



*Introduction to Government and Civics
(Elementary Level)*

Written for the National Student/Parent Mock Election

Written by
The Pearson Foundation to
adhere closely to
standards for teaching
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civics.

www.nationalmockelection.org

Elementary School Lesson Plans

Introduction

The National Student/Parent 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 National Student/Parent 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

Elementary School Lesson Plans

Introduction to Government

Overview

In this lesson students look for everyday evidence of what the government does and contemplate the value of government.

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?
- What does government do?
- Where does government derive its authority?
- Why is government necessary?
- What would life be like without government?

Outcomes

- Students will be able to define government.
- Students will understand government derives its authority from agreed upon principles.
- Students will be able to discuss the role and importance of government as it relates to their world (e.g. family, school, local community).
- Students will be able to discuss, and/or visually illustrate why government is necessary (e.g., what life would be like without government).
- Students will develop written and oral communication skills.

Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards:](#)
 - What is Government and What Should it Do?
 - Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government
 - Understands the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited governments
 - Understands the sources, purposes, and functions of law, and the importance of the rule of law for the protection of individual rights and the common good
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts:](#)

- English Language Arts: Speaking & Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration (SL1.1, SL2.1, SL3.1, SL4.1, SL5.1)
- English Language Arts: Writing, Text Types and Purposes, and Range of Writing (W1.2, W2.2, W3.1, W3.10, W4.2, W4.10, W5.10)

Community Connections

- Research locally elected or appointed officials.
- Invite officials to school to visit with students about their roles in government.

Preparation

- Gather materials for students to write, print and illustrate.
- Determine designated route for School Block Walk.
- Review web resources, specifically:
 - [Center for Civic Education Glossary](#)
 - [Ben's Guide to U.S. Government for Kids K-2](#) and [3-5](#)
 - [The National Archives online exhibit on Charters of Freedom](#)

Concept Vocabulary

Students may or may not be familiar with the conceptual vocabulary. For complete definitions on the terms listed below, as well as additional terms, please refer to the [Center for Civic Education Glossary](#):

- Government
- Authority
- Power

Anticipatory Set (1/2 one class period)

Brainstorm — Ask students to point to the classroom rules (if posted) and/or have students share what they know about the school rules (e.g., as listed in school handbook). Have student pairs highlight particular classroom or school rules and have them give reasons why they believe they are important. Ask students to identify what happens when rules are not followed. Ask students to identify leaders in the classroom, family, school. Who is in charge of enforcing rules? Whose responsibility is it to obey or follow the rules? Ask students to imagine a classroom, family or school or country without rules and leaders. What would it be like?

Guided Instruction (1/2 class period)

Discussion — Build upon student participation and work from the Anticipatory Set. Share with students the definition of government and draw analogies to the structure in the classroom or school.

For younger students, discuss government as one entity. For older students, help them to identify divisions of government — local, state, and national.

Share with students and/or have students explore the recommended web resources for visual and

succinct text about the nature of government, importance of government, branches of government.

Ask students to identify other roles of government, in addition to establishing and upholding rules or law.

Collaborative Learning (one to two class periods)

School Block Walk — Ask students to help you create a partial list of the responsibilities of government. Give them clues — public safety (police, fire, street lights), public utilities (water, gas, electricity), transportation (streets, highways, buses, trains), education and recreation (schools, libraries, parks, museums, etc.), and the legal system (a system of rules and laws).

With adult supervision, have student pairs take a School Block Walk. Student pairs (equipped with pencil and notebook) take a walk around the school block, looking for evidence of government's role in the community. Have student pairs record what they find, e.g. school, roads, street signs, bus stops, mailboxes, fire hydrants, military personnel etc.

Debrief with class. Complete the list from the beginning of the lesson. Summarize with students what they've learned about the purpose of government.

Independent Learning (time varies)

Illustrations & Journal Writing — Have students illustrate what they found on their School Block Walk. Have students reflect on the necessity of government by illustrating or writing about a town without a government.

Student Assessment

Assess student illustrations and journal writing. Does student work reflect understanding of the concepts of government?

Extension Activities & Service Learning Opportunities

- Plan a field trip to a local government office.
- Students may:
 - write and illustrate a fable titled The School without Rules that teaches the necessity of government
 - research and create a graphic organizer comparing the roles and responsibilities of local, state and national government
 - research and create a graphic organizer comparing the roles and responsibilities of mayor, governor and President

Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction

- Allow students to express their thoughts with different mediums; provide parent or student helpers to write down thoughts of younger students as they speak.
- Create graphic organizers for any of the activities.

Family Connection

- Send an informative letter or email to students' families outlining student learning about Government.
- Have families brainstorm a list of all aspects of government connected to their lives. What services do they use? (libraries, roads, schools, etc.) Do parents work for a government service? (e.g. firefighter, mail carrier, etc.)

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?

Elementary School Lesson Plans

American Principals

Introduction to the Constitution

Overview

In this lesson students create their own class Bill of Rights to make connections between the values and rules of the classroom and the values and laws of government.

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 rules do we follow in the classroom?
- What rules do citizens follow?
- What are founding principles and values?
- Where do our founding American principles come from? What are they?
- Why is it important for our community and our democratic society to share common values and principles?
- What role do we, as citizens, play in sustaining and promoting the values and principles of our democratic society? What role does government play?

Outcomes

- Students will realize the necessity of shared values and principles.
- Students will work as part of a team.
- Students will develop written and oral communication skills.
- Students will create class Bill of Rights, illustrating or writing their own amendments.
- Students will make connection between class Bill of Rights and Charters of Freedom.
- Students will make connection between shared class values and principles and those within our democratic society.

Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards](#):

- What is Government and What Should it Do?
 - Understands the concept of a constitution, the various purposes that constitutions serve, and the conditions that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government
- What are the Basic Values and Principles of American Democracy?
 - Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs, and principles of American constitutional democracy
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts](#):
 - English Language Arts: Speaking & Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration (SL1.1, SL2.1, SL3.1, SL4.1, SL5.1)
 - English Language Arts: Writing, Text Types and Purposes, and Range of Writing (W1.2, W2.2, W3.1, W3.10, W4.2, W4.10, W5.10)

Community Connections

- Research local and/or online organizations that work toward advancing an American principle

Preparation

- Gather materials for writing, drawing and illustrating.
- Prepare age appropriate excerpts of the Constitution.
- Review Web Resources, specifically:
 - Center for Civic Education Glossary (http://www.civiced.org/index.php?page=stds_glossary)
 - Ben's Guide to U.S. Government for Kids [K-2](#) and [3-5](#)
 - [Schoolhouse Rock!](#) / [The Preamble](#)
 - [The National Archives online exhibit on Charters of Freedom](#)

Concept Vocabulary

- Liberty – freedom
- Tranquility – peace, no fighting
- Justice – fair and reasonable
- Rights – authority to be able to do something
- Shared principles or values – a shared code of conduct, something important

For complete definitions of additional terms relating to the Constitution (e.g. Preamble, amendments, etc.), please refer to the [Center for Civic Education glossary](#).

Anticipatory Set (1/2 class period)

Discussion — Ask students what is *liberty* or *freedom*? What are they free to do as a student or as a child? Brainstorm the concept of rights. What rights do they have as a student, and as a child? Ask students to determine whether or not everyone has the same rights in their class, community, around the world. How might this affect the well-being and happiness of each student? Is it important to respect the rights of others? Discuss.

Guided Instruction (1/2 class period)

Constitution Show & Tell – Share age-appropriate excerpts of and/or web links to the Constitution. Share key concepts about the Charters of Freedom with students. Make connections between the values and rules in the school and the values and laws of our nation. Key ideas to discuss include:

- The Constitution is a document that was created when our country was formed and is often referred to as “the highest law of the land”.
- The Constitution’s Preamble discusses Liberty, or freedom for Americans. Students may enjoy both the historical nature (circa 1975) and the upbeat and entertaining Schoolhouse Rock! video, Preamble to the Constitution.
- The Bill of Rights, the first 10 Amendments to the Constitution, lists guaranteed rights for Americans.

Share with students that they will create their own class Bill of Rights. What values or principles should their classroom Bill of Rights protect? What laws and shared values need to be in place for students to have a good day at school (freedom, safety, etc.)? Capture student comments on board or overhead.

Collaborative Learning (one to two class periods)

Illustration of Classroom Bill of Rights – In small groups, have students use poster paper to illustrate the principles that they hold important for their classroom community. Have each student group illustrate one principle. Ask older students to write amendments for their selected concept, in the manner of the actual Bill of Rights amendments. After student groups have worked on their principles, compile. If time allows, write a brief Preamble. Publish finished document or post student work somewhere in school for student body and parents to see.

Independent Learning (time varies)

Journal Writing — Have students reflect upon their learning. Why are established rights and rules necessary for our class? Our nation?

Student Assessment

Review student Preambles and Bill of Rights. Does student work reflect understanding of key concepts?

Extension Activities & Service Learning Opportunities

- Create a class constitution.
- Promote one of the American principles (e.g. justice) by researching community members in need and helping them.

Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction

- Pair younger students with older students (or with parent volunteers) for collaborative and independent activities.
- Have students play the online treasure hunt “Pirates of the Preamble”
http://www.texaslre.org/PiratePreamble/pirates_game.html
- (3-4) Have students play the [Bill of Rights game](#) where students test their knowledge of the application of the Amendments to real-life situations
- Invite students to research the Constitution on their own, using the suggested websites. Have students create a report to share their learning with class.

Family Connection

- Send an informative letter or email to students’ families outlining key concepts of the Bill of Rights students are learning.
- Suggest students ask their family members if they recall the Schoolhouse Rock! video, Preamble to the Constitution. The series’ original run lasted from 1973 to 1985, and was later revived with both old and new episodes airing from 1993 to 1999.
- Invite families to make their own Family Preamble and Bill of Rights.
- Ask parents to volunteer for student collaborative activities.
- Share copy of class constitution (if applicable).

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?

Elementary School Lesson Plans

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.MD10, 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](#)