

Guaranteeing the Privileges of Citizenship to all Americans: A Problem Worth Solving

A Teacher's Guide to Election Reform

**“The right to vote is the right upon which all other rights depend”
Thomas Paine**

UNIT OVERVIEW:

Nancy Matthews, former Social Studies Supervisor for the State of Utah has written,

“How Americans vote and who is able to vote are critical issues. One hundred five million Americans voted in the Presidential Election of 2000 in the United States, but 57 percent experienced problems at the voting booth, only pointing the finger more directly that the system of electing people to represent citizens needs to be overhauled. As a result 6 million voters (this figure has been set between 3 and 6 million by various sources) were disenfranchised on November 7, 2000. Is massive election reform necessary to ensure everybody in America is treated fairly in the election process? There exists a pathetic and tragic situation in this country today and election reform is badly needed to ensure Americans' votes count. Fraudulent elections didn't happen only in the 2000 Presidential election or in only one State. Poorly conducted elections are occurring in all 50 states, some worse than others and they have been going on for years. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was to ensure everyone in the United States the opportunity to vote but did not guarantee equal opportunity or quality. Everybody who is a citizen who is duly registered and entitled to vote in his or her state ought to have the opportunity to vote but only one vote. Yes, we want our citizens registered and if they are a legal voter whether they are in a wheelchair, visually impaired, or have other physical challenges, despite the fact that they may be older or not as strong and as able, they have the right to vote and they have a right to have their vote counted, and they have a right to the kind of equipment and technology that is available that makes sure those voted are counted and certified. America needs an easy, accurate way to register and to vote for every citizen.”

This unit provides students with the opportunity to evaluate the current U.S. election procedures. Students will make judgments about the necessary changes to make voting fair, equal, and an accurate opportunity for all Americans.

* This guide was prepared by Nancy Matthews, former Social Studies Supervisor for the State of Utah and the staff of the National Student/Parent Mock Election.

UNIT OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Understand the current U.S. election process
- Analyze the person(s) responsible for voting precincts
- Examine current voting booth technology
- Explore the problems to be solved in regard to the guaranteed privileges of citizenship to all Americans
- Make proposals to their respective legislative representatives in an attempt to change the election process before the next Presidential election
- Becoming involved in the Mock Election as well as the actual election process
- Research what is being done/not being done across the country in regard to election reform
- Write model legislation to share with legislators

TIME REQUIRED:

The teacher will wish to have this unit's time frame structured to meet the needs and interests of the class. Optional credit assignments are suggested at the teacher's discretion.

SUGGESTED MATERIALS:

American history textbook or American government text

Videos – Some suggestions are:

- o CNN – Election 2000 (2001)
- o Just the Facts – The Election Process in America (2002)
- o Web Sites – Viewed in Real Player format

~~///~~ http://www.reformelections.org/hearings/h4/h4_video.php

~~///~~ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/elections2000/recount/front.htm> (Many newspapers and news magazines have links on their Web sites with video clips concerning election reform.)

~~///~~ <http://www.cato.org/events/020619pfb.html>

Readings/Handouts (Note: All press releases in this Teacher's Guide are reprinted as Student Handouts, as is the Senate/House Comparison of Election Reform legislation.)

Current newspapers and news magazines

Internet access for current information

Note to teachers: The American University Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies has created a resource guide to help teachers teach their students about elections. Please visit their Web site www.american.edu/academic.depts/spa/ccps/index.html and look under New at CCPS TV to see the article “Bringing the 2002 Elections into Your Teaching” by James Thurber & Robin Kolodny. Another site to visit is: <http://www.suntimes.com/index/elect.html>.

VOCABULARY:

reform
disenfranchisement
fraud
absentee ballot
provisional voting
pregnant, dangling chads
Motor Voter Act
accessibility
uniformity
apparatus
error rates
residual votes
over-voting/under voting