



citizens. not spectators.  
promoting youth civic and political engagement.



## Center for Civic Education

### **Citizens, Not Spectators**

#### **Lesson 1: Becoming a Voter**

##### **Lesson Overview**

In this lesson, students apply their state's requirements for registering to vote. Students learn when and how to register, how to complete a voter registration form, and when and how to reregister.

##### **Supplemental Materials**

*We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution* student text correlations are offered as examples to use with Citizens, Not Spectators lessons when applicable. A comparable social studies text used in your classroom may be adapted for reference in its place.

This Citizens, Not Spectators elementary curriculum correlates with *We the People*, Level 1, Unit Four, Lesson 21: "How does the Constitution protect your right to vote?" (pp. 169–74)

##### **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 general voting requirements,
- understand the voter registration requirements and process in their state, and
- complete a voter registration form.

## **Vocabulary**

- absentee ballot
- citizen
- felony
- independent voter
- mentally incompetent
- parole
- register

## **Materials Needed**

### **Teacher Resources**

- Quick Vocabulary (Teacher Resource 1)
- State Voting Qualifications (Teacher Resource 2)
- Who Can Register to Vote? (Teacher Resource 3)

### **Student Handouts**

- Building Our Vocabulary (Student Handout 1)
- Who Can Register to Vote? (Student Handout 2)
- Voter registration forms from your secretary of state's website or the National Mail Voter Registration Form (Student Handout 3)
- *We the People: The Citizen & the Constitution*, Level 1 or another social studies text

## **Before the Lesson**

A week or two before Lesson 1, communicate with the registrar of voters' office. Prepare for the lesson by obtaining the following materials and information:

- Voter registration forms (one per student)  
You can obtain these from the registrar of voters or download, print, and photocopy the form from your secretary of state's website. Another alternative is to use the [National Mail Voter Registration Form](#).
- Determine the date for the simulated election (Lesson 3). The simulated election can be timed to coincide with or precede the general election.
- Request "I Voted" stickers—one for each student in your class.
- Research your state's requirements for registering and voting. Find this information on your secretary of state's website. You will use this information for Teacher Resource 1.
- Determine who can vote by absentee ballot in your state.

Review and photocopy all Lesson 1 student handouts and teacher resources.

Assign students a reading or review of *We the People*, Lesson 21, or a comparable text.

## Lesson Procedure

### 1. Beginning the Lesson: Why Do States Control Voter Registration?

Student Handout 1 and *We the People*, or a comparable social studies text, are needed throughout this lesson.

Distribute Student Handout 1 to each student. Inform students that in today's lesson they will begin learning new vocabulary terms associated with the voting process.

Begin the lesson by asking students who is eligible to vote today. From their homework assignment, students should reply that a U.S. citizen is eligible, and may also name groups such as African Americans, women, and eighteen-year-olds. Ask students to explain what makes a person a citizen.

Using the *We the People* glossary, or that of a comparable social studies text, instruct students to look up the term *citizen* and add the definition to their vocabulary list.

As an introduction to the concept of voter registration, ask students if they have a guaranteed right to attend school. Next, ask if they had to register to attend school. Remind them that although they have the right to attend school, there is a procedure that must be followed to realize that right.

Inform students that the U.S. Constitution and state constitutions establish voter registration qualifications.

Ask students to define the phrase "register to vote." Remind them about registering to attend school.

### 2. What Are the Requirements to Register to Vote?

Student Handout 2 and Teacher Resources 1, 2, and 3 are required for this part of the lesson.

Distribute Student Handout 2 to each student. Inform students that in today's lesson they will learn about rules for registering to vote and make a list of the rules on this handout.

On a screen or the classroom board, project the first half of Teacher Resource 3. It indicates voting requirements for all citizens of the United States.

- Ask different students to read the registration requirements and instruct the class to take notes on Student Handout 2.
- Students may need help with the vocabulary terms *felony*, *independent voter*, *mentally incompetent*, *parole*, and *register*. Definitions can be found in Teacher Resource 1.
  - Add the definitions to the vocabulary chart.
  - Have students fill in the definitions in Student Handout 1.

Show students the second half of Teacher Resource 3. Indicate your state's additional requirements for voter registration.

### **3. Applying Information: Registering to Vote**

A voter registration form (Student Handout 3) is required for completion of this part of the lesson. You can obtain a voter registration form from your secretary of state's website. Inform students that, in most states, voter registration must be completed within a specific time period before an election. Tell students the voter registration deadline in your state.

Distribute a voter registration form to each student.

- Review the registration form step-by-step with students.
- Assist them in completing the form.
- Collect the registration forms.

### **4. Is My Voter Registration Good for the Rest of My Life?**

Inform students that there are a number of reasons why they might have to reregister to vote.

Ask students whether they would have to reregister if they changed their address.

- They might respond that they would have to reregister.

Ask students whether they would have to reregister if they changed their name.

- Ask students to give reasons why people change their names.

Define and explain the term *absentee ballot* (reference Teacher Resource 1).

- Add the definition to the vocabulary chart.
- Instruct students to add the definition to Student Handout 1.
- Ask students to think of voters who qualify to use an absentee ballot. Here are some examples of possible responses:
  - College students who cannot get home to vote
  - Military personnel who cannot get home to vote
  - Adults who cannot get to the election polls because of their jobs
  - Physically disabled adults

Inform students that some state registrars remove people from the rolls of registered voters if they do not participate in elections. This means that if you fail to vote in a specific number of consecutive elections, you may have to reregister.

Ask students whether a homeless person can register to vote given that they have no permanent address.

- Some voter registration forms allow an intersection of streets to be used as an address. This allows homeless people to register to vote.

### **5. Concluding the Lesson: Would Our Registration Forms Be Accepted?**

Ask students whether the class would meet the state's deadline for registering to vote if the forms were mailed today.

Ask students whether all the rules to register to vote were followed.

- They should answer that they do not meet the age requirement.
- If everyone in the class were eighteen years old, would the registration forms be accepted?

Explain to students that in Lesson 2 they will be given the opportunity to create a class ballot. Ask students to start thinking about which rules they would like to change, or new rules and policies they would like to add for the classroom or school.

### **6. Homework Assignment**

Each student will write up one suggestion for the class ballot and include reasons for the suggestion. This homework assignment will be graded.