



Creating Change Through the Electoral Process

Overview

This two-day lesson focuses on electoral politics and how it deeply influences policymaking. First, students discuss the role that electoral politics plays in policymaking. Next, they read and discuss research on youth voting. Then in small groups, students role play campaign workers and create strategies to attract young people to participate in an election campaign.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Express a reasoned opinion on whether or not voting is important.
- Explain how electoral politics can affect policy.
- Develop strategies for a hypothetical candidate to get out the youth vote.

Preparation & Materials

- [Handout A: Voting and Young People](#)—1 per student
- [Handout B: Campaign Team](#)—1 per student
- [Handout C–F: Youth Vote Assignment](#)—1 of the four assignments will go to each student (so make enough of each for one-fourth of your class)

Procedure

Day One

I. Focus Discussion

A. Hold a discussion by asking students: How can elections affect policy?

Student answers should touch on these topics. If they do not, prompt them.

- Officeholders decide on policy. Candidates usually run for office with specific policy objectives, e.g., a candidate may have a position on environmental issues. If elected, this candidate will probably affect environmental policy.
- The public can track candidates' and elected officials' voting records, agendas, and positions on web sites run by the government, public-interest groups, and even the officials themselves.
- Voters in some states and cities decide on policies through referendums and initiatives.

B. Explain that one group that has a low voter-turnout rate is young people and that they are going to explore issues related to this.

II. Reading and Discussion—Voting and Young People

A. Distribute [Handout A: Voting and Young People](#) to each student. Ask students to read it, consider why young people vote at low rates, and think of strategies for improving voter turnout among youth.

B. When students finish reading, hold a discussion using the questions on the handout:

- Do you think voting is important? Why?
- Why do you think younger people vote at much lower rates than older people?
- What ideas or strategies do you think could be used to increase voter turnout among young people?

III. Small-Group Activity—Campaign Team

A. Tell students that they are going to role play a campaign team working for a candidate for state senate. Distribute [Handout B: Campaign Team](#) to each student. Read it aloud to them and answer any questions they may have.

B. Divide the class into groups of four students each. Distribute one of the [Handout C–F: Youth Vote Assignments](#) to the members of each group. Explain that each group will create a strategy and message for young voters and present its ideas next session. Circulate as students prepare, answering questions that they may have.

Day Two

IV. Small-Group Activity—Preparation and Presentations

A. Ask students to form their groups. Give them a few minutes to prepare their presentations, reminding them that each student should have a role in the presentation.

B. Have students present their strategies.

V. Debriefing

A. Debrief the activity by asking students:

- What strategies do you think work well with younger voters? Why?
- How would you convince a candidate that the youth vote is important?
- What would you tell candidates to do if they want to get the youth vote?
- Do you think you would be interested in working on a real campaign to help reach young voters? Why or why not?

B. After completing this lesson, have students return to the Citizenship Brainstorm, identifying and adding to the lists.