Sam Ellis was a strong supporter of one candidate for President. He agreed with all of her positions. He planned to vote for her in the election. Then, one morning, Sam read in the newspaper that his candidate had once been caught with marijuana. This had happened back when the candidate was in high school, over 25 years earlier. Sam was disappointed. He wondered if she still deserved his vote.

During campaigns, we learn a lot about political candidates. Some have abused alcohol or drugs. Some have cheated on their spouses or stolen money. Do we have a right to know personal details about political candidates? Some people say yes. They point out that a candidate is asking for the public’s trust. They ask how we, the public, can understand a candidate’s ethics if we don’t know about his or her personal life.

Others think that if we exclude everyone who ever made a mistake, we might leave out people who would make good leaders. Some people think we should only focus on how candidates will handle crucial issues like terrorism, education, and global warming, not how they handle their marriage or their private mistakes. Should some parts of a candidate’s personal life be off-limits?

Imagine this: One of your friends posted a photograph of you being a clown and doing something very embarrassing at a party (use your imagination). If one day you decided to run for public office, you could be sure that this photo would be displayed in newspapers, on television, and all over the internet. One funny moment from years earlier would follow you into your future. Would you feel like your privacy had been invaded? Or would you believe that the public has the right to know about your teenage behavior?
USE THE FOCUS WORDS  *and alternate parts of speech

candidate (noun) a person being considered for a position

Sample Sentence: Sam Ellis was a strong supporter of one candidate for president.

Turn and Talk: What do you think makes for a strong presidential candidate?

campaign (noun) a political contest; a series of activities to achieve a goal

Sample Sentence: During campaigns, we learn a lot about political candidates.

Turn and Talk: What are some things that candidates do during a presidential campaign?

*campaign (verb) to work towards a goal (such as winning an election)

Sample Sentence: Some countries do not allow politicians to campaign on television because they do not want wealthier candidates to have an unfair advantage.

Turn and Talk: Do you think politicians should be allowed to campaign on television? Why or why not?

ethics (noun) beliefs about what is morally right

Sample Sentence: Some people ask how we, the public, can understand a candidate’s ethics if we don’t know about his or her personal life.

Turn and Talk: What are some examples of ethics in school?

issue (noun) a matter of public concern; an important topic of debate

Sample Sentence: Some people think we should focus on how candidates will handle crucial issues like terrorism, education, and global warming, not how they handle their marriage or their private mistakes.

Turn and Talk: Which issue needs to be addressed more urgently in your community: teen smoking or teen pregnancy? Explain.

*issue (verb) to give out or supply

Sample Sentence: The mayor issued 100 extra building permits to allow for more construction in the city.

Turn and Talk: Would students learn more if they were issued digital tablets to use in the classroom? Explain your answer.

display (verb) to show something; to put something where people can see it

Sample Sentence: If one day you decided to run for public office, you could be sure that photos from your past would be displayed in newspapers, on television, and all over the internet.

Turn and Talk: Where in your school are awards displayed?

*display (noun) a performance or exhibit

Sample Sentence: The soldier was honored with a medal for his display of courage on the battlefield.

Turn and Talk: Should athletes be disciplined for making emotional displays when they don’t agree with a referee’s call?
In 2008, New York Governor David Paterson called a press conference to admit to an ethical mistake. Years earlier, he confessed, he had several affairs while he was married to his wife. Some people said that his honesty was a display of good ethics. Others wondered why he chose to put his mistakes on display. When it comes to politicians and political candidates, which issues should be private, and which should be public?

In March and April 2008, New Yorkers were asked the following question: Do you think the press should report if a married politician has an affair? Below are the most common responses.

- 33% said: Yes, always.
- 34% said: Only if the politician used public money to pay for the affair.
- 15% said: Only if the politician ran a campaign based on family values.

**Option 1:** How many New Yorkers thought that the press should always report if a married politician has an affair?

A. about one in two  
B. about one in three  
C. about one in four  
D. about one in five

**Option 2:** In the same poll mentioned above, 40% of respondents said that the press should report illegal drug use by a politician under any circumstances, even if the drug use occurred when the person was much younger. Based on this information, were New Yorkers more tolerant of politicians who use drugs, or of politicians who have extramarital affairs? Explain.

**Discussion Question:** When someone decides to become a candidate for political office, are they deciding to put their marriage or relationship on display? Or should cheating on your spouse only become an issue if it involves some other unethical behavior directly related to the candidate’s public role, like stealing money or running a hypocritical campaign?
Mr. Seemy has been discussing an upcoming election with his students. He is still undecided about which candidate he will support even though the campaign is nearing its end. He is unhappy about some ugly comments one of the candidates wrote on a social media site. Even though the comments were made 10 years ago, the candidate's opponent is displaying the information and is claiming that it is an important issue of ethics for voters to consider.

Mr. Seemy doesn't like the comments, but he also questions whether it's ethical to dig through a candidate's old posts. He wonders what his students think about the issue, so he creates the following survey.

**Ethics Survey**

On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = totally unethical and 5 = highly ethical), please evaluate the following behaviors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Totally Unethical</th>
<th>Highly Ethical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lying about your age on Facebook.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading a text message on your friend’s phone without their permission.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a $20 bill on the hallway floor and keeping it.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Posting that a restaurant has bad food.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing a photo of someone without their permission.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not challenging a rumor even though you know it's untrue.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Searching through old posts online to try to find something embarrassing about a political candidate.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Think of two more behaviors and ask a classmate to evaluate them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

When you use social media, do you ever decide not to display something because it might come back to haunt you later on? Explain.
POLITICS AND PRIVACY: WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT A CANDIDATE?

DEBATE THE ISSUE
Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A
- The public should know about a candidate’s ethics. Candidates should be prepared to have their personal lives on display.

OR

B
- Only information about a candidate’s illegal activities should be revealed during a campaign.

OR

C
- Candidates’ personal lives should stay private.

CREATE YOUR OWN

Jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:

- You make a good point, but have you considered...
- I agree with you, but...
- I believe that...
- Can you show me evidence in the text that...
TAKE A STAND

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

candidate | campaign | ethics | issue | display

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