In the News: The Presidential Players

The Presidential election race is on. The vote happens every four years, on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November - that is, November 6, 2012. Each of the two major parties will be picking its final candidate between now and next summer. So far, there is little talk about any Democrat running against President Obama:

"Would you like to see other Democratic candidates challenge Barack Obama for the party’s nomination for president in 2012?"

But there’s loads of talk about who the Republican candidate will be. You have probably heard about these candidates in the past few weeks, as they have officially announced their candidacy, and started debating each other: Mitt Romney, former Governor of Massachusetts; Rick Perry, Governor of Texas; Michelle Bachmann, Congresswoman from Minnesota; Jon Huntsman, former Governor of Utah; Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the US House of Representatives; Herman Cain, Businessman; Ron Paul, Congressman from Texas. See abcnews.go.com/Politics (then click on Vote 2012 along the top) for a brief biography of each of these candidates, and a few others.

One new factor in this election is the unknown influence of the Tea Party. The Tea Party is not an official political party but rather, a coalition of people who value limiting the power of the federal government power, oppose many forms and targets of taxation, and value reducing the national debt. While it claims adherents from both parties, most members of Congress who agree with the Tea Party are Republicans. The Tea Party was a powerful force in August’s debt ceiling negotiations, and its impact on the Presidential race is not yet known. The latest polls (see below) show a slip in its assessment among voters, but November 2012 is a long way away.

"The Tea Party has a mostly positive effect on Congress." (% who agree)
Labor Day

Labor Day, the first Monday in September (this year, September 5), is a legal holiday in all 50 states. The holiday began over 100 years ago as a day to honor people who worked in factories, usually for low pay and under poor conditions. During that time, many labor unions were formed to protect the US workers. Unions grew in size, to a peak in the mid-1940s.

Today in the US there are unions for actors, musicians, postal workers, police, teachers, nurses, farm workers, painters, and more — about 80 unions in all. The American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is a kind of union of unions, with about 14 million members. Still, the proportion of workers who are union members has decreased steadily in the last 50 years (to a record low now of about 13%), as has the number of work stoppages, or strikes.

Labor Day has an unofficial meaning in the US as well. It marks the end of summer. Outdoor swimming pools may close. Museums and parks begin new winter hours. Many public schools and universities begin the new academic year in “the week after Labor Day,” whenever that happens to be. For students in the US, Labor Day is a kind of New Year holiday.

Labor Day Weekend is a time for families to enjoy one last piece of summer. Picnics are traditional. But beware! On Friday and Monday afternoons, the highways will be crowded with cars filled with bicycles, barbecue equipment, canoes, ice coolers, suitcases, camping tents, children, and dogs. Plan your driving carefully.

Plan Your Car Trip

The American Automobile Association (www.aaa.com) estimates that more than 30 million people will travel more than 50 miles from home over the Labor Day weekend, mostly by car. If you plan to be one of them, you might check these web sites first:

- **www.fuelcostcalculator.aaa.com** Select your starting city and destination city, and information about your car, and it will compute how much your gasoline will cost for the trip.
- **www.gasbuddy.com** Find gasoline prices at stations near you or on your route.
- **www.traffic.com** If you live in (or will be traveling to) one of 50 cities in the US, you can find a map that shows current traffic problems. Or, you can “customize a drive” — tell it where you plan to drive — and it will rate the severity of any traffic problems you will encounter and save the customized route for future use.
- **maps.yahoo.com** or **maps.google.com** These mapping sites combine travel maps with traffic status information.

And if you have a smart phone or iPad, try these apps:

- **MotionX GPS Drive** Directions, interface with wikipedia and Facebook, maps
- **City Maps 2Go** Download city maps onto your device while

Worcestershire Sauce, Pam and Other Mysteries

Recently I was looking through some American cookbooks with you, Reader, in mind. I thought this might help:

**Worcestershire Sauce** (pronounced “WUH-ster-sher”): A combination of water, vinegar, molasses, corn syrup, anchovies, spices and seasonings, used to add intensity to sauces, marinades, and dips.

**Mayonnaise and Miracle Whip**: Mayonnaise is a sauce made of eggs, oil, lemon or vinegar, and seasonings, used in the US mostly as a sandwich spread or as one ingredient in salad dressing. Miracle Whip is one brand of a lower-fat, usually cheaper version of mayonnaise. Both are now available in low- or no-fat versions.

**Tabasco Sauce**: Hot pepper sauce made of red peppers, vinegar, water and salt. Very intense flavor.

**Crisco**: A shortening made of vegetable oil. Used in baking, especially in wheat-based dough. Is solid at room temperature, with a higher smoke point than butter or margarine, so some people use it to grease a cookie sheet too.

**Pam**: A spray oil; use to cover baking sheets to prevent sticking, or to add a light layer of oil to meat or vegetables.

NEWCOMER’S ALMANAC 2
Social Attitude Trends in the U.S.

Here at the beginning of the Presidential election cycle, it is a good time to review U.S. opinion on various social issues. Overall trends are shown in the charts; subgroup differences are described to the right.

There has been a clear increase in support for gay marriage in the last 15 years, especially among Democrats (from 33% to 57%) and Independents (from 33% to 51%), but also among Republicans (from 15% to 23%). There are also regional differences, with support for gay marriage strongest in the Northeast (59% in favor) and West (56%), compared to the Midwest (40%) and South (34%).

Support for legal abortion (“in all or most cases”) has waxed and waned from a high of 59% in 1995, to a low of 46% in 2009; currently, 54% currently favor it. Support is higher among Democrats (65%) and Independents (58%) than among Republicans (34%). Support is weakest among White evangelical Protestants (34%), compared to White mainline Protestants (60%), Catholics (52%) and Religiously Unaffiliated (71%).

Support has gradually grown over the last 20 years for legalizing marijuana, although 50% Americans still oppose it (compared to 45% who support it). Those under 30 are most likely to support legalizing the drug (54%). Support is stronger among those who completed some (50%) or all of college (48%), compared to those who finished high school or less (40%).

Almost equal numbers of Americans say it is more important to protect the right to own guns (48%) as say that it is more important to control gun ownership (47%). This poll was taken just two months after the highly publicized shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords; attitudes showed very little effect as a result of this event.
Open House (and Other Hidden Messages)

This Fall, if you have a child in a US school (any age, private or public), you will probably be invited to an ‘Open House’ or ‘Back to School’ event. On this night, you can visit your child’s classroom(s) and meet the teacher(s). What the teachers do that night may surprise you unless you understand something about the values they are hoping to communicate. For example:

### Promoting Individualism

The teacher does this: tells a cute story about a boy in her class who corrected her description of something they were studying.

You may think: the teacher is risking losing the students’ respect; with so much to learn, you may feel it is best for the teacher to do the explaining, describing, and lecturing.

But the teacher intends: to communicate that she encourages independent thinking in her students. Some researchers asked eighth grade students how much they agreed with this statement: “In my mathematics class students do exactly as the teacher says.” In the US, 48.8% agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. Compare this with 73.8% in Taiwan, 79.8% in England, 69% in Japan, and 85.1% in Jordan. While this might reflect a difference in teachers’ abilities to maintain discipline, I think instead that it reflects a difference in teachers’ willingness to allow – or even to encourage – challenge and interruption, as they believe this helps build individualism.

### Student-Led Learning

The teacher does this: tells you that children will be expected to read books of their own choosing, both in school and at home.

You may think: it would be better for teachers, as experts, to select the best books to be read.

But the teacher intends: to encourage student-driven

---

**Vocabulary for the First Day of School**

**Open House:** A night when parents come to the school to meet the teacher, visit the classroom, and hear about the plans for the year.

**Field Trip:** A class trip away from the school — perhaps to a museum, historic site, factory, farm, etc. May cost extra money (for bus travel, admission fees, or snacks) but schools usually have a fund to help children pay if necessary.

**Permission Slip:** A form signed by a parent, giving permission to do a special activity or go on a field trip.

**Show and Tell:** In younger grades, there may be a regular time during the week for children to show something (like a picture of a grandparent who visited) or tell about something (like a trip to the zoo) to the class.

**Report Card:** A written notice about a child’s progress in different subjects in school.

**Recess:** A time during the school day for (younger) children to play outside.

**PTO or PTA:** Parent-Teacher Organization (or Association). A voluntary group that serves as a liaison between parents and school officials. It may offer regular evening meetings, discussion groups, andlec-

continued on page 5 sidebar
learning (which presumably will be more meaningful to the children) and expand the range of information present in class discussions. When researchers asked fourth graders how often they read a book during school hours that they had chosen by themselves, 71.9% of the American children said they did this every day, much more often than children in many other countries (see chart below).

Teacher Feedback

The teacher does this: hands you a folder of your child’s recent work, with stickers and “Great job!” written at the top of each one, even pages with some mistakes on them.

You may think: the teacher seems to be rewarding mediocrity; if there are mistakes, how can they be considered “great?” You may worry that if all students are told they are “great” they will not work hard to improve.

The teacher intends: to encourage children to feel like competent learners and to solidify their base of self-esteem so they will grow into adults who love learning.

By the way, it is likely that, even if you have these worries at your first Open House, you will come to like some/much of what the US educational experience offers. The parents I know love joining their children’s classes, they become regular parent volunteers, and they come to understand the benefits of emphasizing each child’s individual progress. But it takes a while to understand the teacher in context.

At the same time, school is often a place where parents feel caught between cultures — even if they see benefits to a new way, the loss of their own educational values is tough. Talk to your child and your child’s teachers about differences and see if you can come to a balance that works for all.

% Fourth Graders who said they read a book during school hours that they had chosen themselves

By the way, it is likely that, even if you have these worries at your first Open House, you will come to like some/much of what the US educational experience offers. The parents I know love joining their children’s classes, they become regular parent volunteers, and they come to understand the benefits of emphasizing each child’s individual progress. But it takes a while to understand the teacher in context.

At the same time, school is often a place where parents feel caught between cultures — even if they see benefits to a new way, the loss of their own educational values is tough. Talk to your child and your child’s teachers about differences and see if you can come to a balance that works for all.

% Fourth Graders who said they read a book during school hours that they had chosen themselves

Our book, Understanding American Schools: Answers to Newcomers’ Most Frequently Asked Questions (by education specialist Georgia Bennett and me - Anne Copeland) has already helped over 10,000 newcomers to the US understand how to navigate the public and private school system. We’ve just finished updating every fact, statistic and tip, in time for a September 2011 launch. Order your copy of the Fourth Edition today at www.interchangeinstitute.org. In the Comments box, note that you are a Newcomer's Almanac reader and we’ll give you a 15% discount.

Science Fair: A school or district may invite students to demonstrate original science experiments or activities on one particular day; sometimes prizes are given. Or, science (and other) teachers may organize a day of interactive science activities.

Library Volunteer: Most US schools welcome parents’ participation and involvement. One common way of helping is to volunteer to work in the school library. It’s a fun way to catch a glimpse of your child at school, and help the school, too.

Homeroom: In grades in which children move from one classroom to another for different subjects (usual in middle and high school), this is the room (and teacher and group of children) in which they hear announcements. May be the first class of the day.

College vs. University: “College” usually refers to any four-year undergraduate program of education that follows high school. A “university” is similar but has several different degree programs, including a graduate program and research facilities. Universities are not necessarily higher in quality than colleges in the US.
Birthday Biography: Arthur Nielsen

Have you heard of “Nielsen Ratings” of television shows? They are a measure of how many viewers watch each show, which in turn drives the demand for advertising on those shows — the higher the ratings, the more money advertisers will pay. Arthur Nielsen, born on September 5, 1897, was the marketing expert who invented this approach. Nielsen first started monitoring peoples’ radio channels in 1942, and then televisions in 1950. Participating volunteer families allow a monitor to be placed on their TVs that records what shows they watch.

Nielsen was an early leader in the field of “marketing research,” long before TV was invented. He showed the benefit of “test marketing” (releasing a new product in small numbers, in a small area, to test its popularity). And, in his pre-computer age, he led the use of statistical sampling to measure “market share” — for example, he would randomly select a small number of stores across the country then measure the percent of a product (say, soap) sold that was made by one of his clients. If the random selection were done correctly, this approach would provide valuable information about nationwide sales.

Happy Birthday, Mr. Nielsen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>TV Show</th>
<th>Estimated Viewers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950–1951</td>
<td>Texaco Star Theater</td>
<td>6 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952–1955</td>
<td>I Love Lucy</td>
<td>14-15 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957–1961</td>
<td>Gunsmoke</td>
<td>17-18 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962–1964</td>
<td>The Beverly Hillbillies</td>
<td>18-20 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964–1967</td>
<td>Bonanza</td>
<td>17-19 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–1976</td>
<td>All in the Family</td>
<td>21-22 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979–1980</td>
<td>60 Minutes</td>
<td>22 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–1982</td>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>22 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994–1995</td>
<td>Seinfeld</td>
<td>20 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–1997</td>
<td>ER</td>
<td>18-21 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–2001</td>
<td>Survivor: The Australian Outback</td>
<td>30 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–2002</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>25 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For reference, there are currently about 116 million households with a television in the US. The traditional way of measuring television watching (that yielded these results) was to put ask people to complete a TV-watching diary or to put a monitor gadget on the TV which would record channel choice. The Nielsen Ratings are having to adapt to the new ways people are watching television, of course. Now it measures digital video recordings (like TiVo), to capture time-shifted TV viewing. And it is now focused on how to capture data from those who watch TV in groups (like in a college dorm or in a pub), through iTunes, or online (like hulu, youtube, or the networks’ own sites ).
Jewish High Holy Days

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are two of the most important holy days in the Jewish calendar. Rosh Hashanah (pronounced Rosh Ha-SHAH-na), the Jewish New Year, is a time for Jews to remember the creation of the world, and to renew their faith through charity (giving to others) and prayer for a healthy new year. It is a solemn and sacred day, a day to think about all that is good and all that is bad, not just about one person, but about the human race as a whole. Jews may go to the synagogue on the first one or two days of Rosh Hashanah. There the traditional symbol of Rosh Hashanah, the shofar (ram’s horn) is blown. Jews may also greet each other (or send cards) saying, “May the year be good and sweet,” or simply, “For a good year.”

At Rosh Hashanah, many Jews gather with their families for a dinner. A traditional bread, challah, is shaped in a round loaf on this night, to symbolize the cycle of the year. Families dip apples in honey, to symbolize a sweet year. Some eat a pomegranate; each of the hundreds of seeds stands for a good deed done during the year.

The ten days after Rosh Hashanah are a time of preparation for Yom Kippur, (pronounced YOM Ki-POOR) or the Day of Atonement (action to gain forgiveness). This is a time to try to find ways to improve one’s relationships and behavior. It is traditional to fast (not eat) as atonement for and concentration on past wrong doings, and in the hope of living a sin-free life in the future. Yom Kippur marks the end of the judgment period that started with Rosh Hashanah.

This year, Rosh Hashanah begins on September 29, and Yom Kippur on October 8. The Jewish day, and therefore Jewish holidays, begin at sunset of the previous calendar day. Therefore observation of Rosh Hashanah will begin at sunset on September 28 and Yom Kippur at sunset on October 7.

The Jewish Calendar

The Jewish Calendar: With Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish Year 5771 begins. Year 1 is believed to have been the year God created Adam and the world. The timing of Jewish holidays is based on cycles of both the moon and the sun. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur always occur in the fall, roughly around the time of the vernal equinox. Rosh Hashanah begins on the day of a New Moon, but before the days of accurate astronomy, it was difficult to know exactly when this New Moon would occur - sometimes it was 29 days after the last one, other months it was 30 days after. Therefore, a tradition arose to celebrate this holiday for two days. This tradition is followed by many — but not all — Jews today.

For information about other calendars currently used around the world — Chinese, Christian, Indian, Ethiopian, Balinese, Islamic, Persian (Iranian) and Baha’i — as well as some ancient ones, see webexhibits.org/calendars/calendar.html.
Newcomer’s Almanac is published monthly by The Interchange Institute, for people who have recently moved to the United States. Its goal is to promote international understanding by providing information about the American holidays, customs, values, social issues, and language that often confuse and surprise newcomers. It is written by Anne P. Copeland, PhD, who is a clinical psychologist and the Director of The Interchange Institute. She is an American and has lived and worked overseas with her family.

The Interchange Institute is a not-for-profit organization that studies the impact of intercultural transitions on individuals, their families, and the organizations for which they work. From the results of this research, the Institute offers seminars and workshops, produces publications, and provides consultative services to the international newcomers, their organizations, and to host communities, recognizing that change and insight on both sides facilitates smooth transition.

US English speakers use a lot of idioms based on [mostly] Greek mythology:

The lack of sales to teenagers is my company’s Achilles’ heel. (The lack of sales to teenagers is the weakest part of my company, which is otherwise very strong.) (In the Greek myth, infant Achilles’ mother held him by the heel and dipped him into the river to make him immortal; he grew up to be a warrior and was killed by an arrow that struck him in his heel.)

Since her boss told her she might be fired soon, she has had the sword of Damocles hanging over her. (Since her boss told her she might be fired soon, she has had to try to continue living normally even though in danger.) (Damocles was a servant to the king; to punish Damocles, the king forced him to sit under a sword held up by a single hair.)

Don’t ask about his last job! That’s like opening Pandora’s box. (Asking about his last job will lead to all sorts of unpleasant and unexpected information.) (Pandora, the first mortal woman, opens a box and releases all human ills into the world.)

They made a Herculean effort to finish before the storm arrived. (They worked very hard at the huge task of finishing before the storm arrived.) (Hercules was the son of Zeus, famous for his strength; Hercules is actually the Roman name for the Greek Heracles.)
UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ

Read Open House (and Other Hidden Messages) on pages 4 and 5. Pick the better phrase to complete each sentence below:

1. Open Houses are held _____ every fall:
   a. in US elementary schools.
   b. in US schools of all levels

2. US principals are _____ likely than Belgian principals to expect parents to volunteer at school.
   a. more
   b. less

3. To an American teacher, a child who disagrees with something she has said
   a. is showing disrespect and should be punished.
   b. is showing independence of thought and should be encouraged.

4. Doing exactly what the teacher says to do is _____ common in a US classroom than an English one.
   a. more
   b. less

5. Fourth graders in US schools are _____ likely to read books they chose themselves during school.
   a. not very
   b. quite

6. When a US teacher writes “Great job!” at the top of a student paper, it means
   a. that the paper is unusually well done, truly extraordinary.
   b. that she intends to encourage the student to continue working hard.

7. Teachers in the Czech Republic are _____ likely to select the books their children read during school.
   a. not very
   b. quite

8. Parents who are worried about some of the things they see in their child’s US classroom should
   a. first discuss these with the teacher and/or someone who understands US practices.
   b. look for a different school.
1. Read Vocabulary for the First Day of School on pages 4 and 5. Write in the correct word/words from that list in the sentences below:

1. Jan’s favorite part of the school day is ______________ because she loves to run and play games with other children.

2. Do not forget to have your parent sign your _____________________ and bring it tomorrow, or else you will not be allowed to go on the ______________ ______________ with the rest of the class.

3. His last ______________________ was so poor that his mother asked to speak with the teacher.

4. I always enjoy going to _______ meetings because I like to get to know the other parents and teachers.

5. At tonight’s ________________________, parents will learn about what their high school students must do to be admitted to _________________.

6. Every morning she is greeted cheerfully by her ____________________ teacher.

7. What are you going to talk about during _________________________ — your new baby sister or your latest soccer game?

8. Jason is going to the state _______________________ to get his PhD in math.

2. Read Social Attitude Trends in the US on page 3. Look for examples of the present perfect tense, in which the past is connected to the present. For example, “I have worked here for 5 years” (present perfect tense) differs in meaning from “I worked here for 5 years” (simple past tense). In the first sentence, the speaker is saying that he still works at that job while in the second sentence, he says that he used to work here but no longer does. Re-write these sentences from simple past tense into present perfect tense:

1. I studied European history. _______________________________

2. She liked picking apples. _________________________________

3. He rode his bike. _________________________________

4. You sang a pretty song. _______________________________

5. They invited me to go with them. ________________________
Across
1. Americans are almost evenly divided over the issue of ___.
4. The ___ Party's influence on the presidential election is not yet known.
6. the study of what people would like to buy
8. a ram's horn, a traditional part of a Rosh Hashanah service
9. At ___ and Tell, a child might tell about a trip she took with her parents.
10. American ___ is a very popular TV show these days.
12. not eat
14. Labor Day was started to honor people who worked in ___.
16. Universities are not necessarily higher quality than ___.
18. He lived under a sword held by a single hair.
19. US teachers often encourage children to choose what ___ to read.
21. You will learn how your child is doing in school when you see his/her ___ card.
23. His heel was weak.
24. Jewish holidays begin at ___ on the day before.

Down
2. Labor Day is the unofficial end of ___.
3. There has been an increase in the number of Americans who think ___ should be legal.
4. Presidential elections are always held on a ___ (day of the week).
5. On line ___ are challenged by words that have two meanings.
7. US school principals hope parents will ___ their time and skills.
11. a shortening made of vegetable oil and is a solid at room temperature
12. A ___ trip is one that a class takes together, away from school, for a day.
13. He was known for his strength.
15. She opened a box that let out human troubles.
17. ___ Day is the day many swimming pools close in the North.
20. Miracle ___ tastes a bit like mayonnaise.
22. ___ House is a time to visit your child's school.

OUT AND ABOUT
1. Read Labor Day on page 2. Make a list of changes that happen on Labor Day in your US community — like opening hours for swimming pools, or parks.

2. Read In the News: Presidential Players on page 1. Pick three of the Republican candidates mentioned in the article and count the number of times they are mentioned in a national newspaper or web site.

3. Read Birthday Biography: Arthur Nielsen on page 6. Were any of the TV shows listed in the chart on that page available in your home country? Were any other US TV shows?

4. Read Worcestershire Sauce, Pam and Other Mysteries on page 2. Go to a supermarket and find five items that are unfamiliar to you. Read the ingredients. Does the label tell you how to prepare and use it?

5. Read Social Trends in the US on page 3. Do any of these trends or attitudes surprise you? Where would your home country score on these charts?
WITH A FRIEND

1. Read Open House (and Other Hidden Messages) on pages 4 and 5.

Hold a debate with a friend or partner about this statement:

“It is very important for teachers to promote individualism, allow student-led learning, and give positive feedback.”

In a debate, each person speaks either in agreement with the statement, or in disagreement. Do not discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each side. One of you should say why it is important for teachers to stress these things and the other of you should say why that is not what a teacher should do. You do not have to agree with what you are saying! If you like, you can switch sides after five minutes.

2. Read Pushed from the Nest or Given Wings to Fly? on pages 6 and 7. Describe to a friend or partner what happens when young adults go to university or get a job in your home country. Where do they live? For how many years does a young adult usually live with his/her family? What about you and/or your children? What do you think of the US tradition of encouraging independence?

3. Read That Crazy English: Mythology. In your home language, think of some idioms or metaphors that are based on ancient stories. Explain several of these to a friend or partner. Tell the ancient story and describe how it is used in modern language.

4. Read Social Trends in the US on page 3. Describe to a friend or partner how you think people in your home country would respond to these social issues. (You do not have to reveal your own attitudes in this discussion, just describe what these charts would look like in your home country.)

ANSWER CORNER

UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ
1b  2a  3b  4b  5b  6b  7b  8a

VOCABULARY LESSON
1 recess  2 permission slip, field trip  3 report card  4 PTO (or PTA)  5 Open House  6 homeroom  7 Show and Tell  8 university

PRESENT PERFECT TENSE
1 I have studied European history.
2 She has liked picking apples.
3 He has ridden his bike.
4 You have sung a pretty song.
5 They have invited me to go with them.