Citizens, Not Spectators

Lesson 1: Who Can Vote in the United States?

Lesson Overview

This lesson challenges students to speculate about voting requirements. Students will begin learning vocabulary that is used when talking about voting.

The Citizens, Not Spectators elementary curriculum correlates with the We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution elementary student text’s Unit Four, Lesson 21: “How Does the Constitution Protect Your Right to Vote?”

Suggested Grade Level

Elementary (Grade 5–6)

Estimated Time to Complete

50 minutes

Lesson Objectives: After completing this lesson, students will be able to

- understand that there are conflicting ideas about voting and
- define and understand the terms enfranchisement and suffrage.

Vocabulary

- enfranchisement
- suffrage
Materials Needed

**Supplies**
- Chart paper
- Markers

**Teacher Resources**
- Quick Vocabulary (Teacher Resource 1)

**Student Handouts**
- What Do You Know about Voting in the United States? (Student Handout 1)
- Building Our Vocabulary (Student Handout 2)

**Optional Resource**
- If you have students who are noncitizens, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website is a wealth of information about the process of becoming a citizen: [http://www.uscis.gov/](http://www.uscis.gov/)

**Before the Lesson**
- Review Teacher Resource 1. Review and photocopy Student Handouts 1 and 2.
- Place chart paper and markers in various places throughout the room. You will be asking students to divide into groups of three to five people. There should be enough chart paper and markers for each group.
- Contact the Registrar of Voters office to begin discussing (1) materials needed for a simulated election, (2) a possible classroom guest presentation by the registrar, and (3) a schedule for the simulated election.
- Inform students that they will be picking up Student Handout 1 as they enter the classroom. Assign a student to monitor this process.

**Lesson Procedure**

1. **Beginning the Lesson: What Do You Know about Voting in the United States?**

   This lesson begins with a brainstorming activity. Read Student Handout 1 with your students to ensure their understanding. Make sure they know what each question is asking. Point out the chart papers and markers placed around the room. Tell students that each group should identify a group reporter for each question. This student will enter the group’s answer to the question on the chart paper. A student may be a reporter for two or more questions.

   Have students form groups of three to five people to work on the questions on Student Handout 1. Allow about 15 to 20 minutes for group work. Once group work is completed, call
for Question 1 reporters go to the chart paper to enter the group’s answers. Do not correct the responses if they are wrong. If there are conflicting or multiple responses, include them.

When all questions have entries, review the list of responses and note the discrepancies. This will tell you what the students know and where more information is needed. Tell the class that they will be referring back to their responses later in this and in upcoming lessons.

2. Building Our Vocabulary

Distribute Student Handout 2 to each student and explain that they will be learning new vocabulary that is used when talking about voting. Have students put their names on the handout. The students will be using Student Handout 2 in each of the next four lessons. Let students know that during each of the upcoming lessons, whenever a new vocabulary term is discussed they are to write down the definition next to the term.

Define and write the following terms on the board or on chart paper and ask students to enter the definitions on Student Handout 2.

- enfranchisement
- suffrage

Explain to the students that when talking about voting, these two terms are often used. Ask students to write two sentences, one for each of the terms. Have several students read their sentences to the class.

Students who are participating in the We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution curriculum should be told that these terms will appear in their study of Unit 4: How Does the Constitution Protect Our Basic Rights?

3. Concluding the Lesson: What Have We Learned?

Call on different students to read the questions and responses that appear on the charts they have created. After each reading, ask the class what they think about the answers.

- Students may say that they guessed the answers.
- Students may respond that there are conflicting answers.
- You may want to call for a hand vote on the conflicting answers and note the votes on the charts.
- Tell students that as they study more about voting rights, they will learn the correct answers to these questions.

Tell students that they will be referring to Student Handouts 1 and 2 again in the next lesson.
Teacher Preparation for Lesson 2: Suffrage Amendments

To prepare for Lesson 2, create two poster board charts: “Who Could Not Vote in Early America?” and “Who Can Vote Today?”