

Why Voting Matters

OBJECTIVE

Students learn about elections and the importance of voting.

MATERIALS

Election simulation handouts (pages 4 and 5), graphic organizer (page 6), “Why Voting Matters” PowerPoint presentation (which we will send to you), and the ability to project the PowerPoint in the classroom.

BACKGROUND

The original intent of public education was to prepare students to participate in our democratic society. In the past few decades, the focus of public education has turned sharply toward science, math and literacy as we seek to help students develop employable skills. The fact is, students need both: preparation to participate in the workforce and preparation to participate in society. Students need to know how our government and communities function, understand key issues and different perspectives, and be able to articulate their opinions with competence, respect and civility.

Research has shown that listening to civic leaders share their stories and viewpoints is an exceptional way to bring civics alive for students. According to a report commissioned by the American Bar Association Division for Public Education: “Civic education, especially when it is interactive and involves discussion of current issues, is an important way to develop the skills that young Americans need to succeed in the 21st Century workforce. Students who experience interactive discussion-based civic education (either by itself or in combination with lecture-based civic education) score the highest on ‘21st Century Competencies,’ including working with others (especially in diverse groups) and knowledge of economic and political processes.”

LESSON PLAN

Introduction (5 minutes)

Start your classroom presentation by introducing yourself so the students know more about you and what you do. Most importantly, we encourage you to share something personal, meaningful or important to you that illustrates why you choose to do the work you do. If students know the ‘why’ behind your job, it will impact them more than if you just share your job title.

You can also share why you chose to volunteer to come to their classroom. Why do you think it’s important for students to hear from civic leaders? What are the outcomes you are hoping for as a result of your visit? Were you nervous to come? Excited? What do you remember about your experience in school that might affect how to approach your classroom visit?

Warm-up discussion (5 minutes)

Start by saying something along the lines of: “Today we are going to use a simulation exercise to explore how voter turnout affects which issues legislators focus on. To get warmed up, I would like to hear your thoughts on the following questions:

1. What are elections and what do they accomplish?
2. Who participates in elections? Is it important to participate? Why or why not?
3. What happens if there is an election and few people participate?
4. How might such an election affect you? Would it matter to you?

Activity (15 minutes)

Divide the class into two groups – have 40% of the class become “Baby Boomers” (ages 65-74) and 60% of the class become “Millennials” (ages 18-24). Say to both groups: “You will be voting in an upcoming midterm election. Midterm elections take place in the middle of a four-year presidential term. In this election, there are two candidates running for office, Candidate A and Candidate B.”

Ask for a volunteer from each group to be the two candidates. Their job will be to hold a sign promoting their stand on an issue. Candidate A’s sign reads “Reducing College Costs” and Candidate B’s sign reads “Reducing Nursing Home Costs.”

Have the two candidates stand on opposite sides of the room. Then say, “Election Day is coming soon, and we’re going to see how much support each candidate has and predict who will win. Get out of your seat and stand by the Candidate you will support. Remember to support the Candidate whose position best represents the interests of your age group.”

Direct students to get up and move to their candidate’s side of the room. Count how many supporters each candidate has. Who would win the election? Since 60% of students are Millennials, Candidate A should be the winner since Candidate A cares about lowering tuition costs and that is an important issue for Millennials.

Now simulate who actually voted on Election Day. Say, “Election Day has come and it’s time to vote. Candidate A expects to win. But as it turns out, not all of A’s supporters actually went to vote. In fact, only 20% of 18 - 24 year olds who were eligible to vote actually voted in the 2014 midterm elections. So now we’re going to see how that impacts this mock election. For every 5 voters standing by Candidate A, 4 of you have to sit down. Count off by fives and #1, 2, 3, 4 (sit) and #5 stay standing. 80% of Millennials should be back in their seats. Remember, Candidate B had fewer supporters, but Baby Boomers had the highest voter turnout of any age group in 2014, almost 80%. So let’s count off by fives and this time #1, 2, 3, 4 remain standing and #5 sits down. 80% of Baby Boomers are still

standing! They are the ones who showed up to vote. So now who will win the election? Candidate B is the winner!

Ask voters standing by Candidate B: Why do you think Baby Boomers are more likely to vote?
Turn to the Millennials: Is this a good election result? Why or why not? Why do you think so many Millennials don't vote? What will happen to the tuition issue they cared about?

Thank students for participating and have everyone return to their seats.

PowerPoint Presentation/Discussion (15 minutes)

Hand out the graphic organizer. Instruct the students to fill it out as you move through the PowerPoint. Say, "For the next 15 minutes, we will be taking a closer look at why people vote and why voting is important to all of us. At the end of today, I would like you to decide why voting matters to you. Now we're going to look at why people choose to vote, as well as the reasons people often give for not voting – and ways to eliminate many of the barriers that people think exist."

Click through PowerPoint Slides.

Reflection (5 minutes)

Ask students to write a short reflection on what issues matter to them. What are the issues that impact you? What issues are you passionate about? Do you care about that issue enough that you are willing to vote because of it?



Vote Candidate A

**I will make college
affordable!**



Vote Candidate B

**I will make nursing
homes affordable!**

Graphic Organizer

Name: _____

<p>Why (or why not) vote?</p>	<p>Who votes?</p>
<p>What happens if you don't vote?</p>	<p>What stops people from voting? What are the solutions?</p>