

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)

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

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 community, 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?

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. 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)

- Next, tell the class there will be a revote. But first, ask the class to make rules. 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?
 - Does everyone have a responsibility to vote? Should everyone have to vote? Or can someone decide to not vote?
 - Other rules: Do we need to have other rules? If time, ask students to pair with a classmate or group to quickly review the rules already made and identify anything else that is missing. (For example: Who should count the votes?)

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?