To Vote Or Not To Vote

Subjects: Social Studies/Math

Estimated Time of Completion: four to five fifty minute class periods

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I. Summary

Students will gain a historical understanding of voting rights in America through an online game, "Inside The Voting Booth." Students will then examine the contemporary problem of low voter turnout. Through surveys and research, students will pinpoint causes and propose solutions to increase vote participation.

II. Objectives

- Students will recognize the importance of voting within a democracy.
- Students will conduct a survey of voters in the community.
- Students will analyze results of the survey.
- Students will suggest ways to increase voter participation.
- Students will list steps in registering to vote.
- Students will identify various ways to register to vote (local registration, on the Web, through the department of motor vehicles, by mail).
- Students will understand voting trends.

III. Materials Needed

- Computers with Internet access, spreadsheet or database software and desktop publishing/word processing

IV. Procedure

1. Ask students if they have ever voted. Allow students to brainstorm voting situations at school, at home in family decisions, at clubs or places of worship, etc.
2. Move to the online activity "Inside The Voting Booth." Students will learn about the history of voting rights in the "Could You Vote?" game.
3. What are the voter eligibility requirements in the students' own state? Students might contact local government offices or the League of Women Voters to find answers. The LWV Web site also contains good, general voter registration information.
4. The Federal Election Commission provides statistics on voter turnout in recent elections. How can the percentage of active voters be increased? Students will be asked if they can think of an easier way to vote. Voting via the Internet may be discussed. As background information, you may find the Government Computer News site or the Direct Democracy Center site helpful. What other options can students think of that would make voter registration and voting easier?

5. Conduct a community survey to determine local voter participation in the last presidential and/or local election. Students should collect basic demographic data (sex, age range, etc.): information about voting behaviors (“Did you vote in the last election? Why or why not?”); and voter preferences about improving the process (choosing the best ways to make voter registration and voting easier, from the list the class brainstormed together).

6. Students will survey at least 10 people of voting age. Encourage students to survey a representative sample of age levels, educational levels, different occupations, etc.

7. Demonstrate to students how the forms should be completed. Create the survey form together, using a word processing or desktop publishing program.

8. Students will be given a minimum of 10 copies of the survey and a results tally form created by the teacher.

9. Students will tally and graph the findings from own 10 voter surveys; this data should also be combined with other students’ data for a class composite, creating a class spreadsheet or database. Students will compare/contrast their data from the ten surveys to the classroom data.

10. Students will use their data to determine the percentage of eligible voters that did vote. Students will also draw conclusions about the characteristics of voters and non-voters. (Examples: males more likely to vote than females or educational levels are important to voting behavior.)

11. Students will examine reasons for not voting and suggest ways to improve voter participation. Students will then e-mail their results to local officials and the League of Women Voters.

12. Return to the PBS Web site’s "Inside The Voting Booth" activity to print out customized voter reminder/registration cards for students to keep until they turn 18.

13. Create posters that promote voting participation. Students will use their acquired data to help create the posters.

14. Students will place these posters up around town in cooperating businesses.

IV. Classroom Assessment

- **Excellent**: All surveys and tally sheets were neatly done and completed on time. Student used appropriate Web sites and researched information adequately. Student worked within the groups to analyze all data. Student contributed to discussions with insightful reasons and suggestions about voting behaviors. Student created poster was original, neat, and suited to its purpose.

- **Good**: All surveys and tally sheets were completed on time. Student used appropriate Web sites and researched information adequately. Student worked within the groups to analyze data and was then able to contribute to discussions with insightful reasons and suggestions about voting behaviors. Student created poster was original, neat, and suited to its purpose although bigger text, more compelling detail, or better illustrations could have improved the poster.

- **Average**: All surveys and tally sheets were completed. Time or neatness may have been areas of improvement. Student used appropriate Web sites and researched information; however, student may have improved his or her research by gathering more specific or more relevant details. Student worked within the groups with some help to analyze data and was then able to contribute some to discussions with reasons and/or suggestions about voting behaviors. Student-created poster was completed although bigger text, a more defined purpose, or better illustrations could have improved the poster.
• **Below Average**: Student did not complete all parts of the project adequately.

V. Extensions and Adaptations:

• Have students draw conclusions and make generalizations about voter behavior before surveying adults. Compare the information gathered from the survey to students’ earlier generalizations.
• Compare and contrast the level of local voter participation to national figures.
• For a quick introduction to international voting, visit the PBS "Not For Ourselves Alone" Web site. Students might expand on this by researching voting rights in a particular country.
• Older students can take a closer look at one particular division of voting behavior (e.g., educational levels or occupational effects on voting) to draw conclusions.
• Students will debate the pros and cons of direct voting and voting via the Internet.
• Compare and contrast voting behaviors in different presidential election years.

VII. Relevant National Standards
These are established by McREL:

**Language Arts**

• Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process
• Gathers and uses information for research purposes
• Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process
• Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts
• Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning
• Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

**Technology**

• Knows the characteristics and uses of computer software programs including the Internet

**Math**

• Understands that data represent specific pieces of information about real-world objects or activities
• Uses data and statistical measures for a variety of purposes (e.g., formulating hypotheses, making predictions, testing conjectures)
• Organizes and displays data using tables, graphs (e.g., line, circle, bar), frequency distributions, and plots (e.g., stem-and-leaf, box-and-whiskers, scatter)
• Understands the basic concept of a sample (e.g., a large sample leads to more reliable information; a small part of something may have unique characteristics but not be an accurate representation of the whole)

**Social Studies**

• Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government
• Understands the sources, purposes, and functions of law, and the importance of the rule of law for the protection of individual rights and the common good
• Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy responsibilities
• Knows the fundamental principles of American democracy (e.g., the people are sovereign; the power of government is limited by law; people exercise their authority directly through voting; people exercise their authority indirectly through elected representatives)
• Knows how the values and principles of American democracy can be promoted through participating in government (e.g., voting, keeping informed about public issues, writing to legislators, serving on juries)
• Knows how people can participate in their state and local government (e.g., being informed, taking part in discussing issues, voting, volunteering their time, and understands why it is important that people participate in their state and local government (e.g., improve the quality of life in their community, gain personal satisfaction, prevent officials from abusing power)
• Understands why it is important for citizens to monitor their local, state, and national governments; and knows ways people can monitor the decisions and actions of their government such as reading about public issues, watching television news programs, discussing public issues,