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Center for Civic Education

Citizens, Not Spectators

Lesson 3: Culminating Activity: In-Class Simulated Election

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students apply what they have learned about voting procedures and experience the processes similar to a real election polling site by role-playing poll workers with specific duties. Students become familiar with the polling site procedures and mechanics of voting in their state. Additionally, students cast their vote and assist others with voting in an environment that approximates an actual polling place. The lesson's election simulation coincides with the actual November general election for a more authentic experience. A supervisor, ideally the registrar of voters, should be in the vicinity of the voting booths to assist students who may have questions about the voting process and mechanisms.

Suggested Grade Level

Elementary (Grades 5–6)

Estimated Time to Complete

50 minutes

Lesson Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to

- explain the requirements for a polling place,
- understand and explain their experiences as a voter and poll worker,
- understand and explain the necessity for the various roles and responsibilities of poll workers,
- understand and explain the need to keep the polling place apolitical,
- understand and explain the importance of voter registration lists, and
- understand and explain the voting mechanisms used.

Vocabulary

- apolitical
- poll worker
- polling place
- registration list
- registrar of voters

Materials Needed

Teacher Resources

- 2011 Class Ballot (Teacher Resource 5)
- Diagram of Polling Place (Teacher Resource 6)
 - The registrar of voters is the best source for proper polling place setup.
 - If a representative of the registrar of voters office is unable to visit your classroom to assist in the polling place setup, this diagram provides an example.
- Who Does What and Where? (Teacher Resource 7)
- Registration Check-in for Students Without Identification Cards (Teacher Resource 8)

Polling Place Setup

- Demonstration table: posters with students' initiatives for a new rule
- Voter registration list (alphabetized class list)
- Ballots for voting, plus pencils if needed
- Voting mechanism, privacy booths, and ballot box
- "I Voted" stickers
- Vote tally sheet

Before the Lesson

One week before the simulated election, confirm the delivery of materials with the registrar's office. You should request that voting booths and voting mechanisms be delivered to the school the day before or earlier if possible. Request a secure storage location with administrative approval and assure the registrar's office that equipment will be stored safely.

Students should present rationales for their new rules and vote on the proposed initiatives.

Lesson Procedure

1. Keeping the Polling Place Apolitical

Explain to students that they have had time to present their rationale and the opportunity to learn about all the ballot initiatives in the days before the election. Once the simulated election polls open, no further discussion about the ballot initiatives is allowed. No pressure or persuasion on

how to vote is allowed in the polling area. This includes the display or use of buttons, banners, posters, and similar items.

2. What Does an Election Polling Place Look Like?

Project Teacher Resource 6 on a screen or the classroom board.

- The diagram provides one example of a polling place setup. The registrar of voters can provide the setup your state requires.
- Ask students their opinions of why the polls are set up this way.
 - Students may suggest that the setup maintains order.
- Explain the reasons for the polling place setup.
 - Ensures legally registered voters
 - Avoids voting fraud such as duplicate voting

3. What Do Poll Workers Do?

Refer to Teacher Resources 6 and 7 for this section.

- Point out the setup required for a polling place. Tell students that they will experience an abbreviated version of an actual election poll.
- Ask students if they think the poll workers' duties support the site setup goals.

Project Teacher Resource 6 on a screen or the classroom board. Indicate the polling place positions you will be using in the simulated election.

- Ask students if this setup will ensure a fair and accurate simulated election.

Request student volunteers for the poll positions your simulated election will engage.

- Explain that two students will be assigned to each position. This enables continued position coverage and the opportunity for each student to cast a vote.
- Student identification
 - If your school issues student identification cards, you should remind students to show them at the simulated election registration table.
 - If a student does not have an identification card, have him or her sign in on Teacher Resource 8: Registration Check-in for Students Without Identification Cards.
- Class list
 - Your class list can be divided into groups by alphabetical order. This will allow several students to work at the registration table.
- Ballot distribution (Teacher Resource 5)

- A student stationed at the end of the registration table will distribute paper ballots to voters who have completed registration sign-in.
- Tallying the ballots
 - States use a variety of mechanisms for tallying the completed ballot votes. Regardless of the procedure, monitors are needed at the site of a finalized ballot.
- First vote
 - In some elections, the first voter to complete a ballot is asked to check the ballot box to ensure that it is empty; you or the registrar will then seal the ballot box.
- Computerized mechanisms
 - One or two students will monitor the ballot entries.
- “I Voted” stickers
 - Distribute a sticker to each voter who casts a ballot.

4. Applying Knowledge and Skills: Casting a Vote in the Simulated Election

Each student will have the opportunity to cast his or her informed vote on the simulated election ballot.

As poll workers, students will assist and guide other voters through the voting procedures.

5. Tallying the Vote

If the registrar is present, he or she may tally the vote with the help of students, announce it to the class, and determine when and if the simulated election results will be announced publicly.

If older machines are used, students can tally the votes as the registrar reads them from the back of the voting machine.

6. Concluding the Lesson

Ask for volunteers to help you and the registrar break down the polling area.

Distribute the Citizens, Not Spectators survey and have students complete it.

- The survey asks students to rate the lesson and its activities and gives them the opportunity to answer questions about their experience and offer recommendations for improvement.
- If time is a factor, schedule fifteen to twenty minutes of the next class meeting for completion of the survey.