

3.1 Read & Discuss: Linking Youth, Politics and Social Media

Overview

Students read about the participation gap among young people in the political process and learn about the role that social media can play in promoting civic engagement.

Key Skills

NCSS Civic Ideas and Practices Expectations: Practice forms of civil, civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic

McREL Language Arts Standards: use prior knowledge and experience to understand and respond to new information; use new information to adjust and extend personal knowledge base; draw conclusions and make inferences based on explicit and implicit information in texts; differentiate between fact and opinion in informational texts

ISTE NETS Standard: 3c: Research and Information Fluency: evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks

Grades 7–12

Time Estimate One 45-minute period

Preparation Make copies of Worksheet 3.1 for all students

Procedure

- 1. Grab interest.** Ask students to close their eyes and put their heads on their desks for a confidential survey. Ask them to raise their hands if the answer to the following question is “Yes”: Are you 100% confident that you will vote when you turn 18? Make an informal count. Then ask students to guess what percentage of students in the class raised their hands. Introduce the reading, which looks at the participation gap between college-students and non-college students aged 18 to 25.
- 2. Read.** Depending on your students’ ability, you may want to preview unfamiliar vocabulary.
 - Disparity:** A lack of equality and similarity, especially in a way that is not fair.
 - Dissect:** To cut open or to examine something in detail.
 - Turnout:** The number of people who are present at an event, especially those who go to the polls to vote during an election.
- 3. Discuss.** After students have finished reading, hold a large-group discussion using the questions at the end of the reading. Depending on your students, you may want to use small group discussion or partners so that everyone can participate actively. Invite each group to summarize some key ideas at the conclusion.
- 4. BLOG THIS!** For homework, ask students to reflect upon the reading and discussion in an entry on their blogs. In addition or as an alternative, you may wish to have students write an extended response to one or more of the discussion questions.

Assessment

Review students’ blog entries to ensure that they have understood and processed the key ideas from the reading and discussion and to assess their communication, collaboration and technology skills.

Worksheet 3.1 Linking Youth, Politics and Social Media

True or False: Young people don't get involved in politics. Here are the facts:

- In the 2000 presidential election, while 70% of adults over 25 voted, only 42% of youth 18–24 voted.
- 18–24 year-olds now represent 13% of the population but only 8% of the vote.
- High school graduates vote at nearly twice the rate of high school dropouts, and college graduates vote at three times the rate of high school dropouts.
- The voter turnout rate for 18 to 25-year-olds is consistently 21–49% lower than adults for all elections in all states, and it has been this way since the voting age was lowered to 18 in 1972.

Young people are often seen by older generations as not caring about politics. However, the 2008 election may be different. The Center for Information and Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) found that in the 2008 primary election, there was a record turnout of 6.5 million young voters (under age 30). The youth voter turnout rate almost doubled from 9% in 2000 to 17% in 2008. Some states saw triple or quadruple increases in youth voters. Results showed that college students are very concerned about political issues and want their leaders to be positive, address real problems and call on Americans to be constructively involved.

The Participation Gap

There are big gaps in youth voting that need to be examined. It turns out that, while one out of every four college students voted in the 2008 Super Tuesday states, only about one in 14 out-of-college young people voted. According to Time magazine, this disparity in voter turnout has persisted since 1976, with only minor improvements in 2000 and 2004.

There are 13 million 18- to 25-year-olds who have never been enrolled in college in America. So far, only about three million of them voted in the primaries. Many non-college youths come disproportionately from lower-income backgrounds and from African American and Latino communities. These are the communities that stand to gain the most from more political power and resources. What are some solutions to encourage ALL young people to participate in the political process?

Social Media: A Tool for Civic Engagement

One solution is using social media. Political involvement for today's young people is different than it was for their parents' and grandparents' generations. Being politically engaged means taking action: going to a rally, protesting, or joining a union. Today's youth can also get informed and involved through social media. The Internet and social media tools offer information and opportunities for communication about key political and civic issues. These resources allow youth to connect with others and often provide ideas for taking action, such as gathering petitions, contacting politicians, raising money, organizing high-profile demonstrations, or volunteering. Many of today's youth identify themselves as political bloggers; they have signed online petitions, written e-mails and/or posted comments advocating their positions.

Social media allows young people to easily connect with like-minded people interested in the same political issues and learn from people with differing opinions. Yet, we must be careful not to mistake online conversation for full political engagement. The ultimate goal in making social change is to move from conversation to collaboration and action.

For Discussion

1. Are there ways that teens can get other young adults interested in social issues? Which techniques would likely be most effective? Which issues do you think young people are likely to care most about? Why?
2. Some people say that all social change results in large part from the energy and idealism of young people. Others say that young people's involvement in social change is mostly superficial and that youth are easily manipulated into high-visibility actions that may not contribute much towards genuine social change. Which do you believe to be true?
3. Some people hold the belief that in order to make real social change, you must try to persuade and change other people. Others believe you cannot really change other people; rather, they believe that "if you change yourself, you change the world." Still others believe that politics must involve competition and victory over others. Which view do you believe in, and why?

