

MAKING ELECTIONS WORK

Overview

When people vote to make decisions together, that is an election. In elections, different rules and processes are used to be sure that people who vote can do so fairly. When people vote for candidates and issues on Election Day, election rules are made by the government: lawmakers and people who serve on Boards of Elections. In this activity, students will consider voting rules and processes such as who can vote, one vote per person, different ways to vote, and make real life connections to the content.

Estimated time

30 minutes (can modify to fit time available, or extend to multiple days)

Objectives

- Students explore the concept of elections
- Students understand that in elections, government puts rules and procedures in place that allow people to make group decisions by voting, and to help establish trust that the vote is fair for all
- Students make real life connections to the content including using role play and comparison with historic and foreign structures and processes

Introduction (5 minutes)

- Ask students:
 - What happens in an election?
 - When people vote in an election, are there rules? Why do you think rules are needed in elections?

- Who makes rules for elections? (government)
- Tell students that in elections, rules and procedures are in place that allow people to make group decisions by voting. The rules, which are made by the government, say who can vote, when they vote, how they vote, and how many votes each person gets.

Activity 1 (5 minutes)

- Ask: what is a rule (or process or procedure) we use in this classroom or school? Why do we do it this way? What would happen if we didn't have this rule?
- Say: In elections and voting, the government makes different rules to ensure the process works smoothly, people who vote are allowed to vote, and the election is fair.
 - When people vote for President or the mayor, do they do it on the same day or whenever they want? (they vote on the same day or group of days). Why? Is that a rule? Is that a good rule?
 - If there is an election for the mayor of our city, does everyone get to vote? Why do you think that is? Is that a good rule?
 - How old do you need to be to officially vote for President or the mayor or anything else on Election Day? (18) Why do you think that is? Is that a good rule? Why or why not?
 - If your class is studying other periods of history or different structures of government, you can incorporate this into the discussion

Activity 2 (5 minutes)

Tell the class: we have been talking about elections and voting. Now we are going to have a class vote! (Decide ahead of time what the vote will be about, for example deciding between two books to read or music to play on Friday. Make it a simple choice.)

- Instruct students and vote on the topic you chose:
 - Birthday in January, February, March, April, and May get 1 vote each = raise one hand
 - Birthday in June, July, August, September, and October get 2 votes = raise both hands
 - People born in November and December do not get to vote

(Modify as needed based on class birthdays)

- Count the votes and announce the winner.
- Ask the class: what did you think about that vote? Was it fair? Why or why not? What would a better rule be? Is it important to have one vote for one person? Why or why not?

Activity 3 (10 minutes)

Tell the class that the government's job is to make sure elections and voting is done fairly and correctly.

- Ask: What do you think the role of the federal government is in elections? (students answer)
- *At the federal level, the government decides who can, and cannot, vote. These rights and responsibilities are included in (and protected by) the U.S. Constitution. Voting laws have changed over history through amendments. The [15th Amendment](#) gave Black men the right to vote in 1870. The [19th Amendment](#), ratified in 1920, gave American women the right to vote. The [24th Amendment](#), ratified in 1964, eliminated*

poll taxes. The tax had been used in some states to keep African Americans from voting in federal elections. The [26th Amendment](#), ratified in 1971, lowered the voting age for all elections to 18 (from 21).

- Ask: What do you think the role of the state government is in elections? (students answer)
- *At the state level, the government creates laws about the process for voting in North Carolina. These laws cover the process of running elections. The [State Board of Elections](#) implements elections laws.*
- Ask: What do you think the role of the local government is in elections? (students answer)
- *The local government is responsible for running elections through [the county boards of elections](#). This includes registering voters, recruiting and training elections workers, and making elections work. In our state, there are usually elections every year. Some years, there are only local elections, and in other years there are state and national elections.*
- Next, tell the class there will be a revote. But first, ask the class to make 3 rules to make it more fair or work better. Write the rules on the board or document as they are made:
 - Voting method: Should it be a secret ballot where no one knows how you voted or how many votes you made? Or should it be raised hands? Or something else?
 - Who gets to vote? Should everyone get to vote or only some people? Why?
 - How many votes per person? Should we vote like we did before? What would you improve? Why?
 - If your class is studying other periods of history or different structures of government, incorporate this into the discussion and activity – you can make decisions/vote in the same way other systems have done or do

Activity 4 and wrap up (5 minutes)

- Using the newly created class rules, conduct your vote.
- Ask:
 - What did you think about voting? Do you agree with the result?
 - If you did not vote for the winning (book or whatever you voted on), how did that make you feel?
 - Did the voting rules help? Did it make you trust that it was a fair election? Why or why not?
 - Did you feel that you had a right and a responsibility to vote? Why?
 - How does citizenship and the voting process in America compare with what we are learning about (a period of history, a different system of culture, etc.)