

Voting

Overview

Students need to understand that voting is a citizen's right and responsibility. In these activities, students will learn about the process of making decisions about candidates, voting, and the act of voting.

LESSON OBJECTIVE

In this lesson, students will learn basic information about registering to vote and voting.

SKILLS

- Understanding terms and concepts associated with voting
- Recognizing when and how to register to vote
- Understanding why it is important to become an informed voter
- Reading and filling out an election ballot
- Following voting procedures at a polling place

ALIGNMENT WITH TRANSITION SKILLS INVENTORY

- **Primary:** Q-1, pages 500–501; and Q-2, pages 502–503 in the *Transition Skills Inventory*.
- **Secondary:** B-1, pages 40–43; C-1, pages 54–56; C-2, pages 57–60; and R-5, pages 513–515 in the *Transition Skills Inventory*.

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER LESSONS

- “Understanding Voting Concepts” and “Learning About Voting Requirements” see *Understanding Citizenship*.
- “Completing a Voter Registration Form” see *Government Employment Forms*.

Vocabulary

- Ballot
- Campaign
- Candidate
- Citizen
- Democracy
- Election
- Government
- Issue
- Majority rule
- Political party
- Polling place
- Representation/Representative
- Voter registration

Class Discussion Questions

- When have you voted before?
- What does it mean to vote for or against something?
- What is a secret ballot?
- How does a voter decide whom to vote for?
- How is the president of the United States chosen?



Activities

Activity 1: Understanding Voting Concepts

Objective

- Understand vocabulary and concepts connected to voting

Materials

- Slips of paper to use for secret ballots
- Pencils
- Word cards

1. Introduce the activity by taking a vote. With the students, come up with two choices that affect the group, such as two places to go on a field trip. Then have the students vote by secret ballot for their choice. Count the votes, declare the “winner,” and ask questions to discuss the experience. Examples of questions:
 - Why is voting a good way for a group to come to a decision?
 - Why is it important to vote secretly?
 - How do voters on the “losing” side feel?
2. Prepare ten word cards using the terms that are underlined in the sentences below. As you read aloud each sentence, hold up the card with the target term. Have the students repeat the term and use their own words to tell what it means.
 - Voters fill out a ballot to show their choices.
 - “Vote for me!” said Dave Davis in his campaign for mayor.
 - I’ll vote for the candidate I think will make the best senator.
 - A citizen has the right to vote.
 - In a democracy, the people rule themselves.
 - Every four years, the United States has an election for president.
 - We vote for leaders and lawmakers in our government.
 - The vote was 50 to 49 in favor of the bill, so majority rule means the bill passed.

- The Republicans are one political party in the United States.
 - There are too many of us to make the nation’s laws, so we vote for lawmakers to represent us.
3. Display two word cards at a time and challenge the students, possibly in teams, to use both terms in a sentence or tell how the terms are related.

If the student has limited reading skills: Work with the student defining and repeating each term and having him or her discuss the concept. Repeat each term as necessary until all terms have been covered.



Check for Understanding

- Does the student understand terms and concepts associated with voting?

Activity 2: Learning About Voting Requirements

Objective

- Understand the requirements to be eligible to vote

Materials

- Computer with Internet access

1. Have the students give ideas about who can vote in the United States. Then list these sentences on the board and ask the students to tell you how to complete each.
 - You must be a ___ of the United States. (citizen)
 - You must be at least ___ years old. (18)
2. Explain that each state has other requirements for their state and local elections, such as residency in that state. Point out that in almost all states, a voter must register before being allowed to vote. Guide the students to their state or local government’s website to learn the requirements for registering to vote. Have them sum up the requirements by taking notes in answer to these questions:

Who: Am I eligible to vote? (Possible response: I am 18 and have

lived in my district for more than 30 days)

What: What identification do I need to register? (Possible response: a state ID card)

Where: Where do I register to vote? (Possible response: the Secretary of State office)

- Using the information and deadlines provided for your state, help the students determine whether they will be eligible to vote in the next general election and when they would need to register in order to vote in that election.



Check for Understanding

- Can the student identify the eligibility and requirements for becoming a registered voter?

Activity 3: Completing a Voter Registration Form

Objective

- Complete a voter registration form

Materials

- National Mail Voter Registration Application (available online)
- A pen

- In preparation for this activity, make copies of the National Mail Voter Registration Application, which is available on the Election Assistance Commission website (www.eac.gov). Make sure to include both the General Instructions and Applications Instructions pages, along with your state's specific requirements. (You may prefer to use the voter registration form provided by the local Board of Elections.)
- Have the students read the eligibility requirements with you, along with general instructions about filling out and submitting the application.
- Help the students read the instructions for each box on the form

and then follow the instruction. Make sure that they refer to their state-specific instructions for filling out boxes 6, 7, and 8.

- Have the students read the oath aloud. Clarify meaning. If the students are eligible to vote and will use this form to register for the first time, they may sign and date the form. Otherwise, have the students tell what they would write in each box.
- Review sections A through D on the bottom half of the form and ask the students who would fill out each section.
- Finish the activity by discussing why the information requested is necessary for someone to become a registered voter.

If the student has limited reading/writing skills: Help the student with filling in the form by reading and repeating the information needed. Have the student gather and verbally tell you the information as you fill in the form. Make sure that the student signs the form for himself or herself.



Check for Understanding

- Does the student understand the information requested on a voter registration application?
- Can the student complete a voter registration form?

Activity 4: Reviewing Issues to Become an Informed Voter

Objective

- Understand how to become an informed voter

Materials

- Slips of paper to use for secret ballots
- Pencils
- Published commentary on a local issue
- Local or state publications about ballot items, directed to voters in the next election (if available)
- Computer with Internet access

1. Choose a local issue in the news that voters will address. For example: Should the new soccer fields be built on wetlands? Should tax money fund a town youth center? If a state election is about to take place that includes ballot items, choose one of the ballot items.
2. Guide the students in locating writings online or in newspapers that present opposing viewpoints on the issue. Consider news editorials, letters to the editor, and opinion essays as possible sources.
3. Read and discuss the materials together. Prompt the students to summarize the different sides of an issue. Encourage them to do further research into related facts.
4. Finally, have the students vote on the issue using a secret ballot. Count the votes and talk about possible reasons for the results.



Check for Understanding

- Can the student summarize opposing viewpoints on an issue?
- Can the student form a position based on learning about an issue?

Activity 5: Completing an Election Ballot

Objectives

- Understand how to read an election ballot
- Practice filling out a ballot

Materials

- Copies of reproducible, “Sample Ballot,” at end of lesson
- Pencils

1. Write the term “election ballot” on the board. Review the concept of a ballot—voters fill out a ballot to show whom or what they are voting for. Have the students tell what happens to the ballots that voters fill out.
2. Distribute copies of the “Sample Ballot,” the reproducible at the end of this lesson. Go over the ballot with the students to help them understand its organization. Have the students identify these elements:
 - Political offices
 - Candidates
 - Abbreviations for parties: Democrat, Republican, Conservative, Green, Independent (not affiliated with a party)
 - Ballot questions
3. Ask the following questions to focus on ballot details:
 - How many candidates can you vote for in the United States Senate race? (one)
 - What are the two congressional offices listed on the ballot? (United States Senate and House of Representatives)
 - Who is the Conservative Party candidate for the United States Senate? (Andrew Reiner)
 - Who is the Independent candidate for the House of Representatives? (Victoria Daniels)
 - Who is the Democratic candidate for State Senator? (Laurel Robinson)

- Who is the Independent candidate for State Senator? (Judy Larson)
 - Which office is Evan McCauley running for? (State Attorney General)
 - If you vote Yes on Ballot Question 1, what do you want to happen? (The state will take over land to turn it into a state park and nature preserve.)
 - If you vote Yes on Ballot Question 2, what do you want to happen? (Raise the tax that people pay when they use overnight accommodations and give the money to the state’s Department of Tourism.)
4. Explain that voters fill in the ovals on the ballot, and a machine scans the marks and records the votes. Tell the students to fill in the ovals as if they were voting and to make sure that they only fill in one oval where required.
 5. Have the students tell what they would do differently if they were going to fill out this ballot for a real election. During discussion, emphasize that voters should come prepared—knowing who the candidates are, what their positions are, and what the arguments are for the ballot items. Make the point that some voters bring notes with them so that they can remember the choices they made at home.

If the student has limited reading skills: Take the student through the sample ballot, saying each candidate and ballot question and having the student repeat after you. Ask the student his or her thoughts around the ballot question issues to impel his or her thoughts on voting and the choices the student would make.



Check for Understanding

- Does the student understand the organization of a sample ballot?
- Can the student correctly fill out a sample ballot?

Activity 6: Voting in a Polling Place

Objectives

- Recognize the basic features of a polling place
- Understand the steps involved in casting a ballot



Materials

- Student Book, page 77, and a pencil
- Mockups of polling place features

1. Talk with the students about where people vote in an election. They may recall from experience that voting locations, such as firehouses and school gyms, have other uses most of the year. Explain that on Election Day, tables are set up, voting machines are moved in, and these places become polling places—places where people vote.
2. Guide the students in setting up a polling place in the classroom. Start by telling them about each step of the voter’s experience. Use the descriptions below, or modify them to match the polling place procedures in your location. Encourage the students to suggest ways of creating each feature:
 - Step 1: Have the students learn their district and voting locations. The students will need to know their home address and then they can use the Internet to find their local Board of Election site. Go to the polling place or to the section of the polling place intended for voters in your election district or precinct. A map shows these election districts. (Possible way to show: Tack a map to the classroom door labeled “Election District 1”)
 - Step 2: Go to the table marked with your district number. Tell the poll worker your address and name. The worker will check your name in the sign-in registry book. (Possible way to show: Put the names and classroom seat addresses of the registered voters in a notebook on a sign-in table.)
 - Step 3: Receive your ballot from the worker at the sign-in table. (Possible way to show: Create a ballot with an issue to vote “Yes” or “No” on.)






- Step 4: Take your ballot to the voting booth. Mark your ballot to show your choices. (Possible way to show: Set up a booth behind the sign-in table. The booth can be a desk with a screen around it. It has a sign on it.)
 - Step 5: Deposit your ballot in the ballot box. (Possible way to show: Make a slot at the top of a closed cardboard box marked “Ballots Here.”)
3. Assign tasks and provide materials so that the students can implement their plan. Together, decide on the issue to put on the ballot (Possible topics: “School lunches should be more healthy” or “School should be year-round”), as noted above.
 4. Before beginning the role-play, discuss acceptable behavior in a polling place. Have the students give ideas about why voters cannot do any of the following.
 - wear campaign buttons or clothing that shows a political preference
 - have conversations about candidates or political issues
 - disturb other voters
 5. Have one student play the role of the poll worker as the other students come to vote on Election Day. When the voting is complete, take the ballot box to a secure location and return to announce the election results.
 6. If you are using the Student Book, go to page 77. Have the students work independently to identify the different features of a polling place.



Check for Understanding

- Can the student recognize the features of a polling place?
- Does the student understand the steps involved in casting a ballot?
- Does the student understand the purpose of polling place procedures and rules?

Extension Activities

-  1. Use the website of a state or national lawmaker representing your district to find out when the person is speaking locally or meeting the public. Encourage the students to pay a visit. Alternatively, invite a member of the representative's staff to come to the class to talk about issues of concern to the students.
-  2. Have the students do online research to find out about their state flower, state bird, state mammal, state rock, and other official state symbols. Are there other things that the students would like to see as official state symbols? Together, choose a category not yet used by their state, such as desserts, sports, or vegetables. Divide the group into two political parties and have each party develop a campaign slogan for its choice of symbol. Each party can then select a representative to participate in a debate.
-  3. Using the classroom computer, guide the students to the local Board of Elections website. Information to find: the location of the polling place for voters who live at each student's home address; services for special-needs voters; a sample ballot (if available) to print and fill out.
-  4. Tell the students that informed voters know who is representing them and governing them. Have the students do online research to learn the names of their elected officials at the national and state levels. After they have studied the names, test their recall by asking teams to compete to show their knowledge. Examples of quiz-show questions: Who represents you in the state legislature? Who represents your district in the U.S. House of Representatives? Who are the senators from your state? Who is the president? Who was the president before? Who is the vice president?
-  5. What is a problem that the students would like their elected officials to try to solve? Prompt the students to choose an issue of concern and as homework draft a letter to the editor expressing their opinion. Display a variety of letters to the editor for the students to use as models.

Activity 5: Completing an Election Ballot

Sample Ballot

CONGRESSIONAL		BALLOT QUESTION 1
<p>United States Senate (Vote for One)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Arnold Johanson DEM</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sarah Vinick REP</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Matthew Sjolan IND</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Andrew Reiner CON</p>	<p>House of Representatives (Vote for One)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Carolyn Teague DEM</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> William O. Stern REP</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Victoria Daniels IND</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> James Hudson CON</p>	<p>Shall the state take possession of 2,358 acres of land gifted to the state by the heirs and administrators of the Vulcan Cement Company for the purpose of creating a state park and nature preserve?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
STATE		BALLOT QUESTION 2
<p>Attorney General (Vote for One)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Jeffrey Rochovitz DEM</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Evan McCauley REP</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Toni Madigan IND</p>	<p>Comptroller (Vote for One)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ortiz DEM</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Dennis Conrad REP</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ryan Pearson IND</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Alice Waterman CON</p>	<p>Shall the state levy a .1 percent tax in the room fees charged by hotels, motels, and bed and breakfasts, to be used by the State Department of Tourism to promote tourism in the state?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
STATE LEGISLATURE		
<p>Governor and Lieutenant Governor (Vote for One)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Allan Bailey DEM</p> <p>David Chen</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Joshua Russell REP</p> <p>Maria Krasner</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Carolyn Evans IND</p> <p>Michael Swartz</p>	<p>State Senator (Vote for One)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Laurel Robinson DEM</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Walter Newman REP</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Judy Larson IND</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Daniel Rodriguez CON</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Dylan Zeigler GR</p>	