Voting and Elections

Lesson 1: Who Can Vote?

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
What are the rights and responsibilities of citizens?

GUIDING QUESTIONS
1. What are the requirements to vote?
2. What steps must you follow to vote?
3. Why is it important to vote?

Terms to Know
principle basic belief
suffrage the right to vote
register to sign up to vote
polling place location where a person goes to vote
ballot a list of candidates who are running for each office
voter turnout rate the percentage of people allowed to vote who actually do vote
apathy a lack of interest

What Do You Know?
In the first column, answer the questions based on what you know before you study. After this lesson, complete the last column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Now...</th>
<th>Later...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you vote?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why does voting matter?</td>
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Qualifying to Vote
For most of history, countries were ruled by kings and queens. People did not have a say in how they were governed. Even in the United States, suffrage, or the right to vote, was limited to white men who owned land. The principle, or basic belief, that “all men are created equal” had not yet been achieved. Individuals and the government worked for many years to give more people the right to vote. Over time, all American citizens over the age of eighteen were granted the right to vote.

Most voting rights in the United States were granted through amendments to the Constitution. The graphic organizer below shows these amendments.

15th Amendment
Ratified in 1870; Allowed African Americans to vote

19th Amendment
Ratified in 1920; Allowed women to vote

26th Amendment
Ratified in 1971; Lowered voting age to 18
Lesson 1: Who Can Vote?, continued

Even after the Fifteenth Amendment passed, some states did not let African Americans vote. This lasted for another hundred years. Women who fought for the right to vote were called suffragists. Famous suffragists included Alice Paul and Susan B. Anthony.

Millions of people are eligible, or allowed, to vote in the nation today. To be eligible to vote, a citizen must

- be 18 years old and
- be a U.S. citizen.

Some people are not eligible to vote. People who have committed serious crimes are not able to vote while in prison. Also, people who suffer from certain mental illnesses may lose their eligibility to vote. Most citizens in the United States can vote. Each time you vote, you are helping to run your government.

Steps in the Voting Process

Voting requires three steps. First you must register to vote. To register means to sign up. Most states require voters to register 25 days before the election. Some let you register on Election Day. Registering to vote is easy. You just fill out a form with your name, address, and age. You might also list your political party. You will need to show your driver’s license, birth certificate, or another valid form of identification to prove your age and citizenship.

There are many ways you can register to vote, including

- using the mail,
- using the Web,
- visiting the library,
- visiting government offices, and
- visiting agencies that serve people with disabilities.

In addition, the National Voter Registration Act says that people are allowed to register to vote when they renew their driver’s licenses. Some people call this the “Motor Voter” law.

After you register, your second step is to prepare to vote. You must be informed about current issues because your vote will affect the lives of many people. You also need to find out about the candidates before you can decide which one to vote for.
Preparing to Vote

Does the candidate stand for the issues I think are important?

Is the candidate reliable and honest?

Does the candidate have experience?

Will the candidate be effective in office?

Watching the news, reading the newspaper, using the Internet, listening to the radio, and reading books and magazines help you become an informed voter. You must be careful to separate facts from opinions as you gather information. Some people use bias in their materials. They try to tell you only their opinion instead of fact.

The third step is casting your vote. This is done at a polling place. Polling places are usually set up in schools, fire stations, or other public buildings. There is one polling place in each precinct, or voting district. Many states allow early voting. This means that citizens can vote before Election Day. This can be done by mail in some states and at certain locations in others.

When you get to your polling place, you will be asked to show identification. You will then enter a voting booth. The booth may have a curtain. It may have some other way to make sure your vote is secret.

A ballot is a list of candidates who are running for each office. The table below shows the different types of ballots.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Ballots Used Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper ballot</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absentee ballot</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Touch-screen ballot</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the 2000 presidential election, ballots became a source of major conflict. Some of the ballots were not marked clearly. This made it hard for election officials to read them properly. In the end, the U.S. Supreme Court had to make a decision. In the U.S. Supreme Court case Bush v. Gore, the Court said that the votes should not be recounted. The decision meant that George W. Bush won the election.

Some people cannot get to the polls on Election Day. They may be traveling or they may be serving in the military. These voters can send in an absentee ballot. You must get an absentee ballot before Election Day.
Why Your Vote Counts

Have you ever heard the phrase “every vote counts”? It is true. The United States is committed to the ideal of equality. When you vote, your vote will be counted exactly the same way, and be given the same value, as everyone else’s vote.

Voting is a right. It is also a responsibility. There are many good reasons to vote.

• You can help choose government leaders.
• You can vote to keep leaders that you like.
• You can vote to remove leaders whose work you dislike.
• You will have a say in how your community, state, and nation are run.

The people who vote each Election Day know that every vote counts. They also know that they have no right to complain about things if they have not voted. They believe in the democratic process.

But many people do not vote. Voter turnout rate is the measure of how many people actually vote. In the United States, this number is often under 50 percent. There are many reasons for this. Some people say they are too busy to vote. Others suffer from voter apathy. Apathy is a lack of interest. Still others forget to register to vote. Some others do not know that moving requires them to register again. If they wait too long, they will not meet the deadline.

Check for Understanding

Name the requirements people must meet in order to vote.

1. ______________________________________
2. ______________________________________

Name three things you need to do before you can vote.

3. ______________________________________
4. ______________________________________
5. ______________________________________

11. What does the saying “every vote counts” mean?

12. Circle the reason for voting that is most important to you.

13. What does it mean to say that voter turnout is often less than 50 percent?

14. Place a one-tab Foldable along the dotted line. Label the front Voting Rights and explain why it is important. Label the reverse Voting Requirements and explain U.S. voting requirements.
Lesson 2: Elections and Campaigns

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
Why do people create, structure, and change governments?

GUIDING QUESTIONS
1. Why are there different types of elections in the American political system?
2. How are presidents elected?
3. How do candidates run for political office?

Terms to Know

issue  matter of public concern
initiative  process that lets voters propose new laws or amendments to state constitutions
referendum  process that allows voters to accept or reject a law passed by the state legislature
recall  election in which voters can remove a person from office
Electoral College  group of electors that chooses the president
popular vote  the votes cast by the people in the general election
winner-take-all system  Electoral College system in which the winner of a state’s popular vote gets all of that state’s electoral votes
pursue  to reach or attain
 canvass  to go from door to door to gather support for a candidate
political action committee (PAC)  organization set up by interest groups to raise money for candidates

What Do You Know?
In the first column, answer the questions based on what you know before you study. After this lesson, complete the last column.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Now...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the types of elections?</td>
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Voting and Elections

Lesson 2: Elections and Campaigns, Continued

The general election is held on the same day across the country. This day is always the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. National elections are held in even-numbered years. Elections for the entire House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate are held every two years. Elections for president are held every four years. State and local officials are usually elected at the same time.

During an election, people are also asked to vote on issues. An issue is a matter of public interest. For example, if a city council wants to build a new school, the council will put that issue on a ballot. The voters decide if the school gets built or not.

There are two ways that voters can have a direct voice in government. The chart below explains these methods.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Direct Voice Methods for Voters</th>
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<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum</td>
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In an initiative, a certain number of voters must sign a petition. The petition asks for a new law. If enough people sign the petition, the proposal is put on the ballot.

Some states also allow recall elections. These are elections in which voters can remove a person from office. A recall begins with a petition. If enough people sign the petition, a recall vote is held. If the people vote to remove the official, another special election is held to find a replacement. Special elections are also held to fill an office if an elected official has died or resigned.

Presidential Elections

The election of the president is different from other elections. The president is not elected directly by the people. When people vote for president, they are really voting for electors. These electors make up the Electoral College. The Electoral College actually chooses the president and vice president. People vote for the electors through a popular vote. This is when citizens tell the electors which candidate they want elected. The diagram on the next page will help you understand how this works.

? Making Inferences

2. Why do you think only one-third of senators are up for election every two years?

Explaining

3. What can voters do in some states if they want to change their state constitution?

Reading Check

4. What is the difference between a recall election and a special election?

Reading Check

5. When people vote for the president of the United States, for whom are they actually voting?
Some people do not like the Electoral College system. They especially dislike that it is a **winner-take-all** system. In most states, the winner of the popular vote gets all of that state’s electoral votes. This is true even if the candidate wins by only a few votes.

Sometimes the person who wins the popular vote in a presidential election still might not get enough electoral votes to become president. This has happened four times.

### The Electoral College Process

1. The general election for president takes place in **November**. In most states, the candidate who wins the most popular votes in the general election wins all of that state’s electoral votes.

2. In **December**, the electors meet and cast their ballots. They send the results to the Senate.

3. In **January**, the House and Senate meet in joint session to officially count the votes.

4. The candidate who wins a majority of the electoral votes (at least 270 of 538) wins the election.

### Running for Office

When a person tries to win an election, his or her efforts are called a **campaign**. A campaign begins when someone decides to run for office. The person must first make sure they meet the requirements for the office. Most offices require a person to be a certain age and a U.S. citizen. If someone wants to run for president, the candidate will form an exploratory committee. The committee’s job is to find out how many people support the candidate.

If there is enough support, the candidate announces that he or she is running for office. Usually several people from each party decide to run for president. The party picks one of these people as their candidate at the national convention. The conventions are huge events that get a lot of attention from the media.
No matter what office candidates are running for, they must make many public appearances before the election. They give speeches and interviews. They hold debates. They try to appeal to as many voters as possible.

Candidates usually have staff to help them. Volunteers help candidates pursue voters in many ways. Volunteers canvass neighborhoods. This means they go from door to door to gather support. They also make telephone calls and send e-mails to tell people about their candidate.

People running for office also try to get endorsements, or support, from important people or groups. They hope that voters who like these people or groups will vote for them. Some examples of this kind of support are celebrities, politicians, newspapers, and unions. Candidates also spend a great deal of money on ads in newspapers, on the radio, and on TV.

Campaigns cost a lot of money. The race for president costs each candidate hundreds of millions of dollars. Most of this money comes from donations. Donations are made by individuals, businesses, unions, and political action committees (PACs). Political action committees (PACs) are set up by interest groups to raise money for candidates.

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) makes rules about how much money candidates can spend. But many Americans still worry that campaigns cost too much. They also worry that elected officials will try to please big donors rather than the people.

Check for Understanding

Name two kinds of elections that are held in the United States.

1. ____________________________ 2. ____________________________

Write the reason that the president has to be officially elected by the Electoral College.

3. ____________________________

Name two things that a candidate running for office must do.

4. ____________________________

5. ____________________________

Mark the Text

9. Underline the words that tell you what canvass means.

Reading Check

10. Why do candidates want endorsements?

Identifying

11. What is the purpose of a PAC?

Describing

12. What is the job of the FEC?

13. Place a one-tab Foldable along the dotted line. Label the anchor Electoral College. Write three sentences that describe the Electoral College.