

Unit 3: The Political Process "Political Parties"

LESSON 1

The Meaning of Political Parties

Objectives: To introduce students to the concept of political parties.
To engage students in an experience with their parents or grandparents to explore the meaning of political parties in their relatives' lives.

Materials: Dictionaries, chart paper, markers.

Procedure:

- Have students research and then discuss the meanings of the following terms: democracy, political parties, symbols, convention, platform. (Note to the teacher: Be sure to discuss the different meanings of "party.")
- Make up a questionnaire with the students so they can interview their parents or grandparents about the political party to which they belong. Examples – to which party do you belong? why did you join this party? what beliefs do the members of your party share in common? what symbol represents your party? which elections do you remember best? what was important about them?
- Have students report back to classmates the results of their interviews.
- Encourage students to watch a TV news report with parents that focuses on election issues and respond to the experience. Was there any mention of the positions on issues taken by a political party?
- Ask students to discuss with parents:
 - Do the different parties always completely disagree with each other or do they know of times when they agree with each other about some questions but not about other? (e.g. both Democrats and Republicans agree that education must be improved but disagree about how best to improve it.)
 - Do the different parties sometimes cooperate for the common good? When? (e.g. Bipartisan support for a declaration of war.)
- Share parents' responses with the class.

LESSON 2

How Do Political Parties Work?

Objectives: To involve students in acquiring knowledge about the political parties in the United States.

To discover how political parties can influence government.

Materials: Encyclopedias – books as well as CD-ROMS (Grolier's, Encarta).

Procedure:

- Have students work in cooperative learning groups to do research on the Democratic or Republican Party (or Libertarian or other third parties). One student can look up the origins of the particular party; several can delve into the history of the party and the party platform; another can report on Presidents of the party; still another can do research on the symbols of the Democratic, Republican or third parties; another can report on how a party seeks to influence the government.
- Each child will prepare and deliver an oral report on that aspect of the party about which he or she did research.

LESSON 3

Creating Political Parties

Objective: To give students an opportunity to create political parties for their class.

Materials: Chart paper or chalkboard, paper, pencils.

Procedure:

- Brainstorm names for political parties for the class. Limit to no more than three parties. Choose symbols and write platforms. What would each party like to see the class do? Have each party include in its platform a commitment to some form of community service. For example, party members can volunteer to remove graffiti from bathroom walls, clean up the playground, volunteer to read a story to younger students.

LESSON 4
Registering with a Political Party

Objective: To register students to vote with the party of their choice. (This activity can be done in conjunction with Lesson 2 and/or 3.)

Materials: Alphabetical lists of students' names to be used as party registration forms, individual registration cards made from index cards.

Procedure:

- Have each student decide to which party s/he chooses to belong.
- Type students' names in alphabetical order on the student registration form.
- Have each registering student sign his or her name in the registration column. Indicate which party has been chosen in the student's presence. (Keep this form to be used on the day of the class election.)
- Explain that students are not required to register with a party in order to vote, but they must register if they wish to help choose the party's candidate.
- Register those who do not want to be members in any party as "independent."

LESSON 5
Preparing for Party Conventions in Which Candidates
for Class President are Nominated

Objectives: To involve students in the analysis of characteristics and qualities that a good (class) president should possess.
To examine the responsibilities of a position of authority.

Materials: Experience chart.

Procedure:

- Ask students to think about what qualities and characteristics the President of the U.S., governor of their state or the mayor of a town or city should have as the "Chief Executive." What are the limitations of the position of leadership? How will the role of the class president differ from the role of the monitor? from the role of the President of the U.S.? of a governor or mayor? How might it be the same?
- Identify qualities leaders should have such as:
 - commitment to the values and principles of constitutional democracy
 - respect for the rights of others
 - ability to work with others
 - reliability or dependability
 - courage
 - honesty
 - ability to be fair
 - intelligence
 - willingness to work hard
 - special knowledge or skills
- Elicit the attributes students want their class president to have.
- Record the students' ideas on the chart paper. (Keep the experience chart so the students can refer to it when they hold the nominations.)
- Ask the students to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each party's candidates in terms of the qualifications required for a leadership role such as Class President.

LESSON 6
Participating in a Party Convention

Objective: To allow the students to participate in a simulated party convention at which they nominate candidates for class president.

Materials: Poster boards, oak tag, button-making paraphernalia, T-shirts.

Procedure:

- Tell the students that they are going to hold their party conventions. (They will participate in the convention of the party for which they previously registered.)
- Assign an area in the classroom in which each party can meet.
- Have each party vote for their candidate for class president. (Do the students want this to be a secret ballot? Why? Why not?)
- During the course of the next few weeks have each party create posters, placards, slogans, buttons, T-shirts, campaign brochures, bumper stickers in support of their party's candidate.
- Encourage the students to actively campaign for their party's candidate during recess or at other appropriate times.

LESSON 7
Preparing for the Candidates' Forum or Debate

Objective: To actively engage students in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of candidates.

Procedure: • Have students watch TV with a parent or look through local newspapers with a parent to find articles relating to the election in which candidates either debate each other or state opposing viewpoints on issues.

Discuss:

- Do the candidates identify the party they represent?
- Do the candidates attack each other, or do they show respect for each other?
- Do the candidates display a commitment to the values and principles of constitutional democracy?
- Do the candidates discuss the issues reasonably and fairly or do they avoid the issues?
- Create a bulletin board and display the clipped articles.
- Challenge students to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates they have watched or read about in terms of the qualifications required for a particular leadership role.
- Challenge students to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each party's candidate for class president in terms of the qualifications they believe are required.
- Invite each party to privately coach its candidate prior to the Candidates' Forum or Debate.

LESSON 8

Holding the Debate

Objectives: To provide each of the candidates with an opportunity to write and deliver an oral speech in order to persuade their classmates to vote for them.
To give all students an opportunity to develop questions to be used in the debate among the candidates for each party.
To engage students in cooperative learning to achieve a common goal.

Materials: Paper, pencils.

Procedure:

- Organize the class into committees for the following activities. This is an excellent opportunity for the teacher to stress with the students the necessity for cooperation and the manner in which citizens in a democracy have to work together for the common good to get their goals accomplished, i.e., the election of their candidate to office.
- Candidates for each party will prepare an opening statement citing reasons they would be a good class president, and a closing statement summing up their arguments.
- One committee is in charge of the debate – students will establish the rules for the debate, decide how much time each candidate will have to respond to questions and choose a time keeper.
- One committee, comprised of members from each party, will write the questions for the debate.
- One committee will write letters inviting parents to help and/or be the audience for the debate.
- If the teacher believes the class is ready, one committee can write letters to the local press, inviting them to attend the debate.
- Review the steps of decision making with the students.
- Hold the debate.

LESSON 9
"The Election"

Objective: To involve the students experientially in the actual voting process.

Materials: Paper, pencils, markers, cardboard poll box, ballot box.

- Procedure:
- Choose a committee to be the "Election Commission." The "Commission" will help the election judge ensure that voting is conducted in an orderly and timely manner.
 - Have other committees make ballots, including absentee ballots, and the ballot box.
 - Invite parents to be "poll watchers."
 - Have each candidate prepare an acceptance speech.
 - Have each candidate prepare a gracious congratulations to his/her opponent and "thank you" to party supporters to be used by the candidates who do not win.
 - Decorate the polling place with patriotic signs and symbols.
 - Have each student sign his/her name on the registration form and then vote in secret.
 - Have members of the Election Commission count the votes and report the results.
 - Have each student write in their journals or give an oral report on how they felt and what they thought about the experience of voting for a class president, or working cooperatively to help their party's candidate win.
 - Evaluate with the students what role the debate played in their decision.
 - Review the steps students took to arrive at their decision.