



Module 1: Voting Matters

In this first module, we present a series of goals and performances that are exploratory in nature. Learning activities introduce several explanations as to why voting matters collectively and individually. A separate activity turns the wording around and asks students to deliberate about what might be the matter with voting. In addition, the learning activities introduce online resources and skills that will be used in greater depth as the larger unit proceeds.

Lesson 1: Voting, Leadership and Citizenship

Understanding Goal: What is the value of voting, community leadership and active citizenship?

Introduction:

This introductory lesson begins the process of enhancing students' understanding of voter participation, the reasons that are offered for why voting is a vital civic duty and the obstacles that block or impede voting. Students pay particular attention to voter participation rates by young people since the voting age was decreased to 18 in 1971.

Time Span: 2-4 days

Resources Needed:

- Handout, *Who Votes?*
- Handout, *Leadership Roles Within an Advocacy Movement*
- Handout, *What Makes a Leader?*
- Handout, *Leadership Qualities Inventory*
- Handout, *Participating in a Community*

Skill sets: Analysis, interpretation, group problem solving

Performance of Understanding:

After being introduced to the *Student Voices* curriculum, students analyze data on youth voting and develop a preliminary description of leadership and citizenship.

Procedure:

Begin the lesson by familiarizing students with the *Student Voices* curriculum. Key points to highlight include:

- Students will be joining other students from around the country in learning about the political campaign process as they become involved in a local electoral project.
- The *Student Voices* Web site will be available to explore political concepts, conduct research and discuss current issues with their peers across the country.
- As a class, students will research and identify an important issue or need surrounding an ongoing political campaign.
- Students will then develop and implement an action plan to have their own views heard as they work to improve the electoral process and their community.

- Consequently, students will learn how to become agents of change within their community and school.

The second phase of the lesson requires students to examine data from recent elections.

1. Provide all students with a copy of the handout, *Who Votes?*
2. Ask students to respond to **Part 1: Voting By Age Group** by developing as many reasons as possible that might explain the data. Students should share their insights either in small groups or with the larger class.
3. Have students read **Part 2: A Deeper Look at Youth Voting in 2004**, and ask them to write a brief explanation for the changes in youth voting over time. Once finished again have students share their responses.

The third phase of the lesson focuses on leadership styles and traits.

1. The first task for students is to read the handout, *Leadership Roles Within an Advocacy Movement*, developed by the Advocacy Institute
2. As a whole class, discuss the 11 leadership roles described. You might begin by asking students if the same roles are needed on a sports team or student extracurricular group with which they are familiar. Then lead students into a discussion of a student advocacy organization. Would the latter group find these particular roles more valuable other student groups or teams?
3. Using the *What Makes a Leader?* handout, ask students to think about the list and select the role that best suits their skills and personality. Have students write a paragraph or two on why they selected the role that they did. Students should share their choices with their research team or with the entire class.
4. What roles were most popular? Were any roles not selected? Why? What might the consequences of these choices be in an advocacy organization? Finally, distribute copies of the *Leadership Qualities Inventory* handout and have students complete it, noting leaders they observe among their peers or throughout the community. Students can work in groups or individually and share with the class.

In the final phase of the lesson, provide all students with a copy of the handout *Participating in a Community* and allow students to complete the survey. As a whole group ask students to respond to the reflection prompts.

Assessments:

Assessments for all activities are informal. The teacher encourages students to be thorough and detailed in their descriptions.

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways/Optional Activities:

How to Use the Student Voices Website (runtime = 10:48), <http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/AssetDetail.aspx?myID=1113>. This is a short instructional video that shows what is available from the Student Voices Web site and how to use it. This video is a great primer or refresher for students and teachers who wish to utilize

the project's online resources and discussions.

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard II.D. What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?

Standard V.A. What is citizenship?

Standard V.B. What are the rights of citizens?

Lesson 2: Does the *Rock the Vote* Campaign Increase the Turnout of Young Voters?

Understanding Goal: Why have corporations and non-profit agencies developed programs targeting young voters?

Introduction:

Underlying this lesson is a fundamental question: Why have corporations and non-profit agencies developed programs targeting young voters? In exploring this question through the Rock the Vote program, students begin to understand voter participation, voting as a vital civic duty and the obstacles that block or impede voting. Particular attention is paid to voter participation by young people since the voting age was lowered to 18 in 1971.

Time Span: 1 day

Resources Needed:

- Student access to the *Rock the Vote Timeline* located at http://www.rockthevote.com/rtv_timeline.php#1990
- RocktheVote.com, <http://www.rockthevote.com>
- The brief audio excerpt of President Richard Nixon, “Remarks at a Ceremony Marking the Certification of the 26th Amendment to the Constitution” (July 5, 1971), <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1996/news/9606/28/18.year.old.voting/nixon.wav>
- Full Transcript of President Nixon’s “Remarks at a Ceremony Marking the Certification of the 26th Amendment to the Constitution,” <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3068>
- Mark Hugo Lopez, Karlo Barrios Marcelo, and Emily Hoban Kirby, “Youth Voter Turnout Increases in 2006,” located at http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS07_2006MidtermCPS.pdf

Skill sets: Analysis, interpretation, data collection

Performance of Understanding:

After listening to the excerpt of the ceremony marking the certification of the Constitutional Amendment giving 18- to 21-year-olds the right to vote and reviewing introductory material on youth voting trends, students brainstorm reasons about why programs focusing on getting young people to vote have been developed in the United States. Conclude by having students come up with methods they would use to encourage young people to vote.

Procedure:

Arrange for Internet access or prepare copies of the timeline in advance, and ensure that the sound file is ready to be played at the start of class. Information on youth voting is available from the article, “Youth Voter Turnout Increases in 2006.”

Open class with students listening to the audio recording of the excerpt of President Nixon’s remarks at the ceremony certifying the 26th Amendment (runtime=18 seconds). (The transcript of the full speech is available online for study or use if needed.) After hearing the audio clip, solicit student input about this new demographic of voters. Questions to consider are:

- What different perspectives might this age group bring to politics?
- What issues might younger voters care about that older voters do not?

Have students analyze the Rock the Vote timeline, as well as relevant data from “Youth Voter Turnout Increases in 2006.” Enlist students in a general discussion on youth voting trends.

- Do programs such as Rock the Vote or MTV’s Choose or Lose work?
- Do they help make voting cool?
- Is making the act of voting cool a worthwhile goal?

After students have had a chance to work at answering these questions, inquire about students’ ideas on how it might be possible to encourage increased voter participation among 18- to 24-year-olds. Save these ideas for use in future lessons.

Finally, close the class discussion with the following questions:

- Why do non-profits and corporations support youth voting programs? What is the value to these organizations?

Assessments:

Assessments for all activities are informal. The teacher encourages students to be thorough and detailed in their descriptions.

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways/Optional Activities:

Mobilize.org, <http://www.mobilize.org/>, is dedicated to educating, empowering and energizing young people to increase their civic engagement and political participation. The organization works to show young people how their lives are affected by public policy and in turn, how they can influence public policy.

Black Youth Vote!, <http://www.ncbcp.org/byv/>, is a national grassroots coalition of organizations and individuals committed to increasing political and civic involvement among Black men and women aged 18-35. The youth-led organization seeks to empower Black youth by educating them about the political process and training them to identify issues and influence public policy through participation.

League of Women Voters, <http://www.lwv.org/>, a non-partisan organization with a wealth of information (news, issues, events) for voters in America.

Additional Activities

Using the Rock the Vote Blog and undertaking online research, have students continue the Rock the Vote Timeline to the present. What activities were completed and milestones reached by the Rock the Vote organization since 2004?

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard II.D. What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?

Standard V.A. What is citizenship?

Standard V.B. What are the rights of citizens?

Lesson 3: Does the *Rock the Vote* Campaign Increase the Turnout of Young Voters?

Understanding Goal: What is the best way to encourage youth voting?

Introduction: In this lesson surrounding Rock the Vote and youth voting, students explore their own knowledge of voting and the impact that they as citizens can have on the electoral process. Like those involved in Rock the Vote, students collaboratively plan, implement and evaluate a mini-campaign to encourage peers to participate in the political process.

Time Span: 3-5 days

Resources Needed:

Any of the following can enhance student interest in the project. The public service announcement (PSA) can be developed without these aids and can be presented in class to fellow students.

- Access to computer software that allows students to design and create a poster. Examples include word processing software (Microsoft Word, Google Docs, Zoho) or desktop publishing software (Apple Pages, Adobe InDesign, Microsoft Publisher or Scribus—a free, open-source program available at <http://www.scribus.net/>).
- Camcorder or audio recording equipment for the creation of a public service announcement.
- A free blog and wiki obtained from <http://edublogs.org/>. A free blog may also be obtained through Blogger, Google's free blogging service (www.blogger.com). Free wiki spaces also are available through <http://www.wikispaces.com/>.
- iTunes, which allows for the posting of podcasts. A further explanation of how to proceed in creating your own podcast is located at <http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcaststechspecs.html>.
- *Student Voices* Speak Out: Getting Out the Vote, <http://www.student-voices.org/SpeakOut.aspx?Id=616> (includes a 3-minute video report for students).

Skill Sets: Analysis, interpretation, crafting a persuasive argument, fluency with computer software

Performances of Understanding:

Working together in small groups, students plan, develop and evaluate a product that is to be shared with other students or others living in the community. Their creation should

either creatively inform other young people about the voting process or encourage young people to register to vote and/or participate in civic life.

Procedure

Using the previous lesson as a springboard (examining the need for increasing youth voter turnout), introduce the idea of a student-created PSA to encourage youth voting. The following are examples of types of projects that can be researched and completed:

- 1) Students post to a class blog describing a particular candidate's views and why young voters should or should not support this candidate.
- 2) Students working in small groups create an audio or video podcast urging young people to register and vote.
- 3) Students develop a more informative audio or video podcast highlighting youth voting trends and the need for increasing turnout. (This could take the form of a talk radio show, for instance.)
- 4) Students develop a poster that explains how to register to vote in your state.
- 5) Students create a timeline for the 26th Amendment using presentation software such as PowerPoint, Keynote or Zoho Show that discusses the effort to enfranchise 18-year-olds.

Further information about how to get a free class blog or wiki and how to create a podcast are available in the *Student Voices Teacher Handbook*. These activities can be completed without posting students' work online. The advantage, however, is that a permanent archive of student work can be created for sharing with parents, peers and others as desired.

Students will need time to complete their research and develop the PSA. Students should take advantage of online data resources and online newspaper archives on the *Student Voices* Web site as well as more traditional print magazines sources found in the school media center. An extra day can be used for student presentations.

After the presentations and as part of the assessment students provide feedback to one another on why these projects would engage the interest of other students or community members. Individuals should reflect on their own work to uncover ways that the project might be improved in a new version.

Students may later choose to expand or elaborate on these projects in completion of their culminating project, the Youth Issues Agenda. Discussed more fully in a later lesson, the goal of the Youth Issues Agenda project is for students to work with others in the community to address an issue of importance related to campaigns and elections.

Students should be encouraged to visit and utilize the Speak Outs of the *Student Voices* Web site to engage in discussions with their peers across the country about current issues. Their participation should continue throughout the semester so they become more aware of others' viewpoints and sharpen their deliberation skills. The discussions are password-protected and moderated by *Student Voices* staff and are updated frequently with new topics. To obtain the password for your class, provide your contact and school information via email to studentvoices@asc.upenn.edu. The Speak Out *Getting Out the Vote*, which includes a 3-minute streaming video report, will apply

concepts from this lesson.

Assessments

Assessment is completed by teachers and classmates on 1) accuracy and clarity of the information presented, and 2) degree to which the completed task persuades others.

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard V.C. What are the responsibilities of citizens?

Standard V.E. How can citizens take part in civic life?

Lesson 4: Cutting Others in on the Deal: A Brief History of Voting in the United States**Understanding Goal:** Why doesn't everyone vote in elections in the United States?**Introduction:**

Students gain an understanding of historical factors that have inhibited voting in the United States.

Time Span: 2-3 days

Resources Needed:

- Video: *Voting: The Power of One* (runtime = 10:39), <http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/AssetDetail.aspx?myID=1114>
- Handout: Alex Keyssar, "Suffrage in America"
- Handout: Richard K. Scher, "The Polls Are Open! But Can You Vote?"
- *Student Voices Speak Out*: Should 17-year-olds be allowed to vote in primary elections? <http://student-voices.org/SpeakOut.aspx?Id=656>.

Skill Sets: Textual analysis, interpretation, crafting a persuasive argument

Performances of Understanding:

After watching a brief video on voting in the U.S. and reading the essays by Alexander Keyssar and Richard Scher, students participate in a discussion exploring American attitudes toward voters and voting.

After undertaking brief research on the enactment of the 26th Amendment, students participate in a role-playing exercise about whether the right to vote should be extended to 17-year-olds.

Procedure:

Begin this lesson with a viewing of *Voting: The Power of One* (runtime = 10:39), which can be downloaded from the AnnenbergClassroom.org Web site. This is a short video that explains the history and significance of the right to vote in the United States. Multiple perspectives are discussed and excuses for not voting are debunked.

Students should be instructed to read the short essays by Alexander Keyssar and Richard Scher. The two complementary essays provide background information and ask thought-provoking questions on the history of suffrage in the United States.

Possible discussion prompts for students include:

- Why did men prevent women from voting in the first 130 years of this country's history?

- Is there a group today that should be allowed to vote but is prohibited from doing so by law?
- Is voting a privilege, or should it be considered a right for all citizens?
- How old should a person be before they can vote?

Use this last prompt to enter into a discussion of possible arguments used 50 years ago against allowing the vote to people between the ages of 18-21. Point out to students that while American politicians had discussed lowering the voting age to 18 since at least the 1950s, it was not until March 23, 1971, that Congress passed and sent to the states for possible ratification the 26th Amendment lowering the voting age to 18. Within a week, 11 states had voted to ratify the amendment. By the Fourth of July of that year, 39 states had ratified the amendment and the 26th Amendment became part of the Constitution.

At this point, divide the class into smaller groups to devise arguments either for or against allowing 17-year-olds the vote. Make copies of the Speak Out article “Should 17-year-olds be allowed to vote in primary elections?” (<http://student-voices.org/SpeakOut.aspx?Id=656>) available to each group. Groups should be assigned roles or factions in the public arena. Students should help in determining their roles. Possibilities include: 17-year-old soldiers, a legislator from a university town, civics teachers, a parent group, representatives from the American Association of Retired People (AARP), youth groups, etc. After collecting their thoughts and marshaling arguments, students participate in a brief debate.

Assessments

Teacher assessment of: 1) the accuracy and clarity of the information presented, and 2) degree to which the completed task persuaded others.

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways/Optional Activities:

These Web sites provide additional insights. The first article may serve as a useful hook, while the second site may serve to help expand the suffrage examination, with an emphasis on women.

- Stephen J. Dubner and Steven D. Levitt, “Why Vote? A Swiss Turnout-Boosting Experiment,” *New York Times Magazine* (November 6, 2005). This article works to make sense of voting patterns and participation, with consideration given to what may drive people to cast a ballot when one vote rarely matters.
- The Library of Congress, Votes for Women: Selections from the National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection, 1848-1921, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/naw/>, contains useful information about female suffrage in America (primary and secondary source documents).

electionline.org, <http://www.electionline.org/>, a project of the Pew Center on the States, is the nation’s only nonpartisan, non-advocacy Web site providing up-to-the-minute news and analysis on election reform.

Other Activities

Students undertake a short, focused research project on one element that either promoted or inhibited voting in the United States. Among the possible research topics are: the poll tax, voting restrictions on felons, women's suffrage movement within your state, property requirements for voting, the closed primary, moving and voting in your state, immigrants and voting, and redistricting.

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard II.D. What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?

Standard V.A. What is citizenship?

Standard V.B. What are the rights of citizens?

Lesson 5: Can Levels of Voting in American Elections be Increased?

Understanding Goals: Why doesn't everyone vote in elections in the United States?

Introduction: Students examine factors that continue to lower voter turnout in the United States.

Time Span: 2-3 days

Resources Needed:

- Handout: *Questions on American Voting Patterns*
- Handout: *Understanding Voting Rates*
- Handout: *Tables on Voter Registration and Voting, 2004*
- Video: *18 & Voting* (runtime = 10:39),
<http://www.annenbergclassroom.org/AssetDetail.aspx?myID=896>

Skill Sets: Data analysis, reading and interpreting tables

Performances of Understanding:

Relying on data found at the U.S. Census Bureau website, students acquire basic knowledge about those who register and vote in American elections. Working with partners or in research teams students analyze the data and describe trends in registration and voting. Students refer back to the Rock the Vote timeline to discover if there is any relationship between the Rock the Vote efforts and actual voter turnout among young people. Students should write up their summary findings on the class wiki or class blog.

Procedure:

Begin the lesson by providing students with the necessary handouts. The goal for students is to analyze U.S. Census Bureau data in both table and text form to gain insight into the American voting population.

Students collect data by completing the handout *Questions on American Voting Patterns*. These data can be found using the handouts developed from Census Bureau materials, *Understanding Voting Rates* and *Tables on Voter Registration and Voting, 2004*. The full document from which these handouts were taken is the Census Bureau Report *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004 (P20-556)*, found at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html>.

Upon completion, students reexamine the Rock the Vote timeline used in Lesson 1 to see if there is any relationship between voting trends and Rock the Vote activities.

If there is class time available, conduct a viewing of *18 & Voting* (runtime = 30:32), which can be downloaded from the AnnenbergClassroom.org Web site. This video

follows *Student Voices* voter registration assemblies at several Philadelphia high schools, asking students why they think it is important to register and vote. It also provides information about how to vote and the history of voting rights.

A class discussion should take place to help students reflect on the material. Possible prompts for students include:

- Does Rock the Vote seem to increase youth voter turnout? Why or why not? What other information might be needed to better answer this question?
- What obstacles reduce youth voting rates?
- Based on the data, what is the relationship between voting rate and group or demographic affiliation? (Examples include: level of education, income, military service, residence in a particular region of the country, gender and age). Do you have any explanation as to why these factors may influence voting?
- What are some effective ways to increase voter turnout among young people?

After students have had a chance to discuss these issues as a class, they should post their individual views on the class wiki or blog.

Complementary Materials/Other Pathways/Optional Activities:

The Redistricting Game, <http://www.redistrictinggame.com/index.php>, created at the USC Game Innovation Lab - part of the USC School of Cinematic Arts' Interactive Media Division – for the USC Annenberg Center for Communication, is designed to educate, engage and empower citizens around the issue of political redistricting. Currently, the political system in most states allows the state legislators themselves to draw the lines. This system is subject to a wide range of abuses and manipulations that encourage incumbents to draw districts that protect their seats rather than risk an open contest.

By exploring how the system works, as well as how open it is to abuse, *The Redistricting Game* allows players to experience the realities of one of the most important (yet least understood) aspects of our political system. The game provides a basic introduction to the redistricting system, allows players to explore the ways in which abuses can undermine the system, and provides info about reform initiatives - including a playable version of the Tanner Reform bill - to demonstrate the ways that the system might be made more consistent with tenets of good governance.

Vote: The Machinery of Democracy, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/vote/index.html>, is an online exhibit of the Smithsonian, National Museum of American History. This interactive exhibit explores how ballots and voting systems have evolved over the years as a response to political, social and technological change, transforming the ways in which Americans vote.

Assessments

Informal assessment by teacher based on accuracy of information and skill in research.

Formal assessment of writing completed by students based on 1) clarity of ideas, 2)

accuracy of the information, 3) insights made on the voting process.

Correlation to *National Standards for Civics and Government*:

Standard V.E. How can citizens take part in civic life?