

Understanding Elections

What's
Your **VOTE?**



Levels
3-5

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Your **VOTE?**

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Shell Education

5301 Oceanus Drive
Huntington Beach, CA 92649-1030
<http://www.shelleducation.com>

ISBN 978-1-4258-1353-6

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★★★ **The Importance of Civic Education** ★★★

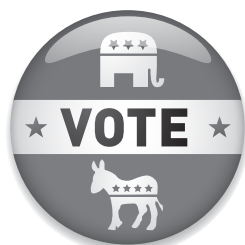
“Young people must learn how to participate in a democracy.”
—Constitutional Rights Foundation 2000

It is the responsibility of those living in the United States to understand how civics relates to them. By being able to participate in a democracy, citizens can affect the nation and its well-being. Therefore, it is necessary for students to learn and understand civics. The National Council for the Social Studies (2010) states that social studies curricula should include opportunities to study “the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.” By learning civics, students can be committed to addressing social and government issues in a constructive way. However, in order to do this, students must understand the country and communities in which they live.

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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Presidential Elections



Students know the fundamental principles of American democracy (e.g., the people are sovereign; the power of government is limited by law; people exercise their authority directly through voting; people exercise their authority indirectly through elected representatives).



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

Paired Texts Reading and Activities

★ Every Four Years (pages 10–11)—

Have students read the story on page 10. Once they finish, ask students why Ripken’s mom decided to vote for Arroz. Ask them why Ripken’s mom thinks elections are important, citing examples from the text. Direct students to complete page 11 in small groups. Since they only have 30 seconds for their commercials, remind students to be creative, concise, and clear. Have groups perform their commercials for the class.

★ Picking the President (page 12)—

Ask students to read the text on page 12. Have them number the different steps in the election process using colored pencils. Next, place the students in pairs to create infographics showing the election process steps. Share sample infographics to show a clear idea of what an infographic is. Students may need to conduct further research to make sure their infographics are informative.

★ Steps to the Presidency

(page 13)—Have students use the informational text to help them list, in order, the steps in the election process. When students have finished, recreate the staircase on the board and go over the answers as a class. Finally, ask students where the best place on the staircase would be to place the “research step” that Ripken’s mom completes in the text.

★ Define, Refine, and Use

(page 14)—Students will use information from both the fictional story and the informational passage to define the three vocabulary words listed. Then, they will look up the words in dictionaries and refine their definitions. Finally, students will use each word in a sentence. After students have completed the assignment, have them share their responses with peers.

Presidential Elections *(cont.)*

Primary Source Connection

★ **Be Counted Primary Source** (pages 15–16)—Tell students to study the primary source on page 15. Read the background information as a class. Then, have students work independently to complete page 16. Point out that the posters they create should grab people's attention and make strong statements.

Puzzle Time!

- ★ **Election Cryptograms Vocabulary Puzzle** (page 17)—Students will enjoy figuring out the code to find the election related vocabulary words.
- ★ **Calculate and Color Elections Puzzle** (page 18)—Students will have fun figuring out which word is hidden in the puzzle full of math problems.

Answer Key

Steps to the Presidency (page 13)

bottom step: primary elections
 second step: national conventions
 third step: presidential debates
 fourth step: Election Day
 top step: Inauguration Day

Define, Refine, and Use (page 14)

Student text-based definitions and sentences will vary. Dictionary definitions for the words are as follows:

election—the process of choosing someone for a political office

candidate—a person who runs in an election

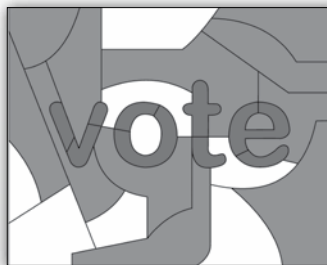
vote—to make an official choice in an election by casting a ballot

Election Cryptograms Vocabulary Puzzle (page 17)

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. debate | 5. campaign |
| 2. vote | 6. convention |
| 3. polls | 7. inauguration |
| 4. candidate | |

Calculate and Color Elections Puzzle (page 18)

answer: vote



★ ★ ★ Every Four Years ★ ★ ★

"This is so stressful!" moaned Ripken.

"I know what you mean," sighed Ripken's mom.
"I'm just not sure who to vote for."

Ripken looked at his mom in disbelief. "What in the world are you talking about, Mom? I'm talking about the game!"

"Oh, sorry, Sweetie. I'm just trying to figure out which candidate I should vote for in the election. It's in a few weeks, and I still haven't made my mind."

"How can you think about the election at a time like this? It's game 7 of the World Series®." Ripken's team was down by one run in the seventh inning. He couldn't believe his mom wasn't watching the game. After all, she was just as big a fan as he was. Instead, she was busy sifting through newspapers and magazines and reading articles on her laptop.

"Mom, I hope you are looking up what relief pitchers are left in our bullpen right now," grunted Ripken in response to his mom's furious typing.

"I think I'm going to vote for Arroz," declared his mom.

"You're only voting for her because she's a girl," retorted Ripken.

"Ripken Ryan Finley! That is not true. After all the research I have done, I believe she is the best candidate for the job. She shares my views on war, taxes, and helping those in need. She stands firm in her beliefs. She has many years of experience. She is wise and speaks well. I truly believe she cares for the safety and welfare of our country."

"Whatever you say, Mom. The game is back on!" Ripken replied, excitedly locking his eyes on the TV.

"Ripken, I don't think you understand the importance of the presidential election. It only happens every four years! Every four years, we the people pick the one person who will lead our country. Not every country gets to choose its leader."

"Mom! The game! Can we talk about this later?!" moaned Ripken.

"Ok, ok. But we will most definitely be talking about this later," Ripken's mom said sternly.

"Mom!" Ripken whined, taking his eyes momentarily off the TV.

"Let's go!" shouted his mom clapping her hands. Ripken laughed and turned his eyes back to the game just in time to see his favorite player hit a home run.



★★★ **Every Four Years** (cont.) ★★★

Directions: Imagine you have been given a 30-second commercial spot that will play during the World Series®. Follow the steps below to make a commercial to convince people to vote in the upcoming presidential election.

Step 1—Think It Through! Brainstorm different ideas. What will you say and do in the commercial? Be clever and creative!

Step 2—Plan It! Sketch below each part of your commercial and write notes on the lines.

Step 3—Practice! Perform your commercial a couple of times for practice. Memorize your lines. Speak loudly and clearly. Know where to stand and when to speak.

Step 4—Show Time! When you are ready, perform your commercial for the class.



★ ★ ★ Picking the President ★ ★ ★

People in the United States have political rights. This means they can take part in politics. Voting is one way to take part. Every four years, people head to the polls to vote for a new president. The president serves one term. That term lasts, you guessed it, four years! However, a president can run twice if he or she chooses to do so.

Elections are held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Although Election Day is only one day, the election process is quite long. There are many steps in an election.

First, candidates announce that they will run in the election. When this happens, the official campaign has begun. There are two main political parties in the United States. A candidate is chosen to represent each party. This happens in primary elections. In the primaries, voters decide who they want to run for president. This person will represent their political party.

Next, the national conventions take place for each political party. They are like big meetings. The national conventions take place at the end of the summer. They last for many days. Songs are sung, and people share posters and signs.

The party platform, or policy, is stated. And the presidential candidate is appointed.

Now, it is time to hit the campaign trail. Candidates work hard to earn people's votes. They travel around the country. They meet with citizens, give speeches, join debates, make TV commercials, and do interviews. They also engage in debates.

In a debate, candidates strongly state their positions about issues. They try to convince voters that their ideas are better than the ideas of their opponents. The debates are shown on TV. Candidates can win many votes if they perform well in the debates.

Finally, it is November. Election Day is here! People go to the polls and cast their votes. They decide who they want the next president to be. The votes are counted, and the winner is announced. Sometimes the winner is announced on Election Day! But the new president does not start his or her new job on Election Day. The new president doesn't take office until Inauguration Day on January 20. This marks the end of the election cycle.

Directions: An infographic is similar to a chart or diagram, but it's more creative and visual! Infographics help people understand information quickly and easily. Summarize the steps in the election process in an infographic.