**Kindred Election Lesson Plan**

**Materials Needed**:

Ballots (one per student)

Slips of paper for debate questions (3-4 per group)

Colored pencils/markers and four sheets of white paper

**Introduction**:  
Once my class has read about ¾ of *Kindred* (through the end of “The Fight”), I run a presidential election in which the students are in charge of creating a presidential campaign around one of the novel’s major figures and then debating on behalf of their candidate. It’s very important to remind students that they must suspend disbelief for this assignment and think of the election as happening somewhere outside of normal space and time: naturally, most of the characters could not run for president in the antebellum South, and it would be difficult for them to step into the present year and be qualified for the presidency! Instead of focusing too much on politics then, this assignment asks them to think critically about character development over the course of the novel and to consider how each character’s personality can be framed as appropriate for a position of power. [If you teach the book in the fall, you may even be able to do this lesson very close to Election Day!]

**Instructions**:

1. Before introducing the activity, discuss the chapter “The Fight” and focus on the following major characters: Dana, Kevin, Rufus, and Sarah. Discuss how the characters develop in this chapter, the motives behind their actions, the way they respond to one another, etc. Ask students which character they would most trust in a position of power, then segue into campaign instructions.

2. Tell class that they will split into groups and be in charge of designing one candidate’s campaign, which should present the character’s qualifications and traits that make them the best-suited for public office. They will need to produce the following materials:

* Short, 2-3 minute speech outlining the candidate’s qualifications
* Vice presidential choice (another character from novel)
* Campaign slogan
* Campaign logo
* Campaign song

3. Describe group roles and job descriptions:

* Campaign manager (1 person, oversees team, presents the short speech and participates in debate, including closing statement) [Note that the campaign manager speaks on behalf of the candidate rather than “playing” the character.]
* Marketing team (2-3 people, work on slogan, logo, and song choice)
* Opposition research (2-3 people, research opponents, come up with debate questions)

Show students examples of campaign slogans/logos/songs from past presidential elections so the marketing team has models to work with. You might also come up with a sample campaign for a minor character, such as Tom Weylin (slogan: Put America to Work!).

4. Split class into four even-sized groups and assign each group one of the major characters discussed earlier (Dana, Kevin, Rufus, Sarah). Ask groups to decide roles and then sit next to the classmates in the same role. Give students ~20 minutes to work in their groups. The campaign manager should spend their time building the case for their candidate by pulling evidence from the novel; also let them know they should be prepared to make some closing statement at the end of the debate based on the answers they give throughout the debate. They should also check in with the marketing and opposition team to check their progress and incorporate their work into the speech as needed. The marketing team should make use of the colored pencils/markers and piece of paper you provide to create the logo. The opposition research team should use the novel to come up with debate questions, which they will write on the slips of paper you give them. Ask them to write some questions aimed directly at other candidates and some questions that can broadly be asked to all candidates.

5. With ~5 minutes left before debate, circle the room and collect the logo and song choice from each marketing team. While the groups wrap up for the last few minutes, search for the song choice on YouTube/Spotify/etc. and make sure projector is warmed up. When debate is ready to begin, ask four campaign managers to step out of the class and collect debate questions from the opposition research team. As you introduce each group’s campaign manager (and they re-enter the room and stand up front), project the group’s logo on the projector and play the campaign song they chose.

6. Once all campaign managers (CM) are introduced, the debate begins. Have each CM give the 2-3 minute prepared speech that focuses on their candidate’s qualifications. After everyone goes, act as the debate moderator and pull slips of paper supplied by the opposition research team, reading each question aloud. If the question is aimed at a specific candidate, let the CM know before reading it. If it’s a broad question for everyone, choose someone to start and have each CM answer in turn.

7. Once you’ve gone through several questions (note that there will likely be overlap in the questions so some will need to be skipped; alternately, you can look at them ahead of time and just choose the 4-5 best questions), thank the CMs and allow them to give short, 1-2 minute closing speeches before returning to their seats. When closing speeches are done, pass out ballots and tell students to *vote honestly for the best candidate*. Remind them that they shouldn’t just vote for their own candidate, but for the candidate they truly think would make the best president based on the debate they just watched/participated in. Collect ballots when everyone’s done voting. Tally vote, announce winner (and runner-up, if wanted), and talk as a class about why that candidate won and why others might have been less qualified for the position. This is a good opportunity to discuss the way various characters in the novel embody or challenge traditional American values (independence, equality, work ethic, etc.).