

Taking Part in the Process

The Right to Vote

As far as the Constitution's Framers were concerned, voting was a responsibility as well as a precious right. The exercises below will help students realize that voting rights are not a given—they have been hard-won. It also lets them encourage their elders to participate in the process. This lesson plan was created by Karen Kellaheer, a substitute teacher in Warren County, New Jersey. Kellaheer, a former Scholastic editor, has published more than 15 books for students and teachers.

Objectives: Students will be able to discuss changes in U.S. voting rights, and identify why voting is an important right.

DIRECTIONS

1. Ask students to discuss why candidates send out so many fliers, visit so many cities, and spend so much money on TV ads. Candidates know that every vote counts—every voter who goes to the polls can help them win the presidency. However, not everyone who is eligible actually votes. In the 2004 presidential election, only 60 percent of all people eligible to vote did so.
2. Ask students to define the term *eligible voter*. Who may vote in this country? (U.S. citizens who are age 18 or older and have registered to vote are eligible. Most states allow people convicted of a felony to vote after they have served out their sentence. Only two—Maine and Vermont—allow felons to vote while still in

prison. In most early-American colonies, only adult white males who owned property could vote.)

3. Send students on a scavenger hunt to learn more about voting rights. Divide them into five groups and assign each group one of the following years: 1870, 1920, 1924, 1966, 1971. Have each group search in books or online sources to find out what happened to voting rights in that year,* then report its findings to the class. (To emphasize the importance of reliable sources, ask each group to cite its sources and have the class discuss which aren't trustworthy and why.)
4. Ask students to discuss why so many Americans don't vote. What would they say to adults to convince them to exercise that right?
5. Have students create posters urging eligible voters to go to the polls. Emphasize that the goal isn't to persuade people to vote a certain way



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but to persuade them to vote for whichever candidate they think is the best for the job. Encourage students to come up with catchy phrases and attention-grabbing slogans. Get permission to display the posters in your local library, community center, or school lobby/hallways.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Invite students to create voting bookmarks (instead of or in addition to the posters) to give to family members and neighbors.

ASSESSMENT

Grade students on their performance on the voting-rights scavenger hunt as well as their finished posters. Make sure that everyone in the group contributed by asking them to submit brief reports outlining what they did.

* See *Answers*, p. T-4.