



Introduction to Government and Civics
(Middle School Level)

Written for the National Student/Parent Mock Election

Written by the Pearson Foundation
to adhere closely to standards for
teaching American government and
civics.

www.nationalmockelection.org

Middle School Lesson Plans

Introduction

The National Student Mock Election curriculum aims to engage students to think critically about civics, democracy and our nation's political process. It is our hope that through the curriculum and the mock election experience, students will be encouraged and inspired to become active participants in our American democracy.

At each grade cluster, the My Voice National Student Mock Election lessons focus on the following Big Ideas (going deeper into each Big Idea as the grade clusters advance):

1. **Our Government** was founded upon basic principles articulated in the Charters of Freedom (the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights). The purpose of our constitutional government is to protect the rights of individuals and promote the greater good; and the powers of our government are limited, and organized by a division of powers among the legislative, executive and judicial branches, and between cities, states and the nation.
2. **American Principles**, as articulated in the Charters of Freedom, provide the basis of our democratic society. The shared values and principles within these Charters provide the framework for the rights and responsibilities of American citizens. An inherent struggle between the ideals of democracy and the reality of democracy require shared civic values, understanding and action.
3. **The Electoral Process** is the method by which a person is elected to public office. Campaigns, political parties, elections and citizen participation impact the electoral process. Citizens can exercise their right to elect leaders and make choices. They may also choose to educate themselves about candidates, issues and the electoral process. It is through continued and collective civic rights and responsibilities (such as voting) that we can sustain and improve our democracy.

In addition to these Big Ideas, lessons components include:

- Alignment to the [National Council for the Social Studies \(NCSS\)](#) major themes of: Individuals, Groups and Institutions; Power, Authority and Governance; and Civic Ideals and Practices
- Alignment to the [Mid-continent Regional Education Lab \(McREL\)](#) standards for Civics
- Integration with the [Common Core State Standards](#)
- Essential questions for students
- Articulated outcomes
- Opportunities for guided instruction, collaborative and independent learning
- Built-in assessment
- Extension and Differentiation suggestions
- Family and Community connections

Political Parties & Platforms

Overview

In this lesson students research and study the nature of the political parties and platforms, and create their own party platforms.

Big Idea

Our Government was founded upon basic principles articulated in the Charters of Freedom (the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights). The purpose of our constitutional government is to protect the rights of individuals and promote the greater good; and the powers of our government are limited, and organized by a division of powers among the legislative, executive and judicial branches, and between cities, states and the nation.

Essential Questions for Students

- Why are government and politics necessary?
- What are political parties and platforms?
- What purpose do political parties and platforms serve?
- How do political parties and platforms impact the electoral process?
- How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation?

Outcomes

- Students will gain an understanding of the role of political parties and party platforms.
- Students will write group party platforms based on relevant current political issues.
- Students will work collaboratively.

Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards](#):
 - What is Government and What Should it Do?
 - Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government
 - What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?
 - Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals
 - Understands the importance of political leadership, public service, and a knowledgeable citizenry in American constitutional democracy
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts](#):
 - English Language Arts: Reading, Informational Text (RI6.1, RI7.1, RI8.1)
 - English Language Arts: Speaking & Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration, and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL6.1,6.4,6.5, SL7.1, 7.4, SL8.1, 8.4)
 - English Language Arts: Writing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge (W6.7, W7.7, W8.7)

Community Connections

- Invite representatives from major political parties to discuss and debate party platforms

Preparation

- Make printed copies of the Handout for students
- Preview recommended [Curriculum Resources](#) to gather additional information for guided instruction and to identify websites for student research. Specific recommendations include, but are not limited to:
 - [The National Archives — The Charters of Freedom](#)
 - [Party Platform](#)
 - [The American Presidency Project – Compilation of Party Platforms](#)
 - General recommended [Media Resources](#) for research on issues

Concept Vocabulary

There is a wealth of civics vocabulary that may be addressed over the course of the lesson. Please refer to these glossaries for complete definitions of civics terms:

- [U.S. Senate Glossary](#)
- [Kids in the House U.S. House of Representatives Glossary](#)

Anticipatory Set (20 min)

True or False? — Ask students to respond True or False to the following statement. The U.S. Constitution mandates a two-party system, Republicans and Democrats. Share with students that this statement is false. Our Constitution does not limit the number of political parties. Ask students to share the names of any other political parties they have heard about within the U.S. or in other nations around the globe. Ask students to share their knowledge about party platforms.

Guided Instruction (one class period)

Modeling – Build on knowledge from the Anticipatory Set. Share the Handout. Model writing a platform for a fictitious political party.

1. Share with students that [party platforms](#) derive some of their planks from the values and principles articulated in the Charters of Freedom. Ask students to review those documents when writing their platforms, in order to determine whether they will draw from those principles as well.
2. Post the following broad categories: Fiscal Policy, Social Policy, Political Policy, Energy Policy, Foreign Policy & National Defense. Brainstorm with students some politically charged issues within each category. For example, within the Fiscal Policy category, students could write positions on tax structure, national debt, unemployment, the mortgage crisis, etc. Within the Social Policy category, students could write positions on universal healthcare, education initiatives, etc.
3. Create a model platform:

- We Believe... (general overarching beliefs and goals on the selected issue)
- We Support... (specific actions or beliefs that would help achieve goals)
- We Oppose... (specific actions or beliefs that would detract from the goals)

Collaborative Learning (three to four class periods)

- Have students review the instructions and background information on the Handout.
- Give student groups time to research American values and principles they would like to incorporate, and allow time to research the current issues they would like to address.
- Have students groups write their platforms.
- Provide an opportunity for each group to present their platform.

Independent Learning (time varies)

Draw a [Venn diagram](#) comparing your party's platform to that of another group's platform.

Student Assessment

Assess student presentations.

Extension Activities & Service Learning Opportunities

- Hold a mock convention to share platforms and nominate candidates.
- Write campaign signs, brochures, ads, etc., based on party platforms.
- Create party symbols and select party color(s).
- Review official party campaigns and track their comments throughout the election. Compare comments and speeches to platform.
- Identify platform issues that affect your family or community. Think of ways in which you may support those affected by the issue.
- Consider ways in which to help the general public become more informed on the issues and candidates of the upcoming election.

Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction

- Research effects of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 or other impactful legal decisions such as Citizens United vs. Federal Election Committee. Include position statements regarding these legal decisions in party platforms.
- Allow students to express their platforms via different mediums (PowerPoint, Animoto, oral presentation, picture books or a group skit).
- Create a graphic organizer to assist in writing platforms.

Family Connection

- Send an informative letter or email to students' families outlining student learning.
- Invite families to hear party platform presentations.

Lesson Evaluation

Did students master the stated outcomes? What evidence of learning can you cite? How might you alter lesson for next time to increase effectiveness?

Handouts

- [Student Handout](#)

Middle School Lesson Plans

The Charters of Freedom

Overview

In this lesson students research and analyze the Charters of Freedom, and then create games to teach and test their peers.

Big Idea

American Principles, as articulated in the Charters of Freedom, provide the basis of our democratic society. The shared values and principles within these Charters provide the framework for the rights and responsibilities of American citizens. An inherent struggle between the ideals of democracy and the reality of democracy require shared civic values, understanding and action.

Essential Questions for Students

- What American principles and values are derived from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights?
- What are the nature and purpose of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights?
- What should be the balance between individual rights and the common good?
- How is government power and responsibility distributed, shared and limited by the United States Constitution?
- What is the place of law in the American constitutional system?

Outcomes

- Students will be able to identify the foundations of our democracy that stem from the Charters of Freedom.
- Students will be able to identify and apply concepts of our government and American principles, as defined by the Constitution.
- Students will design games that showcase their learning.
- Students will participate in student-designed games as part of the learning process.
- Students will work as part of a team.

Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards](#):
 - What Is Government and What Should it Do?
 - Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government
 - Understands the essential characteristics of limited and unlimited governments

- Understands the concept of a constitution, the various purposes that constitutions serve, and the conditions that contribute to the establishment and maintenance of constitutional government
 - What are the Basic Values and Principles of American Democracy?
 - Understands the central ideas of American constitutional government and how this form of government has shaped the character of American society
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts](#):
 - English Language Arts: Reading, Informational Text (RI6.1, RI7.1, RI8.1)
 - English Language Arts: Speaking & Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration, and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL6.1,6.4,6.5, SL7.1, 7.4, SL8.1, 8.4)
 - English Language Arts: Writing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge (W6.7, W7.7, W8.7)

Community Connections

- Invite other classes or members of the community to play the student created games.
- Have student groups teach what they have learned to younger grades. Have them play their games with those students.

Preparation

- Gather materials and resources for game design.
- Review recommended Curriculum Resources ([link to Curriculum Resources](#)) to gather additional information for guided instruction.
- Provide student access to Curriculum Resources ([link to Curriculum Resources](#)) for collaboration activities, specifically but not limited to:
 - [The National Archives — The Charters of Freedom](#)
 - [Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids 6-8](#)

Concept Vocabulary

There is a wealth of civics vocabulary that may be addressed over the course of the lesson. Please refer to these glossaries for complete definitions of civics terms:

- [Center for Civic Education](#)
- [U.S. Senate Glossary](#)
- [Kids in the House U.S. House of Representatives Glossary](#)

Anticipatory Set & Pre-Assessment (20 min)

3 Minute List — Give student pairs three minutes to list as many rights or principles that they believe are fundamentally American. Discuss lists as a class. Facilitate discussion towards Charters of Freedom — the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Gather existing student knowledge of these documents and post for class to refer to throughout lesson. What American principles, or values, are derived from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights? What are the nature and purpose of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights? How do these documents impact our American lives today?

Guided Instruction (one class period)

Part I

Preview — Provide a preview of the recommended resources. For example, present to students the National Archives online exhibit *The Charters of Freedom*. Build upon student knowledge from the Anticipatory Set. Share with students differentiating facts about the Charters to help build context, such as:

- In 1787, eleven years after the United States declared its independence; the framers of the Constitution wrote the Constitution to articulate, among other things, how the country would be governed.
- The Constitution did not protect certain freedoms, which is why the Bill of Rights — the first 10 Amendments to the Constitution — was created two years later, in 1789.

Tell students that they will research and analyze the Charters in groups, creating games to teach and test their fellow students' knowledge of the major concepts stemming from the Charter documents.

Part II

Game Design Instructions — Divide students into the following game design teams:

1. Declaration of Independence game — Students reviewing the Declaration of Independence
2. Legislative game — Students reviewing Article I of the Constitution
3. Executive game — Students reviewing Article II of the Constitution
4. Judicial game — Students reviewing Article III of the Constitution
5. Power of the States game — Students reviewing Article V will work on the States game
6. Bill of Rights Game — Students working on the first 10 Amendments

Brainstorm sample game designs, e.g. online web quests, treasure hunts, card games, board games, TV game shows, video game etc.

Brainstorm sample design questions. Questions can be literal, e.g., How many U.S. Senators are allowed from each state? Questions can be inferential, e.g., How does the Constitution promote a system of checks and balances? Questions can call for evaluation and application of knowledge, e.g. Cite evidence from US History that contradicts a founding principle stated in the Declaration of Independence.

Student groups can make one-page Hint sheets for fellow students that provide key concepts and facts for their game content.

Set expectations for points (or grade) that students can earn for quality of game design, quality of game questions, quality of Hints sheet, and quality of participation in actual games.

Collaborative Learning (three to four class periods)

Divide students into the assigned game design groups. Encourage students to research their topics via the recommended web resources before they design the game. Have students cite resources for their questions and answers.

Rotate through student groups to facilitate student learning. Once student groups have completed their games, give student groups an opportunity to present to the class. Have them explain what they have learned and the rules of their game. Encourage fellow students to take notes. Give student groups time to play each of the board games.

Independent Learning (time varies)

Ask students to reflect in writing about what they have learned from game design and from playing games. How is the Constitution like the rules of a game? Post the initial question and answers from the Anticipatory Set. Have students compare their knowledge pre and post lesson.

Student Assessment

- Assess student game design, based on expectations set in Guided Instruction.
- Informally assess students as they design and play games.
- Assess student reflection. Do student comments reflect greater knowledge and understanding of the concepts?

Extension Activities & Service Learning Opportunities

- Write a short essay on how Americans have moved towards the ideals expressed in our Charter documents over time.
- Write a short essay on ways in which America must still work to achieve “the ideal”.
- Plan a Service-Learning project to benefit those who might still remain disenfranchised in some way.

Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction

- Encourage students to create their questions and answers to a level that reflects the best of their abilities.
- Provide game questions for students.
- Create a graphic organizer for game design.

Family Connection

- Send an informative letter or email to students’ families outlining student learning.
- Allow students to checkout games to take home to play with family members.

Lesson Evaluation

Did students master the stated outcomes? What evidence of learning can you cite? How might you alter lesson for next time to increase effectiveness?

Candidate Analysis

Overview

In this lesson students complete a scavenger hunt about current elected officials and then research and display information about candidates and the publicly held offices they seek to hold.

Big Idea

The Electoral Process is the method by which a person is elected to public office. Campaigns, political parties, elections and citizen participation impact the electoral process. Citizens can exercise their right to elect leaders and make choices. They may also choose to educate themselves about candidates, issues and the electoral process. It is through continued and collective civic rights and responsibilities (such as voting) that we can sustain and improve our democracy.

Essential Questions for Students

- How do people in our community get elected to office?
- Who represents you in legislative and executive branches of your local, state and national governments?
- How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation?
- How is government power and responsibility distributed, shared and limited by the United States Constitution?
- What do citizens need to know and understand to be effective and responsible participants in our democracy?

Outcomes

- Students will be able to identify their representatives at state and national levels.
- Students will be able to explain how to contact their representatives.
- Students will identify elected officials on the national, state and local levels.
- Students will work collaboratively.
- Students will create displays detailing their findings about candidates and their positions.
- Students will make connections between civic knowledge and effective participation in the electoral process.

Targeted Content Standards

- [McREL Civics Standards:](#)
 - What Is Government and What Should it Do?
 - Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government
 - How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy?
 - Understands the roles of political parties, campaigns, elections, and associations and groups in American politics
- [Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts:](#)

- English Language Arts: Speaking & Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration, and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (SL6.1,6.4,6.5, SL7.1, 7.4, SL8.1, 8.4)
- English Language Arts: Writing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge (W6.7, W7.7, W8.7)

Community Connections

- Attend a City/Town Council meeting.
- Write to one of the candidates, sharing class opinions on a current issue.
- Visit campaign headquarters for candidates and interview campaign volunteers.

Preparation

- Prepare copies of Handouts.
- Provide web access for guided instruction and collaborative activity.
- Locate your City and County government websites.
- Gather the list of offices included in the current election for your local, state and general election.
- Review recommended [Curriculum Resources](#), specifically
 - [United States House of Representatives website](#)
 - [United States Senate website](#)

Concept Vocabulary

There is a wealth of civics vocabulary that may be addressed over the course of the lesson. Please refer to these glossaries for complete definitions of civics terms:

- [Center for Civic Education](#)
- [U.S. Senate Glossary](#)
- [Kids in the House U.S. House of Representatives Glossary](#)

Anticipatory Set (one class period)

Web Scavenger Hunt — Who Represents You? Give each student a copy of the Scavenger Handout. Ask students to share who their elected representatives are. Based on student knowledge, divide students into pairs. Have student pairs go on a web Scavenger Hunt to find their representatives. Provide a simple prize or incentive for team who answers all questions correctly. Debrief with students. Why is it important to know our representatives? What is the connection between elected officials and the laws and policies that affect us?

Guided Instruction (1/2 class period)

Modeling — Share with students a list of offices included in the current election for your area (e.g. Board of Education, U.S. Congress, State Senate, State House, President, etc.)

Tell students that they will research and present information on specific candidates running for offices in the current election. Place students in pairs or small groups. Share the instructions Handout with students. Model how to use the recommended web resources to find information. Complete some sample

information for the assignment. For example:

- Candidate XYZ, running for U.S. House of Representatives
- Duties of the Office include:
 - Arrange meetings for constituents with a federal agency
 - Help constituents solve problems such as immigration issues
 - Help constituents find reports from government research organizations introduce legislation
 - Co-Sponsor existing legislation
 - Vote for, or against, legislation in the House, or that being considered by the Senate

And so on...

Collaborative Learning (two to three class periods)

Candidate Research & Display — Have student groups complete the research and display as detailed in the Handout.

Once student groups have completed their work, allow time for presenting to the class, or for students to do a gallery walk of their fellow student displays.

Independent Learning (time varies)

Application of Knowledge — Ask students to identify which level of government they should contact to:

1. Express their opinions about a curfew for persons under 16 years of age
2. Protest an increase in state sales tax
3. Provide monetary aid to another country
4. Obtain a driver's license
5. Share an opinion about a national healthcare policy

(If students don't know the answer, allow them to use the recommended [Curriculum Resources](#) to help find the answers.)

Student Assessment

- Assess independent learning.
- Assess student displays. Does student work reflect new knowledge of the electoral process?

Extension Activities & Service Learning Opportunities

- Research electoral votes by state.
- Explore the current political infrastructure — How candidates win votes and why candidates campaign more heavily in some states than others.
- Create a poster or wiki page for the community about who represents them and how to contact them.
- Provide voter registration information for the community.
- Invite senior citizens for an “Election Tea” to discuss the campaign.

Suggestions for Differentiated Instruction

- Provide graphic organizers for note taking and comparisons.
- Reduce or increase research options.

Family Connection

- Compile an informative brochure or email to students' families outlining the election information learned.
- Poll parents about their opinion on the election, voting, etc.

Lesson Evaluation

Did students master the stated outcomes? What evidence of learning can you cite? How might you alter lesson for next time to increase effectiveness?

Handouts

- [Candidate Research](#)
- [Scavenger Hunt](#)