

## Vote Quotes

### OBJECTIVE

Students analyze and interpret quotes about voting to help them understand the history and the value of voting in our country.

### MATERIALS

Copies of the “Vote Quotes” handout (page 3 of this lesson) for each student.

### 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?

### **Setting the Stage (10 minutes)**

Say something like: “The United States prides itself as a beacon of democracy on the world stage. But the fact is that our country has a somewhat complicated history when it comes to voting.

You may be surprised to learn that the United States Constitution did not originally define who was eligible to vote, and instead left it up to each state to determine who was eligible. In the beginning, most states allowed only white male adult property owners to vote. Freed slaves could vote in four states. Women were largely prohibited from voting, as were men without property. By 1856, white men were allowed to vote in all states regardless of property ownership. On the other hand, several states stripped the free black males of the right to vote in the same period.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which was intended to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote as guaranteed under the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Many people consider the Voting Rights Act to be one of the most important pieces of civil rights legislation ever passed.

In 2015, we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. Today I’m going to show you a short video of Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon talking about the importance of the Voting Rights act for all Minnesotans, including young people. Ask the teacher to assist you in pulling up the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BoXuRh9GGg>

Ask the students to watch the video and write down the answer to this question:

**“What does the Secretary of State mean when he talks about ‘The Minnesota Way’ in regards to voting?”**

### **Activity (20 minutes)**

Once the video is complete, ask for volunteers to share their answer to the question. Once everyone who wants to has shared, say something like: “We’re going to continue our discussion about voting by examining and discussion quotes about voting by famous people.”

Give each student in class a copy of the “Vote Quotes” handout.

Ask students to get into groups of four. Write the following questions on the board or a flip chart and ask each group to work through all the questions:

1. What quote did you agree with the most? Why?
2. Did you struggle with understanding any of the quotes? Which one(s) and why?
3. Did you disagree with any of the quotes? If yes, why?
4. Did everyone in your group interpret the quotes in the same way? If not, what were some of the differences?
5. What insights do these quotes give you about voting?

Give the students 10 minutes to work through the questions. Have the class come back together and share their responses.

**Reflection (5 minutes)**

Ask students to write a short reflection that answers the following questions. Do you think voting is important? Why or why not? Are you looking forward to voting at 18? What does that right mean to you?

If there is extra time at the end of the class period, ask for volunteers to share their reflections.

## VOTE QUOTES

**1. “The ballot is stronger than the bullet.”**

~ Abraham Lincoln, 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States

**2. “The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.”**

~ Winston S. Churchill, former British Prime Minister

**3. “Bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.”**

~ George Jean Nathan, American drama critic and magazine editor

**4. “Those who stay away from the election think that one vote will do no good: 'Tis but one step more to think one vote will do no harm.”**

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet

**5. “We all know that an angry electorate is a voting electorate.”**

~ Donna Brazile, American political strategist and author

**6. “If you can’t put your values into your vote, we don’t have a democracy.”**

~ Jill Stein, American physician, activist and politician