



Introduction to Government and Civics
High School Level

Written for the National Student/Parent Mock Election

www.nationalmockelection.org

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High School Lesson Plans

Introduction

The National Student Mock Election curriculum aims to engage students to think critically about civics, democracy and our nation's political process. It is our hope that through the curriculum and the mock election experience, students will be encouraged and inspired to become active participants in our American democracy.

At each grade cluster, the My Voice National Student Mock Election lessons focus on the following Big Ideas (going deeper into each Big Idea as the grade clusters advance):

1. **Our Government** was founded upon basic principles articulated in the Charters of Freedom (the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights). The purpose of our constitutional government is to protect the rights of individuals and promote the greater good; and the powers of our government are limited, and organized by a division of powers among the legislative, executive and judicial branches, and between cities, states and the nation.
2. **American Principles**, as articulated in the Charters of Freedom, provide the basis of our democratic society. The shared values and principles within these Charters provide the framework for the rights and responsibilities of American citizens. An inherent struggle between the ideals of democracy and the reality of democracy require shared civic values, understanding and action.
3. **The Electoral Process** is the method by which a person is elected to public office. Campaigns, political parties, elections and citizen participation impact the electoral process. Citizens can exercise their right to elect leaders and make choices. They may also choose to educate themselves about candidates, issues and the electoral process. It is through continued and collective civic rights and responsibilities (such as voting) that we can sustain and improve our democracy.

In addition to these Big Ideas, lessons components include:

- Alignment to the [National Council for the Social Studies \(NCSS\)](#) major themes of: Individuals, Groups and Institutions; Power, Authority and Governance; and Civic Ideals and Practices
- Alignment to the [Mid-continent Regional Education Lab \(McREL\)](#) standards for Civics
- Integration with the [Common Core State Standards](#)
- Essential questions for students
- Articulated outcomes
- Opportunities for guided instruction, collaborative and independent learning
- Built-in assessment
- Extension and Differentiation suggestions
- Family and Community connections

High School Lesson Plans

Government – Compare & Contrast

Overview

In this lesson students compare and contrast government in one of the following ways: local and/or state to national government; U.S. government to a foreign government; U.S. government to a government in fiction.

Big Idea

Our Government was founded upon basic principles articulated in the Charters of Freedom (the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights). The purpose of our constitutional government is to protect the rights of individuals and promote the greater good; and the powers of our government are limited, and organized by a division of powers among the legislative, executive and judicial branches, and between cities, states and the nation.

Essential Questions for Students

- What is government?
- How does the government of the United States, established by the Constitution, embody the purposes, values and principles of American democracy?
- What are the distinctive characteristics of our government?
- How do governments differ? How are they similar? What makes this so?

Outcomes

- Students will be able to draw comparisons between various levels of government, or between different national governments.
- Students will be able to make connections between the nature of governments and the policy implications for its citizens.
- Students will be able to participate effectively as part of a research team.
- Students will be able to present their findings, citing supporting evidence.

Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards](#):
 - What Is Government and What Should it Do? (all standards)
 - How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy?
 - Understands how the United States Constitution grants and distributes power and responsibilities to national and state government and how it seeks to prevent the abuse of power

- Understands issues concerning the relationship between state and local governments and the national government and issues pertaining to representation at all three levels of government
 - What is the Relationship of the United States to Other nations and to World Affairs?
 - Understands how the world is organized politically into nation-states, how nation-states interact with one another, and issues surrounding U.S. foreign policy
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts:](#)
 - English Language Arts: Reading, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (RI9-10.9, RI11-12.7 and 8))
 - English Language Arts: Speaking & Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration, and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL9-19.1, SL9-10.4, SL11-12.1, SL11-12.4)

Community Connections

- Research current issues in local government.
- Invite members of City Council or the School Board to join in student collaborative activities.

Preparation

- Prepare student copies of Handout.
- Preview recommended Web Resources.
- Select a work of fiction for Anticipatory Set.
- Provide students with Web access for collaborative research.

Concept Vocabulary

There is a wealth of civics vocabulary that may be addressed over the course of the lesson. Please refer to these glossaries for complete definitions of civics terms:

- [Center for Civic Education](#)
- [U.S. Senate Glossary](#)
- [Kids in the House U.S. House of Representatives Glossary](#)

Anticipatory Set (20 min)

Read-Aloud — Read an excerpt from a work of fiction that depicts a government in action (or lack thereof), such as an excerpt from W. Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. Ask students to compare the government (or lack of government) in the work of fiction with our government. Facilitate student opinion and discussion about the nature and necessity of government. Encourage students to draw comparisons between levels of government, our government and foreign governments. How do government principles and values impact the welfare of its citizens?

Guided Instruction (one class period)

Instructions & Exemplars — Build upon student knowledge from the Anticipatory Set. Provide each student with a copy of the Handout for detailed instructions. Share with students their assignment options as well as the research and presentation elements required. Have students choose which forms of

government they will research, compare and contrast:

1. National government to state and local governments
2. U.S. government with a foreign government
3. U.S. government with that in a work of fiction

Give students examples for the political issues they will research. For example, students could compare and contrast:

- Your state's policy with the national government policy (or proposed policies) regarding healthcare coverage for the uninsured. What is role of each level of government? Do governments agree on those roles? Do they agree on principles?
- U.S. government's guaranteed rights of individuals (as defined in Bill of Rights) to that of another government.
 - Define the treatment of the right to free speech for each government. How does each government define this right? Is there a gap between ideology and reality of these rights for citizens?
- How U.S. government handles the national debt, voter reform policies, etc., vs. how it might be handled in your chosen work of fiction (e.g., the world of Hunger Games) handle the national debt, or voter reform policy for felons?

Collaborative Learning (three to four class periods)

Have students work in small groups. Provide students with Web access for group research. Once students have completed their research, provide them with time to evaluate, prepare presentations, and share with class.

Independent Learning (time varies)

Additional time to research information for group projects

Student Assessment

Review student presentations. Does student work reflect understanding and application of key concepts?

Extension Activities & Service Learning Opportunities

- Visit a local government office to gather additional information on subject of research.
- Create a Constitution for a government in a work of fiction.
- Compare and contrast additional political issues.

Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction

- Assign students only one part of collaborative activity.
- Detail current political issues to get students started.
- Create graphic organizers for each part of the collaborative activity.

Family Connection

Send an informative letter or email to students' families outlining student learning.

Lesson Evaluation

Did students master the stated outcomes? What evidence of learning can you cite? How might you alter lesson for next time to increase effectiveness?

Handouts

- [Our Government](#)
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Implications of Political Issues

Overview

In this lesson students research and analyze the implications of political issues, and write persuasive letters to Representatives, in U.S. Congress or State Legislature.

Big Idea

American Principles, as articulated in the Charters of Freedom, provide the basis of our democratic society. The shared values and principles within these Charters provide the framework for the rights and responsibilities of American citizens. An inherent struggle between the ideals of democracy and the reality of democracy require shared civic values, understanding and action.

Essential Questions for Students

- What conflicts exist between the ideals of democracy and the reality of democracy?
- What should be the balance between rights and responsibilities?
- What should be the balance between individual rights and the common good?
- What is the role of the citizen in the community, in the nation, and the world?
- What makes a valid and effective persuasive argument?
- How can you participate in the democratic process to influence local, domestic and foreign policy?

Outcomes

- Students will evaluate current political issues
- Students will write persuasive letters to Representatives arguing for or against an issue
- Students will participate effectively as part of a research team
- Students will write arguments to support their analysis of an issue
- Students will use valid reasoning and will supply sufficient evidence

Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards](#):
 - What Is Government and What Should it Do? (all standards)
 - What are the Basic Values and Principles of American Democracy? (all standards)
 - What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?
 - Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals
 - Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts](#):
 - English Language Arts: Reading, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (RI9-10.9, RI11-12.7 and 8))

- English Language Arts: Speaking — Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration, (SL9-19.1, SL9-10.4, SL11-12.1, SL11-12.4)
- English Language Arts: Writing, Text Types and Purposes (W9-10.1, W11-12.1)

Community Connections

- Research local issues and initiatives
- Invite members of the community who represent both sides of the issues to speak to class

Preparation

- Review recommended Web Resources
- Provide students with Web access

Concept Vocabulary

There is a wealth of civics vocabulary that may be addressed over the course of the lesson. Please refer to these glossaries for complete definitions of civics terms:

- [Center for Civic Education](#)
- [U.S. Senate Glossary](#)
- [Kids in the House U.S. House of Representatives Glossary](#)

Anticipatory Set (one class period)

Brainstorm — First, ask students to generate categories for major political issues that pertain to the current election. Facilitate discussion towards key categories such as:

- Fiscal Policy
- Social Policy
- Political Policy
- Energy Policy
- Foreign Policy — National Defense

Second, have students brainstorm issues that are important to them that fall within each category. For example,

- Fiscal Policy (national debt, youth unemployment rates, etc.)
- Social Policy (universal healthcare, education initiatives, etc.)
- Political Policy (campaign finance reform, voter registration initiatives, etc.)
- Energy Policy (renewable energy, environmental issues, etc.)
- And so on..

Guided Instruction (one class period)

Modeling — Using a student-generated issue, model how to research multiple sides of the issue on the Web and/or using other resources. Remind students to evaluate sources. What makes a source reliable?

Provide students with the Handout and demonstrate completing some of the items as well as the structure of the persuasive letter.

Have students self-select small groups or pairs based on issue that is most important to them. Share with students that the assignment will have two parts: small group work to research an issue, followed by individual persuasive letters to their Representatives.

Collaborative Learning (one to two class periods)

Research & Analysis — Student pairs or small groups use the recommended web resources and/or teacher selected resources to complete their research, as detailed in the Handout.

Independent Learning (one to two class periods)

Persuasive Letter to Representative — Students write a persuasive letter about the issue, as detailed in the Handout.

Student Assessment

Informally assess students as they research. Review student persuasive letters. Do letters show evidence of understanding of the issues and essential questions? Does letters substantiate their arguments with reasoning and evidence?

Extension Activities — Service Learning Opportunities

- Investigate citizens who are affected by the researched issues, and volunteer to help them
- Create a wiki page or student blog to inform community about the issues.

Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction

Provide students with additional graphic organizers for note taking, and/or with some of the information pre-filled.

Family Connection

- Send an informative letter or email to students' families outlining the researched issues
- Ask students to poll their parents on the issues. Compare and contrast views to student views

Lesson Evaluation

Did students master the stated outcomes? What evidence of learning can you cite? How might you alter lesson for next time to increase effectiveness?

Handouts

- [Political Issues](#)

The Electoral Process

Introduction to Voting

Overview

In this lesson students take a class vote, complete bar graphs for group votes, and analyze the impact voting has for both the individual and the community.

Big Idea

The Electoral Process is the method by which a person is elected to public office. Campaigns, political parties, elections and citizen participation impact the electoral process. Citizens can exercise their right to elect leaders and make choices. They may also choose to educate themselves about candidates, issues and the electoral process. It is through continued and collective civic rights and responsibilities (such as voting) that we can sustain and improve our democracy.

Essential Questions for Students

- Is voting an important responsibility for citizens? If so, why?
- How can citizens participate in democracy?
- How do citizens make choices? (vote)
- How do citizens select leaders?

Outcomes

- Students will participate in voting process.
- Students will reflect upon individual and collective impact of voting (or not voting).
- Students will work as part of a team to create a polling question.
- Students will complete and analyze bar graphs of student responses.

Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards](#):
 - What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?
 - Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals.
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics](#):
 - English Language Arts: Speaking & Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration (SL1.1, SL2.1, SL3.1, SL4.1, SL5.1)
 - Mathematics: Measurement & Data, Represent & Interpret Data (1.MD.4, 2.MD.10, 3.MD.3)

Community Connections

- Invite a local elected official to talk to the class about voting.
- Research location of local polling stations.
- Visit polling station. View images of polling booths and stations from community.
- Make a map of local polling station for family members who are eligible to vote.
- Create a poster to encourage participation in our democratic society by voting. Post in community.

Preparation

- Review the teacher Handout.
- Make copies of the Student Handout.
- Prepare class copy of Student Handout for overhead or computer projection.
- Collect materials for creating ballot boxes, ballots etc. (e.g. shoe boxes, index cards).

Concept Vocabulary

- Vote — a choice
- Poll — a question or set of questions to which voters respond by selecting a choice
- Prediction — an educated guess regarding what will happen in the future or what the answer will be
- Tally — total
- Ballot — an official paper that lists voters' possible choices, and which voters use to mark their choice
- Election — when citizens vote for political leaders and on political issues

Anticipatory Set (1/2 class period)

Brainstorm — Ask students to share some examples of group decisions they've made by voting (e.g. what the family is going to eat for dinner, what game to play at recess, name of classroom pet, etc.)? For youngest students, introduce the concept of voting by talking about choice. What kinds of choices do they make everyday? Tell students that voting allows people to help make group decisions about things that might affect them.

Ask students to share what they already know about voting in the United States. Depending on grade level, discuss vocabulary and concepts around voting. Key discussion points may include:

- In the United States we select our leaders by allowing citizens to vote.
- When you turn 18 years of age you will have the right to vote in local, state, and national elections.
- The right to vote is protected by the United States Constitution and the laws of the national government.
- Each state constitution and the laws of each state also protect the right to vote.
- Under our system of government, the states have the responsibility to conduct elections.
- Many believe it is a citizen's responsibility to vote. Do you think this is so?

Guided Instruction (1/2 class period)

Class Vote Exemplar — Help students experience the voting process by holding a class vote. Use the Handout as a graphic organizer. Create sample ballots and a ballot box. Determine a valid polling question — something where students have the authority to determine the outcome. Example polling questions: What read-aloud should the teacher read next? What game should the class play at recess? What should be the consequence for breaking a classroom rule (a) warning, (b) text to parent (c) visit to principal? etc.

Model the voting process. Have them each cast their vote by placing a ballot in ballot box. Use the Handout to capture voter responses and tally results. Polling question can be yes/no response or multiple choice.

Collaborative Learning (one to two class periods)

Group Polls, Class Votes and Group Graphs — Have student groups determine a polling question, create their own ballots and ballot box. For youngest grades, questions can be about favorite animals, sports teams, etc. For upper elementary, questions can be about a class policy, or a leadership position in the school, etc. Have students write down the polling question on the Handout, and on a large piece of paper placed on the table. Have student groups design their own ballot boxes, and have index cards or small pieces of papers to serve as ballots. Give students time to rotate through the classroom casting their votes for each group's question. Assist each group in tallying their results on the bar graph. Have each group record their reflections. Discuss reflections as a class. Did students get their choice? Do they feel voting is a fair or valid process for making a group decision? If they had the opportunity to do over, would they take part in the voting process, or abstain? What are some advantages and/or disadvantages of having people vote to select leaders or make group decisions on issues? What are some ways to solve these potential problems?

Independent Learning (time varies)

Reflection & Analysis — In student journals or on Handout ask to students reflect on voting process.

Student Assessment

Extension Activities & Service Learning Opportunities

For upper elementary, help students make connections to the real-world voting process.

- Have students research local and national candidates. For what offices are they running? What views/opinions do they represent?
- Have students research local ballot initiatives.
- Have students make public service posters to encourage citizens to vote. Post in community.
- Simulate the voting experience by including some or all of the following:
 - Polling station: create a place in the auditorium for students to vote
 - Registration check in: have class list and a check-in desk where students check in as voters when they come to vote
 - Polling booth: create a curtained-off space to act as voting booth

- “I Voted” stickers: give students “I Voted” stickers as they leave the polling booth

Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction

- Pre-fill the Voting Handout with questions/pictograms so that students need to complete voting section only.
- Create pre-printed ballots.

Family Connection

- Send an informative letter or email to students’ families outlining concepts learned about voting.
- Encourage students to discuss current election with parents.

Lesson Evaluation

Did students master the stated outcomes? What evidence of learning can you cite? How might you alter lesson for next time to increase effectiveness?

Handouts

- [Voting Sheet](#)
- [Voting Sheet Example](#)