LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

LESSON

The Truth About Voting

In this lesson, students will learn some common myths about voting today, think through who these myths might benefit, learn why these myths are incorrect and consider how people might ensure every eligible citizen has a chance to vote. In an extension activity, students learn how to register to vote.

Grade Level 6-8, 9-12

Topic: Rights & Activism
Subject: Social Studies, Civics, History
Social Justice Domain: Justice, Action

OBJECTIVES

At the end of the lesson:

- Students will be able to recognize and correct common myths about voting in the United States.
- Students will understand the effects of misinformation about voting.
- Eligible students can register to vote.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How does voter participation affect election outcomes?
- Who is harmed by—and who benefits from—conflicting messages about voting?

MATERIALS

- Handout: Five Myths About Voting
- Chart paper and markers
VOCABULARY

**Consensus** [kun-sin-sus] (noun) an agreement of the majority of people involved.

**Eligible Voter** [el-uh-juh-bull] [vote-er] (noun) someone who meets all of the requirements (e.g., age, residency, etc.) to legally vote in an election.

**Voter ID Laws** [vote-er eye-dee] (noun) a group of state laws, many passed within the last 10 years, that require voters to present identification when voting in person or when requesting an absentee ballot. Proponents of the laws claim that they prevent voter fraud, but opponents say that these laws suppress the vote.

NOTES TO THE TEACHER

We are publishing this lesson in the fall of 2020, as many educators are teaching remotely. Where necessary, the procedure for this lesson includes adaptations for classes meeting online.

Prepare the “Fighting Myths” activity by arranging five workstations around the room. Place a piece of poster paper and a different color marker at each workstation. At the top of the poster paper, transcribe one of the following myths (including the number).

- # 1—The U.S. Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to vote.
- # 2—Presidential elections are the ones that really matter.
- # 3—Voter ID fraud is a big problem in the United States.
- # 4—College students have to vote where their parents live.
- # 5—My vote doesn’t count.

For remote classes or students who are social distancing, educators might consider creating virtual workstations, using shared online files like Google documents. Each could be labeled with one of the myths, and students working in groups could add notes below.

PROCEDURE

1. Start with a warm-up to get students thinking about the importance of participating in elections. Have students “vote” on any trivial debate—you might have them choose “Which is better: cats or dogs?” or have them choose between two movies or songs popular in your classroom. This activity will need to move quickly, so it’s important to offer students a low-stakes choice. Either they can “vote with their feet” by moving around the classroom, or they can raise right hands for one answer, left hands for the other. Those teaching remotely might ask students to change their display name to reflect their choice.
2. No matter the results, tell students that you can’t declare a winner yet. Ask them to count off to five, so each student has a number one through five. Let students know they’ll need to remember their numbers for a while. Tell them: *Only 80% of Americans are registered to vote, so we should only count 80% of these votes.* Ask all of the students in group #1 to sit (or lower their arms, or change their display names back.) Repeat this process, letting students know: *Even though 80% of Americans are registered, only 60% vote in Presidential elections.* Ask all of the students in group #2 to sit (or lower their arms or change their display names).

3. Ask students how they feel about the fact that, at this point, just over half of the class is making a decision for everyone. Ask them to suggest a few reasons why so few Americans might vote. Remind students: *Some people aren’t allowed to vote. Voting is more difficult for some people than for others. And some people don’t believe that their vote matters.* Explain the goal of the day’s lesson: *We’ll be learning about some common myths about voting today, thinking through who these myths might benefit, learning why they’re wrong, and considering how we might ensure everyone has a chance to vote.*

4. Move into the main activity by having students divide into five groups based on their numbers from the warm-up. Ask them to go to the workstation (or shared document) that matches the number for their group. They should read the myth and answer three questions:
   - If everyone believed this myth, what would change?
   - If no one believed this myth, what would change?
   - Who benefits from this myth?

5. Have each group choose a recorder who takes notes on the chart paper (or shared document) and labels the group’s responses with their group number. After 3-5 minutes, have each group move on to the next myth. Groups can spend 3-5 minutes on each station or document, rotating until each group has had a chance to respond to each myth. At the end, ask groups to return to their original myth—the one that shares their group number—and read through their classmates’ responses to decide whether they agree or disagree.

6. Distribute the “Five Myths” handout. Give each group 2 minutes to present their findings to the class. Students should do three things:
   - Read their myth aloud.
   - Take a hands-up poll: *How many have heard this myth before today?*
   - Share the truth about their myth from the “Five Myths” handout.

7. After each group has shared, ask students to share their thoughts about who benefits from each of these myths and why.

**ALIGNMENT TO CCSS**
English Language Arts Standards | History/Social Studies | Grade 6-8
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4

English Language Arts Standards | History/Social Studies | Grade 9-10
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8

English Language Arts Standards | History/Social Studies | Grade 11-12
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

EXTERNAL LINKS

Nationwide Voting Information https://www.rockthevote.org/how-to-vote/

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