

## Unit 5 The Election

### LESSON 1

Overview: The Races for Governor, the Congress, the Presidency;  
focus on the Senate

- Objectives:** Students will review the three jurisdictions of government. Students will gain a general understanding of the definition and purpose of state as well as federal senators. Younger students will begin to understand that people whose names are on the signs run for office to tell the capitol in Washington DC what we want to make life better and to make new laws when we need them.
- Materials:** Clipboard, paper, pencils. Optional: 10 copies of the local newspaper with stories on U.S. Senate candidates, maps of state and country, computer access to the internet, copies of the federal constitution (you could acquire your state's copy too for enrichment) possibly for each student, permission to take walk if required by your school.
- Procedure:**
- Discuss and review the three jurisdictions of the government: federal, state, and local and the candidates that may be running at each level. (Use a map – show what cities their offices would be in.) Review why parties are important to help getting elected.
  - Take the students on a walk around the school or nearby area where they can view signs, write down names, colors of signs, parties, office. Tell the students to note which signs they thought were most eye catching.
  - When you return from the walk, look for the names on their list in the newspaper and target the candidates for U.S. Senate, governor, and Congress. Write each candidate's name on a list and cut out and take notes on the information in the newspaper articles. Use these notes during the entire unit on Congress, the races for governor and the race for President.
  - Discuss what the requirements are to run for the Senate. Ask where we would find out. Read the Constitution: Article 1, Section 3.
  - On web site (list attached), have a small group look up the responsibilities of a U.S. senator. See if they can find the candidates' web sites. (Optional: read state constitution requirements for a state senator and note the differences.)

- Have student brainstorm a list of questions to ask their state and federal senate candidates. The teacher types or writes on the computer as the students generate questions in a large group discussion. Call, e-mail, or send a letter with your questions to the current people in office and the candidates if you have addresses. Include an invitation for them to visit and speak to the class.
- Discuss letters to the editor in the newspapers. Discuss opinion writing vs. factual news stories and having good reasons for opinions based on facts. Possibly read a few so students can hear models of this form of writing. Thinking ahead: at the end of the unit, after reviewing all the candidates, students can choose one to support and write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper.
- Ask students to look at TV, newspapers, or magazines with their parents for information about the candidates. Assign a conversation with parents to ask what they can learn together about the candidates.

## LESSON 2

### The Governor

**Objectives:** Students will gain a further understanding of some of the responsibilities of an elected official and the balance of power of the three branches of government by playing the part of a legislator, governor, or judge. Students will understand the concept of the chief executive of the state vs. the chief executive of the nation.

**Materials:** Set up classroom with table at the front for judge, the governor in a chair to one side and the legislators on chairs to another side. A copy of the state constitution, 3x5 actor cards defining the role of each student in a simulation of the three branches of government in action.

**Procedure:**

- Review who is running for governor. Explain a governor's responsibilities as executive of the state – compare to the president as the executive of the country. (If available, read that portion of the state's constitution that explains the governor's office.)
- Explain a simulation that the students will act out. "We will each have a place in the government process in order to understand the kinds of thinking needed to be a governor, senator, or congressman or judge." Appoint or vote on a judge, legislator and executive/governor from the class to represent the three branches of government. The rest of the class will be legislators.
- Scenario overview: The legislator has just convinced the class and the other legislators that it would be a good law if all brown-eyed students ate in their classrooms because the cafeteria is too crowded and loud. The governor signs the bill and it becomes law. One brown-eyed student objects to having to eat in the classroom and takes the law to court. The judge must look at the Constitution and see if the state law follows the U.S. Constitution or laws of the country. Allow class discussion. (Review the balance of the three branches of government.) The law cannot be upheld because it is not allowed by the Constitution. It discriminates against one group of students. No state shall enforce any law which denies a person equal protection of the laws: Amendment 14 – The Rights of Citizens.
- Discussion: Sometimes laws that don't follow the nation's laws are passed by legislators and judges have to decide whether they can stay as laws and whether they follow the rules of the U.S. Constitution. (Introduce the U.S. Supreme Court as the ultimate authority on whether or not a law is constitutional.)

- Ask parents to help students look for additional information in the newspaper or local magazines about candidates for governor. Look at web site state.(put in 2 initials of state).us to read about your current governor.
- Update the bulletin board with the new information the students bring in.

### LESSON 3

#### Congressman or Congresswoman

**Objective:** Students will understand the role of a congressman / woman and why there are more congressmen / women than senators in Washington (balance of power).

**Materials:** Internet access, computer room, paper, pencils.

**Procedure:**

- Review news articles and candidates from first lesson.
- Look at the Constitution again to see the requirements to be a congressman / woman – Legislative Branch: Article 1, Section 2. Discuss the difference between the requirements for senator and congressman / woman. Why do you think they are different? Read the powers of Congress and the powers denied to Congress in the Constitution. Have each student go on the internet and try to search for information.
- Possibly by this time you will have heard from other congressional candidates who can speak directly to the students. Schedule a time for the candidates to visit the class.
- Ask students to discuss with families the way the government affects their daily life. Note: In some families there is no discussion about politics or local issues and how the outcome of an election can effect one's daily life. The simple fact that the town hall/ city hall is government may be news to the students.
- Follow the family discussion with a discussion listing the ways the government effects daily life to bring a closer understanding of the importance of voting: amount of taxes to pay, education, arts, police and military, business laws, minimum wage, regulations on cars and transportation, etc. Thinking about the bigger issues like treaties between countries could be included with older students.
- Invite parents, TV or news reporters to come in when the candidate visits.
- After the visit, have the class write a group letter or individual letters to tell the candidate what they have learned from his/ her visit about the balance of power, the roles of local and state government vs. the national government, and / or the issues that affect their daily life.
- Make a chart for the bulletin board of the office, requirements in the Constitution to hold office, and the responsibilities listed in the Constitution for each office being discussed – President /governor, senator, and congressman / woman.

LESSON 4  
The President of the United States

**Objective:** To survey the responsibilities of the President. Students will understand what a President can and cannot do and how he can use the high visibility of the Presidency to persuade citizens. Students will explore how a President can use the support of his/her party to get legislation passed.

**Materials:** Class "TV set" and a copy of the Constitution.

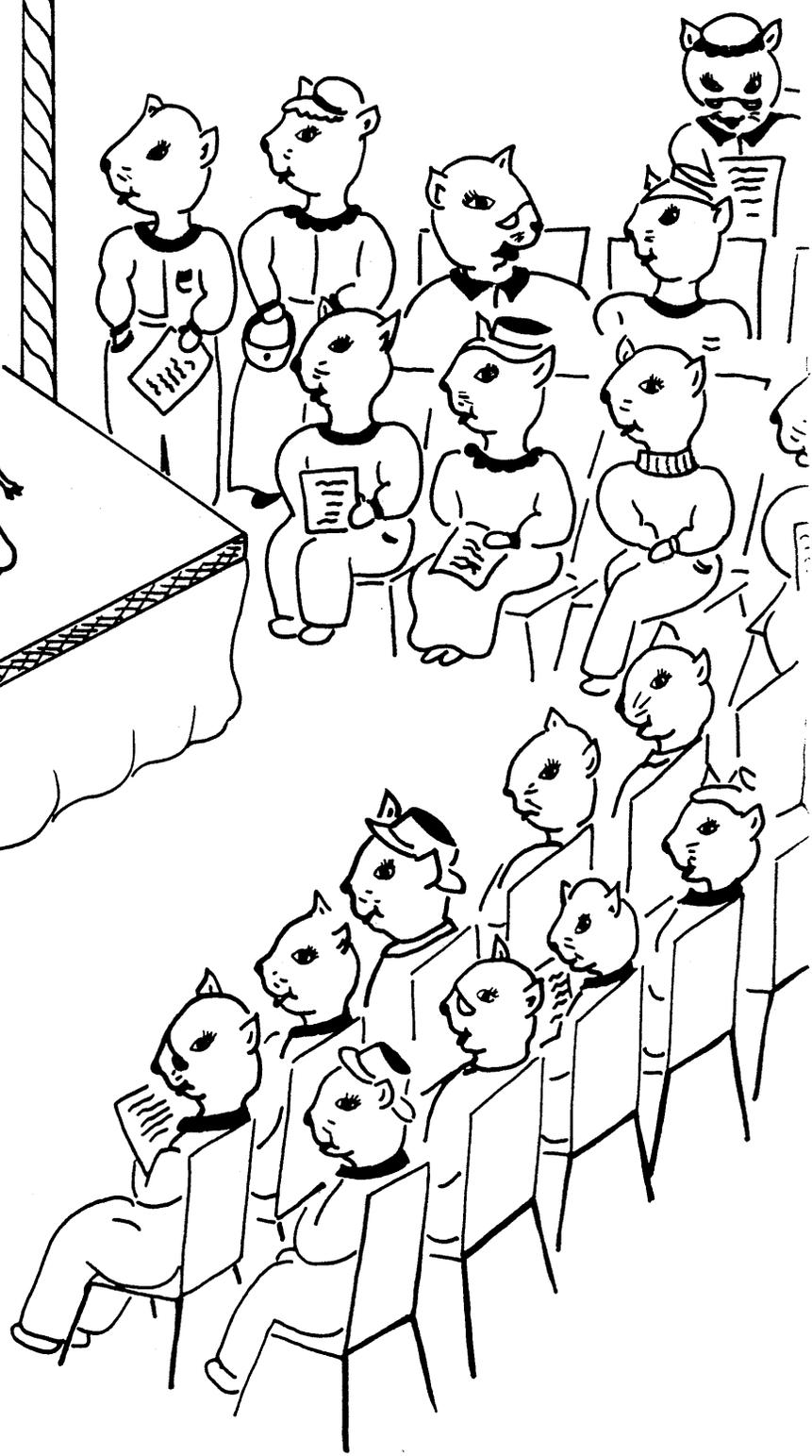
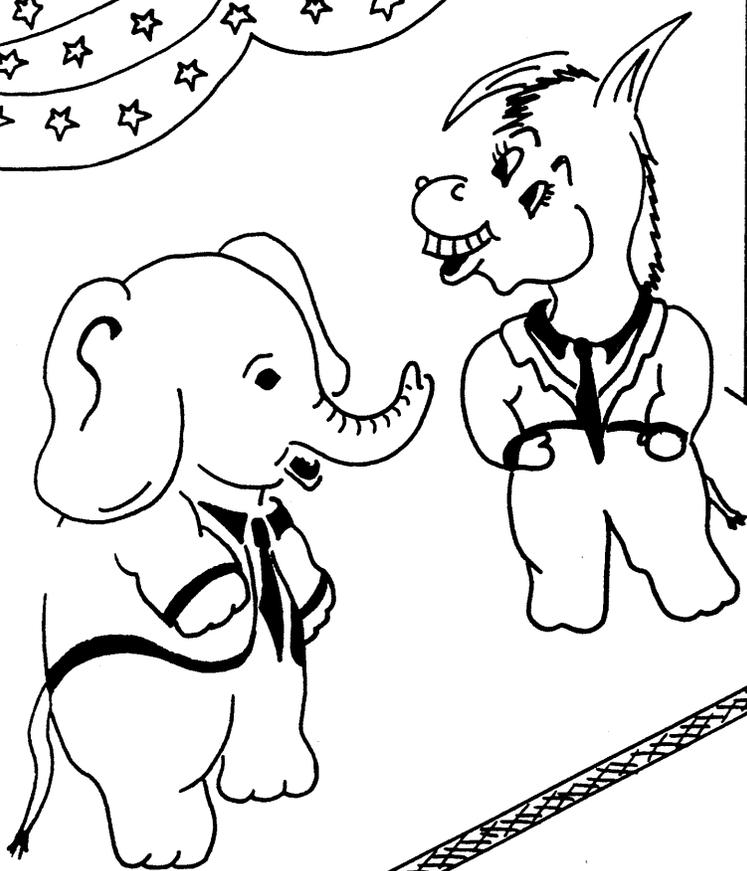
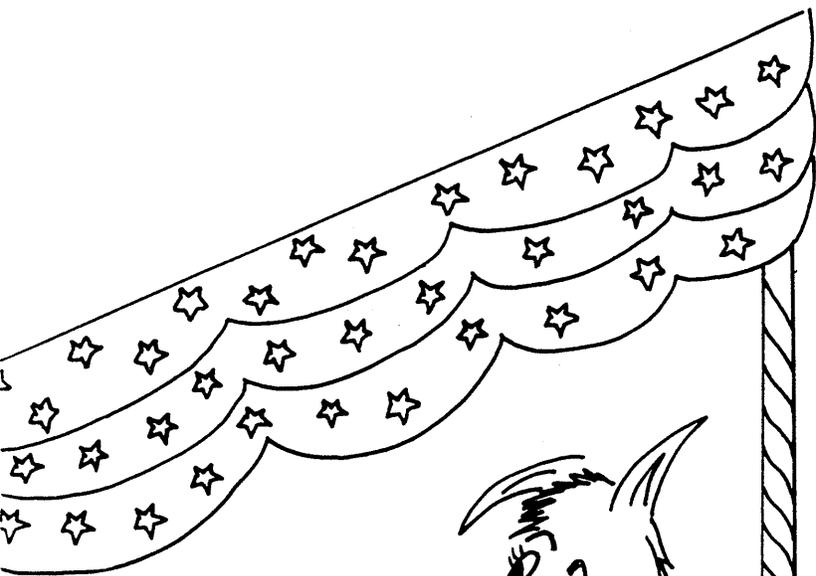
**Procedure:**

- Examine the Constitution of the United States.  
Discuss:
  - How many places can the class find where the powers of the President are listed? (Early primary grade teachers may wish to use simple wording to explain relevant sections to the youngest students).
  - How many places can the class find where the powers of the President are limited by another branch of government?\*
  - Why did the writers of the Constitution limit the powers of the President?
  - Why are "We the People" the ultimate source of authority and not the President?
  - What role does the President play as the leader of his party? How can his party help him get his ideas passed as laws?
- Divide the class into five or six committees. Challenge each committee to select one member to play the role of President while the others play the roles of the President's assistants. The President is preparing to give a "State of the Union" speech to the Congress and to the nation. S/he will include in his/her speech all the ideas s/he would like to see the Congress turn into laws about education, health care, the economy, the environment, etc. Each committee must brainstorm the ideas for their President to include in his/her speech and help with their President's speech.
- Assign as homework a search for good ideas with parents, at the library, while watching TV, on the internet, etc.

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\* (Note to teacher: Only Congress can decide what money will be recognized and used in our country. Only Congress can raise an army and declare war. The President's appointments of federal Judges must be approved by the Senate. The Congress can hold hearings on whether the Executive Branch has carried out the laws correctly.) e.g. Only the Executive Branch can coin money, raise an army and declare war. The President appoints federal judges. The Executive Branch can hold hearings on whether the laws have been complied with. Teachers of younger children will wish to adapt these concepts to the level of the child's understanding and introduce only those ideas they believe their students are ready to understand.)

- The teacher may wish the committees to meet several times before the speeches are finalized.
- After all the "State of the Union" speeches have been given, vote for the "President" you believe gave the best speech. Ask the "assistants" who helped the winner to stand for a round of applause from their classmates.



## LESSON 5

### Organize a Mock Presidential Debate

**Objective:** To prepare for watching the actual Presidential Debate. Students will acquire critical viewing skills.

**Materials:** Pencils, paper, chart paper, markers.

**Procedure:**

- Ask students to help you list the qualities they believe a Presidential candidate should have. Which of these do they believe can be determined by watching the Presidential candidates debate?
- Prepare a class "Rate the Candidates" chart\* on which students and parents will rate both the mock and the actual Presidential candidates. For each category, rate each candidate from one to five (see attached).
- Decide in advance who will be the moderator for your Mock Debate. What will be the time limits for the candidate? Who will prepare the questions for the candidates? Will you have "citizen participants" who may ask their questions or will the questions be determined in advance by a special committee?
- Rehearse for the real debate by having members of the class role play the candidates for each party in a Mock Debate. The "viewers" will rate the "candidates."
- After the Mock Debate, discuss:\*\*
  - What did you learn about the candidates or issues that you did not know prior to the debate?
  - Did the debate influence your attitudes about the issues or the candidates?
  - Were there any issues of interest to you that were not discussed during the debate?
  - Were there any issues raised that you considered irrelevant or unimportant?
  - How do debates compare with other campaign information sources (e.g. news, ads, speeches, conventions, call-in shows, on-line resources, etc.) in helping you learn about the candidates and the issues?
  - What are your reactions to the debate format (i.e. time limits, moderator, citizen participation, questions)?

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\* See one possible chart attached. Help students find the meanings of the words they do not yet understand. Omit questions beyond the maturity level of the students.

\*\* Adapted from *Debate Watch*.

- If you could change one feature of the mock debate format, what would it be? Why?
- Will this Mock Debate and discussion influence the way you watch the actual debates?
- Watch the actual debates with your family and rate the real candidates on a "Rate the Candidate" chart.

## The Presidential Debates

Since the first televised Presidential debate in 1960 helped put John F. Kennedy in the White House, a candidate's ability to perform under the glare of TV lights has become very important in American Presidential elections.

What will be the outcome when the candidates face off this fall? Will a decisive "win" in the debates make a difference? Should it? Tune in to one of the 2000 Presidential debates and "score" it using the chart on this page. Then answer the questions that follow with your family.

For each category, assign a rate from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

| CATEGORIES   | Democrat | Republican | Other Candidate |
|--|----------|------------|-----------------|
| Was the candidate's opening statement a good one?            |          |            |                 |
| How much did he/she seem to know?                            |          |            |                 |
| Did the candidate use evidence to back up arguments?         |          |            |                 |
| Were the arguments logical?                                  |          |            |                 |
| Was the candidate responsive to questions?                   |          |            |                 |
| Was the candidate nervous or at ease?                        |          |            |                 |
| Did the candidate seem to have the qualities of a President? |          |            |                 |
| Did you like the candidate?                                  |          |            |                 |
| Was the candidate's closing statement a good one?            |          |            |                 |
| What was your overall impression?                            |          |            |                 |
| <b>TOTAL SCORE</b>   |          |            |                 |

On a scale of 1-5, rate the value of this debate as a source of information for voters: .....

Explain your rating.....

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In your opinion, will one of the candidates get a "bounce" in the polls as a result of this debate? How much?  
 Check your prediction against next week's polls.....

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LESSON 6  
Returning to "Our Town"

Objective: To review all that has been learned thus far.

Materials: Crayons, paper, scissors, paste, pencils and pens.

Procedure: • Return to the imaginary town the students are creating.

Discuss:

- Since the last time we visited our town, we have learned a great deal more about local, state and national governments. As Election Day nears, what do you think needs to be added to our town that is missing now? How will the class decide who will be the Chief Executive of the town? Where his/ her office will be? Where the legislature will meet? Where the judges will hold court?
- Will the town have a newspaper? Where will it be published?
- Who will be in charge of elections? Where will people vote? What issues will be important to the people in our town? What problems are they having? Which of the issues can best be dealt with at the local level? Which must be dealt with at the state level? Which must be dealt with at the national level?

(Note to the teacher: This lesson can be extended and expanded as long as classroom time permits, and the town can be revisited and developed at greater depth many times after the election, e.g. some classes may wish to "publish" an imaginary town newspaper, some may wish to draw analogies to the town or city in which they live and the issues of concern in their "real" world.)

## LESSON 7

### Get Out the Vote

**Objective:** Students will understand the purpose of voter registration and of advertising the mock election date.  
Students will participate in getting out the vote for the real election.

**Materials:** Poster paper, markers, tape, lists of every class that is participating.

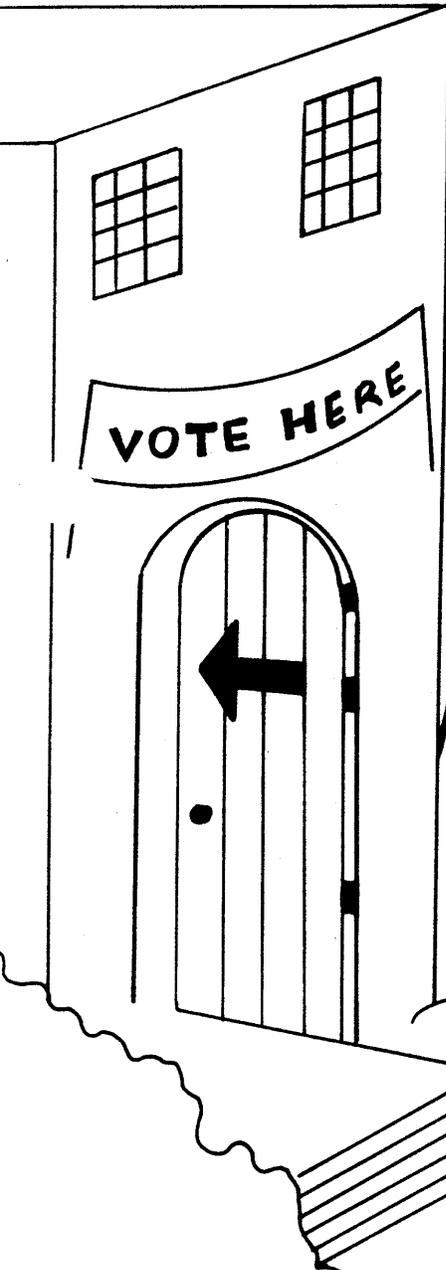
**Procedure:**

- Think about the candidate signs you saw at the beginning of the unit. What made some of them stand out? Think about color, design, message.
- Have students make "Vote in the National Student/ Parent Mock Election" posters to put up around the school with the date of the mock election and the location.
- To register the voters, students invite each classroom that has agreed to participate to come to the classroom, or a chosen location in the school, at a certain time (maybe just before lunch or recess) to sign next to their name on a class list representing registration. Students who are absent will sign and send their signature by messenger to the class later.
- Students will ask their parents if they are registered for the real election and if so, how they registered to vote. Students have the assignment of writing about how their parents registered (another form of writing).
- Have a "Get-Out-the-Vote" parade around the school and send home flyers designed by students urging every parent to vote on the real election day. Give the polling place, date, and time the polls are open.

Suzie Smith  
for  
Senate

Danny Jones  
for  
Congress

Pat Curry  
for  
Congress



## LESSON 8

### The Mock Election

**Objective:** Students will organize and conduct a mock election for the entire school.

**Materials:** Posters, paper, markers, tape, copier paper box or one of that size for a ballot box, ballots for both candidates and issues, 3-sided cardboard dividers for voting booths to be taped to desks or tables for primary, pencils, calculators, request for parent volunteers, class lists of every class that is participating in the school, pencils taped down on strings at each voting place, lists of candidate and office for the counters to use when tabulating each classroom's vote, lists of issues on which students will also vote, three copies of each class list (divided into three alphabetical groupings) that will be voting in the school for the check-in stations. A large sign with all the candidates and the offices to be displayed outside the voting area. Optional: patriotic music to play outside the voting area (ask the music teacher what you might borrow). Use the school's public address system to remind classes this is Mock Election Day.

**Procedure:**

- With a student and parent, ask permission from the principal to call the local newspaper or TV station and see if they would like to cover the mock election in your school. It is important to give them advance notice.
- Look at above materials needed and have students help as you see fit.
- The lead teacher should ask teachers of other classrooms to sign up for a time their class can come to vote on the day of the mock election.
- On the day of the mock election, the lead teacher will divide the class into five committees. (If possible, ask parents to be poll watchers and oversee each of the five committees.)
  - *registration* – check in: get classroom lists and organize each class into three groups alphabetically. Put the letters of the grouping on a sign at each desk with a student to check in "voters" that are on the list as they come to vote. Extra students monitor the lines, answer questions and show the sign that lists all the candidates and the offices they are running for.
  - *ballot distributors* – stand by each booth and place ballots in voting booths before each student votes.
  - *poll watchers* – students answer questions at the head of the line of students waiting to vote and direct voters to the voting booths as they become available.

- *ballot box watchers* – students wait at the ballot box and show voters how to put their ballot in and make sure there is only one per voter. At the end of each class' voting period, these students collect the ballots and give them to the counters.
- *counters* – go through each ballot and tabulate the results with tally marks on the provided sheets.
- Have the students rotate duties so they can experience each job as different classes in the school come through to vote.
- After the whole school has voted, designate a group to count class and whole school totals for each candidate and for the issues. Find the sums and differences between classes. Post or announce the results by the end of the day for the whole school to see and hear. Math lessons use this data to create a large graph or poster of the results by class for the school to see.
- The school representative to the Mock Election calls in the results to the State Election Headquarters.
- On Mock Election Night, check the National Election Headquarters' results on the internet as each of the state's totals come in.
- Math lesson: On the day of the real election, compare the student results to the adult voter's results.
- Writing reflection: Discuss how the Mock Election process went. Write the following questions on the board:
  - What have students learned about how government works, candidates, running for office?
  - What is the importance of the election process?
  - What did they like about this unit?
  - What would they change?
  - What are the overall feelings and thoughts on the process we followed?
- Have students meet in small groups to discuss the questions. Have the whole class share their lists in an open discussion and write the important points on the board. Students should then write four paragraphs of their own opinions using the information gained from all the experiences. Send these reflections to the National Student/Parent Mock Election at 225 W. Oro Valley Drive, Tucson, Arizona 85737.
- Assign students to watch early results of the actual election with their parents and / or bring newspaper articles of the results. Ask older students to note the total number of votes shown on TV for one or two candidates and the time they wrote down that information.

- Post and compare the real results with the school's mock voting results. Possible math lessons can result with these numbers. How many more votes did one candidate win over another? Make a graph of the votes for each candidate.
- Write a letter to the winning candidates and congratulate them on their victories. Share what your class has learned because of the Mock Election.