

# The New Face of Congress Teacher's Notes

B1

B1+

B2

A young Latina woman from the Bronx, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez shatters our traditional vision of Congressional Representatives. This article explores her life, both private and public, from the Bronx to Washington, D.C. after the recent midterm elections: how can “one of us” sit in Congress at barely 29 and champion the average working class person's rights?

This article comes in 2 versions: B1 and B1+/B2 which enables you to have the whole class work on the same subject, with the same worksheet (making it easier for you to correct the activities with the whole group).

In cycle *Terminale*, this fits perfectly into a sequence on *Lieux et formes du pouvoir*.

## Vocabulary and structures

- politics and power: *run for office, stand as candidate, be elected, midterm elections...*
- low-income / poverty: *to make both ends meet, to struggle financially*
- linkwords : cause and consequence (*in order to...*) + contrast (*whereas, yet...*)
- past / present perfect
- jobs / workplace: *waitress, work hard, toil, have two jobs*
- making hypotheses: *may / might / must; be bound to / be likely to*

## Pronunciation

- understanding an authentic campaign video
- word stress changes: verb, adjective, noun

Congressional elections determine who represents your state in Congress. Congress is the branch of the federal government that makes laws. It includes the House of Representatives and the Senate. Congressional elections use the popular vote to choose winners. They don't use the Electoral College, which is used in presidential elections.

Midterm elections occur halfway between presidential elections. Voters choose one-third of senators and every member of the House of Representatives.

Midterms determine which party—Democratic or Republican—will control each chamber of Congress for the next two years. The party that controls a chamber usually wins that chamber's legislative votes. Proposed legislation must pass in the House and the Senate for it to reach the President's desk.

<https://www.usa.gov/midterm-state-and-local-elections>

## Listening, speaking, writing

■ We suggest starting with the pictures and have the students describe what/who they can see (*a young smiling woman, in the streets, giving a high five / sharing a good moment with other people/ making a speech + people all around, listening, cheering/ clapping / applauding. She seems to be "important" to them / a mentor / hierarchy between them? They seem to look up to her / admire her since they listen carefully and attentively. She may be / is likely to be the mayor or a city representative. She may be a TV star / singer / actress*).

■ Then, show the first sentence from the text (*women like me...*) which is extracted from her video, and ask the students to explain that quote (*she doesn't fit the traditional standards of Congressional representatives / young women with Puerto-Rican origins are don't usually get elected to Congress*.)

■ Then, students can start reading the article and do the activities on the worksheet.

■ **Activity C** asks pupils to focus on the vocabulary specific to politics in general and American politics in particular. They are asked to identify the words in the lexical field in the article before sorting them into categories. Finding the vocabulary can be done in interaction as a group activity, or, you may want to provide the B1-level pupils with the list of words:

run for office, campaign, candidate, Congress, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., midterm (election), elected, Democratic Party, Republican (Party), to sit, district, primary (election), Representative, politician, election, voter, represent, Senator, the Senate, presidential, politics, Democratic Socialist, reform, President, lawmaker, convene

■ While working on / correcting this activity,

you could take the opportunity to work on pronunciation and especially word stress. The pairs where the stress stays the same (*represent, Representative; elect, election ; Senate, Senator*) versus those where it shifts (*President, presidential ; Democratic, Democrat*).

■ The string "politics, political, politician" is particularly complex. We've provided a box to clarify the meanings of "politics", "politician" and "policy". You may need to point out that "politician" doesn't have the negative connotation in English that "politicien" has in French.

■ Watching the video is required for the final task, but we do recommend working on the text first as some idiomatic expressions are introduced in the text, thus helping the students understand the video.

■ When watching the video, make sure the students focus on some elements and take notes. Main points to focus on: places, people + social class / Alexandria: what sort of woman she is/ the pronouns used + impact / last still: "one of us" slogan: meaning and impact? (You may want to give some/all pupils these headings.)

■ Before debating, allow a 5-minute brainstorm so the students can find some ideas and prompts to debate properly

## Video Transcript

<https://youtu.be/rq3QXIVR0bs>

■ Women like me aren't supposed to run for office. I wasn't born to a wealthy or powerful family. Mother from Puerto Rico. Dad from the South Bronx. I was born in a place where your zip code determines your destiny. My name is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. I'm an educator, an organizer, a working-class New

Yorker. I've worked with expectant mothers, I've waited tables and I've led classrooms. And going into politics wasn't in the plan.

But after 20 years of the same representation, we have to ask, "Who has New York been changing for?" Every day gets harder for working families like mine to get by. The rent gets higher, healthcare covers less, and our income stays the same. It's clear that these changes haven't been for us, and we deserve a champion. It's time to fight for a New York that working families can afford. That's why I'm running for Congress.

This race is about people versus money. We've got people, they've got money. It's time we acknowledged that not all Democrats are the same. That a Democrat who takes corporate money and profits off foreclosure, doesn't live here, doesn't send his kids to our schools, doesn't drink our water, or breathe our air, cannot possibly represent us.

What the Bronx and Queens needs is Medicare for all, tuition-free public college, a federal jobs guarantee and criminal justice reform. We can do it now. It doesn't take a hundred years to do this. It takes political courage. A New York for the many is possible. Vote for one of us. Vote for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on June 26.

## Solutions

Elements that appear only in the B1+-B2 article are underlined below.

**A.1.** Name: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
 Origins: Puerto-Rican mother / Father born in the Bronx to Puerto-Rican parents  
 Jobs: before Nov 2018: waitress, community organizer; After Nov 2018: Congresswoman (Representative)

Social background: poor / working-class / humble background

Date and place of birth (age):  
 1989 / Bronx (29)

School / studies: Local public school (her "zip code" school) + Economics and International Relations at Boston University

2. Her father died of cancer and this was a turning point in her life. Indeed, after his death, it was hard to make both ends meet, as a consequence Alexandria and her mother had to work long hours / to toil in order to earn a decent living. She had no choice but to work as a waitress.

### B.1.a. June

<b>Names</b>	Cowley	Ocasio-Cortez
<b>Budget</b>	Huge / big (\$3 million)	\$200,000
<b>Experience in politics</b>	Already known in Washington DC	None / very little
<b>Support</b>	The entire political party supported him / backed him up	ordinary people
<b>Winner + consequences</b>	Ocasio-Cortez won → she was on her way to sit in Congress to stand for NYC 14th district	

**2.a.** Boston Uni  
 - Kennedy Office  
 - Sanders campaign 2016

**b.** Close to Sanders and Obama  
 - "left wing of the Democratic party" / "Democratic socialist"

c. She sees them as corrupt people who only act in the interest of a small group / are only interested in money / are hungry for money and power

d. represent / stand for / defend the ordinary person ("one of us")

- universal healthcare
- free public university education
- national minimum wage
- reform / fix the laws on immigration and prison

3. Contrary to Obama, OC is not old enough to become president of the USA. / to run for the next presidential election

Obama has a foreign-born parent, so does OC.

Unlike Obama, she has no political experience

### c. People of power

a Representative, a candidate, the Democratic Party, Republicans / the Republican Party, a politician, a voter, a Senator, a President, (Brand New Congress), a Democratic Socialist, a lawmaker

### Places of power

Congress, the House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., a district, a mock parliament, the Senate

### Forms of power

to run for office, to / a campaign, an election, a midterm election, to elect, to sit, a primary, to represent, politics, left wing, to / a reform, presidential, to convene