studies teachers in my two middle schools

YvonneF: I think my students would be thrilled to think someone actually cared about their opinions.

DavidTo: I think that just getting the kids to talk and do some deeper thinking about it would be great.

MichaelH: Yvonne, you may have just hit on one of the major plusses of the site....

KathyLL: Perhaps I can convince my library assistants at the middle schools to use the site in the libraries with kids

MeghanCon: Do you have plans to do an actual mock election?

UnaR: I want the additional resources Our teachers will like the tracking. Whom amongst this group will be working with sp.ed and gen ed. 8-12 graders

ClaireR: the elections is such a big topic, I think kids are already interested, this might be the hook for many of them

KathyLL: Yvonne I agree - they would be thrilled - especially to have the candidates see their thoughts

MichaelH: this definitely is an interesting campaign... my bet is a lot of kids are hearing things from their parents, and that also has piqued their interest

SarahSha: I'd like to do a mock election come November as well as a pre-voter pledge drive to get teens not old enough to vote to commit registering when they can

YvonneF: I work with both sped and gen ed 8th graders.

MeghanCon: it might be fun to have them "register" to vote somehow...

KathyLL: This is an election like no other and I think that kids are interested

MichaelH: Sarah, an idea.....

YvonneF: Peoria, IL

DavidTo: Will this site stay available after the election?

SarahSha: I agree that knowing the candidates are hearing the voice of the teens is important - which is why, ultimately - the more teens who actually go through the site and add their 2 cents - the more we can send off the candidates. So with everything you do, make sure the kids are actually adding their 2 cents on the site - not just in the classroom!

MichaelH: it looks to me like you have a good core group of teachers, educational professionals here... how can they use the site to link together and maybe have their students interact with each other to discuss issues and report on how the campaign is affecting them locally?

SarahSha: We will be working with our partners to continue the "My2CentsforChange" brand of youth empowerment and civic involvement after the election, yes.

UnaR: I will encourage the tracking of Illinois because we are studying Lincoln at Gettysburg in the Fall a grant through Cornell Univ. Mandatory reading for all freshmen this coming year

DavidTo: That sounds great.

ClaireR: I see you have 2cents commercials .. this could also be an opening for students to do their own campaign commercials etc.

SarahSha: One of the pieces that will be launched in the coming week or so is a My2CentsforChange blog which allows more in-depth discussion on issues, the election, etc. Perhaps students from all of your classes could become blog contributors/commenters

KathyLL: Cool idea

SarahSha: One school in Rockville, MD is devoting an entire week to election education

MichaelH: that sounds super, Sarah... our session participants should really consider working in that

SarahSha: including a day where each discipline will discuss the election from their perspective

YvonneF: Our district is in the dark ages and we can't blog at school but I could encourage them to carry it over to their home

MichaelH: they could blog through the site, couldn't they, Sarah?

SarahSha: So in Math class the students talk about polling/electoral college; English they can talk about election rhetoric, etc.

ClaireR: I teach all subjects and I can see many areas of curriculum covered

UnaR: also I will post this to my blog overnight after talking to the teachers
www.21stcentury.edublogs.org

BarbaraAD: Yes as well as writing persuasive essays

SarahSha: The commercials Claire mentioned can be broadcast on internal school TV stations as promotion as well as part of a larger school-wide election project

KathyLL: We have community TV - I'm thinking commercials

UnaR: I look forward to encouraging collaboration with all of you. Thanks,

SarahSha: I think the sky is the limit - and what I'm here to do is to guide you in ways you and other teachers can use the website as a means for creating meaningful discussion for your students

ClaireR: Our kids are so digital, this really appeals to them

MeghanCon: Thank you for working toward important goals for our students

YvonneF: Sarah, will we have a way to contact you personally if we need to?

SarahSha: Thank you for being their teachers!!

KathyLL: Sarah thank you so much for sharing with us

SarahSha: Yes, I would love for each of you to email me directly so I can follow up and help out

SarahSha: My email is sarah@my2centsforchange.org

SarahSha: My phone is [202-857-6691](tel:202-857-6691)

BarbaraAD: Thanks Sarah.

MeghanCon: thanks

SarahSha: Again, the website is www.my2centsforchange.org

ClaireR: Thanks for the discussion

SarahSha: And resources can be found at www.bbyo.org/my2cents

KathyLL: awesome

YvonneF: Thanks

MichaelH: Sarah, you're always welcome to interact with these teachers (or others) here in Tapped In

SarahSha: And I encourage you checking out our partner websites which have TONS of great resources

SarahSha: www.dosomething.org

SarahSha: www.youthnoise.org

SarahSha: www.servicevote.org

SarahSha: etc.

SarahSha: Thank you so much and I hope to hear from all of you very soon!

ClaireR: are these links attached to the web site?

SarahSha: Yes, you can get them in "Learn more about the 2008 election" as well as in many of the materials in the resources

ClaireR: Thanks again, Sarah

MichaelH: Sarah, this was a great session, thanks for joining us this evening!

SarahSha: My pleasure. I'm happy to stay and answer more questions but I want to let you get back to your busy lives!

MichaelH: Anyone have any final questions or comments for Sarah before we call it a night?

MaryannDu: THANKS!

KathyLL: No my mind is chock full

BarbaraAD: very informative.

DavidTo: Yeah, thanks for sharing.

ClaireR: good night

SarahSha: Thanks for participating!