

Understanding Elections

What's
Your **VOTE?**



Levels

K-2

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Your **VOTE?**

Author

Torrey Maloof



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“Young people must learn how to participate in a democracy.”
—*Constitutional Rights Foundation* 2000

According to the National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education 2014), the following are the organizing questions around which civic education should be based:

- I. What is government and what should it do?
- II. What are the basic values and principles of American democracy?
- III. How does the government established by the Constitution embody the purposes, values, and principles of American democracy?
- IV. What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?
- V. What are the roles of the citizen in American democracy?

Teachers need to help students understand and respond to these civic questions so that students can apply their knowledge later in life when responding to daily events as adults in a democracy. Experiences during the K–12 school years lay the foundation for students to be able to evaluate situations and defend positions on public issues as well as influence civic life through working and managing conflict (Constitutional Rights Foundation 2000).



★★★ **The Importance of Civic Education** (cont.) ★★★

The lessons in this book bring about the following benefits and skills:

- increased written and oral communication
- working knowledge of government and democracy
- interest in current events
- higher likelihood of consistent voting and voting on issues rather than personality when an adult
- increased ability to clearly articulate opinions
- tolerance of differing opinions
- knowledge of how to make decisions even when others do not agree
- increased political and civic activeness
- appreciation of the importance and complexity of government
- increased civic attitude (Carnegie Corporation 2003)

In order for teachers to be effective, civic education needs to be recognized as a key aspect of today's curriculum. All of the aforementioned skills contribute to the goal of becoming a well-rounded, contributing, responsible, and civic-minded member of society outside of the classroom. However, these skills take time to develop and need to be integrated into the curriculum beginning in kindergarten and extending through 12th grade to be ultimately effective (Quigley 2005). Research suggests that children start to develop social responsibility and interest in politics before the age of nine. The way students are taught



"[C]hildren start to develop social responsibility and interest in politics before the age of nine."

about social issues, ethics, and institutions in elementary school matters a great deal for their civic development (Kirlin 2005). Therefore, teachers have a responsibility to students to provide them with the activities necessary to learn these skills throughout their education.

Civic education can be taught both formally and informally. Intentional formal lessons imbedded in the curriculum give students a clear understanding of government and politics and the historical context for those ideas. This instruction should avoid teaching rote facts and give as much real-life context as possible.

Informal curriculum refers to how teachers, staff, and the school climate can lead by example and illustrate to students how a working civic community operates (Quigley 2005). When adult role models portray and promote responsible civic engagement, students have a greater conceptual understanding of the formal, civic-based curriculum and how it relates to everyday life.

★★★ **How to Use This Book** ★★★

Overarching Themes

The lessons in this book cover three overarching themes, or units, that take students through the election process.

- **What Is a Presidential Election?**—This unit lays the foundation for elections. Students will make connections between rules and laws, learn about leadership, the importance of voting, and the characteristics of political parties.
- **Elect Me!**—In this unit, students will learn about the road to election day, characteristics of good leaders, and the responsibilities of leadership from national conventions to campaigning.
- **And the Winner Is...**—Students will experience the voting process and will learn about ballot counting and Inauguration Day in this unit.

Activities in this Book

The lessons in this book are divided into three sections. Each section is designed to engage student interest and enhance student knowledge of the lesson topic.

Paired-Texts Reading and Activities

Using paired fiction and nonfiction texts can be an engaging way to introduce a topic to students and allow them to compare and contrast various types of text. By pairing the texts, a connection is created between the content of both. Students may gravitate in interest toward one type of text—fiction or nonfiction. Presenting similar information in both types of text allows one passage to help build background knowledge while the other passage focuses on reinforcing that knowledge and building interest. Students will use graphic organizers to arrange their thoughts and participate in active learning opportunities with their peers.

Primary Source Connection

Using primary sources gives a unique view of history that other ways of teaching history are unable to do. Primary sources include newspaper articles, diaries, letters, drawings, photographs, maps, government documents, and other items created by people who experienced past events firsthand. Primary sources show students the subjective side of history, as many authors that experienced the same event often retell it in completely different ways. These resources also show students how events affected the lives of those who lived them. Primary sources make history real for students. As students view these historical items, they are then able to analyze the events from various points of view and biases. Each lesson contains a photograph or a document from election history.

★★★ **How to Use This Book** (cont.) ★★★

Activities in this Book (cont.)

Puzzle Time!

These are opportunities for students to practice content and problem-solving skills and to increase student engagement and interest in the lesson topic. Puzzles allow students to have fun while they reflect on what they have learned during the lesson. Students decode secret messages, use addition to create hidden images, find their way through fun mazes, and more!

Culminating Activity

This engaging activity is included to demonstrate students' overall knowledge of the election process and allow them to take part in a fun classroom election.

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Choosing a Leader



Students will know that promoting justice is one of the fundamental purposes of law in American society.



Students will analyze fiction and nonfiction texts and synthesize the information in a variety of ways.

Paired Texts Reading and Activities

★ **Election Day!** (page 10)—Read the fictional story on page 10 to students. Then, have students reread the story in pairs. Next, have a class discussion about why voting for a president is a big decision. Have them pair-share times they had to make big decisions or choices. Have volunteers share their stories.

★ **What Is an Election?** (pages 11–12)—Read the informational text on page 11 aloud while students follow along. Then, have students read the text and use pencils to circle words they would like to clarify. Once they finish reading, work as a class to clarify any words students found confusing. Next, have students individually complete page 12. When students have finished, go over the answers as a class.

★ **Election Day Details** (page 13)—Have students use information from the fictional story and the informational text to answer the questions on page 13. Then, have them share their answers with peers.

★ **Election Day Step-by-Step** (page 14)—With this activity, students will use the words in the word bank to complete the sentences that describe the steps a person takes on Election Day. Then, they will cut out the pictures that show the steps at the bottom of the page and place them in the correct order. This activity can be done individually, in pairs, or in small groups. When students have finished, go over the answers as a class.

Choosing a Leader (cont.)

Primary Source Connection

★ Fair Elections Primary Source

(pages 15–16)—Study the primary source on page 15 with students. Read the background information to them. Tell students that a long time ago, African Americans were not allowed to vote and that this was unfair. Explain that today, all citizens that are at least 18 years old can vote and this is more fair. Have students work in pairs to complete page 16. Go over the directions of this page and clarify key vocabulary words students may not know, such as *citizen*.

Puzzle Time!

★ Fill It In! Vocabulary Puzzle

(page 17)—Students will enjoy completing this puzzle that challenges them to fill in the missing letters in the vocabulary words to find the answer to the question.

★ Calculate and Color Puzzle

(page 18)—Students will have fun solving addition problems and coloring the picture to find the hidden answer to the Election Day question.

Answer Key

What Is an Election? (page 12)



Election Day Details (page 13)

1. Election day is in November on the first Tuesday after the first Monday
2. They go to the polling place.
3. A ballot is a list of people who want to be president.
4. The votes are counted when everyone is done voting.

Bonus: Elections are fair because everyone has the right to vote.

Election Day Step-by-Step (page 14)

1. polling place
2. ballot
3. votes
4. ballot box

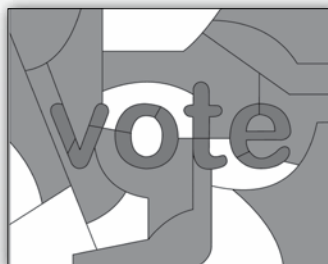
Fill It In! Vocabulary Puzzle (page 17)

1. leader
2. fair
3. polling place
4. election
5. vote
6. ballot
7. president

Answer: Lincoln

Calculate and Color Puzzle (page 18)

vote



★ ★ ★ Election Day! ★ ★ ★

It is November. It is Tuesday. It is Election Day! Eva is excited. Her mom is going to vote. Her mom will vote for a new president!

Eva gets to go with her mom. The two of them drive to the polling place. This is where Eva's mom will make a choice. She will choose who she thinks will be the best leader. She will fill out a ballot. Then, she will turn it in.

In the car, Eva asks, "Mom, this is so fun! Why didn't we do this yesterday?"

Eva's mom says, "Election Day is always in November. It is on the first Tuesday after the first Monday. That is the only day the polls are open."

At the polling place, Eva's mom gets a ballot. The ballot has a list of names. It shows who is running for president. She takes the ballot into a voting booth. She makes her choice. She chooses who she wants to be the next president. It is a big choice! Next, she drops her ballot in a box. That's it! Eva's mom has voted!

Eva can't wait until she is older. Then, she can vote, too. And she can't wait to see who wins the election!

Directions: Think of a time you had to make a big choice. How did you choose? What did you choose? Tell a partner about the choice you made. Explain why you made that choice.

★ ★ ★ What Is an Election? ★ ★ ★

Do you know what an election is? It is a fair way to pick laws. And it is a fair way to choose a leader. The president is the leader of the whole country. A new president is chosen every four years. This happens on Election Day!

Election Day is in November. It is always on the first Tuesday after the first Monday. On this day, people go to a polling place.

First, they get a ballot. This is a list of people. These people want to be president.

Next, they go into a voting booth. Then, they vote! They pick a leader.

After that, they turn in their ballot. They drop it into a box. Or they push a button on a computer.

Last, the votes are counted. The person with the most votes wins!

Everyone has the right to vote. This is why elections are fair. They are just.



★★★ **What Is an Election?** (cont.) ★★★

Directions: An election is a fair way to make a choice. When something is fair, it is equal for everyone. Read the sentences below. Color the pictures that are fair. Draw a big X on the pictures that are unfair.



Sal does not share.



Gigi takes a turn as line leader.



Everyone rides the bus.



Only tall kids can buy ice cream.