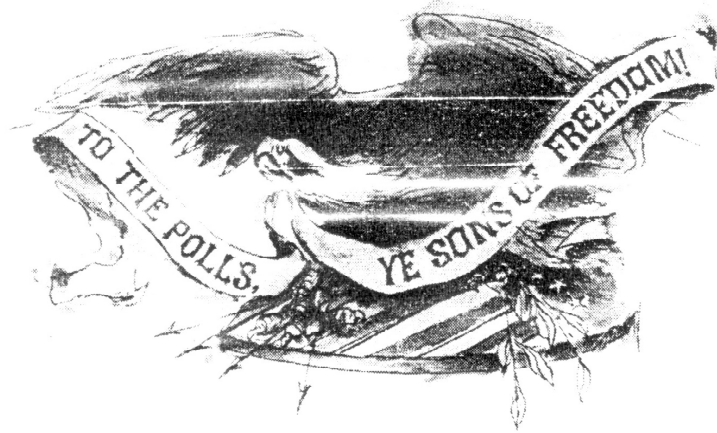


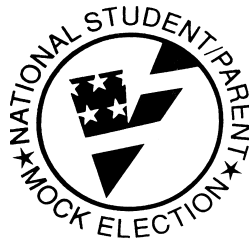
Guide to the Electoral Process

Elementary Level



by
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Dear Educator:

“A teacher fights for the oncoming future,” Loren Eiseley has said. Since it first began in 1980, the most important rule of the National Student/Parent Mock Election has been that “the way that is right is the way that is right for you.” We at the Mock Election strongly believe in experiential education and in motivating activities that create the “need to know.” Research has proven that traditional classroom lessons designed to increase knowledge of “civics” do not change attitudes and behavior. It is *active involvement* that is the catalyst for change.

There are no requirements about which voter education materials you must use for the Mock Election or how you must use them. This “Guide to the Electoral Process” by Charles F. Bahmueller and Ken Rodriguez of the Center for Civic Education is yours to use as you think best.

For educators seeking an intensive voter education curriculum designed to help teachers meet the new National Standards for Civics and Government, using the entire course will be the right strategy. For educators whose students do not respond to “read the text and answer the questions,” selecting portions of this curriculum, and perhaps combining them with “Election Activities,”¹ will be the appropriate choice (e.g. combining the “What Do You Think?” questions in the Guide with “Founding Libertyland” in the Mock Election’s “Election Activities” notebook). Teachers of gifted students might wish to supplement the lessons in the Guide with extra credit assignments from “Election Activities.” The choices must be the teachers.²

An election presents educators with unique opportunities to share the joy in freedom that is the birthright of Americans as the citizens of a democracy. Whichever teaching strategies you have chosen, we hope that this joy will be the outcome of your lessons.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gloria Kirshner".

Gloria Kirshner President
National Student/Parent Mock Election

¹ Available on the Internet.

² Teachers may wish to adapt the wording of these materials to the needs of parents they seek to reach. The heartwarming response of parents eager to learn about American democracy and begin new lives as American citizens is a Mock Election bonus,

What are some examples of decisions we make by asking people to vote?

Often groups of people who play together make decisions by asking everyone to vote. Voting allows people to help make decisions about things that might affect them. We often use voting to decide who will lead the group. We also use voting to decide an action we might take. List some examples of when you have used voting to make a group decision.

When do we vote to select a person to be leader or to do something?

At Home

In Our School

In Our Community

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

When do we vote to decide an action we want to take?

At Home

In Our School

In Our Community

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

What are some advantages of having people vote to select a leader or to make a decision.

What are some problems that might arise when we make decisions by having people vote?

What are some ways to solve the problems you have listed?

Who you people think having the right to vote is important?

In the United States we select our leaders by allowing citizens to vote. When you turn 18 years of age you will have the right to vote in local, state, and national elections. Your right to vote is protected by the United States Constitution and the laws of the national government. Your state constitution and the laws of your state also protect your right to vote. Under our system of government, the states have the responsibility to conduct elections.

Have you ever thought about why voting is such an important right of citizens? One way to find out why voting is an important right is to ask people what they think. You and your classmates will be talking to other students in your school and to adults in your family and community to find out what they think. You will be asked to interview several people and to write down their answers. When your class finishes gathering this information, you will compile the answers to see what people in your community think.

Remember, when you conduct an interview with someone, you should first introduce yourself. Tell the person what your class is studying. Ask the person if he or she would be willing to answer your questions.

Here are some questions you might ask people. You and your classmates may want to add other questions to this lists.

Conducting an Interview³

Name of person _____

Occupation _____

1. Do you usually vote in local, state, or national elections? Yes No
2. (If the answer to #1 is Yes) What are some reasons why you decided to vote?
3. If the answer to #1 is No) What are some reason why you decided not to vote?
4. What do you think is the purpose of having elections in our country?
5. Would you favor having a law that requires all citizens to go to the polls on election day? Why?

³ Teachers may wish to adapt the interview format to the needs of the class. For students interviewing non-English-speaking parents, for example, the wording might read: "Why do you want to live in America? In America we have a democracy based on a Constitution that limits what government can do. What do you think might happen if we did not have a Constitution?"

Conducting an Interview

Interviews are sessions in which one person (the “interviewee”) is asked questions by another (the “interviewer”). Interviews can take place in person, by telephone, or online. To conduct a good interview, it is important that the interviewer not put words in the mouth of the interviewee by suggesting answers or by asking leading questions. It is also important that the interviewer not express an opinion about the interviewee’s answers. The interviewer is to remain neutral through the interview. The interview is to be conducted in a cordial, businesslike way. The interviewer should be courteous no matter what answers are given and should thank the interviewee at the end of the interview.

Name of person _____

Occupation _____

1. What do you think is meant by the term “constitutional democracy”?
2. Does the United States have a constitutional democracy? Why or why not?
3. What do you think should be the role of citizens in a democracy?
4. Why do we have elections in a democratic society?
5. Would you favor or oppose a law that requires all citizens in the country to vote on election day? Why?
6. What suggestions, if any, do you have for improving elections in our community? (You may want to think of additional questions to ask during the interview. If so, write these on a separate sheet of paper. When you and your class complete your interviews, you should compile the data. Examine the data and determine what conclusions you can reasonably draw from the information gathered. Compare the information from the interview with what you learned in class.)
7. What do you think should be the role of citizens in a democratic society?
8. Having elections is one way we decide how our government will run. What might be some other ways citizens can get involved in their government?

CLASS ACTIVITY

After you finish compiling the information gathered from your interviews, you may want to create a class bulletin board illustrating the information you have collected. With the help of your math teacher, you can create some graphs and charts that illustrate what people in your community think about the importance of the right to vote. You might illustrate your information by using photographs from newspapers and magazines. You might also draw cartoons and illustrations of your own.

How can we organize a class election?

This exercise will help you understand something about the way in which elections are organized and conducted in our country. During this activity you will simulate a campaign and elect someone to be your class president. In this election you will also vote to approve or reject a rule that will affect your entire class. There will be several opportunities for everyone in your class to become involved. Follow each of the steps described below to organize an election.

• Create two political parties

Two major political parties, and sometimes third parties as well, conduct elections in our country. The political parties nominate candidates for office and propose policies to solve problems. The candidates may, if they wish, use the party's ideas during their campaigns.

Divide the class into two groups. Each group will function as a political party. You may give your political party a name. You may develop symbols and banners for your political party.

Each party should develop a list of policy proposals they would like to see implemented in the class. For example, you may propose that the class have 15 minutes of quiet time every day.

Then members of your party who wish to run for class president should offer themselves to be the party's nominee for class president. The people who offer themselves as candidates for the party nomination should make brief speeches before a meeting of the party. During the speeches, the candidates should explain why their party should nominate them to be a candidate for class president.

After the nominating speeches, the members should select someone to be their candidate for class president.

• Create an election board

The job of the election board is to conduct the election. Four or five students should serve on the election board. The board will develop a few rules for conducting a free and fair election.

The election board will be responsible for developing the ballot. They will conduct a voter registration drive. Only those students who register will be allowed to vote.

The board will be responsible for setting up a polling booth. The board will also make sure that only those who registered to vote actually do so. The board will monitor the polling place to make sure that the election is free and fair.

- **Create in interest group**

In some states, groups of interested citizens may place an issue on the ballot for voters to decide. Sometimes a state legislature decides that something should be decided by the citizens of the state.

Four or five students should serve as an interest group. The group should propose a rule that they would like to see adopted by the class. After the group develops its rule, the group will have to get signatures for at least one-third of the students in the class saying that they would like to see this issue on the ballot. If you do not get the needed signatures, then there is not enough interest in this issue and the election board will not allow your proposal on the ballot.

Once you get your rule on the ballot, you will want to develop a campaign to make sure the class understands your proposal so that they want to vote for it. Some people in the class may oppose your proposal and may campaign against it.

- **Candidates develop a campaign committee**

The candidates from the political parties should each have a campaign committee. The committee will help you advertise your candidacy, help you prepare campaign speeches, and poll the members of the class to evaluate how well your campaign is progressing. If the polls show that the candidate is not doing so well, the campaign committee may help you devise a new strategy to win votes.

Each campaign committee should include the following members:

1. a campaign manager who will help develop strategy, advertisements and speeches;
2. a pollster who will survey the voters and measure how well the candidate is doing; and,
3. a campaign worker who will pass out leaflets and talk to interested students about the strengths of the candidate.

You should plan a campaign that will last one, maybe two weeks, depending on how much time your teacher wants the class to devote to this activity.

- **Create the class media**

Two to three members of the class should function as news reporters. Your role is to write about the candidates. You may develop a class newspaper that includes political ads, cartoons, news articles, and editorials. You should also develop a television program. Invite the candidates to participate in a debate about the issues before the class.

- **Conduct the campaign and hold the election**

The election board should set a date for the election by consulting with your teacher. During the next few days you may conduct your campaigns. On the day of the election, the election board should supervise the voting, tally the votes, and announce the winning candidate and what the voters decided on the rule which the interest group placed on the ballot.

- **Evaluate the election**

After your class election, you should spend time thinking about how the campaign went. Was the election free and fair? Were the campaign speeches and the political advertisements fair? Did everyone who wanted have a chance to have his or her opinion on the issues heard? Did the election board conduct the election in a fair manner? In what ways was this activity like a real election? Next time we have a class election, what would you do differently?

CLASS ACTIVITY

How can I decide which candidate will be a good class president?

Sometimes class elections are popularity contests. If you take elections seriously, you want to vote for the person who is best qualified to do the job. It is not always easy to decide which candidate to support. This exercise can help you make a better decision. First you need to think about the job of class president. What are the responsibilities and powers of a class president? What are some of the limits on the powers of a class president? For example, the class president does not have the power to discipline students.

Second, you need to think about the qualities or qualifications a person needs in order to do the job well. For example, the class president should be honest and he or she should have the time to devote to the job.

Third, you need to compare the candidates to decide which one best meets the qualifications to be a good class president. You want to listen to what the candidates have to say about themselves and about what they would like for your class.

<p>Analyze the position of the class president</p>	<p>Determine the qualities or qualifications a good class president should have</p>
<p>What are the responsibilities of a class president?</p>	<p>What qualities or qualifications should a person have to carry out these responsibilities well?</p>
<p>What are the powers of a class president?</p>	<p>What qualities or qualifications should a person have to exercise these powers properly and wisely?</p>
<p>What are the limits on the powers of a class president?</p>	<p>What qualities or qualifications should a person have to help ensure that he or she does not abuse the powers of the office?</p>

What candidate do you think best meets the qualities and qualifications needed to do a good job as class president? Why?

CLASS ACTIVITY

How do people in our community get elected to office?

In this lesson you will work in small groups of five students. You will investigate how someone in your community, state, or nation gets elected for office. You will create a display for the class displaying what you have learned.

Select one of the following offices as the subject of your investigation:

Mayor

City Council Member

District Court Judge

School Board Member

Governor

State Legislator

President of the United States

Representative or Senator

Your display should include the following information:

- Duties of the office
- Qualifications needed to fill the position
- How a person is nominated to be a candidate for the position
- How a candidate gets on the ballot in your community or state
- How a candidate pays for his or her campaign
- Who are the people who worked to help get the candidate elected
- A brief description of recent candidates for the office (include two or three issues that were important during the campaign)
- An explanation of who won the election and why

Your display should include the following material:

- A chart showing the steps the candidate had to follow to get elected
- A campaign poster (you may draw your own)
- A cartoon which shows one of the issues during the campaign (you may draw your own)
- Any photographs or newspaper articles that discuss the campaign
- A sample ballot, if you can find one

Present your display to the class

- Your presentation should include a five to 10 minute discussion about what you learned about being a candidate for this office
- You should explain the charts, photographs, and other material you included in your display
- All the members of your group should participate in the presentation
- You may want to invite parents and people from your community to be part of the audience for your presentation

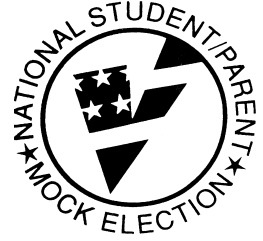
Evaluate your participation in the project

When you finish your project, you and the members of your group should take some time to reflect on your experience. What did you do well? What were some of the problems you encountered in gathering information and in preparing your display? The next time you participate in a similar project, what might you do differently?

Note: The contents of this guide were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Please photocopy for all participating teachers.

EVALUATION RESPONSE FORM



Name of School _____

School District _____

School Level: Elementary Middle or Junior High Secondary

Population of School (Number of Students) _____

Mailing Address of School _____

Name of Teacher _____

Class Level(s)/Grade(s) _____

Number of Students in Class(es) _____

What were the principal ideas and bits of information the students seem to have learned from their participation in the Mock Election? What were the difficulties?
