

Election 2008: Reviewing the Election Process

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will:

1. Create a flowchart illustrating the U.S. election process.
2. Discuss major themes related to each step on the election process flow chart.

Related National Standards

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning), at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

Civics

Standard 7: Understands alternative forms of representation and how they serve the purposes of constitutional government.

Standard 17. 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.

Standard 20: Understands the roles of political parties, campaigns, elections, and associations and groups in American politics.

Standard 29: Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy.

Language Arts

Listening and Speaking

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 6: Applies decision-making techniques.

Working with Others

Standard 1: Contributes to the overall effort of a group.

Standard 4: Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.

Estimated Time to Complete Lesson

One 50-minute class periods

Materials Needed

- Poster board/chart paper (1 piece per small group)
- Markers (at least 1 per small group)
- Access to a printed or online copy of the U.S. Constitution (example available at <http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html#Article2>)

- Handout: [Election Process Steps-Teacher Key](#) (PDF file)

Backgrounder for Teachers

As the presidential campaign continues to heat up, Americans are bombarded by news of every speech, stop and flub made by the candidates. While this provides interesting coverage and fodder for the late-night talk shows, it does not encourage viewers to delve more deeply into some of the tougher, less publicized issues that voters could benefit from exploring.

Using content and election coverage from the NOW website, this series of lessons offers students and teachers the opportunity to explore questions such as the fairness of the electoral college, the role of various groups in the outcome of the election, voting laws, the effect of money and campaign contributions on political policy, and political spin tactics and political advertising.

Giving students an opportunity to look at the election and focus on issues that are not often part of mainstream news will help broaden their understanding of the political process and foster a greater awareness of the role of democracy in shaping our everyday lives.

Assumed Student Prior Knowledge

Students should be familiar with the major presidential candidates. Knowledge of terms such as primary, caucus, political poll, Electoral College, delegates, superdelegates, and lobbyists would be helpful in students' ability to understand discussion information and when making decisions about which topics they might be interested in presenting to the class.

Teaching Strategy

1. To get a better understanding of what students already know about the process of electing an American president, place them into small groups and have them work together to use their prior knowledge to create a flow chart that illustrates the steps candidates go through from the time they declare their candidacy until they become President. After discussion, the group should construct their flow chart on a poster board or chart paper.

2. After groups have had 15-20 minutes to create their flow charts, discuss the correct content and order for the steps. See the **Election Process Steps Teacher Key** for suggested flowchart content. As you review each step, use the board, overhead or chart paper to draw a class flow chart that can be posted and used as a reference for later activities. While talking about each step, reference the U.S. Constitution so students can see the specifics of each step. Facilitate a discussion about key terms associated with each step as well as fielding basic questions students have about the process. Some items of discussion could include:

Step 1:

What are the qualifications for running for office?

Step 2:

What are delegates? Why are they important? What are some of the typical campaign strategies used by candidates?

Step 3:

What is a primary? A caucus? Why are they important?

Step 4:

How is each party's candidate selected at the convention? What role do superdelegates play in this process?

Step 5:

What qualifications must a person have in order to vote in the general election? Who is not allowed to vote?

Step 6: What is the Electoral College? Why do they cast votes after the popular vote has already been cast?

Step 7: When the President is inaugurated, what responsibilities does s/he undertake?

NOTE: For more advanced students, questions such as those listed above could be made into a scavenger hunt with each group from Step 1 above working to find the answers to these questions during a 15-20 minute time period and then using their answers as part of the classroom discussion.

Assessment Recommendations

Consider the following assessment ideas:

1. Assign students completion of participation grades for involvement in class discussions and group work activities.

Extension Ideas

1. Facilitate a class discussion/debate about the current election process used by the United States. Encourage students to create a pros and cons list about the election process. From there, working individually or in small groups, have students make a flow chart that represents changes they believe should be made to the election process as a means of improving it.

Related Resources

PBS Teachers: PBS Vote 2008

<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/vote2008/tools.html>

A collection of resources including items such as Ask Your Lawmaker, Ballotvox, Campaign Audio, Get My Vote, Idea Generators, Interactive Map, Select a Candidate, Vote by the Issue Quiz and You Decide.

NOW's 2008 Election Coverage

<http://www.pbs.org/now/election-2008/index.html>

Provides a "Democracy Toolkit" and "Burning Questions" related to the 2008 election as well as links to current election news, political cartoons, tracking polls, viewer feedback, and other resources.

Online Newshour: Vote 2008

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/vote2008/>

Access current news stories, a reporter's blog, delegate counts, candidate profiles and more.

American Experience: The Presidents

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/2008/>

This site connects the past to the present by asking voters to consider a number of questions related to the presidency by examining how past presidents have handled similar issues.

P.O.V.: Election Day (airs July 2008)

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/electionday/preview.html>

A documentary film that follows 11 different voters on election day 2004 and provides a glimpse into the election process and decisions made by voters.

U.S. Constitution

<http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html#Article2>

On online copy of the U.S. Constitution

About the Author

Lisa Prosocki is an independent educational consultant who taught middle school and high school English, social studies, reading, and technology courses for twelve years. Prosocki has worked extensively with PBS authoring and editing many lesson plans for various PBS programs and PBS TeacherSource. In addition to conducting workshops for teachers at various state and national meetings, Prosocki also works with many corporate clients creating training programs and materials, facilitating leadership and operations workshops, and providing instructional support for new program rollouts. Prosocki has authored one book and also serves as an editor for other writers of instructional materials.

Election Process Steps: TEACHER KEY

Directions: Below you will find a short, simple description of each step in the election process.

