

AMERICAN CONSTITUTION SOCIETY (ACS) CONSTITUTION IN THE CLASSROOM THE RIGHT TO VOTE

ELEMENTARY (2-5) SCHOOL CURRICULUM — SPRING 2019

Lesson Plan Overview

The purpose of this lesson plan is to provide elementary school students with a basic understanding of the Constitution and the right to vote. Topics include what it means to vote, the history of voting rights in the United States, which types of votes are constitutionally protected, and certain efforts to restrict people's right to vote.

Note: times are approximate. You may or may not be able to complete this lesson within the class period.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	1
VOTING RIGHTS IN THE CONSTITUTION	3
RESTRICTIONS ON VOTING	4

Introduction (3-5 minutes)

Briefly introduce yourself and explain what you do as an attorney in an age-appropriate way (for example, a public defender may say, I defend people who are accused of breaking the law to make sure that they get a fair trial; a prosecutor may say, I make sure that people are safe by putting lawbreakers in prison). Go around the room and have the students introduce themselves.

Background (10 minutes)

What is voting?

Are you ever with a group of your friends and you all want to play together, but people want to do different things (e.g. tea party, house, kickball, dodgeball, tag, etc.)? Let's say your teacher said you could have recess for the whole day, but everyone in the class had to agree to only play one game. How would you decide what to play?

Exercise: Recess Game Vote

Ask students what they'd want to play and write the answers on the board and put a number next to each answer. Pass out slips of paper and ask students to write the number of the game they'd like to play. Ask them to place it in a box/bowl/hat. Tally the votes and announce the winner.

This is voting. It is a fair way to decide what groups should do.

Optional Exercise - Alternative Ways to Vote:

Explain that there are other ways to vote (scream the loudest, raise hands) and ask them why it might be better to write down their answers and put them in the box.

Explain that screaming wouldn't necessarily be fair because some people may be louder and some may be quieter. Raising hands could work, but what if a bully said she'd beat up anyone that didn't vote for her favorite game?

By writing down your vote and putting it in a box with all the others, no one knows who you voted for unless you tell them.

What is the Constitution?

The Constitution sets up the government of the United States and guarantees certain freedoms, called rights. It is the highest law in the land. It is illegal to pass a law that conflicts with the constitution.

Can you name some of the rights/freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution? [freedom of speech, freedom of religion, right to vote].

Might need some prompts here, such as:

- Can our President tell newspapers what to write?
- Are you allowed to celebrate a holiday different from your friends?

Voting Rights in the Constitution (30 minutes)

The right to vote is at the core of a democratic government. It ensures that the people get to choose their leaders.

Explain that although the Constitution is a very important and impressive document, it did not get everything right (i.e. slavery). The Founders recognized that this might be the case and created a process to change (amend) it. This is really important when it comes to voting.

Exercise: Voting Rights History

Ask the students to divide into four, evenly numbered groups (ideally with as many of their friends as possible). Pass out one color card to each student and each group should receive the same color. Explain that there are four different color cards: red, white, blue, and green. Red cards stand for white, landowning, men. White cards stand for all men, regardless of race, color, or land holdings. Blue cards stand for women. Green cards stand for people who are 18 years old.

Explain that, when the Constitution was written, only white landowning men could vote. Go back to the list of games from the introduction and only allow students with red cards to vote (for expediency, you can allow students to raise hands this time).

Explain that in 1870, after the Civil War, the 15th Amendment was passed protecting the right to vote for all men, regardless of race or color. Repeat the voting exercise allowing red and white cardholders to vote.

Explain that in 1920, after a long fight, the 19th Amendment was passed, protecting the right to vote for women. Repeat the voting exercise allowing red, white, and blue cardholders to vote.

Explain that in 1971, the 26th Amendment was passed, protecting the right to vote for anyone who was 18 years old or older. Repeat the voting exercise allowing red, white, blue, and green cardholders to vote.

Did the results change as more people were allowed to vote? Why do you think that is?

Exercise: Who Can You Vote For

Please handout the Elementary School worksheet for this section.

The Constitution only protects the right to vote in certain elections, but not all elections. First, let's explore some examples of things you can vote for that may or may not be protected by the Constitution. [Draw two columns on the board: "Guaranteed/Protected by the Constitution" and "Not Guaranteed/Protected by the Constitution"]. Go around the room and ask students which column the following should be in (encourage them to

guess if they don't know):

NOTE: these are provided in appropriate columns, but mix it up for the class! Also, feel free to supplement this list with your own ideas.

Guaranteed/Protected by the Constitution	NOT Guaranteed/Protected by the Constitution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President of the United States • US Senators from your state • Congressional representatives from your state • Candidates for President 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President of Mexico • US Senators from another state • Congressional representatives from another state • Class president • Major League Baseball All-Stars • Supreme Court Justices • Laws

Now, let's explore why you don't have the right to vote for everything. Let's think back to the exercise about what game to play during recess. Let's say that instead of our class deciding on a recess game, the class down the hall was actually getting that fun option. Now, would it make sense for us to be able to vote on what they get to play during recess? Why or why not? It doesn't make sense to allow people to vote for things that won't affect them. With that in mind, let's go through this list again and see if it makes more sense.

Restrictions on Voting (15-20 minutes)

Even though the Constitution protects the right to vote, some people have tried to stop certain people from voting or make it harder for them to vote.

Poll tax

One way that people have tried to control the outcome of elections is by passing laws that make it harder for a certain group of people to vote.

Does anyone think you should have to pay money to vote?

Well, years ago a number of states, including Virginia, use to make people pay to vote, in what we sometimes call a poll tax. What group of people do you think this would keep from voting? Can you think of a good reason why this group shouldn't be allowed to vote? Think back to the voting exercise with the colored cards. Would it be fair if we asked you to pay money before we allowed

you to vote?

Remember when we talked about changing the Constitution? Well, this is one of the things that our government decided to change because it wasn't right. In 1964, the 24th Amendment to the Constitution was passed. It made it illegal to force people to pay a poll tax in order to vote in federal elections.

Literacy test

Another way that people tried to stop a group of people from voting was to require them to pass a test before they could vote. You may have heard of this – it is often called a literacy test.

What group of people do you think this would keep from voting? Can you think of a good reason why this group shouldn't be allowed to vote? Think back to the voting exercise with the colored cards. Would it be fair if we asked you to read something before you could vote?

This is another thing that our government realized was wrong and that they changed. In 1965, Congress passed a law, which made it illegal to require people to pass a literacy test in order to vote.

Voter ID

Recently, some states have started to require that a person show something to prove who they are before they are allowed to vote. Something like a driver's license. We sometimes call this voter identification or Voter ID. What group of people do you think this would keep from voting? Can you think of a good reason why this group shouldn't be allowed to vote? Think back to the voting exercise with the colored cards. Would it be fair if we asked you to provide identification before you could vote? What are the reasons we might want someone to show this identification?

How to Make Voting Easier (15-20 minutes)

To encourage more people to vote, some people are trying to make voting easier. We are all busy and lots to do (i.e. going to work or school, taking care of our families).

Was it better when you all were able to vote or when only some of you were? We talked about how some people want to make voting harder. What if we wanted to make it easier? What could we do?

If the students are having trouble, offer the following prompts:

In some states, voting is on only one day. What if you have a lot to do that day? (more days to vote)

Some countries make their election day a day that everyone has off work or school. (make election day a national holiday)

Here we have to sign up early to vote. Some people forget to do that on time or are too busy. (automatically register people to vote)

What if you need to travel on election day or are too old or sick to stand in line to vote? (ability to vote by mail or not in person)

Conclusion

Voting remains the most basic and most important method by which people participate in democracy. It allows citizens to pick who represents them in government. Then our government representatives write, pass, and enforce the laws which influence all our lives.

The Constitution, the blueprint for America's government, guarantees and protects many rights, including the right to vote. In the beginning, only a small, privileged number of people were able to vote. Over the years, the right to vote has expanded from white, land-owning men to all adult citizens, regardless of race, gender, wealth or education.

The most important concept to take away from today's presentation is the right to vote is sacred. Remember when the United States was founded only land-owning white men could vote. Since that time, a multitude of people have desperately fought to secure the right for all people to vote. Please vote in every election in your lifetime. Voting matters and your vote counts!

Special Note on Pre-registration for high school students: Some states allow 16 and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote. That means you can register to vote EARLY. You will then be automatically registered when you turn 18 and can legally vote! To find out more, go to <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/preregistration-for-young-voters.aspx>

All students who are not currently eligible to vote should encourage their parents to vote in the 2019 and 2020 elections and should accompany their parents to the voting booths!