Kids Voting USA
High School Service-Learning Curriculum

The Activities

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTORY LESSON

Democracy: What is it really?

Objective:
Students will internalize the meaning of democracy as a process for individuals and societies.

Estimated time: 2 hours

- Ask students to read the "Democracy: What is it really?" handout.
- Engage the class in discussing what they think democracy is all about. Does the definition of democracy change as you consider governments outside of the U.S.?

Interested students could explore the Human Rights Watch web site to learn more about democracies around the world. (http://www.hrw.org/)

- Have the students read the quotes on the "Democracy in U.S. History" handout. Discuss or look up any vocabulary words with which the students are unfamiliar.
- Tell students that it is important for them to understand how the term democracy and voting are linked. Ask them to describe this linkage and explain how changes in voting requirements over time have modified ideas about the nature of democracy.
- Ask each student to choose one or two quotes that best exemplify his or her views on the nature of democracy. Have students discuss or write a short paper about their views on democracy incorporating the quote(s) they have selected.
- In class, discuss the quotes, the time period or events with which they are associated, and the changing views of democracy they exemplify.
- Give the students the "Democracy as Sport" handout to complete for homework.

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Democracy: What is it really?

Some say democracy means *the majority rules.* Some say it means *freedom* while others claim that it means *rule by the people.* To interpret the word literally we must look back to the ancient Greeks who developed the idea. Linguists often translate "demos" to mean *mob*, and "kratia" to *rule or govern,* but do any of us associate democracy with *mob rule (mobocracy)*? Probably not.

The Greeks conceived of democracy in the context of a relatively small City-State, where citizens could express their views directly on a particular issue. In other words the people could govern themselves without relying on elected leaders to decide matters for them. The small scale of Athens, for example, made it possible for this kind of pure democracy to flourish.

The United States required a type of democracy which placed responsibility for governing in the hands of elected leaders. We call this representative democracy and it has allowed us to address both practical considerations of governing an extended Republic, comprised of numerous States, and certain theoretical concerns about how to mitigate the potential tyranny that is inherent in majority rule.

Representative government doesn't let ordinary citizens off the hook in terms of public policy. Indeed, the legitimacy of representative government depends on the transfer of power that can only occur in democratic terms as a result of an election. This transfer is essential because the people are believed to hold sovereign power, and only through their collective agreement to be governed can the government be empowered to act on behalf of all citizens.

An important, related concept is that we are bound together as citizens by certain core beliefs but beyond these shared beliefs, religious freedom for example—our interests and views can be decidedly different. We use elections to vote for representatives, legislative and executive, who will best represent our interests and views in the process of deciding public policy.

In order for democracy to work well at least four additional conditions must be present. First, all citizens must have equal voting power. This does not mean that they are equally influential. Some, because of wealth, education, natural talent, and willingness to participate responsibly, may have more influence on policymakers. At the polls, however, each person may only have one vote.

Second, all voters must have equal access to information, competing viewpoints, and the ideas of all of the candidates. Free media and strong educational programs are important in this regard. Third, people must be free to organize with others in order to achieve political goals. Persons acting alone are at a disadvantage when trying to make their views known or change policies.

Finally, elections must be decided one way or the other by majorities or at least pluralities. It is also generally thought that majority rule must be constrained by a stated set of minority rights. This responds to the concerns about the possibility of a *mobocracy* developing. Regular elections help as well because they give the minority a chance to organize and try to become a majority.

Democracy is best understood in relation to time, place and circumstances. It is an ongoing social project, one that is still in progress and often seen in different ways by those people who are part of the

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experiment. As people have changed, so have many of our ideas. One of the major issues in the United States and in other nations as well has been to decide on exactly who "the people" are. We usually say that "the people"—those who are sovereign and have the right to vote—must be "citizens." Today most citizens who are over 18 years of age—including men and women of all races and ethnic groups —who meet certain residency requirements and register to vote can do so. It is when they vote that they become sovereign.

All of the people who have the right to vote now have not always had it. When the nation was founded only white male property holders could vote. Some states even limited voting to those who belonged to particular churches. Over the years, voting rights accorded by ownership of property, church membership, color of skin, gender, and other limitations have been done away with. Citizenship has remained a requirement, but there are many today who believe that voting rights should be extended to resident aliens who pay taxes. There are those, as well, who believe that felons who have been released from prison have paid their debt to society and should not be kept off of the voting rolls. Some states have made it easier to register to vote. Same day registration and motor voter registration laws are examples of this trend.

At the same time we hear about people who contend that those who do not vote in a certain number of elections should lose their right to vote. Several groups have proposed laws that would force citizens who do not vote to pay a fine or penalty. Others believe that ballots should be printed only in English, which would keep non-English readers from voting. Voting and the right to vote are related to how democratic a nation really is.

Today over 75 nations claim to have democratic governments. However, opinions vary on just *how* democratic they really are. In 2000, ten nations attended a special conference in Warsaw, Poland, where they initiated an organization known as The Community of Democracies. Among various democratic-related goals the founders stated, "The Community would enable democracies to work together more cohesively, more forcefully and effectively on issues common to democracies."

Their efforts have drawn the attention of another organization called Human Rights Watch, the world-wide defender of people's basic rights. In a letter to The Community of Democracies, Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of HRW, laid out several points of concern in relation to the true democratic nature of some of the Community's members. He asked that the organization not "render its name meaning-less" by allowing nations who are democratic in title only to belong.

Roth reports that the Russian government is controlling a once free press, that Egypt has arrested a democratic reform agent for criticizing election procedures, and that human rights activists in Tunisia have been unfairly detained and deprived of their basic rights. He summarizes the concerns of HRW by urging "the convening states to consult closely with individuals and organizations independent of the government in these countries of concern to determine whether their participation will advance or hinder the cause of democracy." (http://www.hrw.org/)

So, what is a democracy, really? The famed philosopher of government, John Locke, believed that a government should be based on the will of the people. Who are "the people?" What is your will for your democratic government? It is a question we must all answer for ourselves and yet, in true democratic form, perhaps we need to consider others' views too.

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Democracy in U.S. History

1. "An honest man can feel no pleasure in the exercise of power over his fellow citizens."
   – Thomas Jefferson

2. "…call on Almighty God who rules over the universe to help the American people find liberties and happiness under a government instituted by themselves."
   – George Washington

3. "You degrade us and then ask why we are degraded. You shut our mouths and ask why we don't speak. You close your colleges and seminaries against us and then ask why we don't know."
   – Frederick Douglas

4. "The ballot is stronger than the bullet." – Abraham Lincoln

5. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." – Emma Lazarus

6. "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal…Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and insist upon the institution of a new government."
   – Declaration of Sentiments

7. "History has thrust on our generation an indescribable important destiny—to complete a process of democratization which our nation has developed too slow."
   – Martin Luther King Jr.

8. "We propose that he (the President) test the young people of America…let us see what happens if service to democracy is made ground for exemption from the military draft."
   – Students for a Democratic Society

9. "I think it should be the popular vote. I think the electoral vote works in most cases, but this one. I think our new Congress should look at that. The popular vote is how a true democracy should work. I'd like to see the end of the Electoral College."
   – Jeremy Shankel

10. "I can't see why people who have been in prison and have served their sentence cannot vote when they get out. We say that they have paid their debt to society, but some states won't let them vote."
    – Anonymous

11. "September 11 is a day that will live in history because once again it proved that democracy and freedom will prevail…We all feel like true New Yorkers today."
    – Norway's Ambassador to the U.S.

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Democracy as Sport

"A democracy must ask itself a series of questions. What if we held an election and no one showed up at the polls? What if problems emerged and no one took the initiative to put them on the public agenda? What if everyone simply said 'let somebody else do it' and no one did? Abandoning the political arena does not mean that nothing will be done but rather that the agenda and preferences of others will dominate. Politics are controlled by those who take initiative to guide it."

"Democracy is a participatory game of contact and blocking, not a spectator sport. It may be able to survive with some of the population simply cheering from the sidelines or even blissfully unaware that the game is being played. But the number of participants can decline to the degree that democracy exists in name only, since the level of participation declines, so does its representativeness. The fewer the people who get involved, the less likely they are to reflect the concerns of the general population."

– Steven E. Frantzich
Citizen Democracy.
NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.

Directions:
Write your own analogy comparing your understanding of democracy to the sport of your choice. Indicate who you are in the game! Indicate what democratic roles some of the other athletes are playing. And remember that democracy is the process of participation, not the product of it. In other words, it is how the game is played that matters to democracy, not who wins!

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CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Act From the Heart

Objective:
Students will use evidence to emphasize a point, recognize the relationship between goals, action, and outcomes; and demonstrate understanding of different points of view.

Estimated time: 1 hour

- Have students read the "Act from the Heart" handout describing how the Clearys have worked to increase safety on college campuses.
- Have students complete the worksheet on page 7 in class or as a homework assignment.
- As a class, discuss students' answers on the worksheet.
- Ask students to think about and discuss the following question. How did voting play an important role in what the Clearys were able to accomplish?

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Act From the Heart

In 1987, the parents of Jeanne Cleary received an out-of-court settlement from Lehigh University over their lawsuit accusing the school of failing to protect their daughter, who as a freshman, was raped and murdered in her dorm room one year earlier. Using this money, the grieving parents organized a nonprofit information service called *Security On Campus,* with the hope of bringing about awareness of campus violence in the U.S. The Clearys' research showed that 57 violent acts are committed every day at America's colleges and universities and that the governing bodies, (sometimes called Boards of Regents), often used their powers to hide incidents of crimes committed by and against students. Statistics that indicated that as many as one out of 10 women become rape victims during their college years, and the fact that 90% of these crimes involve alcohol, made the Clearys determined to do something. They decided to find a legal way to force colleges to disclose crime information in an effort to reduce campus violence.

They began their work at the state level, realizing that passing a federal law would be especially difficult since it is state laws that deal with most crimes. Colleges are typically state or private institutions that are regulated by the states. By 1988, through fact gathering and lobbying they had their first success. The *Pennsylvania College and University Security Information Act.* was passed by the legislature in that state. Ten more states soon followed with similar laws requiring colleges to report crime statistics. Those who failed to do so were told that they would lose state funding. As each state wrote its own version of the legislation, some even adding criminal charges for failure to disclose information, it became evident that uniform codes would make it easier for the public to understand the data and to put it to use in deciding which schools were safest to attend.

The Clearys pointed out that a federal law would make it possible to compare crime rates across state lines. Since it is necessary that proponents of federal legislation demonstrate the need for state consistency, this fact became significant to their efforts at the national level. In addition, the Clearys also pointed out that if a state did not pass its own information act it could easily become a haven for violent student offenders.

The Clearys found two U.S. senators willing to introduce into Congress a federal bill called the *Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act.* To emphasize its seriousness the federal law would include a penalty limiting federal school funding if a university or college violated the act. Opponents voiced their fear that the government's intervention into higher education institutions would be too costly, might encourage misunderstanding of statistics and might possibly hurt the reputation of the schools involved. In spite of these objections the bill passed unanimously in both houses of the U.S. Congress.

When the U.S. Department of Education threatened schools with loss of federal funds if they *did* comply with the new law and open their police records, opponents of the legislation claimed that such action publicized confidential education records. They also said that the federal government had no right to intrude into state and local matters. In an ensuing two-year battle Congress eventually negated the lobbying effort of the opponents of the law by amending the original bill to declare campus law enforcement records as unprotected, non-confidential education information.

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Through the year 2000, additional amendments have been attached to *The Student Right To Know Bill.*, broadening the reporting of sexual assaults, expanding crime categories, adding hate crimes to the list, and making available information concerning sex offender registration on campus. The Clearys' dream, to ensure that their daughter's life not be in vain, has come true and continues to make college life safer for millions of students across the United States.

Two concerned parents working with friends and allies conducted the research, collected the data, wrote letters to the editor, appeared before the media, contacted legislators first in the state of Pennsylvania, and then in other states and prevailed in getting state laws passed. They learned how the judicial system in the United States works and, citing the need for consistency, convinced members of the Congress of the United States of the validity of their position. They were confronted by powerful interests such as various Boards of Regents, university bureaucracies, and people who dislike federal intervention into state issues. Their diligence and hard work paid off and demonstrates how much power individuals in a democracy have.

For more information concerning Security On Campus go to http://www.campussafety.org or read Citizen Democracy, by Stephen E. Frantzich, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999.

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Act from the Heart worksheet

1. Describe four goals that Connie and Howard Cleary had in mind when organizing their information service, *Security On Campus.*

   a)

   b)

   c)

   d)

2. Define the term lobbyist. Next practice being a lobbyist by writing a paragraph that uses at least three facts to defend the need for campus crime disclosure acts.

3. The Clearys' efforts resulted in a very important federal law. What exactly does this law do? Be sure to include in your answer the amendments made to the law since its first passage.

4. Define the term federalism as it describes our nation's organization of government. Then explain the federalism issue that the Clearys had to overcome to get their law passed.

5. What does this story tell you about what people can accomplish in a democracy?

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CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Choosing an Issue

Objective:
Students research an issue of interest to them and write a report about what they learned.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Ask students to think about and choose a social or political issue that interests them. Possibilities include: crime, drug abuse, teen suicide, teen pregnancy, AIDS, preservation of national wilderness areas, animal rights, etc.

- Have students research the issue in both its local and national contexts through two or more of the following activities:
    - searching the Internet
    - interviewing an expert
    - reading newspaper or magazine articles
    - contacting a community agency or national organization that focuses on the issue

- Have students write a report about what they learned. The report should include information from their research as well as their own opinions and ideas about the issue.
  They should include:
    a) a discussion of the issue and why it is of concern to others
    b) a list of organizations and/or individuals working on this issue
    c) current different approaches to addressing the issue, reflecting opposing positions on the issue
    d) their opinions about the issue including ideas for community service and/or further action
    e) how voting and government action at the local, state, and/or national levels has impacted this issue historically
    f) actions they could take to help bring about this further action

- Have students share what they learned with the rest of the class. Ask each student to highlight in their presentation just the 10 most important points in their reports.

- Following the presentations, have the class discuss the connections they see between the different issues they researched. Students should be instructed to listen for and take notes on these connections during the presentations.

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CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Community Survey

Objective:
Students conduct a survey of adults in the community to find out what they think about an issue and how they have voted on it in the past.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- Decide as a class how many issues students will incorporate in their surveys. Options include:
  - teacher choosing an issue that supports the curriculum
  - class voting on one issue for the whole class to use
  - small groups of 2 to 6 students choosing one of the issues they researched
  - each student developing a survey on just the issue the individual researched
- Have students develop a short list of questions to survey adults in the local community. While students could survey parents, neighbors, or other adults they know; encourage them to seek out adults with expertise on the issue. Questions might include the following:
  - What do you think is the cause of the problem?
  - What do you think is the most promising solution for the problem?
  - Have you ever had the opportunity to vote on something related to this issue? If yes, how did you vote?

This survey activity and others like it in this curriculum are designed for students to collect community opinions about a topic. They do not provide random sample, quantitative data. However, students should be encouraged to consider the numbers and demographics of those surveyed. They should also attempt to develop questions that are neutral and do not bias the responders in one direction or another.

- Students could also include in their surveys a hypothetical initiative on the issue. Have them ask those they survey how they would vote on this initiative if they were lawmakers.
- Have students conduct the surveys with an agreed upon number of adults as a homework assignment.

If time is an issue, have all of the students survey adults on one issue. Each student can survey just one or two adults and then the data can be collated.

- After students bring their survey results back to class, have them create graphs and charts and/or share their data with the class.
- Discuss what students learned about others' views on societal issues and how surveys and voting may impact these issues. How are surveys used to influence public opinion and policy? How does voting impact social and political issues? Do community members actually vote on the issues involved? Should some issues be voted on by referendum? What are the advantages and limitations of public policy being determined through a referendum?

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CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Direct, Indirect, Advocacy

Helping an Organization

Objective:
Students will identify an organization working on an issue of concern to them and assist the organization with one of their projects.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

The teacher, the school, or the local community may deem some organizations inappropriate for this assignment. Teachers may want to screen students' selections before students complete the research. Another option would be for teachers to give students a list of organizations to choose from. If possible, encourage students to help in developing the criteria for selecting an organization; let the students know up front the limits to their choices.

Teachers will also need to decide whether the organizations for this activity will be local (e.g. Senior Center, Animal Shelter, Soup Kitchen), national (e.g. Habitat for Humanity, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), international (e.g. Red Cross, UNICEF, Amnesty International, Oxfam) or all three. Each provides different types of opportunities in terms of service. If students' participation in direct service is a priority, local organizations will enable students to volunteer their time working with the organization and/or their clients. Students' work for a national or international organization will more likely be indirect service or advocacy. Students could host a public event to educate others, design a pamphlet to distribute, fundraise, or complete an advocacy activity such as writing a letter to a government official or the local newspaper.

- Have students choose an organization working on an issue of concern to them. (This could be the same issue they researched in preparation activity #1 on p. 10.)
- Have students research the organization through at least two of the following resources: Internet, organization's publications, newspaper or magazine articles, interviewing someone who works for or with the organization.
- As part of learning about the organization, ask students to find out what kinds of projects and programs the organization is involved in and how the organization's mission is connected to public policy. Which of these projects presents an opportunity for the student to get involved in helping to make a difference?
- If the organization is local, students should contribute an agreed upon amount of time to volunteering with that organization. If national, the class can brainstorm various strategies for helping the organization to further its work.

- Students can reflect on and share their efforts with others by creating a photo essay, a poem, or a poster about the organization and the assistance they provided. When their work is completed, have students reflect on the advantages and limitations to different types of service (direct, indirect, and advocacy).

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CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Community Heroes and Heroines

Advocacy

Objective:
Students will interview someone who has made a difference working on a chosen issue in their community and publish the story of this person's efforts.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

For an excellent resource to further develop the ideas in this lesson, see the Giraffe Project educational materials at http://www.giraffe.org. Also, teachers may want to involve their students in the Profile in Courage essay contest in conjunction with this lesson's activities. See http://www.cs.umb.edu/jfklibrary/pica_essay_2001_ideas.html

- Have each student identify a local "hero or heroine," someone who has made a difference in the local community in regard to a social issue the student cares about. Discuss as a class what makes a hero or heroine. Encourage students to think beyond someone who is famous, to someone who has made a positive difference in the world for others in need or for the environment. Make sure each student has a different community member for this activity (or have students work in small groups to learn about a selected community member).

- Students should contact their community members and ask them if they are willing to be included in this class project. If yes, have students interview their community hero or heroine (or have them ask the community member to complete a written questionnaire developed by the class) to obtain information in the following categories:
    - Background information (name, age, prior education and experience relevant to your community efforts)
    - Early Life – What experiences as a child helped you realize the importance of being involved in the community?
    - Getting Started – How did you first develop an interest in or get involved with this issue? What were your first steps in making a difference?
    - Collaborators – Most people do not work in isolation in the community. Who were the people who assisted you in being able to make a difference?
    - Most Meaningful Contribution – From your own point of view, what is the most meaningful contribution you have made in regard to this issue so far?
    - Political Action – Has politics played a role in your efforts? How? What successes and setbacks have you experienced? How did you deal with them?
    - Plans and Dreams – What further efforts do you plan to undertake? What are your hopes and dreams for the future?
    - How Youth Can Get Involved - What ideas do you have for how youth can get involved in making a difference about this issue?

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- Ask students to write up a story about their community hero/heroine and publish it in an appropriate public outlet. Students might write articles for a special section of the school or local newspaper or they could post the stories on a web site. Another option would be to create a display of selected information about each individual along with photos in a public location such as the local library.

- Have students discuss the common characteristics of the heroes and heroines. What personality characteristics or community events led to their making a difference? What can you learn from their experience to assist you in your community efforts?

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CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Educational Outreach

Indirect, Advocacy

Objective:
Students plan a public event to teach others about a local organization making a difference in the community.

Estimated class time: 6 hours

- Decide as a class or club which organization to feature in the public event. Students can list and then vote on one organization or choose an organization that is best aligned with the curriculum of the class or the club's mission. It is also possible for more than one organization to be featured in this event.

- Once a decision is reached, contact the director of this organization to make sure that he or she is willing to collaborate with the class on this project.

Teachers are encouraged to invite community organization staff to the school to brainstorm ideas for the event and to discern their interest in collaborating in the planning and conducting of the event.

- Decide as a class or club on a suitable date and location for the event. A Saturday morning may be the best time for high school students involved in sports and after school activities. Possible locations would include a mall, a grocery store, the public library, or another spot where there is likely to be many people at the time of the event.

- Have students form committees to plan and oversee this activity (or have existing school groups and clubs each take on one or more of these tasks). Committees might include:
    - Community liaison – This group is in contact with individuals involved from the local organization, keeps them updated on the class' efforts, and makes sure that their ideas and concerns are central in how the event is planned.
    - Publicity – This committee is responsible for getting the word out to the general public about this event. Strategies might include posters, flyers, public service announcements, a newspaper article, word-of-mouth, and so forth.
    - Information – This group either obtains flyers from the organization or creates written information (e.g. brochures, flyers) to be distributed at the event.
    - Action – This group plans some type of activity that the public can participate in if they choose when they come to the event. Writing letters or signing a petition are two possibilities.

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- Support Services – Will the class need to bring card tables and chairs? If the event lasts for more than a couple of hours, students should plan to bring snacks. This committee can also set up a schedule for who will staff the table during various time slots.
- Fundraising - This group could plan to raise money for the organization through collecting donations or selling small items (baked goods, buttons, bumper stickers, pencils, etc.) at the event.

Some high schools have specific rules about fundraising. Others are concerned about too many fundraisers. Fundraising is an optional part of this event.

- After the event, have students evaluate how successful it was. What would they do differently if they were to sponsor a similar event again?

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CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Creative Expressions

Advocacy

Objective:
Students will create an artistic display or a public performance to educate the school community about different perspectives on a school issue.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- As a class, decide which school issue to focus on for this service-learning activity.
- Have students research the issue using a variety of resources and personal contacts. Make sure that all perspectives on the issue are represented in students' findings. Decide on what the purpose and message of this activity. Do students want to raise awareness, educate others about diverse views on the issues, promote various solutions to a problem?
- Decide as a class whether to create one type of display/performance or to have small groups work on different ways of educating the school community about the issue. If the former, have the students use voting, along with a discussion of the pros and cons of each possible activity, to make their decision.
- Possibilities for artistic displays and performances include the following:
    - visual arts – drawings, paintings, sculpture, collages, quilts, murals etc.
    - music – composing and/or performing songs about the issue
    - theater – street theater, plays, pantomimes, puppet shows, musicals, readers' theater, rap
    - dance – ballet, jazz, modern, tap, with or without narration or music
    - technology – photos, slide show, videos, interactive computer games
- Depending on students' choices, involve the drama and/or art departments in the school.
- As a class, choose a suitable date, time, and location for the event. If students choose only a visual display, seek a location that will feature the display for a week or longer. If appropriate, publicize the event so that parents and community members can attend.

Many of the committees in the Educational Outreach lesson on p. 15 would be suitable for this service-learning experience as well. In addition, students could form committees to obtain needed props for performances.

- Have a short survey form for each person who views the event to complete. Include on the form name, age, your thoughts on this issue, and feedback on the event, including if or how the event influenced your thinking about the issue.

- Back in the classroom, have students reflect on the event and read the feedback they received in the survey forms. How did most of the people attending feel about the issue? Did the event have any impact on their thinking?

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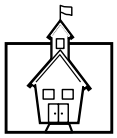
CHOOSING AN ISSUE, MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Direct, Indirect, Advocacy

Issue of the Year

Objective:
The student body votes on an issue for the school year and carries out a number of activities to learn about and effect change in regard to this issue.

Estimated class time: year-long activity, time varies depending on choices

- The student council, a service club, or a class coordinates a school-wide vote on which issue the student body should work on during the coming school year. This vote could be coordinated along with the vote for student body president and vice president. Another option would be for students to rank order a list of the top 10 concerns in their homerooms or advisory groups.

There is no reason why only the top vote getter should be the focus for the school year. Schools could decide they will address the top two or three.

- Classes, clubs, individuals, and those running for office could campaign for the issue they think is most important for the students to address. Campaign strategies could include: posters, flyers, buttons, bumper stickers, t-shirts, information tables, after school meetings with speakers from the community, and articles in the school newspaper.

A survey of 1,238 U.S. students in grades 7-12 conducted by Do Something, *a nationwide network of young people, found that drunk driving, depression and teen suicide, guns at school, improving schools/education, discrimination, violence in school, drugs, self-esteem, AIDS, and abuse at home are teens' top ten concerns, and two-thirds of teens (67%) plan to get involved during the next year with the issues that are important to them.*

- After one or more issues has been selected; individuals, clubs, and classes can then research the issue further and put out a newsletter of ideas (or a lengthy article in the school newspaper) for student actions. (Many of the individual and group service-learning activities on pp. 12 - 17 would be suitable activities for working on the selected issue(s) throughout the school year.) Also, ask teachers in the school to incorporate some aspect of the issue into their courses sometime during the year. It is also possible to invite parents, public officials, and other community members to participate in the year-long activities.

- One club, class, or teacher should serve as "command central" for these activities, making sure that groups in the school compliment but do not duplicate each others' efforts. They could also keep track of the activities and their results in the community.

- At the end of the year, the school could have a Celebration Night for students, parents, and community members. The event would highlight information about the issue, actions completed by the students during the school year, and opportunities for others to get involved and make a difference.

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VOTING IN MY COMMUNITY

Use It or Lose It!

Objective:
Students will recognize the fragile nature of the right to vote and acknowledge the need to protect the right by designing active response plans.

Estimated time: 1 - 2 hours

- Have students read the "Use It or Lose It!" handout.
- Have students circle the actions they would be willing to take part in at the bottom of the handout. Tell them they should be ready to: 1. defend their choices; 2. give the reasons they chose as they did; and 3. describe the possible consequences of their actions or reluctance to act. Following a class discussion of the activity, determine if any of the students have changed his or her mind.
- Working individually or in small groups, have students complete the "Voting Hassles" worksheet.
- Ask the students what countries they guessed the different events occurred in. Do they think that the event is historical or current? What ideas have they determined might be a solution to the problem?
- Next, read the following to the class:

  Do you still think your right to vote is secure? How effective do you believe the different laws having to do with voting have been in the United States? Here are the corresponding dates and places where the voting conditions described on the worksheet have existed—each of them right here in our own nation! Maybe we need to think twice about protecting our right to vote.

  1. Louisiana, 1890's 2. Alabama, 1965 3. Mississippi, 1960's 4. New York, 1872
  5. Texas, 1996 6. Texas, 1990's 7. South Carolina, 2000 8. Florida, 2000

- To conclude the lesson, have students identify what problems with voting remain that must be solved.

References:
Hampton, Henry and Steve Fayer. Voices of Freedom. Bantam Books: New York, 1991.
Rapoport, Miles S. "The American Prospect". http://www.org/print/V12/5/rapoport-m.html

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Use It or Lose It!

The United States' first national election of the new millennium brought out less than one-half the population of all eligible voters. Some political scientists believe that this poor turnout reflects a thriving economy and happiness with most governmental actions. People are generally content with the government and see no need to make changes. These academics argue that the polling data show that if people are unhappy, they tend to turn out in larger numbers. There are other scientists who say that a poor turnout is indicative of a nation with serious problems; one in which citizens do not care enough to take part in electing their government leaders or don't believe that their votes will make a difference. These theorists say that many citizens do not understand that a strong democracy requires the participation of an active group of participants. They point out that in those cases where people have lost the vote or have never had the vote the government usually falls into the hands of too few, and the rights of the people are ignored.

The founders of the country strongly believed that democracy requires its people to take part. If we fail to take part, we are no longer truly a democratic nation, no matter how content or unhappy we are with it. Taking the right to vote for granted is dangerous and deadly to the process of democracy.

It has not been easy for many members of this nation to gain the right to vote. After many years of fighting and seemingly gaining the right of suffrage (vote), some groups of people have had to keep fighting to continue protecting that right. Many of those groups were finally protected with the passage of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 that was written to enforce the constitutional right to vote and then strengthened with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 that prohibits the use of voting laws, practices or procedures that discriminate in either purpose or effect on the basis of race, color, or membership in a minority language group.

Today around the world people continue to fight and die for the right to vote. How far would you go to keep this basic human right to choose your own government leaders? Indicate below which of the following you would be willing to take part in.

Protest	Run for office
Non-violent actions	Attend meetings
Fight in a war	Make campaign donations
Letter writing campaign	Go to jail
Petition	Nothing

What other actions might you take to defend your right to vote?

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Voting Hassles

Directions:
Seriously consider for a moment what it would mean to be denied the ability to elect our government officials who have so much power over our lives. Imagine that the following incidents happened to you. First, for each example, write down in what country you think this incident might have happened. Next, develop an action plan that responds to each example and begins to take positive steps to protect the right to vote. Be prepared to discuss your ideas with the class.

1. While you are waiting to register to vote, many men ride by in a pickup truck with shotguns. It is very hot and you are waiting in line very long. The water has been turned off at nearby faucets and there is none to drink. Suddenly the doors ahead close and you are told for the third day in a row to go home and come back tomorrow.

2. A poll tax is charged for you to vote. You have very little money to pay, and they tell you that since you did not pay last year, you now owe twice as much if you want to vote.

3. Before they will allow you to register to vote, you are required to interpret several sections of the country's constitution that explains the rules of government. Your explanation must meet the approval of the registrar.

4. When you attempt to vote, you are arrested and put in jail.

5. Voting districts are gerrymandered (boundaries are drawn in uneven, illogical shapes) so that certain groups of people are submerged in a larger group. This larger group of people will effectively cancel your voting interests.

6. Radio ads are run to purposely confuse you about the method of absentee voting.

7. Polling places are closed early in certain areas of the city. Your precinct is closed when you get off work, and you do not get to vote.

8. Ballots are difficult or confusing to interpret. They are also difficult to mark so that your vote cannot be easily read.

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VOTING IN MY COMMUNITY

Voting and City Government

Objective:
Students research the individuals, groups and committees that make up the local city government and determine what part voting plays in how local government operates.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- Using the phone book and/or the Internet, have students develop a list of the individuals, groups and committees that make up the local city government. For each one, students should gather the following information, if needed by contacting someone at City Hall.
    - Name of individual position, group or committee
    - Contact information (name, phone number and/or e-mail address)
    - List whether individuals in this group are appointed, elected, or hired

- Pooling their information, students can assist in constructing a flow chart to determine how voting contributes to the make-up of the city government. (See example on p. 23.)

- Next, have students e-mail someone from each group or committee to find out how voting plays a role in the functioning of the group. Do the groups use voting to make decisions? How often? About what types of topics?

- After students have received replies to their messages, ask students to reflect on and discuss the role of voting in local government groups and committees. Do many groups make decisions by voting? Are there any groups that do not use voting? How do those groups make decisions?

- An optional activity would be for students to research and write a report about one government group or committee for which voting is very important. What would happen to this group if there were no elections for members? How does the group use voting at its meetings?

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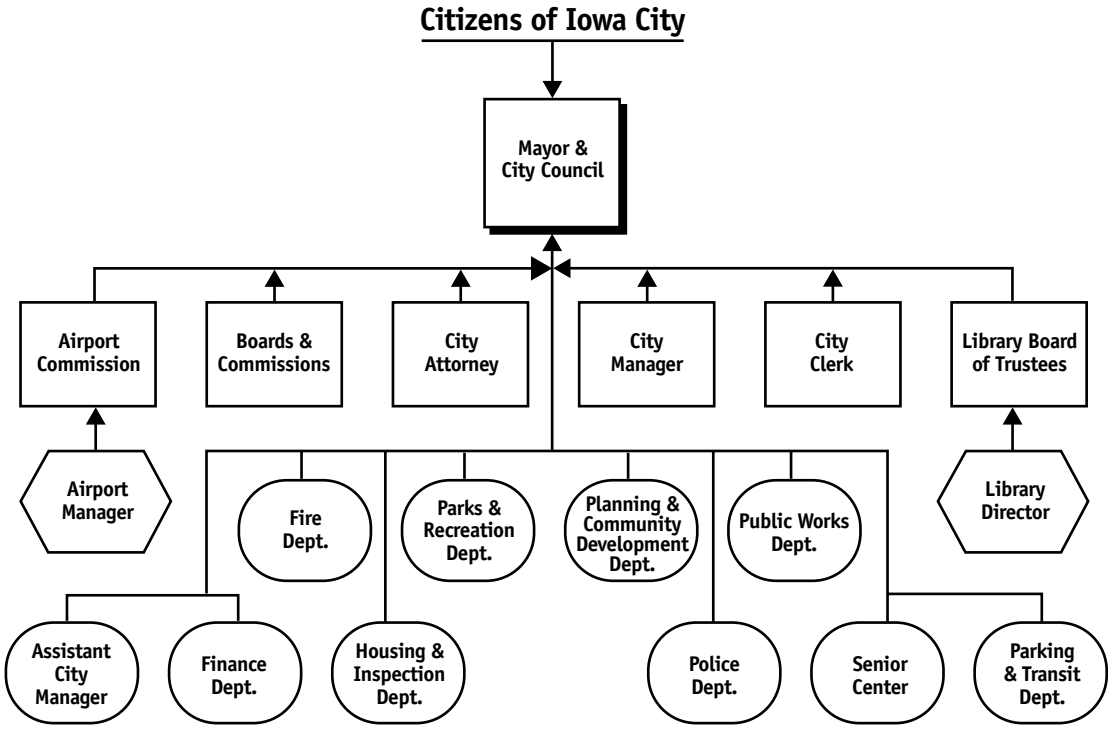

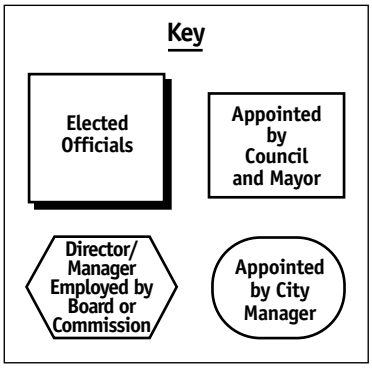

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VOTING IN MY COMMUNITY

Voter Survey

Objective:
Students will survey adults to learn why they vote or why they do not.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- As a class, decide how many adults each student will survey. Each student should plan to talk to 5-10 adults to provide adequate data. Require students to go beyond just their parents or other relatives and to attempt to reach a diverse spectrum of the general voting public. A more time efficient way to collect data might be to use e-mail; some parents might be willing to provide their children with e-mail addresses of their friends and/or co-workers for this purpose.

- Have the students brainstorm possible questions to ask on the survey. Be sure that students' questions are clear and neutral. Questions might include the following:
    - Did you vote in the last presidential election?
    - If yes, what were your reasons for voting?
    - If no, why did you decide not to vote?

- Have the class determine what demographic information to collect along with the answers to the survey questions. Possibilities include gender, age, ethnicity, occupation, and educational level.

- Make sure students keep accurate records of their survey results. A common form could be made and copied to ensure this outcome.

- In small groups, have students compare their survey results. What percentage of people voted? Does there seem to be any relationship between any of the demographic information collected and whether a person voted or not? What are the most common reasons adults gave for voting? Why did they say they did not vote?

- Compiling all the information from the class, have students develop a profile, perhaps even draw a picture, of the typical voter from their community. Compare this profile with data from local exit polls (contact your local voter registration office) or with national survey data from a web site.

- Have students reflect on what they learned from this activity. Based on the reasons adults gave for voting and not voting, brainstorm possible strategies for increasing voter participation. What ideas have you heard about already? Have any of these been effective? Has Kids Voting USA been an effective program in your community for getting adults to the polls? What other ideas might hold promise for increasing the number of voters in future elections in the U.S.?

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VOTING IN MY COMMUNITY

Voicing Your Opinion

Advocacy

Objective:
Students will attend a school board, town meeting, city council, or county supervisors' meeting and voice their views on a selected issue either verbally or in writing.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Have students select a current community issue of concern to youth that will be discussed at an upcoming school board or city council meeting.

At the beginning of the school year, call the city council office and the superintendent of schools and ask to be put on a mailing list for the locations, dates, times, and agendas of the two groups' meetings.

- Ask students to find out all they can about this issue, the various perspectives held by community members, and the options for action. Newspapers, public opinion surveys, and printed materials from the school board or city council will be the best sources of information.

See lessons on Choosing an Issue (p. 10) and Community Survey (p. 11) for further ideas on how to have students research an issue.

- Have students develop their own position on the issue. Their positions should be written in essay form and should include: a) a brief description of the issue; b) a discussion of different perspectives and ideas for action on the issue; c) the student's own perspective; and d) reasons supporting the student's perspective.

- Students should choose whether they would like to express their opinion in a letter to the city council or school board or publicly at the group's meeting. If students write letters, send them ahead of the meeting the students will attend. If students plan to speak publicly, they can write out a few notes on an index card to remind them of their key points.

- Before attending the meeting, if possible, obtain and watch part of a videotape of a past city council or school board meeting. After watching the tape, discuss as a class how the meetings are organized. What are the rules for who can speak? When will students speak? Will they remain seated, stand up or speak from a podium?

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- Attend the meeting as a class, if possible. The next day in class, discuss the meeting and the students' contributions. Do they feel that their views were heard? Do they think they made a difference in regard to the issue?

- Continue to stay informed about this community issue. Encourage students to bring in news clippings and/or attend future public meetings where this issue is addressed and report back to the class. Have a bulletin board in the room or school hallway where students can post news clippings. You could also invite local government leaders to come to class and talk about steps taken to address the issue. Finally, discuss as a class how students can continue to be involved voicing their opinions to make a difference. For example, do students have any issues of concern that they would like to try to get on a community group's agenda?

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VOTING IN MY COMMUNITY

Direct, Advocacy

Student Representatives

Objective:
Students serve on a local community board or committee as youth representatives to provide a youth perspective on community issues.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- Have students develop a list of community agencies and local government committees that might welcome a youth representative.

- Divide up these groups and have each student contact one or two agencies by phone or letter to inquire about their interest in having a youth representative on the committee. Be sure to include in this communication how youth might contribute to the efforts of the group. Have students tell those who are interested in having a youth representative that they will be contacting them again soon for more information.

If students come across boards or committees that already have youth representation, have them gather additional information such as written guidelines for youth participation and an interview with the current youth representative. An additional resource may be your congressional representatives; some have youth advisory councils.

- As students gather information from interested boards and committees, they should make sure to ask for all of the following:
    - name and contact information for the chair of the board or committee
    - specific information about when, where, and how long the committee meets
    - purpose of the committee, current projects and activities
    - how elected officials affect the committee
    - ideas about how a youth perspective might contribute to the committee's work
    - limits on youth participation (For example, will the youth representative be a voting member of the committee?)
    - how long a commitment the committee wants in regard to student involvement (one meeting, six months, the school year, etc.)

- Have students add this information to a chart or fill out a form that can be included in a booklet of local opportunities or a web page for youth representatives.

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- Make the information accessible to students who might want to participate as youth representatives. Have students sign up with one teacher or club for effective coordination.

- Provide opportunities for students who serve as youth representatives to gain public recognition in the school and/or community for the time and energy they are contributing.

- Also, provide periodic forums for these students to share what they are learning about the community, local issues, and the specific board or agency with a service club, social studies classes, or the student body.

Make sure that students participating in this service-learning activity are willing to make a commitment to attend the community board or committee meetings for the days, times, and duration required.

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VOTING IN MY COMMUNITY

Advocacy

Election Judge Trainees

Objective:
Students will learn about the voting process and assist at the polls during an election.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- Have students research the history of voting in the United States. (*Civics Alive!* core activities: A Game of Cards (p. 7), 1965 Alabama Literacy Test (p. 10), and We, the Women (p. 17), are good content lessons for this subject.) How has the process changed over time? How do election laws or the voting process differ from state to state? What are some of the challenges that have disenfranchised voters (e.g. poll taxes, butterfly ballots)? What is the history of suffrage in the US? (Women? Blacks? Youth?) What is the process for challenging a voter? What are some of the famous voting rights issues/cases? How do you think the process can be improved? Since 1972, 18 year-olds have had the vote and there was a fifty percent turnout in that election year. It has declined ever since. What can be done to reverse this trend and engage more young people?
- Contact your local elections or voter information office. Invite someone to come and speak to the class about the election process. How and why does it work the way it does? How do people register to vote? Can they register at the polls on the day of the election? What contributions do poll workers make to the election process?
- The next day in class, have students discuss which of the options presented by the guest speaker they are most interested in. Since poll workers are getting older and seeking volunteers is sometimes challenging, there is enthusiasm in some locations for involving youth in this capacity. Talk with the entity in your area responsible for elections about the possibility of involving youth in the capacity of election judge trainees, serving as an actual election official with important responsibilities. Some of the duties of election judge trainees could include helping regular adult election judges with opening and closing the polls; being responsible for all election materials; ensuring that only qualified voters are permitted to vote and that each qualified voter is permitted to vote only once; distributing ballots, ensuring that all votes are cast in secret; helping voters who require assistance; maintaining order in the voting place throughout the day; obtaining the results after the polls are closed; and certifying the precinct election results.

Be sure to clear permission for this activity with your school principal.

- If serving as judge trainees is not feasible because of state election laws or other restrictions, an alternative volunteer opportunity might incorporate a range of more modest activities including: help set up equipment at the polling places, answer phones, get refreshments for poll workers, welcome voters, hand out ballots, provide translation services, provide assistance for those with special needs, assist in counting ballots, and pack up equipment and supplies.

- After completing the service activity, as students to discuss or write about their experiences as poll workers. Was it hard to do? Fun? What kinds of reactions did they get from others? Do they think they made a difference? What did they learn about voting and elections from their experience? Are there pieces of the process that could be changed to make the voting experience more acceptable, interesting, etc.?

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VOTING IN MY COMMUNITY

State Issue Watch

Advocacy

Objective:
Students contact their state lawmakers about their positions on an issue of current public concern.

Estimated class time: 4 hours

- As students read the newspapers and watch television news, encourage them to focus on news at the state level. What issues are of concern? How do they affect students' lives and future?

- Also, ask a few students to check your state government web site to find out about issues that will be voted on in the near future.

- After reviewing several issues of concern at the state level, have students vote on the issue they would like to address. Students should research the issue and develop an understanding of the various perspectives on it. If possible, invite a local state representative to the class to give the students information about the different views on this issue.

As with other lessons in this curriculum, students should choose an issue of interest and significance to youth. For example, in Iowa, for the past few years the state legislature has been discussing the pros and cons of passing a law requiring all individuals up to the age of sixteen to wear bicycle helmets when they are cycling.

- Have students develop their own perspectives and choose a method for making their voices heard by their state representatives. Possibilities include in-person lobbying, phoning, writing or e-mailing their views.

- Before contacting the chosen elected official, students should use a government web site to find out how this individual currently views the issue, his/her past voting record on the issue, and any other pertinent information that will assist the student in developing an appropriate communication.

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- Students should include the following information, regardless of the method chosen.
    - their name and contact information
    - why they are contacting their elected official
    - some basic knowledge and facts about the issue
    - their perspective on the issue
    - how they would like the elected official to take action on this issue
    - a request for a response from the elected official as to his/her views and intended action

- Set up a bulletin board in the room to keep track of responses to the students from state law-makers and any news articles about actions taken at the state level on the issue under study. Students can also periodically review state government web sites to find out what votes or actions have been taken on the issue.

- In addition to the advocacy activity here, students could also inform other students, parents, and community members about the issue and encourage their involvement. The class could also brainstorm options for continuing to work on the issue through either advocacy, direct action, or indirect action such as a fundraiser.

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VOTING IN MY COMMUNITY

Direct, Advocacy

Get Out the Vote

Objective:
Students will participate in a variety of activities to increase the number of registered voters and/or Kids Voters who attend the polls on election day.

Estimated class time: 3 month project, time varies according to choices made

- Have students brainstorm responses to the following question: "How can we increase the number of registered voters who attend the polls to vote on election day?"

It is important to begin this activity in September in order to have enough time to plan and carry out activities before a November election.

- Here are some possibilities to add to students' lists if they do not come up with them.
  - posters
  - flyers
  - letter to the editor of a newspaper
  - public service announcement on the radio
  - voter registration
  - calling registered voters to remind them to vote
  - setting up a public display in the library, mall or outside a grocery store
  - contacting neighbors, friends, former high school grads, relatives, etc.
  - driving seniors or others who need transportation to the polls
  - coordinating childcare at the polls
  - assisting younger students in Kids Voting USA at the polls (who hopefully will come with their parents who will also vote)

Be sure to check school policies and local election laws to determine if it is permissible for students to drive senior citizens or others who need rides to the polls.

- Provide students with accurate information about where the polls are located and what hours they are open.

- Decide which activity or activities students will undertake to increase the voter turnout. Students in one class or club could work in small groups based on their chosen task. Another possibility would be to have different classes in the school take responsibility for planning and coordinating different activities.

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- Before students plan their activity, have them find out if there are others in the community with whom they might coordinate their efforts, such as the PTA, the teacher's union, or the local voter registration coordinator. The major political parties often organize calling registered voters to remind them to vote a day or two before the election. If students want to participate in this effort, they should contribute time to all political parties involved or an equal number of students should contribute their time to each party.

- Have students plan early on how they will assess the results of their efforts. Groups should endeavor to count the number of people they have supported in voting. A large thermometer type graph could be posted in the hallway and filled in periodically as students complete their activities. (Of course, they won't be able to discern the effects of all activities, for example, posters and flyers.) As a school or a class, students could set a goal to support a certain number (100? 1000?) of voters getting to the polls. They could check Auditor's web pages or contact the Auditor's office or the Election Commissioner for voter turnout records. Be sure to compare results to the voter turnout of the last comparable election.

- After the election, discuss in class whether students think they made a difference. What did they learn about the challenges of voting in our democracy?

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CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

It's Party Time!

Objective:
Students will use their knowledge of political parties and descriptive terms to analyze the actions of current political leaders.

Estimated class time: 1 - 2 hours

- Have students read the "It's Party Time!" handout.
- Ask students to use the Internet and find information about the Republican and Democratic parties to fill in the handout. Then have them use the Internet or other sources to research one other political party of their choice. Have the students use the chart on the handout to describe that party's history and values.
- Discuss students' findings for the major parties. What are the similarities and differences in what they believe is important? If possible, invite local representatives of the two parties to class to explain the views of their party.
- Discuss the other parties students chose to research. How many of these had they heard of before? How many are represented locally?
- For homework, ask students to read the government section of a newspaper and find an article about a Democrat or a Republican. Students should bring the article to class and be prepared to give an example of an action the person in the article took, or comments the person made that demonstrates his/her political affiliation.

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It's Party Time!

In the presidential election of 2000 over 140 people announced their candidacy for President of the United States of America. This group of candidates represented at least 23 different political parties, most from the popular and powerful political parties, Republican and Democratic. The people in these organizations share in the effort to get laws passed, to support candidates that support their issues, and to organize elections at the local level where we vote.

To learn about the differences between the two major parties, research them using the web site addresses provided in the chart below. List a brief history and the important values or principles of the Republicans and the Democrats in the appropriate columns. In the third column, research one other political party and write there about its history and values.

The Republican Party	The Democratic Party	The _____ Party
Republican Party web site http://www.rnc.org/	Democratic Party web site http://www.democrats.org/hq/history/index.html	Research other political parties at this web site: http://www.vote-smart.org /organizations POLITICAL_PARTIES/

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CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

Campaign Brochure

Objective:
Each student will design a campaign brochure targeted at young adult voters for one candidate in an upcoming election.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- Have students learn about the candidates running for public office in their community. Collect information from campaign headquarters, web sites, newspaper articles, etc.
- Have each student choose one of the candidates. The next task is to collect a variety of information about the candidate. Possibilities include:
  - photos of the candidate and his/her family
  - background information on the candidate (where born, current address, education, job experience)
  - relevant experience related to the position the candidate is running for (community organizing, board membership, other elected office, how long in office, etc.)
  - candidate's positions on a variety of issues (voting records)
- Students can collect the information on their candidates through any of the following:
  - newspaper articles
  - existing campaign literature
  - a candidate's web site
  - interviews with campaign workers and/or the candidate
  - e-mail or letter to the candidate
- After the appropriate information is gathered, have students design campaign brochures for their chosen candidate, targeted at voters from the ages of 18-25. Consider what issues might be of most interest to young adult voters. Examine brochures from current or past elections to determine effective marketing elements. To maintain nonpartisanship, it may be a good idea to include information on brochures stating that Kids Voting USA students also have completed a brochure for the opponent.

Microsoft Word has a "brochure" format under "publications" that would be especially suitable for students' use.

- Check on the school's guidelines for posting the brochures. They could be put up in the classroom, a school hallway, or (with candidates' permission) in a public space. Students could also send their brochures to the candidate and invite the candidate to use it during his/her campaign. Another option would be for students to create a web site with their brochures.

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CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

Campaign Issue

Objective:
Each student will write a paper describing several candidates' positions on a selected campaign issue.

Estimated class time: 2 hours

- Have students read the newspapers and watch local television news to determine the issues of central concern in an upcoming local election. They could also contact campaign offices to get candidates' views on which issues are of greatest concern.

- Each student should choose one issue to address. This should be an issue the student cares about and/or one that is relevant for youth generally. The next task is to collect information on this issue from a variety of sources (books, newspapers, journals, web sites). Is this issue of concern in other communities in the U.S.? What is the history of this issue? Students could work individually, in pair, or in small groups on researching an issue.

- Next, have the students research candidates' positions on the issue. Each student can focus on just the candidates running for one elected position. They can find out the candidates' positions from news articles, web sites, campaign literature, contacting the candidate's campaign office, or interviewing the candidate in person or via e-mail.

- Students should then develop their own position on the issue under study. Which candidate's views are most aligned with their own?

- Have students write a paper summarizing their research. Each student should include the following:
  a) an overview of the issue locally, nationally and historically
  b) a summary of several candidates' views on this issue
  c) the student's position on the issue with a rationale for why s/he has chosen this perspective
  d) actions the student could take to influence candidates' views on this issue

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CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

Letter to the Editor

Advocacy

Objective:
Students will write letters to the editor of a local newspaper about the candidates of their choice.

Estimated class time: 2 hours

- Students will need to learn about the candidates running for local public office and decide which candidate they wish to support. (See "Campaign Brochure" activity on p. 36 for specific suggestions about learning about the candidates.)

- Have students write individual letters in support of their chosen candidate to send to a local newspaper. In addition to the community's daily paper(s), consider other publication outlets such as the high school paper, local college paper, alternative newspapers, and community organization newsletters, as well as national news magazines and news shows (such as National Public Radio's Morning Edition). Students may have greater odds of getting their letters published in smaller publications. Have several students send their letters to the same newspaper. It is likely that at least one will be chosen for publication.

- Encourage students to consider the following guidelines in developing their letters:
    1. Be direct - The letter should be short and focus on one or two main points (such as asking for others to support the candidate or highlighting the candidate's position on a key issue).
    2. Be timely - The chances of publication will increase if students refer to a recent article, editorial or letter in the newspaper they are sending their letters to. Be sure to reference the title, author, and date of any article referenced.
    3. Check the format - Students should examine other letters to the editor from the newspaper and develop their letters in a similar style in terms of length, number of paragraphs, etc.
    4. Be professional - Have students address the letter to the editor by his/her name. Students should type their letters, proofread them before mailing, and make sure they have included contact information (student's name, address, phone number and e-mail).

- In addition to the student proofreading his/her letter, have students review a peer's letter and make sure that you, as the teacher, read all letters before they are mailed.

Many excellent ideas on advocacy letter writing can be found in Just add consciousness: A guide to social activism, published by Oxfam America and Campus Outreach Opportunity League, 2000. This publication is available on the web at the following address: http://www.oxfamamerica.org/

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CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

Direct, Advocacy

Campaign Volunteer

Objective:
Students volunteer their time working in the campaign office of a candidate of their choice.

Estimated class time: 1 - 2 hours

This activity might be most suitable for an after school club or as an extra credit option for a social studies class. It is important that students have full choice over which candidate they work for and that the teacher or school does not promote one candidate or one political party over another.

- After researching the different candidates and deciding on who students want to support, have them contact the different campaign offices to find out what hours and opportunities there are for high school volunteers.
- Here are some of the possible activities a student might help a campaign with:
  - distributing campaign flyers
  - putting up posters
  - register voters
  - updating campaign records on the computer
  - writing press releases or speeches
  - researching an election issue
  - researching opponent's views on an election issue
  - handing out buttons or bumper stickers
  - answering phones
  - opening or sending campaign mail
  - designing or improving the candidate's web page
- Students can also consider their strengths and talents and propose additional activities that would contribute to the candidate's campaign. For example, a student with photography skills might take photos at a public rally or a student with computer skills could help create a campaign web site.
- If students are engaging in volunteer work for extra class credit, make sure to have them keep track of the hours they spend and have someone on the campaign staff sign off on a letter or timesheet developed by the teacher.

- Have students who volunteered time working on a campaign reflect in writing on the campaign process. Are volunteers an important part of this effort? Why? Why do people volunteer for campaign work? What kinds of "rewards" do they receive? How might campaigns work if there were few or no volunteers?

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CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

Election Newsletter

Advocacy

Objective:
Students develop, publish, and distribute a print or web site newsletter that includes information about each candidate running for office and their positions on key issues.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Have students collect information about the candidates running for office in the upcoming election. (See "Campaign Brochure" activity on p. 36 for specific information about collecting this information.)
- Have students use a desktop publishing program to create a professional newsletter on the candidates, their qualifications, and their positions on key issues. Candidates could be invited to contribute a brief statement for the publication as well.
- Students could work on the newsletter contents in small groups according to each candidate or by task (collecting information, writing a draft, proofreading, overseeing the printing, distributing, etc.).
- Place the following in a prominent spot in the newsletter:

"This newsletter was written by students from _____ High School. If any of the information in this publication was useful to you as you decided who to vote for, please let us know. You can send your feedback to us at (include an e-mail address or the school address with a contact name)."

- After the newsletter information has been assembled, have students contact several copy businesses in the community to see who will give them the best rates on getting the newsletter printed. Another option is to create the newsletter on a web site. Students could also produce the newsletter in Spanish.

Students could also sell ads to local businesses for the newsletter. The funds generated could help offset the publishing costs or contribute to funding the "Candidate's Night" activity on p. 42.

- Ask students to brainstorm the best locations for newsletter distribution. Who do they most want the information to reach? Would there likely be different types of people who would pick up the newsletter from a laundromat, a grocery store, or the public library? Consider sending the newsletter home with elementary and middle school students as part of their Kids Voting USA activities.

- A few weeks after the election, discuss as a class: Did the newsletter make a difference? What types of feedback were received from voters in the community?

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CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

In the Spotlight

Advocacy

Objective:
Students plan and participate in a presentation for public access or local television highlighting candidates for public office.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Have several students contact local TV stations to find out what the options are in your community for creating and airing a short television presentation. Does the community have a public access television station? Would local TV stations be open to airing a student-made video? Would they come to the high school to film a debate between two or three candidates?

If the school or district has a news channel, this is another viable option. Work with the school's video/TV production crew or class to plan and carry out this project.

- Answers to the questions above will help determine the project students undertake. Assuming that a local TV station will come out to the high school to film an exchange between students and two candidates for an elected position, the following ideas should prove useful.

  - Brainstorm options for the format of this event. Will students interview the candidates separately or together about their positions on key issues? Will students moderate a debate between the candidates? Will students listen to brief campaign speeches and then ask questions of each candidate? These are just a few of many possibilities; discuss the pros and cons of each of these formats in terms of candidates' interest in participating and the potential impact on voters watching the program.

- After the class votes on the format for the presentation, have several students contact the candidates and the TV station to make sure that all are agreeable and interested in participating in this event at a specified time and day. Send follow up letters confirming the details to both candidates and the TV station.

- Have students prepare for the event through careful planning using a storyboard format. Will the classroom be a suitable location or should students reserve the auditorium? If students will be asking questions of the candidates, prepare several questions in advance.

If the class is interested, students can publicize the time and date the TV show will be aired. They could put up posters in the school and include the information in the school newspaper and a parent newsletter.

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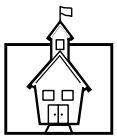
CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE



Advocacy

Candidates' Night

Objective:
Students organize a Candidates' Night at the high school.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Begin planning the Candidates' Night several months in advance of the event. For a November election planning should begin soon after school starts in the fall. Many of the prior activities on pp. 25 - 29 will be useful preparation for this event. For example, students could create a display of their campaign brochures or they could distribute copies of their election newsletter.

Variations of this activity include having students volunteer at an established candidates' night or co-sponsoring the event with the League of Women Voters. Another option would be to design the candidates' night around issues of concern to youth.

- Have students contact all of the local candidates individually to see if they can attend the event. A successful Candidates' Night should have most of the local candidates in attendance. It is also possible that some state-level candidates would be willing to come. Make sure that candidates know that you will be inviting parents, neighbors and other adult community members to attend the event; this will likely increase their interest in participating.

- A student planning committee (or one class) should develop a general plan for the event. Will candidates take turns speaking from a podium in the auditorium or will they be assigned to different classrooms at varied times for those attending to visit as they choose? The planning committee can decide which of the following work groups are needed for the event:
    - publicity – get the word out to community members about the event. This could be a large committee to handle designing flyers, posters, news articles, public service announcements and so forth as well as distributing flyers or putting up posters around the community.
    - candidates' liaison – keep in touch with each candidate to ensure their participation, obtain campaign literature for the information table and fulfill any requests they may have for the event.
    - facilities – make sure there are microphones, chairs, etc. in the appropriate locations.
    - information tables – collect written information and set up staffing for a table to distribute campaign literature for all the candidates (include those who could not attend in person as well).

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- voter registration – gather the appropriate forms and information and set up staffing for a table to register voters.
- program – design and print a program to be handed out to those who attend as they enter the school. Include a map of the school if candidates are going to be located in different classrooms.
- refreshments – provide simple refreshments (e.g. cookies and cider) for those in attendance.
- follow-up – write thank you letters to the candidates after the Candidates' Night

Consider inviting parents and other community partners to assist with this event through one or more of the work groups.

- At the Candidates' Night, students should make sure that all tables are staffed, that some students are assigned to be greeters/program distributors, and that each candidate has a student assistant to help with any last minute needs.

- Follow-up activities could include writing news articles about the event for the school newspaper or local papers. Also, students could develop and distribute a short evaluation form for those in attendance to complete before they leave the Candidates' Night. (Provide examples or instructions for students on how to design an effective evaluation.) This feedback should be helpful in planning similar events in the future.

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VOTER REGISTRATION

Register Your Opinion

Objective:
Students will explore new possibilities and old issues concerning voter registration and voting and write letters to the government expressing their own opinions.

Estimated class time: 2 hours

- Ask students to read the information on the "Register Your Opinion" handout.
- Read the following to the students: "As current or future voters, what suggestions would you have for this committee to improve the system of voter registration and voting to make it more appealing or accessible to you?" Ask students to write out their responses in class or as homework.
- In class, discuss students' ideas. Brainstorm a variety of possibilities and encourage students to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each. This information could be written up in a chart on the board.

Interested students could research voting practices in other democratic countries in the world. Which countries have high voter turnout? Can we learn something from them to increase the voter turnout in the U.S.?

- Have students individually or in small groups write letters to the U.S. House Administration Committee explaining their suggestions and utilizing facts from the handout or other facts from the following web site or some of its links:
http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/nr/2001/voting2facts.html
- If students receive responses to their letters, encourage them to share them with the class or post in a special location in the classroom.
- Further discussion in class could focus on how school elections are held. Do the current procedures ensure a valid outcome? How could the process be improved?

References for this lesson:
National Institute of Standards and Technology. "Hearing Report: Voting Technology Hearing". http://www.nist.gov/hearings/2001/votetech2.htm

Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project. "Voting: What is, What could be". http://weeb.mit.edu/newsoffice/nr/2001/voting2facts.html

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Register Your Opinion

In May of 2001 the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Administration held a special hearing concerning voting technology. Experts in the field shared their opinions, ideas and recommendations regarding voting and voter registration systems in the U.S.

Facts show that elections are currently organized at the state level where officials are responsible for ensuring fair elections. Voting lists enable state officials to check for voting fraud or double voting. Statewide voting lists can make this job more efficient and manageable, yet only 14 states have such computerized lists at this time.

Some experts suggest that the U.S. system of voluntary registration is seriously outdated and seems to hinder voter turnout. In nations where the government either requires its citizens to register, or does not require registration at all, the voter turnout is much higher than in the U.S.

Finding ways to improve registration practices may be the answer. Evidence points to better voter turnout in states with less restrictive registration practices. Currently six states that have same-day registration report higher rates of voter turnout (63.1 percent) than the national average, which is 51.2 percent. Outreach programs for youth registration have shown success in numerous states, such as in Connecticut where registrars are required to go into the high schools each year to register eligible interested students.

Encouraging naturalized citizens to register and vote is also important. During the past two years over 1.8 million immigrants have become U.S. citizens. In some local elections, such as school boards, resident immigrants can actually vote before becoming citizens. Election reform for felons is also of concern. When should criminals have their right to vote returned to them?

The committee also heard testimony on how technology can be used to improve registration and voting practices in the U.S. The experts told the House Committee that more money would enable the states to buy updated electronic equipment, which has been shown to be more reliable. Voting by phone, electronic voting, and online registration and voting are all possible solutions, yet serious problems related to security and privacy need to be overcome before these new technologies are workable.

Another idea is making Election Day a national holiday. Getting to the polling place to vote is a practical problem for many people who work the same hours as the precinct opens. Many citizens have transportation issues and other scheduling conflicts on election days. Recently some states have allowed for votes to be cast weeks or days in advance, or have accepted mail-in ballots, resulting in improved voter turnout for many communities.

Which of these ideas do YOU think would improve the U.S. system of voter registration and voting? What other ideas do you have that might prove useful?

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VOTER REGISTRATION

Learning about Voter Registration

Objective:
Students will learn about the qualifications of being a voter and how to register to vote in their community. They will obtain the forms required for voter registration and practice filling them out.

Estimated class time: 1 - 2 hours

- Have students learn about the qualifications of being a voter in the United States. They can look for this information on the Internet or in printed materials. How have these qualifications changed over time? What grassroots and political efforts led to these changes?

- Have students find out how one registers to vote in their community. Can a person register electronically? Through the mail? In person at a specific location?

- Locate and make copies of the forms that need to be completed to register to vote. Students or teacher could also obtain forms from a neighboring state that are different to compare with those from your state.

- Have students practice filling out the registration forms. Discuss together whether the forms are easy to fill out or whether they might be challenging for some adults.

See the High School Kids Voting USA Civics Alive! curriculum lessons on pp. 45 - 52 for activities that reinforce and extend the learning in this lesson.

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VOTER REGISTRATION

Rock the Vote

Objective:
The students will learn about youth organizations aimed at increasing the voting rate of youth 18 to 25 years old and write a letter to a young friend or relative in another state about how to register to vote.

Estimated class time: 1 - 2 hours

- Have students find information about "Rock the Vote" on the Internet (www.rockthevote.org). While this campaign to increase voting among 18 to 25 year olds was more active before the November 2000 election, the organization is still involved in a variety of efforts to increase youth voting rates.

- Ask students to follow the link on the Rock the Vote web site to find information on voter registration for each state. Have each student choose a state in which s/he has a friend or relative of voting age who is not registered to vote.

- Have students look up the guidelines for voter registration for their chosen state on the Internet (www.lwv.org/electioncentral/registration.htm).

- Ask each student to write a letter to his or her friend or relative in another state about how to register to vote in that state. Include at least three reasons why one should register and vote. Encourage the students to mail their letters and let the class know if they receive a response.

- Discuss whether receiving a letter is an effective method of persuading youth to register and vote. What other efforts might prove successful? Research the effects of the Kids Voting USA program. Has this program increased youth and/or adult voting rates in the communities where it has been adopted?

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VOTER REGISTRATION

Birthday Surprise

Advocacy

Objective:
Students will make and distribute special birthday cards for students in the school who turn 18, encouraging them to register to vote.

Estimated class time: 1 - 2 hours

- Obtain a list of seniors in the high school who will turn 18 before they graduate. Make sure the list has their birth dates.

- Have students design and create special 18th birthday cards. Ask a few students to develop a handout to be included with the card that gives information about registering to vote. The national voter registration form could also be included with the card.

- Develop a plan for distributing the cards to the appropriate individuals on their birthdays.

- Have students include a short survey with the following questions to be returned to the class.
  - Were you already planning on registering to vote when you turned 18?
  - Will you register to vote soon?
  - Do you think it is important for young adults to vote? Why or why not? The surveys could be returned to a teacher's office mailbox or through e-mail.

- After a number of cards have been distributed and surveys received, discuss whether this approach to voter registration in the school is working or not. If not, consider alternate ideas and plans for encouraging those who turn 18 to register to vote.

If you wish to make this a group service-learning project, have committees assigned to work on the following tasks: obtaining the list of seniors birth dates, designing the cards, developing the voter registration handout and obtaining the forms, designing the survey, and creating a plan for distributing the cards.

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VOTER REGISTRATION

Registering New Voters

Advocacy

Objective:
The students will distribute voter registration information to adults who are not currently registered to vote.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- Ask students to brainstorm about how to find adults who are not registered to vote. In general, individuals who are younger, less educated, and less wealthy are less likely to be registered to vote. Have students seek out high school students who are at least 18 years old and local college students. You could also contact the local immigration service center to identify and reach foreign-born citizens. High school language classes could help with translating information.

Work with your local Board of Elections or voter registration office on this activity. They may have additional ideas about how to seek out those who are not currently registered to vote.

- Have students prepare a flyer to be given to individuals they find who are not currently registered to vote. The flyer could be designed by individual students, small groups or the class as a whole. The flyer might include any of the following:
    - how to register to vote (include several options)
    - why it is important to register to vote
    - how your vote could make a difference
    - statistics about close votes, percentage of voters in certain age groups, etc.

- In addition to giving flyers to those they find who are not currently registered, students could post their flyers in public locations or mail flyers to relatives and friends in other states.

If flyers are mailed out of state, make sure to check the voter registration guidelines for that state and send along the appropriate information in a cover letter to accompany the flyer.

- Have students keep track of how many flyers they distribute as a class. Discuss the following question. If each of those who received flyers registered and then asked someone else to register to vote, how many new voters would we have?

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VOTER REGISTRATION

Assisting People with Disabilities

Direct

Objective:
Students will develop and carry out plans to assist individuals with disabilities in registering to vote and voting.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- There are 43 million Americans with disabilities. Many of these people are adults of voting age. With support from the American with Disabilities Act, the U.S. government has a legal responsibility to assist individuals with disabilities in living full and productive lives. Have students brainstorm the types of disabilities that could affect how one registers to vote or how one votes. Could some types of disabilities deter an individual from registering or voting at all?

- Have students research existing services for people with disabilities in terms of registering to vote and voting. What accommodations are available at your local voter registration office and local polls?

- Invite a speaker to the class who works with people with disabilities in the community. Ask the speaker to invite a person with a disability to come to the class with them and speak to the class as well. Have students prepare questions in advance to ask these individuals about issues, problems, and services for people with disabilities related to registering to vote and voting.

- At a class session after the speakers' visit, brainstorm as a class how to assist people with disabilities in registering and voting. Have students, either individually or in small groups, develop a plan to assist people with a specific disability in registering to vote and voting in a local election.

- Have students collaborate with the voter registration office, local agencies that serve people with disabilities, or the local elections commission to increase the numbers of people with disabilities who are registered and who vote. Students could volunteer their time and/or make suggestions to the elections commission.

- Where appropriate, individual students who are completing the service activity can then be paired with a person with a disability to register and/or vote in a local election. If individuals with disabilities require transportation to the polls, it may be possible to use school buses with special accommodations for this purpose.

- After the election, have students who engaged in direct service with people with disabilities talk about their experiences in class. Why is it important for people with disabilities to be able to register and vote? Did the students make a difference with their assistance?

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VOTER REGISTRATION

Senior Citizen Outreach

Direct

Objective:
Students will visit a nursing home to interview seniors and assist those who desire help to register and/or vote.

Estimated class time: 3 hours

- Find a nursing home or senior center within a short distance of the high school. Contact the activities director and explain your ideas for collaborating with them around registering to vote and voting.

For this service-learning activity, the senior citizens must be mentally competent and interested in participating in this collaboration.

- Arrange times when students can visit the nursing home to interview the seniors. The students can brainstorm a list of questions to ask their interviewees. Following are some possibilities:
    - What is your name?
    - Have you ever registered to vote? (If yes, follow up with asking about how old the person was at the time of registration, how s/he completed the registration process, how often s/he has voted over the years, etc.).
    - Do you remember the first time you voted? Who was the first presidential candidate for whom you voted?
    - (If the senior is an immigrant to the U.S.) Did you vote in the country you lived in before the U.S.? What was your experience there like? How does it compare with your experience of voting in the U.S.?
    - Are you currently registered to vote? (If not, would you like to be? Why or why not?)
    - (If the senior is registered, continue with the following.) Our next election is on _____. Would you like to vote in this election? (If yes, would you like to go to the polls or would you like an absentee ballot?)

- Have students follow up with their interviewee to provide appropriate information and/or assistance. Students could also provide the senior with campaign literature, information on special referenda, or just an opportunity to discuss the issues and candidates before voting.

There is a national law that prohibits individuals from coercing others to register or to vote in an election. It is permissible to provide the opportunity to register or to vote, but not to pressure or intimidate someone.

- After the service-learning activity is completed, have each participating student write a short reflection paper on their experience and the following questions. How did your senior interviewee respond to the interview? What did you learn about voting or registering from the senior's experience? Was there any assistance you were able to provide? Why is it important for all people to be able to register and vote?

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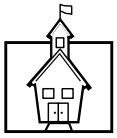
VOTER REGISTRATION



Direct, Advocacy

Voter Registration Drive

Objective:
Students will conduct a voter registration drive at the high school in conjunction with Back to School night (or some other event well attended by adults in the community).

Estimated class time: varies, depending on chosen activities

- Obtain permission from the principal for organizing a voter registration drive on the evening of the Back to School Night. Contact your local Board of Elections or voter registration office for information and guidelines to effectively plan and conduct this activity.

- A student planning committee (or one class) should develop a general plan for the event. Will there be several tables located throughout the school or one table at a central location? The planning committee can decide which of the following work groups are needed for the event:
    - publicity – get the word out to community members about the event. This could be a large committee to handle designing flyers, posters, news articles, public service announcements and so forth as well as distributing flyers or putting up posters around the community.
    - voter registration information – gather the appropriate forms and information and get copies made
    - staffing – create a schedule of students who will cover shifts at each table to distribute registration materials and answer questions
    - refreshments – provide simple refreshments (e.g. cookies and cider) for those in attendance

- At the Back to School night, students should make sure that all tables are staffed and that appropriate information is available.

- Follow-up activities could include writing articles about the event for the school newspaper or local papers. Also, students could develop and distribute a short evaluation form for those in attendance to complete before they leave the school. This feedback should be helpful in planning similar events in the future.

If this activity is successful and students are interested, they could volunteer to coordinate voter registration drives at other schools on their Back to School nights.

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EDUCATING CHILDREN ABOUT CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Apathy or Activism?

Objective:
Students will consider how youth develop civic virtue and make suggestions for better educational practices.

Estimated time: 1 - 2 hours

- Ask students to read the "Apathy or Activism?" handout and define the terms in bold print on the page. Discuss students' views on these ideas and encourage them to relate these ideas to their personal experiences.

- Have students read the "Examples of Activism" handout. Discuss the question printed there. If young people find something to care about and get involved with in their community, can it have an effect on their feelings of efficacy and enfranchisement?

- For homework or in small groups, ask students to consider the following question: What problems exist in your community? For example, are the streets and neighborhoods safe at night? Is there a lot of domestic violence? Is drug and alcohol abuse a problem? Do the parks need to be cleaned of litter? Do parents get out to vote and participate in local elections? Are streams being polluted? Do students demonstrate good sportsmanship at athletic events? Are there enough stop signs at busy intersections? Have you seen evidence of hate crimes in the community? Is bullying going on at the elementary school? There are hundreds of issues that can be studied and addressed to make a community a better and safer place to live.

- Have the class think of a community problem or issue that needs to be addressed and brainstorm what could be done about it. As a class decide on several ways that youth can get involved in current local issues and how such involvement might change their attitudes about participating in the political process.

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Apathy or Activism?

Is the temperature of America's youth running hot or cold in current political waters? Studies show that young citizens have a wide variety of attitudes in regard to politics. According to the National Association of Secretary's of State the youth of our nation feel fairly **disenfranchised** from the political process. Many of them don't see how government policies affect their lives and they have little or no interest in the political process. Some students report that their high school government classes are boring, yet there are those who take an interest in politics and voice their opinion that the act of voting is an important civic duty.

Social scientists have found that young people learn their civic habits and attitudes most often from their parents, but as the number of voters decrease for all ages, so does the chance that parents will teach their children the value of civic duties. Some youth learn through volunteer experiences that participation in their community is important. Studies done by the League of Women Voters show that many people enjoy working with others in their community to solve problems even though they have little interest in government involvement. Since community and government are so closely linked perhaps it is possible for people to find political **efficacy** through community service.

References:

League of Women Voters: "Working Together: Community Involvement in America" http://www.lwv.org/elibrary/pub/cp_survey/cp_2.html

National Association of Secretaries of State. "New Millennium Project". http://www.nass.org/nass99/sect4.html

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Examples of Activism

High school students in Jeanine Redlinger's social studies class completed the projects described below. The comments were made in assessments following the completion of their projects. If young people find something to care about and get involved with in their community, can it have an effect on their feelings of efficacy and enfranchisement? You decide.

Make Way for Help

Three students who share a neighborhood became concerned when they realized how difficult it was to maneuver a full size pick-up between numerous cars parked on both sides of their street. What if a fire-truck or other emergency vehicle needed to pass down the street to save a life? How would they be able to get through?

The young women went to work measuring street clearance between cars, measuring emergency vehicles and interviewing firefighters and residents of the neighborhood. What they found was that an emergency vehicle would have to backtrack and drive several more blocks in order to reach their destination if called to this street for action.

Armed with pictures, interviews and measurements the students approached the city streets engineer with the suggestion that parking on their street be changed to allow for one-side only parking. Their project was a success and because of them the people in their neighborhood can count on reliable emergency services in the future.

"If you put forth the effort and actually act, then you can affect the community."

Chilling Out

During the fall and spring of each year the old brick high school became unbearably hot, especially on the upper floors where there is no air-conditioning. One student became aware that in the bell tower at the top of the school there was an exhaust fan that once cooled the whole building. It was currently sitting motionless due to a lack of working parts. His investigation found that as new technologies began to replace the old sometimes they were not as efficient and in this case a simple old-fashioned ball-bearing, if the right one could be found, might help to solve the problem of overheated learners.

The student interviewed building maintenance workers and toured the old bell tower to see for himself what was needed. He wrote letters to the school superintendent and school board members requesting that they put some extra effort into locating the part needed to restore power to the fan. By the next warm season the fan was back in action, and so were students who found cooler classrooms in which to study.

"I feel more aware of my influence in the community and my responsibilities to it."

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EDUCATING CHILDREN ABOUT CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Elementary Student Interviews

Objective:
Students will interview an upper elementary age student from their families or neighborhood about their ideas on politics and voting.

Estimated class time: 2 - 3 hours

- Have each student think about a student between the ages of 10 and 12 with whom they could complete a 30-minute interview. This could be a child in their family, neighborhood, church, or youth group.

- As a class, develop a common set of questions for the interview. Following are some possibilities:
  - What is your name, grade, and age?
  - What do you think "politics" is about?
  - What is voting? Do you ever use voting at school or home? Have you participated in Kids Voting USA?
  - Why do you think adults in our democracy vote?
  - Do you know any adults who vote?
  - Do you think you will vote in elections when you grow up? Why or why not?
  - What other ways do people help others or make a difference in their community?
  - How have you made a difference in your community? Do you have ideas for additional ways students your age can get involved?

- Have each student record the results of the interview according to each question and use only one side of the paper they are writing on to record their results.

- In class, ask each student to cut their interviews in strips with one question and response on each strip.

- Create small groups of high school students who will each read, analyze, and present the findings on one of the questions to the rest of the class.

- Have students write and/or discuss their answers to the following questions. What do the results of our interviews tell us about youth *knowledge* of politics and voting? What do the results tell us about youth *interest* in voting?

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EDUCATING CHILDREN ABOUT CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Elementary Teacher Speakers

Objective:
Students will listen to and ask questions of elementary school teachers in regard to their ideas about assisting elementary age students with civic participation.

Estimated class time: 1 hour

- Invite 2 or 3 elementary teachers from a local elementary school to your class or club to speak with the high school students about possible ideas for collaboration between the high school students and elementary age students around civic participation.

- Ask the teachers to comment on the following in their presentations:
  - types of service activities youth enjoy
  - types of service-learning activities in the elementary curriculum
  - elementary youth interest in politics and voting
  - topics in the elementary social studies curriculum that deal with politics generally or voting in particular

  (If any of these topics are not addressed during the presentations, the high school students could ask about them at the end.)

If the high school students have completed Elementary Student Interviews (preparation activity #1 on p. 56) they could discuss their findings with the teachers after the teachers give their presentations.

- Follow up with the elementary teachers and/or the principal of the school to explore the possibilities for collaboration between high school students and elementary students. (See the remaining service-learning activities in this section of the curriculum for ideas about possible projects.)

This lesson and those that follow could be conducted at the middle school level as well.

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EDUCATING CHILDREN ABOUT CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Direct

Teaching an Elementary Lesson

Objective:
Students will teach a lesson on some aspect of civic participation to an elementary class.

Estimated class time: 2 hours

- Have interested students work in pairs with an elementary teacher who would like a 30 to 45 minute civic participation lesson in his/her class. Each high school student pair should be given or collect the following information:
  1) the name of the elementary teacher
  2) the grade of the class
  3) the number of students in the class
  4) the location of the school
  5) the discipline/management system used in the class

- Have students develop a brainstormed list of possibilities for the elementary teacher to choose from. These should be sent to the teacher at least one month ahead of the scheduled day for the lesson. Possibilities include:
  - teaching a Kids Voting USA lesson from the elementary Kids Voting USA *Civics Alive!* curriculum
  - teaching a lesson of the teacher's choosing from the social studies curriculum
  - high school students designing and teaching a lesson on a suitable topic: city government, voting, elections, the U.S. Presidency, and so forth.

If high school students develop the lesson, they should send it to the teacher at least two weeks ahead of the scheduled day to teach so that the teacher has time to review it and suggest changes. Also, high school students should make sure that they bring the needed supplies for the lesson or that the supplies are available at the elementary school.

- After the high school students teach their lessons, have them write short reflections about how the lessons went. Did you accomplish your goals? How did the elementary students respond to your lesson? What did you learn from this experience about elementary youth's knowledge and interest in the topic about which you taught?

- Send the participating elementary school teachers a short evaluation form to fill out and return. Questions on the form might include the following:
  - Were the high school students responsible and well prepared to teach?
  - How did the lesson go? How did your students respond?
  - Do you have any suggestions for improving this collaboration?
  - Would you like to participate in this collaboration again?

The elementary lessons or youth group discussions in the next activity could be conducted on a designated "day of service" such as Martin Luther King Day (in January) or National Youth Service Day (in April).

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EDUCATING CHILDREN ABOUT CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Direct, Advocacy

Talking with Youth Groups

Objective:
Students will facilitate a discussion on civic participation with a local youth group.

Estimated class time: 2 hours

- Have participating students look through the yellow pages and talk to family members to come up with a list of local youth groups who might be interested in having high school students facilitate a discussion about civic participation. Possibilities include: 4-H, Campfire, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, religious education classes, and so forth.

- Contact the leaders of these groups to determine who would be willing to have one or two high school students come to one of their meetings to facilitate a twenty to thirty minute discussion. Be sure to get the location, time, and date of the meeting for each participating group.

- High school students should brainstorm a list of ideas and questions for the discussion. Possibilities include the following:
    - What opportunities do you know of for youth your age to get involved in the community?
    - Is helping others part of your activities in this group?
    - What interests or concerns do you have about your community? What projects would you like to be able to do to help your community?
    - Do you think youth should help others in their community? Why or why not? Can youth help solve community problems?
    - Do you think adults should be involved in their community? Why or why not?
    - What other kinds of things can adults do? (Make sure to mention voting if the youth don't.)
    - What do you think might happen in our democracy if no one voted or participated in the community to help others?

- After participating students have completed the discussions with the youth groups, spend some time in class talking about this experience. Were children interested in the discussion? What types of activities were they most excited about? Was this a worthwhile experience for you? For the youth? Do you think you made a difference? If so, how? If not, why not?

Another option for this activity would be to bring several youth groups together at one time and place, mix up the members of these groups into small discussion circles of 3-6 students, and have the high school students facilitate the discussion circles.

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EDUCATING CHILDREN ABOUT CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Kids Voting Club

Direct

Objective:
Students will organize an after-school "Kids Voting" club for upper elementary or middle school students interested in learning about voting, politics, and ways they can get involved in their community.

Estimated class time: varies depending on choice and duration of activities

- Contact a nearby elementary school (or middle school) to see if the principal and teachers will support the idea of an after school club for students focused on politics, voting, and civic participation. It is likely that the club will need a teacher sponsor at the school even though high school students will do most of the work.
- Have the high school students develop a proposal for the club that includes all of the following information:
  1) purpose of the Kids Voting club
  2) day of the week for meetings
  3) time and frequency (Weekly? Monthly?) of the meetings
  4) open to which grades
  5) open to how many students
  6) where the club will meet
  7) supervision provided (suggested: at least one high school student to each 3-4 youth)
  8) possible projects and activities
- Have high school students brainstorm possible projects and activities for the club. They could include fun ways to learn about politics and voting as well as community activities. Community activities could include a variety of service-learning experiences (such as cleaning a park, visiting a nursing home, or walking dogs at the animal shelter) as well as service activities focused more directly on voter registration and voting. (See the activities in the earlier sections of this curriculum for possible ideas.)
- Have high school students make posters to put up in the elementary or middle school to encourage youth to come to an informational meeting about the club. Have refreshments at this meeting and ask those who attend to contribute ideas about possible projects and activities of interest to them.

Make sure to determine ahead of time how long the Kids Voting club meetings will last. Six to eight weeks? One semester? The whole school year? High school students need to plan accordingly so they can follow through on their commitments to the youth. This activity may work best if facilitated by a high school service club.

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EDUCATING CHILDREN ABOUT CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Indirect, Advocacy

Kids' Guide to the Community

Objective:
Students publish a community guide for ways elementary and middle school age youth can volunteer in their community.

Estimated class time: 5 hours

- Have students research existing opportunities for 8–14 year olds to volunteer their time in the local community. Following are some possible methods for this inquiry:
  - look through the yellow pages for community agencies and organizations and then contact the directors to ask about their interest in young volunteers
  - search the Internet
  - talk to parents of elementary age youth and students themselves
  - contact the local public library's reference librarian
  - talk to the school district's service-learning coordinator
  - contact the local United Way or Volunteer Action Center

If guide for young volunteers already exists in your community, perhaps high school students can take on updating it and/or developing a distribution plan.

- As a class, develop a common format for typing up the information about the various volunteer opportunities. Following is a suggested guide:
  a) name of agency or organization
  b) contact name of director or volunteer coordinator
  c) phone number
  d) address
  e) e-mail address and/or web site, if available
  f) types of activities elementary students could be involved with at the agency
  g) days/times for volunteering
  h) any specific requirements (age, skills, etc.)
  i) procedure to follow if youth is interested in volunteering

If different students will be involved with typing the guide, choose a common format in terms of font, size, spacing, etc. for greater ease of production.

- Decide as a class if the guide will include illustrations, graphics or photos. Several students could work on the visual aspects of the guide.

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- Either print the guide at the school or contact local printing businesses to see if one will donate their services in exchange for the publicity they will get in the guide as the sponsor.

- As a class, brainstorm possibilities for distributing the guide to youth in the community. Consider the following options:
    - giving them to elementary and middle school teachers
    - having copies at the local public library
    - distributing to pediatricians, dentists and orthodontists
    - sending copies to local youth groups and organizations
    - advertising it in an article in the local paper with contact information for those who wish to obtain a copy

- Include a section at the end of the guide asking for feedback from those who read it and/or use it. Also, if possible, keep the guide updated by asking those agencies included to send current information on a yearly or bi-yearly basis. At the end of the school year, discuss the feedback that was received and students impressions about the usefulness of this resource.

- Further evaluation and reflection of this project could involve contacting the agencies listed in the guide and finding out how many new youth volunteers they have.

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EDUCATING CHILDREN ABOUT CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Direct, Advocacy

Youth Summit

Objective:
Students plan and conduct a Youth Summit for local 6th graders.

Estimated class time: 8 - 10 hours

Planning for a youth summit in the spring should begin in the fall. Contact local 6th grade teachers early on to insure their interest and gather their ideas to make the event a success. Encourage the high school students to have ongoing reflection and trouble shooting sessions as they work over the year to complete this activity. This activity can be conducted with an entire school district or just one school.

- Have students form the following committees to plan and carry out the youth summit preparations and event:
    - essay contest – develops the essay guidelines, develops and sends out flyers about the essay contest, organizes reading and scoring of the essays
    - teacher liaison – communicates with participating teachers about the youth summit, obtains permission from participating students
    - city council liaison – communicates with city council members about the youth summit
    - food – plans snack and/or lunch on the day of the youth summit
    - summit activities – plans others activities for the 6th graders on the summit day
    - media – contacts local newspapers and TV stations about the summit
    - evaluation – design, collect and analyze feedback sheets, write a report for the school newspaper

- Have students organize an essay contest for local 6th graders. Sixth graders will be invited to write essays on "How Kids Can Make a Difference." The students should choose a problem of concern to them and write a 300 to 500-word essay that:
    a) briefly describes the problem and how it exists in the local community
    b) gives ideas for what the community would look like if this problem were solved
    c) outlines a plan of action, something kids their age can do to help alleviate this problem

- After the essays have been submitted, the essay committee can organize the effort to read and score the essays. Criteria might include: originality, grammar/writing, emotional appeal, feasibility of the action plan for children, and so forth. Select as many "winners" as possible to attend the day of the summit (or organize the activity at just one school so that all submitted essays are "winners" and can attend).

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The number of winners selected depends on the size of the town hall, how many high school student "buddies" there are available for the day of the summit, and in general, how big of an event you want the summit to be.

- The teacher liaison committee works with each teacher to communicate which students from the class have been chosen as essay winners (and therefore, summit attendees). The committee also makes sure that the teacher sends home information about the summit with these students and gets parental permission for students to attend the day of the summit.

The summit could be held on a school day, an evening, or a weekend day. Check with the city council members and teachers to see which time is most preferable.

- The city council liaison committee sends information to the city council members about the summit meeting and follows up with them to find out how many council members will attend. If possible, hold the summit meeting in the council chambers.

- On the day of the summit, high school students should be matched as "buddies" with all participating 6th graders. Activities can be planned for the students to learn about communication, conflict resolution, and youth leadership. The actual summit meeting is where the 6th graders present their concerns and ideas to the city council members. If more than 10 students wish to speak at the summit, have small groups of students elect a spokesperson for their group.

A workable plan for the summit is to have a one-hour meeting in which 5 students present their concerns and ideas and then council members have an opportunity to respond. Then another 5 students present their ideas and again, there is a short time for council to affirm and make further suggestions to the youth. It is also possible for some students to present their ideas at a regular city council meeting. Existing programs, such as the model congresses, may provide further ideas for adaptation.

- Have both the high school and 6th grade students complete feedback sheets at the end of the summit, indicating how much they enjoyed and learned from the summit. There could also be a space on the sheet to write comments or offer suggestions for future summit events. The evaluation committee can collect the feedback sheets, analyze the data, and write up a brief report for the school newspaper.

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