

Assemble

Teaching Civics in an Election year



A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

From the founding of the republic, the United States has sought to live up to the ideal of a “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” It’s an ideal that requires a citizenry with the initiative and drive to arm themselves with knowledge of our civic institutions and the power the American people hold.

Teaching the foundations of American government and the democratic process is essential to building an active future citizenry with engaged and informed voters.

This toolkit will help you examine the importance of civic participation in the democratic process and the investigation of problem solving in society. We hope it provides you the tools necessary to support students in modeling the participation and deliberation of civic duties in the “teachable moment” of this election year.



myarkansaspbs.org/civics

STEP ONE

ELECTION BALLOTS

Create election ballots using this [editable document](#).

STEP TWO

INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS

Introduce the project to your students. Here are some introductory questions to help get started:

1. What is the role of a citizen during an election cycle?
2. How can citizens inform themselves about issues that are important to them or their communities?
3. How can citizens learn about where candidates stand on important issues?
4. How are political campaigns important to the democratic process?
5. How do the issues discussed during a campaign and election cycle relate to issues that are important in our lives and the lives of those in our community? Topics to focus on can include, but are not limited to:
 - Education
 - The Environment
 - The Economy
 - Foreign Policy
 - Civil Rights
 - Health Care

Doing this virtually? Use Zoom or another type of video platform to engage with your students in a face-to-face discussion. If video isn't an option for you, consider having students answer this in a forum or in a discussion assignment created in Google Classroom, Moodle, Canvas, or other LMS platform your district is utilizing.

STEP THREE

iSideWith

iSideWith is a website focused on finding and building new ways to boost voter engagement and education. The site has a quiz that provides questions on social issues, environmental issues, economics, education, and other election cycle topics. After answering “yes,” “no,” or “other stances” to each question, the website uses an algorithm to predict which candidates you side with the most and at what percentage. It is incredibly educational and will allow the students to see who they truly side with based on their individual beliefs and opinions rather than stances influenced by the media or their peers.

Important Tips

- Encourage students to use the “learn more” feature to start to become more informed on issues as they take the quiz.
- It’s best if students can access this themselves and show/send proof of completion. This helps students answer honestly and with less pressure from their peers.
- If your district has this website blocked, you may wish to research alternative websites that provide information on how the candidates side with election cycle topics.
- If time allows, analyze and record the results of how your students side (just the data, no student names or information). It’s fun to compare to the actual mock election results. Will students vote based on policy, or will they vote according to how they feel they are supposed to vote?

STEP FOUR

POLICY DEBATE

Now that students have a base understanding of major election cycle topics, it's important to ask them what they'd like to know more about and help them see the complexities of these issues and consider what their stances would be if they were in a position of power.

Provide a list of more nuanced policy debate topics for students to research, such as these potential topics from the [National Speech & Debate Association's website](#):

- "In a democracy, voting ought to be compulsory."
- "The United States ought to guarantee universal child care."
- "A public health emergency justifies limiting civil liberties."
- "The United States should adopt a declaratory nuclear policy of no first use."

Then, have students choose a topic (or guide them in creating their own). Topics should provide the opportunity to gather an abundance of research on either side of the resolution. After students have researched a topic important to them, you may wish to have them complete any/all the following activities:

- *Either Face-to-Face or Virtually*: Have students research and debate policy positions like they would if they were candidates running for office.
- *Face-to-Face*: Try a center/rotation approach. Group students into multiple groups, and have them answer related policy questions from the perspective of a potential candidate on large Post-It's or butcher paper.
- *Virtually*: Consider creating a Google Document with listed topics and/or questions and a table for students to fill in from the perspective of a candidate answering questions on policy decisions.
- *Follow-Up Activity*: Students may wish to retake the quiz at iSideWith in order to see if their candidate of choice has changed now that they have done more research.

STEP FIVE

MOCK ELECTION

Using the personalized election ballots, set up a “voting station” in your classroom for privacy, much like a real election.

Doing this virtually? Allow students to edit their ballots and send to you.

STEP SIX

ELECTORAL COLLEGE

To illustrate the process of the Electoral College, we encourage you to let your students vote for “electors” to represent their class, grade, group, etc. (much like a state) in the final election vote. Depending on the size of each class or group of students, assign a certain number of Electoral College votes.

■ *Please Note:* This part will be up to you to decide what grouping works best for your students, class, and school district. Have fun with it! It won’t be fair in the eyes of the students, and that’s an easy way to lead into a discussion on society’s debate about the Electoral College.

In class, briefly cover the basics of the Electoral College, its purpose, and its role in the election. Allow students to nominate themselves or someone else. Encourage students to be in agreement on the chosen representatives. Explain to them how many Electoral College votes are needed for a candidate to win.

After you have compiled the results of the Mock Election, share those results with the chosen representatives. The representatives then have the opportunity to vote according to the popular vote of their “constituents” or they can choose to become a “faithless voter” and vote a different way.

STEP SEVEN

ELECTION DAY

We encourage you to show a multitude of election day coverage if admissible by your school district. It's important for students to view a wide variety of sources and analyze similarities and differences among the coverage from different news media organizations.

Can't show the coverage? Encourage students to view it on their own.

STEP EIGHT

THE DAY AFTER COVERAGE

This discussion may be the most important. Lead your students in a discussion to summarize all they have learned through the process. Allow students to express their thoughts and feelings and ask any questions they may have – even ones you may not be able to answer.

- *Tip:* Start the class by asking your students to show a “Thumbs Up/Down/Sideways” to indicate their initial reaction to the results of the real election.

STEP NINE

CONCEPT MAPPING

Have your students complete a concept map to conclude the project. You can have it started with an “Election 2020” bubble and two arrows pointing to “Voting Process” and “Candidates.” This will help students to start filling in the blanks about information they learned and help them make connections to other big concepts.

ARKANSAS RESOURCES

- **AR-CAN – The Arkansas Citizens Access Network:** The Arkansas Citizens Access Network (myarkansaspbs.org/arcan) provides unprecedented access to state government, giving Arkansas citizens a front row seat to legislative proceedings, board and commission meetings, and other government hearings and activities. The website is dedicated to livestreaming Arkansas state government events and meetings and serves as an important educational tool, allowing students to see their government at work while learning about public affairs and civic responsibility. AR-CAN is presented by Arkansas PBS.
- **Arkansas PBS Election Coverage:** Get to know the Arkansas candidates and their stances on important issues with the “Arkansas PBS Debates,” held each October during election years. In addition to keeping viewers informed about the candidates, Arkansas PBS also produces a program on proposed ballot initiatives. Debates and ballot initiatives are broadcast, livestreamed and available on demand. Learn more at myarkansaspbs.org/elections. Tune in to “PBS NewsHour,” “FRONTLINE” and other PBS programming for the latest in national election coverage. Visit myarkansaspbs.org/schedule for more information.
- **“Arkansas Week”:** Hosted by veteran journalist Steve Barnes, “Arkansas Week” highlights experts discussing issues of concern to Arkansans. “Arkansas Week” airs on Arkansas PBS each Friday at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday at 10 a.m. Episodes are also available at myarkansaspbs.org/arkansasweek, and viewers may sign up for program updates at myarkansaspbs.org/engage. Viewers are welcome to submit suggestions for discussion topics by email at paffairs@myarkansaspbs.org, on Facebook or on Twitter with #ARWeek.
- **myarkansaspbs.org/parents:** Arkansas PBS believes that parents are a child’s first teacher. Read our blog, sign up for our newsletters, and find resources from Arkansas PBS, PBS and PBS KIDS to help you on your parenting journey at myarkansaspbs.org/parents.
- **myarkansaspbs.org/educators:** Arkansas PBS is here to help support educators and education here in Arkansas. Read our blog, sign up for our newsletters, and access resources to impact student achievement at myarkansaspbs.org/educators.



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [PBS LearningMedia Election Central](#): Voting and elections are an essential part of democracy. Keep up with election news, study the history and process of presidential elections, explore voting rights, and engage in classroom debates with these videos, activities, and lesson plans.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Dimension 1 – Questions

- Construct compelling questions that promote inquiry around key ideas and issues.
- Answer compelling and supporting questions using appropriate and available sources that consider multiple points of view.

Dimension 3 – Sources and Evidence

- Gather relevant information from multiple perspectives and a variety of sources; evaluate the credibility of the source by determining its relevance and intended use.
- Use evidence from multiple sources to answer compelling and supporting questions by developing arguments with claims and counterclaims and providing explanations.

Dimension 4 – Communicating Ideas

- Use disciplinary lenses within the social science to understand local, regional, and global problems, proposing solutions or assessing strategies and options for action while applying deliberative processes.

Civics 9-12

Strands

■ Civic and Political Institutions

- Students will analyze the roles of government and the political institutions in governing and protecting citizens.
- CPI.2.C.4 – Examine ways the powers, responsibilities, and limits of the federal government have changed over time and are still contested.

■ Participation and Deliberation

- Students will analyze the role of citizens in society.
- PD.3.C.1 – Evaluate rights and responsibilities of citizens in the United States.

■ Participation and Deliberation

- Students will analyze the electoral process and the role of political parties.
- PD.5.C.1 – Critique the roles of political parties in the election process.
- PD.5.C.2 – Analyze the election process in federal, state, and local governments.
- PD.5.C.3 – Evaluate various influences on political parties during the electoral process.
- PD.5.C.4 – Assess the influence of media on the electoral process.

Arkansas History 7-8

Strands

Civics and Government

- Students will analyze government and politics in Arkansas.
- CG.5.AH.7-8.3 – Analyze the political process in Arkansas.