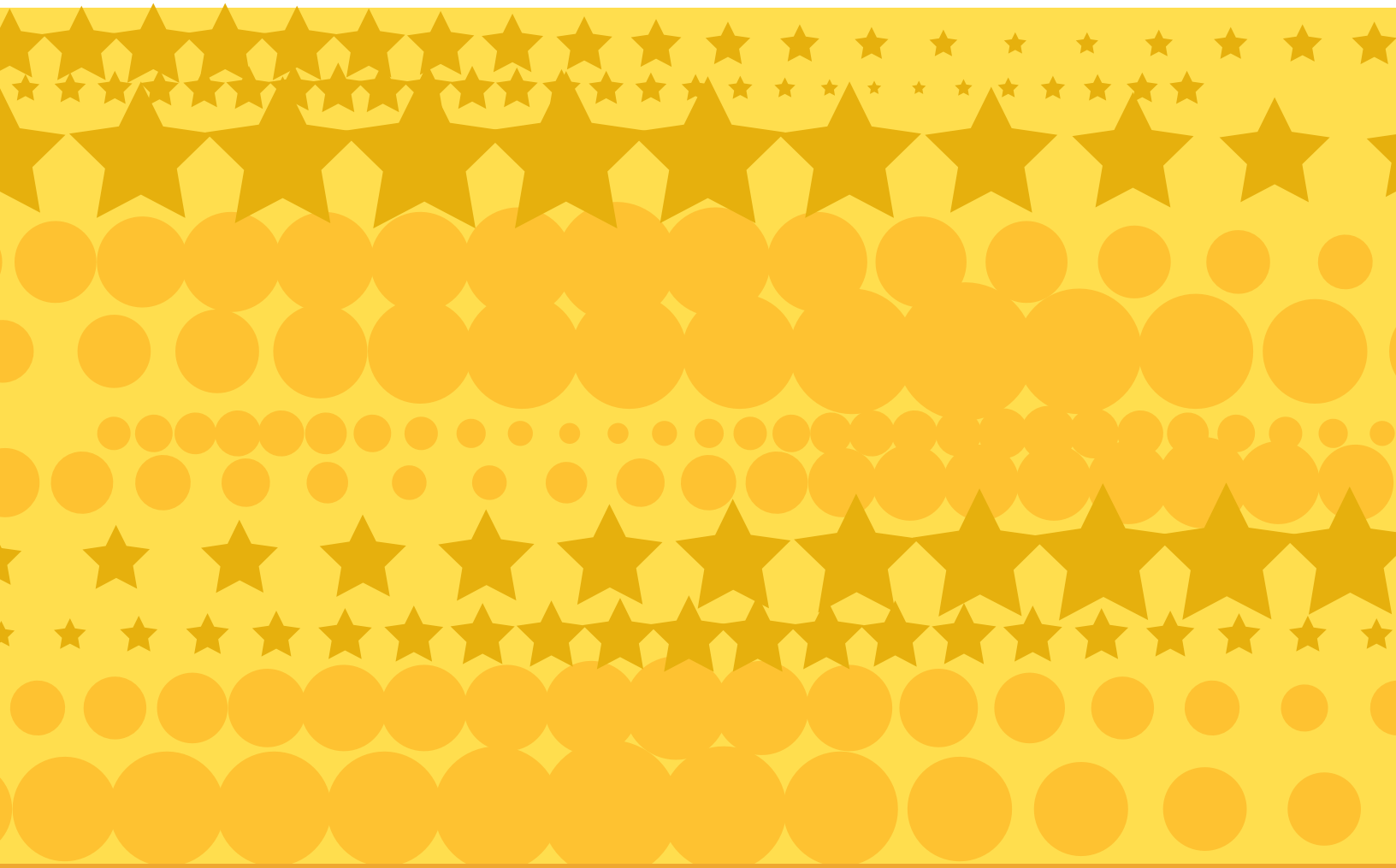
Civics and Government

for Future Voters

Grades k - 4



Free lesson plans provided by the Office of the Secretary of State

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These free lesson plans are provided for your K - 4 classroom by the Office of the Secretary of State.

Each lesson builds on the previous lesson, but there is no reason you can't pick and choose to suit your needs. Subjects covered, an overview and the EALRs are listed as well as the materials you'll need and an estimated time to complete.

Some discussions and activities are geared toward kindergartners and some are more appropriate for 3rd or 4th graders.

Fairness and Diversity with One Vote Lesson 1 of 5

Grades	k - 4
Subjects	Fairness, decision making, voting
Overview	Engaging students in discussion about opinions as a way to help them with higher order thinking skills.
EALRs	1.1.1; 1.1.2
Material needed	1 piece of white paper sheets of 3 additional colors scissors tape
Time required	30 minutes
Discussion	Ask students to discuss what it means to be fair. Ask for examples of their personal experiences where something wasn't fair. ("My little brother gets away with things that I get punished for." "A few students misbehaved, and we all missed recess.") What if one group of people thinks something is fair, and another group thinks it isn't? What is the best way to decide? Voting is a way to decide what most of the people want. It doesn't mean that one group is right and the other is wrong. It just means that more people choose "A" than choose "B." Ask students what kind of voting could occur in the classroom to ensure that everyone is treated fairly. For example, could students vote on where they sit, on what activities/games they play during recess, etc.? Mention that in Washington people who break the law by committing serious crimes (felonies) lose their right to vote. Ask students if they believe this is fair. Would it be fair to tell a student who misbehaves repeatedly that he/she has lost the right to vote on classroom issues? Should there be a way to earn back your voting privilege? Why or why not? Say to students: Today we are going to pretend the cafeteria is changing its menu. But what is the fairest way to decide what we should eat for lunch? We are going to conduct a poll to find out your favorite foods. When I call on you, tell us what your favorite food is. Put this list on the board and discuss the differences. You may have students from different cultures (and food preferences) in your classroom. If not, you might ask your students to pretend for a moment they are from other countries or cultures. What might their favorite foods be if they lived in Mexico or Japan? Alternatively, select something that you'll actually let your students choose: what game is played in class, what book is read, etc.

Activity

Make paper chains to tabulate results of a poll.

Distribute colored strips of construction paper 2 inches wide and 9 inches long to each student.

Select three common favorite foods such as ice cream, pizza, and chocolate. Write these foods across the board with space between the words. Create one link of a chain with white paper (to distinguish it from student votes) and fasten it to the board as a starting link for the paper chain. Do this under each of the 3 foods on the board.

The strips of paper represent the student's votes. Have the students attach their strip of paper one at a time to the chain under the food that is their favorite.

After all the students have had a turn, they will be able to see a visual representation of the class's favorite foods. Ask questions such as, "Which food do most students in our class prefer?" and "How is this activity similar to voting for Mayor or Governor?" and "Would this method work if we were trying to decide on a class snack?"

The Future is in the Voters' Hands Lesson 2 of 5

Grades	k - 4
Subjects	Community, local issues, perspectives, cause and effect
Overview	Discuss elements of community and how things could be different.
EALRs	1.1.2; 1.4.1
Material needed	Paper for drawing activity 1 or 2 Worksheet on page 4 for each student Dry beans or pasta, beads or pennies, etc for each student
Time required	30-60 minutes
Discussion	Discuss the local community. How do schools, parks, roads, police departments, fire departments, and hospitals contribute to the community? How would the community change if these things didn't exist? If you could improve your community, what would you do? What can you do to improve your schools and parks? All of these services are run by someone chosen by the community. The community gets to decide who the best person is for the job, and how much money to spend on each service. We make these decisions by voting. When people vote their vote directly influences schools, parks, roads, police departments, fire departments, and hospitals. How can people learn about what is going on in their community?
Activity 1	Give students white paper. Have them draw a picture of their community with schools, parks, roads, police and fire departments, and hospitals. On the reverse side of the paper, have the student draw what it might be like without some of these things.
Activity 2	Have students draw a picture of themselves doing something to help their community such as obeying laws, going to jury duty or voting.
Activity 3	Create your county budget! Distribute 30 beans to each student as well as a copy of page 5. Have each student divide the beans up according to how much money each department should receive. Ask, how much money should each community service receive?

County Budget

Roads and transportation	Schools
Public health clinics	Parks and recreation
Elections	Waste management
Police and courts	Fire department

Many Good Ideas but Only One Vote Lesson 3 of 5

Grades	k - 4
Subjects	Rights and responsibilities, local issues, public good, government's role
Overview	Students are exposed to voting as a way to solve problems.
EALRs	1.1.2; 1.2.2; 1.4.1
Material needed	Paper for secret ballots
Time required	60 minutes; ongoing
Discussion	Discuss school levies/bond issues. Some people vote for them, others vote against them. Ask, "Why would a person vote for a school issue?" "Why would someone vote against it?" Ask students what they would say to a person who remarks, "I don't vote for school improvements because I don't have any children," or "I don't vote for improved highways because I don't drive," or "I'm going to vote against money for the library because I never use it." These questions, and others like them, can be used to generate discussions about responsibilities of community members, and voting "for the common good." Discuss the difference between public servants who are elected (e.g., mayors, council members, school board members) and those who are not (firefighters, police officers, and teachers.) Help students understand that elected officials have tremendous influence over those who are not. How does a school board election affect what goes on in your classroom? It was elected officials who decided that Washington State should have the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP). What do students think about this? Ask, "If you were an elected official, would you vote for the MSP? Why or why not?"
Activity 1	Ask students to identify a problem at school (e.g., littering, fighting, bullying) that they would like to see improved. Divide them into small groups and ask them to come up with their best idea for a solution to the problem, and to present it to the class. Each group should be prepared to field questions from other class members. Have a discussion about why secret ballots are important. They grant privacy and allow people to vote without fear of political reprisal. When all the groups have presented, distribute secret ballots and ask students to "vote" for the solution they believe will best solve the problem. When the results have been tallied, lead a discussion about why students voted as they did. Ask them if they could support the "winner" even if they didn't vote for it.
Activity 2	Early in the school year, tell students that the class will be holding a number of votes during the year. Plan to vote on questions such as "Will we read this book or that book?" Ask students to register to vote, and remind them frequently that they are registered voters. When a new student joins the class, make sure one of the students helps him/her register to vote. Have a discussion about why registration is an important part of voting in the adult world. During the various class "votes" during the year, look for opportunities to show how only one or two votes can make a difference in the outcome. If a student knows that he/she will be absent during a vote, issue an absentee ballot and ask the student to bring their ballot in advance but keep their vote secret.

Citizens are the Community Lesson 4 of 5

Grades	k - 4
Subjects	Equality, civic rights, perspectives, diversity
Overview	Students learn about the history of voting and how different people vote for different things
EALRs	1.1.1; 1.1.2
Material needed	
Time required	Two 30 minute sessions
Discussion	Talk with students about who has been able to vote throughout our history. In the beginning, only "free men" could vote. Women have been able to vote only since 1910 in Washington State and 1920 in the entire nation. (This could be a good place to talk about suffragettes who marched and protested in order to get the vote; these are people who made a difference.) It has been only since the 1960s that African-Americans in many states have been able to vote. This might also be a good time to introduce the concepts of civil rights and women's suffrage For more information, you may download educational posters on this topic at www.vote.wa.gov . Click on the "Resources" tab and then click on "Posters." Ask students what difference it would make in an election if only men could vote? Only women? Only white people? Only people of color? Only young people? Only senior citizens? Only people of a certain religion? How do they think the results might differ?
Activity 1	Ask students to conduct polls of their fellow students, parents, or others in the community. Consider letting students vote to determine the appropriate questions. Examples include: Were you born in this state? Are you a registered voter? Do you like to eat spaghetti? Do you think the speed limit should be changed? Do you think our city needs a petting zoo. When they have completed their polling and the results are in, lead a class discussion about the results. What does this tell us about our school or community? What differences might you expect between a community where nearly everyone was born there, and one in which nearly everyone moved there from somewhere else?
Activity 2	Draw a picture of people voting. Remember, in our state we vote by mail. The pictures will be of people sitting at their kitchen tables with their ballots, talking things over with their families, putting their ballots in their mail box, or dropping them in a ballot drop box.

Next Steps Lesson 5 of 5

Grades	k - 4
Subjects	Functions of government, voting as a duty
Overview	Students learn about the many elements of community that are affected by government.
EALRs	1.2.2; 1.4.1
Material needed	Paper for drawing
Time required	20 minute discussion & student reports
Discussion	Discuss how voting has had an impact on ideas that affect the way we live today. When appropriate, include voting done in Congress, in state legislatures, in state and federal courts, and in local jurisdictions. Examples: Laws passed in Congress and state legislatures determine how much we pay for gas; a close U.S. Supreme Court vote determined that George W. Bush should be our president; state legislatures vote on how much money schools should get and how much teachers should be paid; in some communities, officials vote on the height of buildings, how many houses can be built on a lot, and even the colors that can be used to paint houses; and in farming communities, votes determine price supports and subsidies. Ask students to think about what our world would be like if there were no elections. How would decisions be made? Ask students if they have voted on anything, e.g., a major league all-star team, a club officer, the captain of an athletic team, what is for dinner. How did they decide on how to vote? List their reasons on the board. Point out that people vote for many different reasons, and they are all important.
Activity 1	Have students draw a map of their neighborhood or town and draw on the map all the things that the government does. Examples: roads, school, fire house, city hall, court, clean air/water, hospital.
Activity 2	Ask students to give brief oral reports giving an example of why it is important to their community that they vote when they turn 18.