

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Nation Awaits History-making Election Day

10/31/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/election_10-31.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Student Worksheet (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. **When is the presidential election?**

2. **How many candidates can you name?**

3. **How many Electoral College votes does your state or area have?**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

1. **What is early voting? How many states have early voting?**

ANSWER

More than 30 states have set up places where people can vote early or by mail in an attempt to alleviate problems caused by everyone heading to the polls on the same day.

2. **How many people have early voted? Is this an increase or decrease?**

ANSWER

Early voting has increased. More than one third of voters will have cast ballots in person or by mail by the time Election Day comes around, predicts Paul Gronke of the Early Voting Information Center. That's up from 15 percent in 2000 and 20 percent in 2004.

3. **What would voters want to vote early?**

ANSWER

People want to vote early in case anything happens on Election Day to prevent them from voting, like their car breaking down.

4. Why do candidates want people to vote early?

ANSWER

Voting early means that a critical event -- such as a scandal, a major misstep or so-called October surprise - could occur after a large number of votes already have been cast. Dan Seligson of electionline.org, a nonpartisan election reform Web site also says that voting early may simplify each campaign's "very complex and labor intensive end game."

5. What are some of the problems that voters have already experienced?

ANSWER

The record numbers flooding polling stations, have caused long lines and confusion in some cases. At the same time, there have been reports of malfunctioning machines in West Virginia, Tennessee and Texas, where voters said voting machines switched their votes.

6. Why is the NAACP suing Democratic Virginia Governor Tim Kaine?

ANSWER

The NAACP is suing Democratic Virginia Governor Tim Kaine, saying the state was unprepared to deal with a record-breaking turnout. Kaine defended his state, saying election officials have done everything they can to prepare.

7. What is the Electoral College and how many votes are there in total?

ANSWER

The Electoral College was created in 1787 to increase the power of states and balance power between small and large states. In total, there are 538 Electoral College members: states are allotted a vote for each of their two senators, each House representative (which depends on population), plus three votes for the District of Columbia.

8. Name 5 of the hottest battleground states.

ANSWER

Nevada, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Missouri, Colorado and Florida.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Do you think early voting is a good idea? Why or why not?

2. Election Day is not a federal holiday, do you think it should be? Why or why not?

3. Do you think the Electoral College is a good balance of power?

4. Research what states were battle ground states in 2000, and 2004. Are they different than this year's battleground states? Why do you think that is?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.