Citizens, Not Spectators

Enrichment Lesson: Why Does Granny Control the Vote?

Lesson Overview

This lesson exposes students to youth voting trends and how they compare to their parents’ and grandparents’ participation in voting. Students are introduced to articles about generation voting trends. Groups work with U.S. Census Bureau charts and graphs to determine voting results among generations, genders, and education levels in the November 2008 presidential election. Students might reach the conclusion that they have significant voting power if they register and vote.

Suggested Grade Level

High school (Grades 10–12)

Estimated Time to Complete

50 minutes

Materials Needed

Teacher Resources

- “Voter Turnout Increases by Five Million in 2008 Presidential Election, U.S. Census Bureau Reports” (Teacher Resource 5)
- U.S. Census Bureau, Figure 3. Voting Rates by Educational Attainment and Age Groups (Teacher Resource 6)
- U.S. Census Bureau, Figure 5. Voting by State: 2008 (Teacher Resource 7)
- Is This You? (Teacher Resource 8)

Student Handouts

- Youth Citizenship Skills and Voting (Student Handout 6)
- U. S. Census Bureau, Table 1. Reported Voting and Registration by Sex and Single Years of Age: November 2008 (Student Handout 7)
• U.S. Census Bureau, Figure 3. Voting Rates by Educational Attainment and Age Groups: 2008 (Student Handout 8)
• U.S. Census Bureau, Figure 5. Voting by State: 2008 (Student Handout 9)
• U.S. Census Bureau, Table 6. Reasons for Not Registering and Voting, by Selected Characteristics: 2008 (Student Handout 10)
• Voter Information Guide (one per student)
  – These can be obtained from the registrar of voters or from your secretary of state’s website.

Before the Lesson

Preassign students to four groups and remind them to pick up their group’s student handouts as they enter the class for today’s lesson. You may want to ask a student to monitor the handout pickups and distribute any that have not been picked up. Have students form their groups as soon as they arrive to class.

• Groups 1, 2, and 3 students will pick up Student Handouts 6, 7, and 8.
• Group 4 students will pick up Student Handouts 6, 9, and 10.

Lesson Procedure

1. Youth Voting Summary

Project the following on a screen or the classroom board and have a student read it.

With the ratification of the Twenty-sixth Amendment in 1971, that lowered the voting age to 18 years old, there was great hope and enthusiasm for the younger generation of this nation. Sadly, these great expectations have only been met with declining political participation among youth. The voter turnout rate of 18- to 24-year olds has steadily declined since 1972. . . . The trend and the actual figures are both very disturbing signs for our democracy.


Tell students to keep the message of this excerpt in mind during their group work.

2. Voter Turnout Increases

Quote several youth voting trends facts from Teacher Resource 5. Be sure to inform students that in the 2008 presidential election, the youth vote increased slightly to 49 percent. However, the young voter was still the lowest voting percentage by demographic group.
3. Critical Thinking Exercise: Correlating Reports with Charts and Graphs

**Group Work: Student Handouts 6–10**

- Have students break into the four pre-assigned groups and check that all members have the correct student handouts.
  - Groups 1, 2, and 3 should have Student Handouts 6, 7, and 8
  - Group 4 should have Student Handouts 6, 9, and 10

- Instruct the groups to read their assigned handouts and answer the correlating questions. Tell students they have 20 to 25 minutes to complete their group assignment and should prepare to report back to the class afterwards.

- Have groups report all their answers. If time is limited, ask the following questions:

  **Group 1**
  - What were the 18-to-24 age group registration and voting percentages in 2008?
  - Within the 18-to-24 age group, what gender had the highest voting percentage?
  - Within the 18-to-24 age group, what gender had the lowest voting percentage? (Although the answer to this last question is obvious, stating the answer out loud is its goal.)

  **Group 2**
  - Do you know someone who is classified as a member of the Civic Generation?
  - Do you know someone who is classified as a member of Generation X?
  - What is the difference between these two generations’ voting patterns?

**Teacher Resource 6**

- Project Teacher Resource 6 on a screen or the classroom board while Group 3 reports, then ask those students the following questions:

  **Group 3**
  - Did the level of education affect voting percentages in 2008? How?
  - What group had the highest voting percentage?
  - What group had the lowest voting percentage?
  - What age group is considered the Millennial Generation or Generation Y?

**Teacher Resource 7**

- Project Teacher Resource 7 on a screen or the board while Group 4 reports, then ask them the following question:
Group 4

- What three demographic groups had significant voter percentage increases in 2008?
- What two states had the highest voter turnout percentages?
- What two states had the lowest voter turnout percentages?
- What were the top three reasons for not registering?
- What were the top three reasons for not voting?

Ask the entire class the following questions:

- What was our state’s voter turnout percentage?
- How do we rank with other states’ voter turnout percentages?
- What is your opinion about the reasons not to register to vote or vote?
- How can we increase the voter turnout for elections?
- What can we do to increase the interest level of youth voters to register to vote and vote?
- According to the statistics the class just heard from the groups, what generation or generations would you say dominate decision-making in the United States?
- What generation could have a major impact on government decision-making if they increase their voting trends?

4. Concluding the Lesson: Can We Solve This Problem?

Project the following on a screen or the board and have a Group 3 member read it to the class:

“A generation that impatiently raps its fingers on the table when it takes more than a few seconds to download a web page from China, which expects packages sent from the other end of the continent to arrive by 10 a.m. the next morning, which finds it difficult to watch TV without a remote control in hand, which demands a piping hot pizza delivered to their front door in half an hour, has elected to bypass government through the immediacy of individual action.”


Ask the class the following questions:

- Does this describe you?
- Would your generation be more likely to vote on the Internet? Why or why not?
- What is your opinion of Internet voting?
- What other ways can we consider to increase youth voting?

5. Homework Assignment

Have students pick up a Voter Information Guide as they leave class. Ask students to review the guide with parents or other trusted adults and come to the next Citizens, Not Spectators class prepared with any questions about the ballot they might have.