

Why Voting Matters

This section offers activities (each of which takes 10-15 minutes) that can be used independently or in conjunction with each other and existing lesson plans.

Goals: Students will explore and articulate their personal connection to voting and the role of voting in democracy.

Discussion: Exploring the Importance of Voting

Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Sticky Notes or Class Discussion Forum

- 1) Ask students to think about one (or more) of the following questions/prompts:
 - As a potential professional in the field of insert field here, the policies that elected officials develop impact me because _____.
 - Voting is an essential element of democracy because _____.
 - Why might someone take voting for granted? Or choose not to vote?
 - How much do you agree with the following statement? "Being concerned with national, state, and local issues is an important responsibility for everybody."¹
 - Why is voting important to you? To the campus community? To the state? To the nation? Why is it important globally?
- 2) Students write their thoughts on sticky notes and stick them on a wall OR write them (preferably anonymously) in an online classroom chat/forum.
- 3) Debrief
 - Did any comments surprise or resonate with anyone?
 - Select a few responses to read and discuss with the class
 - Have students volunteer their own thoughts about why voting is important

Overview: A Brief History of Voting Rights

Adapted from [Turn Up Turnout curriculum](#) from University of Michigan.

Time: 5-15 minutes

Materials: PowerPoint (optional)

- 1) Introduce timeline of voting rights OR a short video of voting rights history. Not all U.S. citizens have always had the right to vote. (3 minutes)
- 2) Acknowledge that even today not every U.S. citizen has the right to vote.
 - Some states permit those convicted of a felony to vote and others do not. Some states allow incarcerated citizens to vote, some after they finish probation, and in some states only a governor or court may restore suffrage. Include your state's restrictions.
 - Citizens of Washington, D.C. cannot vote for U.S. Congress.
 - Even though laws change, many barriers remain to exercising the right to vote. There are many instances of voter suppression.

¹ *This research supports that open discussion of societal issues promoted intention to vote among adolescents.* Joseph Kahne; David Crow, and Nam-Jin Lee. "Different pedagogy, different politics: High school learning opportunities and youth political engagement." *Political Psychology* 34.3 (2013): 419-441.

- Immigration status is a barrier: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and undocumented residents cannot vote and permanent residents (green card holders) cannot vote in federal elections.

Current Events: What Issue do You Care About?

Materials: None

Time: 10-15 minutes

- 1) Prior to class tell students to bring a current event article (from a reputable source) about an issue they care about. This article is ideally discipline-related. Instruct them to find out at least one elected official's stance on this issue.
- 2) In-class discussion:
 - Split students into small groups or pairs and discuss their article/issue, what they learned, and why voting will make an impact on this issue.
 - Alternatively, this can be a reflection paper assignment.

Interactive Game: Who's Voice Matters More?

Materials: Paper

Time: 15-20 minutes

- 1) Write the numbers 1, 2, and 3 on paper. Randomly hand them to three student volunteers. Have the rest of the class be the "judges."
- 2) Have the three students sit in the front of the class and explain their opinion on an issue. This issue can be apolitical, for example, "which are better, turtles or tortoises?" They will each have 1 minute to explain their stance/opinion. However, the person who received the #1 paper can speak uninterrupted. The person who received #2 can speak, but can be interrupted by #1. The person who received #3 can speak interrupted by #1, #2, or anyone in the audience.
- 3) Have the audience vote on whose opinion was best articulated.
- 4) Debrief:
 - The activity relates to voting: As a society, we minimize lower status. We only want to hear people who have the most privilege, represented by #1.
 - In the voting booth, we are all equal.

Alternative version: Increase the numbers handed out and vary the rules accordingly. This can also be adapted in small groups.

Using Your "Whole Vote"

Materials: This [Forbes Article](#)

Time: 10-15 minutes

- 1) Have students read the article, "Why Should College Students – Or Anyone Else – Bother Voting?" This can be done ahead of class, by themselves, or out loud.
- 2) Reflect on the idea of the whole vote.

- What was interesting about this article? What resonated with you? Was there anything that you disagreed with?
- The article states, “just showing up matters” – in what ways is this true? Not true?

Other points: Even if your candidates do not win, what are the advantages of high voter turnout?

Supplemental videos (optional):

Brief History of Voting - [New York Times: A History of Voting Rights](#) (time: 3:19)

Why others vote: UConn Students - [I am a Voter](#) (time: 0:59) (*consider searching your college’s media archives or social media pages for a similar video*).

The Love Vote - Videos of people who can’t vote sharing stories urging others to vote on their behalf - [The Love Vote](#) (time: varies)

Ted-ED - [The fight for the right to vote in the United States](#) (time: 4:31)

Supplemental Reading:

[NPR Article](#) (10/2018) Why Every Vote Matters — The Elections Decided By A Single Vote (Or A Little More)

Presentation Tips:

- Use phrases that normalize voting and concentrate on the positive.² Examples: “Thousands on campus came out to vote last year. Join the movement.”
- On the converse, stay away from graphs and statistics depicting low student turnout. An undesirable norm negatively impacts voting outcomes For example, avoid phrasing like “most students don’t vote, so you should.”

² From Ideas42: D.J. Neri, Jess Leifer, and Anthony Barrows, “Graduating Students into Voters” (April 2016), <http://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/StudentsintoVoters.pdf>.