

Lesson Title: Down Ballot Voting

Subjects

U.S. Government, Civics

Suggested Time

Two 50-minute class periods

Grade Level

7-12

Essential Question

How important are local elections and ballot measures?

Objectives

Students will:

- Understand the many important positions in state and local government.
- Understand that local elections and ballot measures have a great impact on their lives.
- Analyze the merits of candidates and ballot measures in their local elections.

Overview

Often times, state and local elections are overshadowed by the media's focus on national elections. But it is more often the local officials and laws or ordinances that affect daily life the most. The *We The Voters* film "Hot Tips to Rock the Ballot" explores the importance of down ballot voting—looking beyond the national contestants to the local candidates where most of government's direct impact on people occurs. After viewing the film, students will examine the merits of local candidates and ballot measures.

Materials

- *We The Voters* film, "Hot Tips to Rock the Ballot Booth"
- Copies of Student Handouts:
 - Handout #1: Voting Ballot
 - Handout #2: Down Ballot Investigation
- Voting Ballot Answer Key

Procedure

Opening Activity: Ask students how their day started. List the different things they did to get to school and write their responses on the front board. They should have a list that looks something like this:

- They turned on water for a shower and to brush their teeth. (City or county operate and maintain the water supply.)

- They ate a little breakfast. (State or local health departments make sure the food they eat is safe and properly prepared and packaged.)
- They traveled in a car or on a bus. (Streets and roads are built and maintained by state and local governments. Traffic signs and laws in place to make their journey safe.)
- They arrived at school. (State and local governments fund and operate school systems.)

Now ask students to identify the different ways their state or local government was involved with those actions. What did local government do to make sure those services were delivered or make sure they went smoothly? (Refer to the answers in parentheses.) Ask students what their morning might look like if they didn't have those services.

Main Activity Instructions: Now tell students they're going to take a close look at the state and local government officials who are involved in setting up laws, ordinances, or policies to make government work for the people. Tell students that it's a good idea for voters to know who is running for these positions and the policies they promote so that government operates efficiently, effectively, and by the will of the people. Local candidates and ballot measures often have a much greater impact on daily life than federal officials.

Film Viewing: Divide the class into small groups and distribute Handout #1: Voting Ballot. Have the class watch the *We The Voters* film "Hot Tips to Rock the Ballot Booth." Show the film more than once if necessary. Provide time for students to complete the questions on the handout. Review answers with students using the Voting Ballot Answer Key.

Down Ballot Investigation: Keep students in their small groups. Distribute Handout #2: Down Ballot Investigation to each group. Have students review a current voter's guide for an upcoming election. Voter's guides can be obtained from your state's Secretary of State Office or elections bureau or the local League of Women Voters. Have students work in their groups to review the candidates running in one down ballot race and review one ballot measure. After students have completed their handouts, have them share their findings with the class.

Extension Activity

1. Have students develop their own political campaign for one of the candidates of down ballot positions or one of the ballot measures that they support. Have students start with the information they gathered during the lesson on down ballot races and do a little more research. Have them develop position statements, speeches, commercials, and bumper stickers promoting their candidate or cause. Consider using the *We The Voters* film "We Represent" as inspiration.

Additional Resources

- State Secretaries of State
[https://ballotpedia.org/Secretary_of_State_\(state_executive_office\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Secretary_of_State_(state_executive_office))
- League of Women Voters <http://lww.org/get-involved/local-leagues>
- Voter Registration
http://www.eac.gov/voter_resources/contact_your_state.aspx

Standards

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.6 Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards

D2Civ.4.9-12 Explain how the U.S. Constitution establishes a system of government that has powers, responsibilities, and limits that have changed over time and that are still contested.

D2Civ.5.9-12 Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.

D2Civ.9.9-12 Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings.

D2Civ.14.9-12 Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education)

Standard 17: Understands issues concerning the relationship between state and local governments and the national government and issues pertaining to representation at all three levels of government

Standard 21: Understands the formation and implementation of public policy

Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals