



Teaching Activity: Mock Classroom Election

Some aspects of this activity have been adapted from the *Guide to the Electoral Process – Elementary Level* by Charles F. Bahmueller and Ken Rodriguez, Center for Civic Education. Available on the National Student/Parent Mock Election website, <http://www.nationalmockelection.org/curriculum.html>.

Estimated Time

5 – 6 class meetings

Overview

Even if students are too young to vote, mock elections can serve as a means to explain civic rights and responsibilities, the purpose of politics, and the electoral process. Gaining an understanding of the electoral process has the potential to greatly increase students' motivation to engage in civic activities.

In this activity, students will learn more about the electoral process as well as understand the roles and responsibilities of different groups, such as the media, election board, and political parties, during campaigns. *Note: The intensity of this activity can be adjusted based on the needs of your class.*

Activity

Step One. Gather campaign materials (candidate brochures and information about voter registration and local issues) for municipal or state elections in your area. (*You can find materials at your local election board's office or on their website.*) Divide the class into small groups of 4-6, and assign students different segments of the materials. Ask students to review the materials and look for information about the candidates, local issues, and registering to vote. Have each group share their impressions of the materials with the class. Questions to consider for class discussion:

- a. What is the purpose of the materials?
- b. What types of information are included in the materials? For example, what types of information are candidates trying to convey about themselves and their campaigns?
- c. If you were to vote in this election, how would the information influence your decision?

Step Two. Ask students to think about what makes a good president or leader. As a class, brainstorm the qualities of a good classroom president. Ask students to think about the needs of the class and the school as a whole as they put together the list of qualities. Keep the list on chart paper or the board for the duration of the activity as a reference.

Step Three. Begin the classroom election process by randomly dividing the class into two political parties. Allow the parties some time to decide on a name for their party and discuss and list two or three classroom reforms they would like to see enacted. The parties will then nominate a candidate to run for classroom president. During the nomination process, encourage students to recall the qualities of a good leader.

Step Four. Once the candidates have been chosen, divide the remaining students into the following groups: a campaign staff for each candidate, media, election board, and a voter advocacy group. Make sure each group (except for the campaign staff) is represented by members of both parties. As a class, discuss the different roles and responsibilities of each group.

- a. As a team, the campaign staff and the candidate work closely together to determine the course of action for a campaign. They decide what types of and how many advertisements and brochures to create in order to effectively convey the candidate's message. Giving speeches to the public is another form of information-sharing used by candidates. A candidate's campaign staff often includes a wide range of individuals, including policy experts, strategists, press contacts, and speechwriters.
- b. The media plays a role in conveying and analyzing information about the election, including details about issues and candidates. Newspapers, television and radio stations, and web-based news outlets cover campaigns to varying degrees, and sometimes, with a bias towards one candidate over the other. This is a good opportunity to discuss the concepts of fact and fiction with the class. Both members of the media and the public need to be able to evaluate sources of information in order to make informed decisions on election day.
- c. The election board works to ensure the voting process goes smoothly on the day of the election. The election board provides general oversight of the election and makes sure polling sites are properly equipped with ballots, voting booths and machines, and volunteers to assist voters who have questions. Once the poll closes, they are responsible for counting the votes and announcing the winner.
- d. In this activity, the overall goal of the advocacy group is to encourage voter participation and turnout. The advocacy group informs voters about the process and helps voters understand how to register to vote and where to vote. Some advocacy groups also provide voters with unbiased, nonpartisan information about the candidates and the issues affecting the campaign.

Step Five. Let the campaigning begin! Spend the next two class meetings campaigning and preparing for the election. Have students recall the campaign materials from the first activity. Review the types of information students deemed useful to assist voters with their decision.

- a. The campaign staff for each candidate is responsible for making brochures and flyers describing the candidate as well as explaining the classroom reforms for which he/she stands. The candidate may choose to give a couple of speeches or engage in a debate. In this case, the campaign staff and candidate work together during the writing and preparation process.

- b. Members of the media use a number of means to report on campaigns. They can write articles, editorials, or candidate focus pieces for the school newspaper. Students can also choose to conduct radio or television news broadcasts or act as reporters providing live reports from the campaign trail.
- c. The election board is responsible for providing voters with general information regarding polling sites and hours, voter registration, and candidates. The election board also creates and accepts voter registration forms, prepares the ballot, and monitors the polling site on election day. Once the poll closes, they will be responsible for counting the votes and announcing the winner.
- d. The role of the advocacy group is to inform voters as well as to encourage voter participation and turnout. This group can make brochures, flyers, and even spread the message by going “door to door.” Members of the advocacy group can also inform voters about candidates, proposed classroom reform policies, and additional issues affecting the election.

Step Six. It’s Election Day! Members of the election board will monitor the polls and ensure all registered voters are able to vote in a fair manner. Once the poll closes, the election board will count the votes and announce a winner. As a class, debrief about the electoral process. Ask students about their impressions of the electoral process and the campaign. Questions to consider for class discussion:

- a. Overall, were you satisfied with the electoral process? Do you think the process was fair? Why or why not?
- b. How did you make your final decision? Did any particular group or groups influence your vote? Is so, how?