TEACH THE VOTE

A Unit Plan for Teachers

INTRODUCTION: WHY TEACH ABOUT VOTING?

Many teachers perceive teaching about voting to be too political. Especially during election season, teachers often feel more pressure to keep their classrooms as completely neutral space, worried that discussing voting might lead to students, parents, and administrators thinking that the teacher is biased in their delivery of content.

It is more important now than ever for teachers to teach about voting laws and procedures and give students the resources they need to be informed voters. The good news is this can be done without showing a bias in ways that can inform, inspire, and empower students to vote.

There are some excellent studies to help illustrate for students and for your community why voting is important.

1. The most recent data from CIRCLE covers the 2014 youth vote and discovered that youth turnout and youth voter registration that year were the lowest ever. This is something that all citizens should be concerned about and it is important for students to understand the current state of youth voting.

   http://www.civicyouth.org/2014-youth-turnout-and-youth-registration-rates-lowest-ever-recorded-changes-essential-in-2016/

2. Learning about the youth vote can be helpful to share with students, or having them research voters laws in their states and precincts can help them better understand the impact that voting (or not voting) has on election results.

   http://www.fairvote.org/research-and-analysis/blog/america-s-young-voters-who-they-are-and-why-they-matter/

© 2015 CLOSE UP FOUNDATION

In addition to familiarizing yourself with the research, there are many ways that you can help parents, administrators, community members, and others from your school learn more about voting and feel more comfortable discussing voting in the classroom. Here are a few tips to help out:

- Consider inviting elected officials in your community to talk with your class or hosting a town hall–tips at the links here http://ncdd.org/rc/item/10198 and here http://www.congress-foundation.org/news/blog/950 about voting and why they feel citizens should vote. This could mean members of a town council, school board, or your state and federal representatives.

- Invite your county clerk or board of elections representatives to talk with students about the process of signing up to vote, local election laws (How many signatures to get a candidate on the ballot? How about an initiative? What are the deadlines to register? How many elected positions are there in your city? How often and when are elections held?)

- Teach the history of the vote to encourage students to consider the struggle for voting rights Close Up has resources on teaching women's suffrage http://www.closeup.org/lib/CurrentIssuesChapters/LessonPlan_Women's%20Rights.pdf, youth voting rights http://www.closeup.org/lib/CurrentIssuesChapters/LessonPlan_YouthVoting.pdf and a video produced jointly with The Center on Congress at Indiana University featuring Representative John Lewis https://youtu.be/pKUeqxCrPaM.

- Check out the voting statistics for your state/precinct/city and have students find out the median voting age, how many youth vote, how your state/precinct/city compare to others. Have them share their statistics in an assembly, school newspaper, school display, or through social media to encourage voter participation. You can find this information online here to get started http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p20-577.pdf.

- The NCSS Teachers' Library has multiple resources for teaching about elections and voting: http://www.socialstudies.org/teacherslibrary. The C3 Framework also provides significant opportunity to discuss active and engaged citizenship, like this example from CA: http://www.socialstudies.org/c3/resources/5thgraderstakeinformedaction.

- A national, non-partisan research center on young people's civic education and engagement, CIRCLE has a long track record of research on both youth voting and civic education. The website,www.civicyouth.org, is the go-to location for research on youth civic education & engagement.

- Work on making students informed voters. Invite representatives from a variety of political parties to your class/school and have them discuss their party platforms with students.

- Invite someone from League of Women Voters http://lwv.org/getinvolved/local-leagues to your class to talk about the process of voter registration and explain the nuts and bolts to students http://lwv.org/content/educating-and-engaging-voters or use their guide to help register high school students. You can find local voting information on LWV's site www.VOTE411.org.

© 2015 CLOSE UP FOUNDATION

- Teach the history of voting rights in our country. Students gain history content and appreciation for the importance of voting rights when they look at the African-American, Native American, women and youth suffrage campaigns. Close Up has lesson plans about the youth vote and women's suffrage on our website at http://www.closeup.org/curriculum/sample-lesson-plans.

- Consider holding a student-led voter registration drive at your school or other location in your community for those who are 18, are turning 18 before the next election, and for members of the community outside of school who aren't registered to vote. This experience helps students understand the registration process better and helps the community. This resource from LWV is very helpful with how to get a registration drive started http://lwv.org/content/high-school-voter-registration-training-manual-3rd-edition.

- You can also use games to teach the vote that students can play at school or at home. In iCivics' "Win the White House" game, students manage a presidential campaign by strategically raising funds, polling voters, launching media campaigns, and making personal appearances: http://icivics.org/games/win-whitehouse. Additionally, iCivics has lesson plans, which can also be used as a unit, about U.S. electoral processes: http://icivics.org/curriculum/politics-and-public-policy.

© 2015 CLOSE UP FOUNDATION

LESSON – TEACH THE VOTE

Estimated Time: Part One: 40 Minutes. Part Two: 30-60 Minutes.

CCSS.ELA Standards Addressed:

Comprehension and Collaboration
9-10.1 and 11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

9-10.1A and 11-12.1A. Come to discussions prepared having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

9-10.1B. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision making (e.g. informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, and presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines and individual roles as needed.

11-12.1B. Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

9-10.1C . Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

11-12.1C. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework areas included:

D2.Civ.7.9-12. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.

D2.Civ.9.9-12. Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings.

D4.8.9-12. Apply a range of deliberative and democratic strategies and procedures to make decisions and take action in classrooms, schools, and out of school civic contexts.

Materials:

- Blank flipchart for students
- Markers
- Blank notebook paper
- Pens

© 2015 CLOSE UP FOUNDATION

PART ONE- Lesson Procedures:

Spilt students up into small groups and ask each student in the group to answer the following questions posted on the board or on flipchart. (10 minutes)

A) What is your first political memory? (This could be seeing a candidate poster, hearing a debate or political commercial, hearing family or friends discuss an election or a controversial issue, watching or participating in a protest, going to vote with parents, seeing an election at school, participating in a mock election, etc.) Have students record their answers on flipchart, leaving space next to each memory for the second question.

B) Does that memory impact your actions as a citizen today positively (+), negatively (-), or not at all (o)? Have students register which one next to each of their answers with a +, -, or o.

Gather the students back in full group and ask them to stand up when they hear the statement they most agree with, then sit back down after taking their stand. (5 minutes)

- I am absolutely going to vote in the first election I can after turning 18.
- I am likely to vote in the first election I can after turning 18.
- I am not sure if I am going to vote in the first election I can after turning 18.
- I am unlikely to vote in the first election I can after turning 18.
- I am absolutely not going to vote in the first election I can after turning 18.

Pair students up where they are sitting and have each student share answers to the following questions with each other. (5 minutes)

A) What are your top two reasons for agreeing with the statement that you stood for?

B) What are the top two reasons that would make you change your opinion about what statement you stood for?

Regroup and record. (10 minutes)

A) Bring students back together as a class. Present students with the 2014 election statistics, as well as statistics from the first year 18 year olds had the right to vote. If desired, you can have students sit/stand to represent what these statistics would look like if their class was the sample. Then give them data on youth voting. In 1972, one year after 18 year olds were granted the right to vote, 50% of 18-24 year olds voted in the election, in 2014 only 19.9% of 18-24 year olds voted in the election. Ask students to brainstorm in full or small groups what they think the reason/s is/are for this decline. Record these answers on the board or flipchart.

© 2015 CLOSE UP FOUNDATION

Research assignment (6 minutes)

A) Assign students individually, or in pairs or groups, to search out the answers to the reasons they came up with for the decline in youth voting and how they would address those reasons. This may involve research on how/where to register to vote, research on voting locations and times, research on eligibility to vote, laws surrounding voter ID, understanding what initiatives and offices are being voted on, campaign finance laws, access to information about candidates and issues - anything that they listed as a reason for decline in youth voting.

B) Ask students to present their findings in one of three ways, depending on amount of time you have:

- Students can work together and create a display about the decline in youth voting and possible solutions for the school.
- Students can present their findings in class via an essay or oral presentation about the reason they or their group researched.
- Students could present their findings to a live audience at a school assembly, PTA, town council meeting, etc. and ask for support in addressing the reasons for the decline in the youth vote.

© 2015 CLOSE UP FOUNDATION

PART TWO- Lesson Procedures:

Presentation of research and solutions (30-45 minutes)

A) Students present their findings in one of three ways, depending on amount of time you have:

- Students can work together and post their display about the decline in youth voting and possible solutions for the school.
- Students present their findings in class via an essay or oral presentation about the reason they or their group researched.
- Students present their findings to a live audience at a school assembly, PTA, town council meeting, etc. and ask for support in addressing the reasons for the decline in the youth vote.

Reflection on the importance of voting (15 minutes)

A) Take time to reflect back on the beginning of the lesson - How have their experiences as citizens so far (their political memories) impacted their participation or lack of participation in our democracy? What can they do as citizens now to impact the health of our democracy and the right to vote?

Involving the Community (Optional, can be done after, or in conjunction with, Part Two)

What do your neighbors think? (15 minutes)

A) Ask students to go out into the community and ask people their opinions on voting. You may want to set ground rules telling students to avoid polling the same respondent more than once, setting time limits on the poll, reminding them to be polite, and for safety to work in pairs or triads in safe public spaces.

B) Give each student the handout (Attachment A: Taking a Poll) and have each pair or triad poll four people in the community by asking them to agree or disagree with the six questions on the handout. The four people polled should include a high school student, a teacher in their school, a retired adult, and a working adult.

Survey results (15 minutes)

A) Tally the results and place them on the flipchart or board. Discuss the outcomes, paying particular attention to differences between the statements. What conclusions can students draw about voting attitudes in their community?

B) If desired, students can add this information to their display or presentation on voting.

© 2015 CLOSE UP FOUNDATION

Attachment A: Taking a Poll

Use this form to poll four citizens in your community about voting with one or two other students. Ask one person from each of the four categories to agree or disagree with the statements below. Mark their response by circling "A" for agree or "D" for disagree.

All citizens should be required by law to vote.

High School Student		Working Adult		Retired Adult		Teacher	
A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D

Before being allowed to register to vote, people should have to pass a written test on the Constitution and the organization of government to be able to identify their elected officials.

High School Student		Working Adult		Retired Adult		Teacher	
A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D

Ballots should be mailed to all registered voters and all voting should be done by mail.

High School Student		Working Adult		Retired Adult		Teacher	
A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D

Election Day should be moved from Tuesday to Saturday to increase voter turnout.

High School Student		Working Adult		Retired Adult		Teacher	
A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D

The voting age should be lowered to 16.

High School Student		Working Adult		Retired Adult		Teacher	
A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D

People who vote should receive a tax credit.

High School Student		Working Adult		Retired Adult		Teacher	
A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D

If eligible, did you vote in the last presidential election?

High School Student		Working Adult		Retired Adult		Teacher	
A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D

© 2015 CLOSE UP FOUNDATION

Resources for Teaching about Voting:

Evans, R. & Warren, D. (1996). *Handbook on Teaching Social Issues.* National Council for the Social Studies. Washington, DC.

Graham, B. (2010). *America, The Owner's Manual.* CQ Press. Washington, DC.

Levine, P. (2013). *We are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For.* Oxford University Press. New York, New York.

NCSS (2013). *Social Studies for the Next Generation Bulletin 113*. National Council for the Social Studies. Silver Spring, MD.

Niemi, R. & Junn, J. (1998). *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn.* Yale University. New Haven.

Youniss, J. & Levine P. (2009). *Engaging Young People in Civic Life.* Vanderbilt University Press. Nashville, TN.

© 2015 CLOSE UP FOUNDATION