



Role-Play the Vote

Uses Vote Worthy Part 1 Segment 1 [Listen here](#)

Background Reading

Many people feel that the Electoral College is an outmoded method for electing the United States president but dismantling it – or even modifying it – could have unexpected consequences. The original intent of the Electoral College as outlined in the Constitution was to protect the importance of states as geopolitical units. Each state elects a number of electors equal to the number of U.S. Congressional districts in the state plus two (the number of U.S. senators from each state), thus ensuring that every state has at least three electors. In 1961, the 23rd Amendment provided Electoral College representation for the District of Columbia.

The Constitution does not specify how the members of the Electoral College will be determined. In almost all states, the winner of all electoral votes is determined by the statewide winner of the popular vote in a winner-take-all contest. However, two states have a different system. In Maine and Nebraska, each congressional district is represented by an elector selected by the popular vote in that district, and two electors are awarded to the winner of the statewide popular vote.

Maine also uses an innovative approach to voting known as ranked choice voting. Instead of selecting only one candidate, voters rank all candidates in their order of preference. If no candidate receives at least 50% of the vote, the candidate with the fewest number of votes is dropped. Ballots that were cast for the dropped candidate as first choice are recounted with each voter's second choice counting as their vote. The process repeats until one candidate receives at least 50% of the votes. This method is also called an instant run-off since there is no need to hold a second election if a winner does not emerge from the first round of vote counting.

Another scenario that has been suggested and ratified by 15 states is the National Popular Vote plan. According to this plan, the electoral votes of each state would go to the national winner of

the popular vote instead of to the winner of the state popular vote. This plan has been enacted into law in 15 states, but it is connected to an interstate compact that it will only go into effect when, and if, enough states ratify the plan to carry the majority of the electoral votes. This plan would ensure that the candidate who wins the national popular vote also wins the electoral college vote.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the approach taken to selecting members of the Electoral College by Maine and Nebraska is more fair or less fair than the winner-take-all approach of other states in terms of ensuring that every vote counts? Why or why not?
2. What would be the advantages of the National Popular Vote Plan? The disadvantages?
3. What would be the advantages of ranked choice voting? The disadvantages?

Key Vocabulary

Electoral College: Established in Article II, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution, the Electoral College is the formal body which elects the President and Vice President of the United States.

National Popular Vote plan: A plan that has been enacted into law in 15 states that will, if and when it takes effect, award all the Electoral College votes belonging to those states to the winner of the national popular vote rather than to the winner of the state popular vote

interstate compact: An agreement between two or more states

ranked choice voting: A system of voting that allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference rather than simply voting for one candidate

Teaching Tips

- Some students are adept at auditory learning while others benefit from a written explanation. Adding a hands-on, role play experience to the mix provides a third way for students to internalize complex concepts like how the Electoral College functions — something that is difficult for most adults to grasp!
- There are few topics more controversial these days than the election process and voting rights. Review with your students how to distinguish between fact and opinion. After listening to Segment 1 of Vote Worthy, you might ask them to analyze the segment, identifying which portions are facts and which are opinions. Discuss how an informed opinion is one based on an understanding of the facts.

- If you have not already established norms for civic discourse in your classroom, this is an excellent opportunity. The ability to engage in civil discourse with respect for diverse opinions is reflected in both the Kentucky Academic Standards for Social Studies and the national standards. It is also a core competency in Social and Emotional Learning. An easy approach is the THINK test for determining if a comment is appropriate: T—is it true, H—is it helpful, I—is it inspiring, N—is it necessary, K—is it kind.

Suggested Activity

Part One

After students listen to the podcast and read the Background Reading, explain that you are going to create a hands-on exploration of three different voting methods. Instead of voting for presidential candidates, your “election” will be of a favorite flavor of ice cream (or favorite snack, song, or basketball team – whatever will engage your students). You can provide three to four “candidates” or take “nominations” from the floor. (No more than four).

Divide the class into unequal size groups or “states” varying in size from 4 to 12 students each. Assign one student in each group as the ballot counter. Provide each student with an index card to use as a ballot. (Virtual students can use whatever paper they have on hand.) Tell students that this first “election” will use the winner-take-all approach. The number of students in each group will equal the number of “electoral votes” for each group. Ask each student to write his or her vote on the card or paper. You can have the ballot counter collect the ballots, or if you want to avoid sharing materials, each voter can hold up the ballot for the ballot counter to record. If one group has a tie, that group will need to have a run-off vote between the top two choices. The ballot counter then reports the winner in their “state” as you tally the results. Each “state” receives a number of votes equal to the size of the group plus two, and all votes from the “state” go to the same candidate (winner take all).

Combine the results from all the states and declare a winner.

Now ask the ballot counter to record the number of votes for each “candidate” and report these votes to you. Record these individual sums and for each group, add two votes for the winner from the previous tally. Remind students that this is the system used by Nebraska and Maine. As each ballot counter announces the results from their “state,” keep a running tally. Combine the results from all the states and declare a winner. This is what would happen if all states used the Nebraska/Maine approach.

Finally, ask the ballot counter for each “state” to tell you the total number of votes for each candidate without adding the two extra votes. Add the results together and declare a winner. This is the result of a National Popular Vote.

Were the results exactly the same using each method? Lead the class in a discussion using Discussion Questions 1 and 2.

Part Two

Using the same four “candidates,” have each student vote by ranking their choices. They are not required to have a second or third choice if they don’t want to, but remind them that not having alternate choices might mean that their vote ends up not being counted. If there is a clear winner (50% or above), repeat the process with different “candidates” until you end up with a vote in which no one candidate has 50% of the vote or more. Tell students that the lowest ranking candidate is now eliminated. Anyone who voted for that candidate can now add their vote for their second choice to the tally.

Lead a discussion based on question #3 from the Discussion Questions.

Extensions

- Ask students if role playing the different procedures helped them have a clearer idea of what each process entails. Did it change their opinion about the advantages and disadvantages of the different processes?
- Ask students if they think that all voters understand these different election options. They encountered the same information in two different formats – podcast and reading. Which was easier for them to understand? Note that different learners process information differently. Was there an advantage to processing the same information in two different ways? Did the role playing help give them a more concrete understanding?
- Role playing is one way to understand confusing concepts. How else could these ideas be presented in a way that would make them more accessible to the average voter? Point out that you are asking them to consider how to present the facts about the different processes, not their opinion about which process is better. Ask them to work in small groups to come up with an idea of how they could share what they have learned with a wider audience, physical or virtual. It could be through charts, music, video, a computer game, a performance, a graphic representation. Have each group share their idea with the class. If time permits, engage them in developing one or more of the ideas as a community service project.

Kentucky Academic Standards

Social Studies

HS.C.I.CC.1 Engage in civil discussion, reach consensus when appropriate and respect diverse opinions relevant to compelling and/or supporting questions in civics.

HS.C.I.CC.2 Engage in disciplinary thinking and construct arguments, explanations or public communications relevant to meaningful and/or investigative questions in civics.

HS.C.I.CC.3 Engage in disciplinary thinking and apply appropriate evidence to propose a solution or design an action plan relevant to compelling and/or supportive questions in civics.

Reading and Writing Literacy Practices

- Recognize that text is anything that communicates a message.
- Employ, develop and refine schema to understand and create text.
- Utilize receptive and expressive language arts to better understand self, others and the world.
- Engage in specialized, discipline-specific literacy practices.
- Apply high level cognitive processes to think deeply and critically about text.

Reading Guiding Principles

- Students will integrate and evaluate content presented in print/non-print forms of text found in diverse media and formats.
- Students will compose informative and explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.
- Students will use a variety of strategies to determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases, consulting reference material when appropriate.
- Students will acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking and listening in order to be transition ready.

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