Title of Session: SEEdebate
Moderator: Michael Hutchison
Guest Speakers: Meghan Connelly and Ann Thomas
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MichaelH: I need to start figuring what I'm going to do with my government classes as far as the election goes; we start school in about three weeks.

MichaelH: And, I'm not ready!

MeghanCon: SEEdebate will be ready!!

MichaelH: Yep, that's what I'm counting on!

MeghanCon: I am going to use it weekly with my 7th graders

MeghanCon: It's a culture course, but I still need to address the election!

MichaelH: The one thing I need to iron out is the technology. I'd like to get one or two (actually three) computers in my classroom so that kids can more easily access SEEdebate, as well as C-SPAN Classroom

MichaelH: I have one machine, but it's my teacher workstation, with access to the student management system, and my gradebook.

MeghanCon: Yes - That would work well. They could revolve in and out in groups

MichaelH: That's what I'm hoping for, Meghan. Also, I could possibly have kids working at times where they aren't in class... before/after school, my prep period, etc.

MichaelH: And, the opportunity for students to interact about issues (in a thoughtful, supervised manner) is a good thing

MeghanCon: I am going to send a permission slip home asking parents about their computer availability and student use of the site at home

BJB2: what about libraries?

MeghanCon: There is one available and printable at SEEdebate

MichaelH: We have a small computer lab in our media center, BJ, but it's constantly in demand

MeghanCon: That too! We have 2 computer labs - but I'll have to see about availability

MeghanCon: I am certain I want to sign up for the computer lab in the beginning of the year though - to walk through the registration process with them

MichaelH: That makes sense. I think it's a good idea to walk through the process with them, and to forestall any possible questions or issues.

MeghanCon: Especially with 7th grade

MichaelH: 12th grade, too, Meghan :)

MeghanCon: true

MichaelH: BJ, I should probably start... we can be pretty informal because of the size of the group, but we can also take care of anyone who comes late

BJB2: Ann and Meghan, can you give a description of SEEdebate so anyone reading the transcript will understand?

BJB2 nods to Michael

MichaelH: Welcome to today's Social Studies forum

MeghanCon: SEEdebate is an online current events discussion site. Students ranging from grades 5 - 12 participate in engaging online debate/discussion with all the other student users at SEEdebate –

MeghanCon: The discussion centers around current events articles that we pull from actual newspaper sites internationally – and with attention to finding diverse perspectives.

MeghanCon: We categorize the articles into "forums" by subject area – currently we have all the most common social studies subjects, as well as science, health, technology and media literacy. This makes it easier for teachers to find articles that fit into their curriculum goals for their students.

MeghanCon: We also have an entire section on the 2008 election

MeghanCon: That is where we post daily articles about the election

MeghanCon: categorized by issue as well as candidate

MeghanCon: Should I continue on our election resources?

MichaelH: yes, Meghan, I think that would be great

MeghanCon: ok -SEEdebate will be a wonderful tool for teachers for the upcoming election.

MeghanCon: As I said, I plan to use it in my class weekly.

MeghanCon: We will also post each of the televised debates. Students can hash out their stance on the issues and eventually arrive at a very well informed final decision.

MichaelH: Meghan, feel free to post the URLs for the main site or for the election resources.

MeghanCon: Yes - main site is www.seedebate.org

MeghanCon: election resources are at http://www.seedebate.org/forum/80

AnnTho: Here's a list of the forums we categorize our articles into: http://www.seedebate.org/forum

MeghanCon: We will hold live discussions for your students during the televised debates.

MeghanCon: That should be fun

MichaelH: Will those discussions be in real time as the debates are being broadcast, Meghan?

MeghanCon: yes

BJB2: wow!

MeghanCon: depending on the number of students

AnnTho: In a format similar to this one.

MeghanCon: we may have to break into categories

MeghanCon: maybe by grade

MeghanCon: Ann and I will personally participate

MichaelH: I'd say at least by middle and high school level, Meghan,

MeghanCon: we may need other volunteers too!

MeghanCon: I agree with that Michael

MichaelH: maybe 6-8, 9-12?

MichaelH: The only issue there is that you would need separate moderators for each grade level

MeghanCon: Yes - or perhaps more skill based so that teachers can use judgment to see where their students would fit best

MeghanCon: we are hiring interns from the University of CT to moderate in the fall. Grad students

MeghanCon: very exciting!

MichaelH: That's a good point, Meghan. The other issue may be that, for example, Government might be offered on the 12th grade level in some states (like Indiana), and earlier in other states

MeghanCon: True

MeghanCon: I know here it is often a 9th grade class

MeghanCon: in CT

MichaelH: But, I think kids who are relatively close in age can still interact and have a good discussion

MeghanCon: Yes - and there is often such a wide range within grade levels! Also - for the election - we will hold a SEEdebate-wide election for students as well as provide post election articles to keep students informed – as well as weekly polls so students can track what others are thinking.

AnnTho: We've found that the subject their studying doesn't matter as much as the topic they're discussion in the forums

MichaelH: That's an interesting point, too, Ann. For example, I could bring 12th grade government and 11th grade US History, and in the spring, even 10th grade world history kids

AnnTho: Yes, lots of the school-day framework gets peeled away when they are focused on gun control or stem cell research

MeghanCon: There are specific forums for each of those courses, but most of the articles overlap

MeghanCon: so you would find gun control in both government and US History

MeghanCon: as well as the election

MichaelH: Sure, for example, with gun control, I have a lot of younger kids who have guns and hunt, and they have very strong opinions regardless of whether they are older or younger

AnnTho: Yes! We had a class in Montana with the same feelings

MeghanCon: That is a great opportunity to develop their research skills

MeghanCon: make them find the facts to back up their opinions

MeghanCon: to make a strong argument in the forum

MichaelH: Right, that's a key thing... you can't just let kids get online and post without some evidence to back up their opinions

MeghanCon: Gun Control will be it's own standing debate in the fall

MeghanCon: Also, the parameters of the assignment are yours to design. Some teachers are very specific about what they want their students to do.

MeghanCon: Maybe there are specific writing skills you are practicing, or maybe you want them to research the topic and add a certain number of facts to back up their arguments.

MeghanCon: Some teachers are a little more free form and just expect a certain number of posts and/or evidence from the article in the response.

MeghanCon: We find that some structure in the assignment works best

MeghanCon: we have example assignments at the site as well as example rubrics

MichaelH: I'm just curious, Meghan, but have you considered a "teachers' discussion" in SEEdebate where teachers who are using the assignment can post to suggest ideas about how to best use the site, questions or concerns, or classes who are seeking to pair up with other classes in other locations?

MichaelH . o O (you may already be doing this)

MeghanCon: Yes - that is in development for the fall

AnnTho: The "Teacher's Exchange" will be the place for that - as Meg said - in the fall

MichaelH: My thinking was that it would be great for me (or other teachers) to be able to

post requests for classes to interact with (maybe red state vs. blue state, or east coast or west coast)

MeghanCon: Exactly.

MeghanCon: This is the vehicle for that interaction

MeghanCon: You can make the discussion private to only your class and another

MeghanCon: or a group of classes.

MichaelH: That's a great idea, Meghan. I'm guessing you could invite other classes in, though, if you wanted

MeghanCon: Oh yes, of course. That way, a group of, say - economics classes can collaborate at a different level

MeghanCon: because they are required to know more on a topic

MichaelH: That's a good point, also.

MeghanCon: There is a lot to share too. Educators have used SEEdebate in a variety of ways:

MeghanCon: as the basis for a course, as a weekly or bi-weekly assignment, as an in-class assignment, homework, enrichment, extra credit. Teachers also have used the site for closed discussions within their own class or school only, as a place to post other assignments, as a blog assignment, wiki assignment, etc.

MichaelH: How would you use the site as a wiki, Meghan?

MeghanCon: We had a teacher who used the site as a wiki by asking her students to post "pages" for the topic she gave them

MeghanCon: in the end, the "article" was a series of posts by students

MichaelH: That's interesting. I hadn't envisioned doing it that way

MeghanCon: We have some very innovative teachers on our site

MeghanCon: We welcome teachers who want to post their own articles

MeghanCon: If they have something specific - or happening locally

MeghanCon: they can post it to the whole site and get other students' opinions on a local issue

MichaelH: That's a good idea too; for example, kids who are located in a "debate city" or if there's a specific campaign event happening in their town

MeghanCon: Or sometimes they just find a great article in their travels

MeghanCon: Exactly

MichaelH . o O (I don't think that will happen here, but my kids might like to read about what's happening when kids are seeing candidates in their town, or there's some sort of event)

MeghanCon: True - the perspective is really interesting

MeghanCon: That is one of the greatest things about SEEdebate

MeghanCon: students benefit from idea sharing in many different parts of the country

MeghanCon: regional differences

MeghanCon: socio-economic

MeghanCon: urban vs rural

MeghanCon: we can get our kids exposed to the different perspectives in the country

MichaelH: and it could also make the election even more meaningful to kids if they live in a state which apparently is "strong" for one or the other candidates

MeghanCon: I know that kids in New England need it!

MichaelH: For example, I think at this point, Indiana would go for McCain, but it would give my kids a chance to see what's happening in hotly contested states

MichaelH . o O (like Pennsylvania, BJ)

MeghanCon: It cultivates their individuality as well as understanding/tolerance

MeghanCon: CT is Obama - I am pretty sure

MeghanCon: We are true blue over here

AnnTho: Wonder who Mass will go for??? :)

MichaelH: I imagine most of the New England area will go Democrat. Of course, since Obama is our "next door neighbor", that might make a difference

MeghanCon smiles

MeghanCon: true

MeghanCon: this will be a very interesting election

MeghanCon: it is an exciting time to teach

MichaelH: On the other hand, Indiana is as "red as red can be". I've lived through every presidential election since 1956, and we've only gone Democrat one time (1964)

MeghanCon: wow!

MichaelH: Of course, all bets are off if Obama picks Evan Bayh as his running mate

MeghanCon) Maybe it's because there is so little interaction between us in the past -

MichaelH: Somehow, I DON'T think Obama is going to pick Lieberman

MeghanCon: SEEdebate will single-handedly make those predictable colors a thing of the past!!

MeghanCon: No - you are right about that! (Lieberman)

AnnTho: Or John Kerry [Lieberman]

MichaelH: I hope so, Meghan. Actually, Indiana is very conservative, and a farm state, and even though northwest Indiana is highly Democrat, the downstate area is fairly Republican

MichaelH: I've wondered if Obama might select Al Gore...

MeghanCon: But what if McCain chooses Mitt?

AnnTho: Hmm

MeghanCon: I am not sure Gore would accept

MeghanCon: There were grumblings about McCain/Romney

MichaelH: I don't know if personalities will really make the difference, but rather the issues. Six months ago, I figured the overriding issue would be the war; now everyone says the economy

MeghanCon: Yes - I agree

ShayneTr: Would it be too much "chutzpah" to invite candidates to talk on SEEDebate? Just thinking really, really big...

MichaelH: Romney would definitely help McCain in the Midwest

MeghanCon: Energy may come in a little

MichaelH: Actually, Shayne, it's not EXTREMELY big

AnnTho: If we had more summer classes, we could get this very debate going at SEEdebate and then show the users the results later in the fall..

MeghanCon: Chutzpah is our specialty

ShayneTr laughs

MeghanCon: We can contact them

MichaelH: Why couldn't you have kids have a discussion in which they suggest questions, and those questions could be forwarded to the campaigns

MeghanCon: maybe we can get a rep at least?

AnnTho: Perhaps a representative from a campaign

MeghanCon: Or the vice people?

MichaelH: Or, as you mention, Meghan, you could invite candidates (or reps) to actually reply

ShayneTr: It would make up for McCain saying that he barely knew how to e-mail

AnnTho: good point, Shayne

MeghanCon: Wow - that is a sign of the times changing, huh?

MichaelH: Since it wouldn't be in real time, they could reply more at their leisure

MeghanCon: True!

ShayneTr: And wouldn't have to travel

MichaelH: But I think that's the shape of things to come. If people can donate money to a campaign by going to an online site, why can't candidates interact with voters (or future voters)?

MeghanCon: Excellent point

MichaelH . o O (how many times did she say, 'please go to HillaryClinton.com'...)

MeghanCon: right!

MichaelH: maybe it's time they paid us back for that? :)

MichaelH: And, since you're a national site, you might have more clout with the campaigns as far as getting them to respond to student questions

MeghanCon: Or at the very least - write a letter to the students for them to comment on

MeghanCon: as an article

MichaelH: I can imagine the look on a kid's face if he got a response to a question he submitted directly from Obama or one of his strategists

MeghanCon: that would be really cool

MichaelH: The question is what is the best way to contact the candidates or campaigns to get them interested?

MeghanCon: Hmmm - I guess I would start with email. Or we can have our students write them letters - and then call the local news about it....

MichaelH . o O (maybe point out the number of students who are on site who would be first time voters in 2008, 2010, or 2012?)

ShayneTr: and there's always the parents and older siblings

AnnTho: http://my.barackobama.com/page/s/mediarequests   places like this are a good start, too, to get in contact with someone like a rep

MichaelH: That's right, too, Shayne. Of course, even though they might not be participating directly in a discussion, they may be reading what their children/younger siblings are writing, and making their own decisions about who to vote for based on that

MeghanCon: And since we are free and a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit...

MeghanCon: Should I talk a little about safety concerns?

MichaelH: sure, Meghan... but it's getting exciting thinking about possible interaction we could have as teachers and students :)

MeghanCon: I know. It is very exciting - many sites out there have potential, but are not really as user friendly and straight-forward as we are.

MeghanCon: It gives teachers a strong foundation and then they can be creative with it

MichaelH: Well, I imagine there are some teachers who would have concerns about privacy and safety concerns for their kids

MeghanCon: Yes - and parents and administrators of course as well

MeghanCon: That is why we have put a lot of thought into how SEEdebate is designed

MeghanCon: First of all, we check up on all educators who create accounts at the site to be sure they are affiliated with a real school.

MeghanCon: If pre-service educators are on the site - they need to provide their university information

MeghanCon: Second, students cannot sign up without a code from their teacher.

MeghanCon: That way, we can keep people who are not educators or students off the site altogether

MeghanCon: Additionally, the only person who can see your students' names and locations is you.

MeghanCon: So if a non-educator was to "infiltrate" the site, they wouldn't be able to see anything but the students' screen names

MeghanCon: All other students and educators can only see screen names and bios – no personal info (name or location).

MeghanCon: from there...all comments are read by moderators who will remove offensive language, violent or discriminatory ideas, and anything that we deem "cyber-bullying" or otherwise disrespectful.

MichaelH: Meghan, could a parent or school administrator follow a discussion without actually being a member of the site, or would they need the teacher code or log in as a student to read posts?

MeghanCon: Parents would need to get the code from the teacher and log in as a student

MichaelH: thinking that they wouldn't necessarily know student identity but could follow the discussion

MeghanCon: Admins can create educator accounts

MeghanCon: It might make the students worry about what they say - if their parents are online and they have differences of opinion

MichaelH: that's true, also

MeghanCon: Guests at the site can't even see the students' comments without creating an account. That is why you can go to the page at http://www.seedebate.org/Examples to see examples of what students have posted in the past.

MichaelH: It sounds like a safe but easy to use environment, Meghan

MeghanCon: Yes - thank you. We try

MeghanCon smiles

MeghanCon: I am trying to think if there is anything else that we should share....

MichaelH: Meghan, when you are finished with the safety discussion, I wondered if I could ask you if you have examples of how teachers might evaluate or assess student contributions to SEEdebate... in other words, how do they give grades for their students' involvement

MeghanCon: sure

MeghanCon: Well, first of all, your students will have to provide a "class code" unique to your account when they sign up. They are then listed in your class. You can simply click on the students' name to see their comments listed starting from the most recent. It also tells you which article they commented to.

MichaelH: wow, that's very cool!

MeghanCon: This makes it easy to track your students

MeghanCon: It's nice because the teacher has full control of their students on the site.

MeghanCon: We also have example rubrics to help teachers grade posts

MeghanCon: http://www.seedebate.org/DiscussionRubric

MeghanCon: this is a general one

MichaelH: those are great ideas, Meghan. I imagine there are a lot of teachers (me included) who want to use the site, but also may need a little guidance as to how to grade student participation

MeghanCon: I know! Here's one that is more rigorous http://www.seedebate.org/RubricinGrid

MeghanCon: here's the easier version http://www.seedebate.org/RubricLess

MeghanCon: For me, it depends on the assignment.

MichaelH: Just curious, how are you planning to evaluate your students when they use the site?

MeghanCon: If I give a casual assignment then I just give them a point if they do the number of posts I asked - as long as the posts are on topic and actually contain an idea - not "I agree"

MeghanCon: If I ask them to look at a specific topic

MeghanCon: and give them a more specific assignment such as post three times using at least one fact from the article and two facts from your own research to back up your opinion

MeghanCon: I would use some form of the rubric - so that they are graded not only on their ability to meet the requirements but also on the quality of the post

MeghanCon: SEEdebate is easy to differentiate as well

MeghanCon: Because you an give a choice of article (easier and more difficult)

MeghanCon: As well as use different criteria to evaluate posts taking into consideration the specific skill level of the student

BJB2: Meghan, is there anything you want to add in the next 15 minutes that people reading the transcript should be aware of?

MeghanCon: Hmm...only that we would love it if they would use our site! The more students the more rich the discussions are!

MeghanCon: Ann? anything to add?

AnnTho: Yes - the more users, the more robust the site, and remember that it's free.

MeghanCon: FREE!!!

BJB2 smiles. Teachers like free!

MichaelH: Free is good, Ann :)

MeghanCon: and free from advertisement too!

ShayneTr: also good

BJB2: ahhh...good point about ads

AnnTho: And we always answer the feedback/ communications we get from teachers and students

BJB2: did you want your emails in the transcript?

MichaelH: Meghan, maybe we'd want to do a follow-up Social Studies forum early in September to highlight the site one more time?

MeghanCon: That would be great

BJB2 . o O (or is there another way in which people can contact you?)

AnnTho: Yes, please: newsbyte@seedebate.org

MeghanCon: curriculum@seedebate.org

BJB2: Thanks so much, Ann and Meghan!

AnnTho: You

MichaelH: Yes, thanks for the session, it was great!

BJB2: Michael, let me know when you want to schedule this session again

MeghanCon: Thank you too! Enjoy the rest of the summer

AnnTho: You're welcome - thank you again for the opportunity

ShayneTr: Thanks from me too!

MichaelH: OK, I'll check with Meghan and see when she's available

BJB2 nods

AnnTho: stay in touch, Shayne

MeghanCon: Ok Michael

MichaelH: Meghan, I'll get back to you via e-mail to discuss a follow-up session if you'd like to do one in September

ShayneTr: ok

BJB2 heads to the Global Projects discussion.

MeghanCon: ok - as long as it isn't the night of a debate ;)

MichaelH: That will help with more kids back in school and more teachers focused on what they'll do to teach about the campaign