



Elections in the U.S. | Lesson Plan

How do elections work in the United States?

Students learn about why we use elections to choose officials, how elections are conducted, and the purpose of different types of elections within the voting cycle.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the purpose and process of elections in the U.S.
- Identify and describe the roles of state and local governments in organizing elections.
- Analyze the historical context of voting rights, including examining changes like the 26th Amendment.
- Differentiate between different types of elections and evaluate their significance.
- Summarize the constitutional basis for frequent elections and explain the role of the House of Representatives.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Midterm Elections:** A type of federal election held midway through a president's four-year term, primarily to elect members of Congress. They act as a measure of public opinion on presidential performance and play a pivotal role in adjusting or maintaining the legislative direction.
- **Primary Elections:** The preliminary elections in the U.S. political system, during which registered party members vote to select their party's candidates for the upcoming general election.
- **26th Amendment:** A modification to the U.S. Constitution that changed the legal voting age from 21 to 18. This amendment was enacted in 1971, driven by demands for equitable representation among younger Americans, especially in light of their eligibility for the military draft without corresponding voting rights.

Educational Standards: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.5, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.R.6, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4

Academic Subject Areas: Civics, American Values, U.S. History

What You'll Need

- Video: *Street Smarts: Elections in the U.S.* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Street Smarts: Elections in the U.S.* (Click [Here](#))
- Classroom map of the United States

Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

Warm Up: (15 minutes)

Scan to watch episode:



1. Start by asking students, "What do you think are the reasons we have elections in the United States?"
2. Briefly introduce the concept that elections ensure political power belongs to the people, not just politicians.
3. Explain the roles of state and local governments in organizing elections. Use a map to show examples of how different states might have different rules for elections.
4. Discuss the 26th Amendment and its impact on the voting age. Compare historical voting requirements (such as property ownership and age) to current standards.
5. Discuss why these changes were significant and how they reflect societal values.
6. Define and differentiate between primary elections, general elections, and midterm elections. Discuss the significance of each type of election and what positions are typically contested.
7. Use real-world examples to explain how primary elections determine party candidates, general elections decide between these candidates, and midterm elections impact the composition of Congress.
8. Discuss the constitutional requirement for frequent and regular elections. Explain why the House of Representatives is considered the most responsive body due to its frequent election cycle every two years.
9. Explain that students will watch a game-show-style video to test their knowledge of Elections in the U.S. Hand out individual copies of the "Street Smarts: Elections in the U.S. Worksheet" and prepare the video for viewing.

Watch and Complete: (20 minutes)

1. As a class, watch the video *Street Smarts: Elections in the U.S.*, confirming or correcting answers on the worksheet as each question is addressed in the video.
2. Pause the video after each key question and concept is presented.
3. Encourage students to share their answers to check for accuracy.

Wrap-Up: (10 minutes)

1. After the video, ask students to articulate why elections are important based on what they've learned today. Encourage them to think about the role of elections in empowering individuals and shaping communities.
2. Lead a discussion on how understanding the electoral process can make them more effective participants in democracy.
3. Challenge students to identify specific actions they can take to become more active in their community's electoral processes. Suggestions might include:
 - Registering to vote (when eligible)
 - Volunteering in upcoming elections (e.g., assisting at polling stations, helping with voter registration drives)
 - Staying informed about local, state, and national elections
 - Engaging in discussions with family or peers about the importance of voting

4. Summarize by sharing the power of individual action in a democracy. Emphasize that each vote and each voice can contribute to significant changes in governance and policy.
5. Remind students to submit their completed worksheets. Offer a moment for any last questions or clarifications.
6. Ask for feedback on the lesson: What did they find most surprising or inspiring? What do they want to learn more about regarding elections and civic participation?

Extension Activities:

Plan a follow-up class where students can present findings or projects based on their engagement with local community issues or upcoming elections. This could be an analysis of a recent election, an interview with a local politician, or a proposal for addressing a community issue through civic action.

Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (15 minutes)

Distribute the worksheet and allow students to complete it while they follow along with the video.