

“The Election”

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In this lesson students will participate in an election. They will be asked to vote for one of four candidates without knowing who they are or what they stand for. After the election, students will learn who the candidates were. Some will be very surprised when they find out who they voted for.

Rationale: This lesson is designed to help students understand that the security of freedom and individual rights in a democratic society depends upon a citizenry that remains informed.

Audiences: Grades 4-5.

Benchmark Addressed:

Civics 4 [Participation], Grades 4-5: Understand that in order to select effective leaders, citizens have to become informed about candidates' qualifications and the issues of the day.

Assessment: See Handout 4 (rubric included).

Content: The focus of Standard 4 in Grades 4-5 is on the understanding that the likelihood of electing effective leaders increase if we remain informed. Voters logically want to elect leaders who share common interests and points of view. Citizens also have a duty to keep office holders in check by voting against those who appear incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities, those who have behaved illegally or unethically, and those who appear to deviate from the fundamental principles of our democratic society. Keeping informed about candidates serves as a means to communicate preferences and keep elected officials in check.

The means for becoming informed are also important to the benchmark. Attending candidate events and paying attention to stories in the media (TV, radio, newspaper, magazines) are traditional means, but the Internet is fast becoming an important means of becoming informed about candidates.

Essential Question: Why should people take the time to learn more about candidates for elected office?

Vocabulary: informed, ballot,

Materials Needed

- Copies of Handout 1: Election Ballots (1 per student).
- Transparencies of Handout 2: Candidate Biographies.
- Copies of Handout 3: Becoming Informed (1 per student).
- Copies of Handout 4: Assessments.

Time to Complete: 1 class period.

Procedures

Pre-Lesson Preparation: Take copies of Handout 1 and cut the “Election Ballots” into individual sections so that there is one ballot for every student in the class.

1. Distribute one “The Election” ballot (found on **Handout 1**) to each student as he or she enters the classroom. When the bell rings for to begin class, tell students that they are going to be asked to vote in a very important election today. Try to convey the impression that this will be a truly important election. Ask them to cast their ballot for Candidate A, B, C, or D. Note that they are only permitted to vote for one candidate. The only rule is that they are not permitted to talk during voting as you want to make sure that every voter is permitted to think and act freely and independently. Students are likely to look perplexed as they are intentionally being asked to vote for candidates they know nothing about but just ask them to vote. Maintain a serious tone as you give instructions.
2. Ask one student to collect and tabulate the results quietly. Do not announce or hint at the outcome yet.
3. Whole Group Debriefing: Raise the following questions with the class as the votes are being tabulated:
 - a. For which candidate did you vote?
 - b. Why did you vote for that candidate?
 - c. Did you feel comfortable making your choice? What, if anything, made you feel uncomfortable or confused?
 - d. Did you have any concerns about the outcome of the election?
 - e. What would you like to have known about the candidates before you cast your vote? Record their responses to this prompt.
4. Ask the student who tabulated the results to announce the winner of the election (Candidate A, B, C, or D). Then, ask the entire class “who was pleased or displeased with the outcome?” Finally, ask the students if they would like to receive some information about the person for whom they voted? Tell the students that they were voting in a mock election to determine who would be the next leader of their country. Project (and read) the candidate biographical cards

found on **Handout 2: Candidate Biographies** (pp. 6-9) one at a time, starting with Candidate A (or the losing candidates).

Note: Field testing showed that students are probably going to cast the fewest votes for Candidate D – the only “good” candidate in the election. The lesson has its most dramatic impact when you describe the two other losers, then Candidate D, then the winner.

5. Ask the students if they are still pleased with the outcome of the election. What did they learn about the responsibilities of a citizen in a democratic society?
6. Think-Pair-Share: Distribute copies of Appendix 3 – Voter Analysis Sheet. Ask students to work in small groups and come up with...
 - a. a list of things that voters should know about before they cast their ballots.
 - b. a list of ways that people can become informed about candidates for office.
 - c. a list of risks involved in not knowing about candidates for office.
7. Debrief Phase I of the lesson. Raise the following questions with the students:
 - What “big idea” or enduring understanding did you take away from this lesson?
 - What determined the outcome of this election, chance or prudence?
 - How might the outcome of this election have been different if you had been informed about the candidates?
 - Why should people in a democratic society take time out of their busy lives to learn more about candidates for office?
 - What are some ways that people can become informed about candidates for office?
 - What might be some reliable and not so reliable sources of information about candidates for office? Explain why.

Explain to the students that many voters who enter voting booths on election day are partially or completely uninformed. Suggest that this part of the lesson uses an exaggerated scenario to help them to understand the dangers living in a society where uninformed people govern themselves.

Extension: Pick any election that is about to take place. Assign students responsibility for researching information about candidates for office. Have them look into the candidates’ backgrounds, experiences, and positions on the key issues in the election. Allow students to pick their preferred candidates and organize campaigns in preparation for a mock election. Conduct a similar investigation about a piece of pending legislation that will have a significant impact on your students or the state/local community.

Tips from the Teacher: Field testing suggested that students are least inclined to select Candidate D in the “Election” exercise (Procedure 1). However, this may not be the case in your classroom. Consequently, you may want to cover up the candidate letters on




Handout 2 and simply present the candidates in a manner of your own choosing so that the “best” candidate (Superman) appears to have received the least number of votes.




This lesson can be modified easily for use with even younger students. Simply change the candidates to television or literature characters who are familiar to younger audiences (e.g. Swiper from Dora).

Bibliography

Candidate information culled from Wikipedia at
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

Handout 1: Election Ballots

<p style="text-align: center;">The Election Ballot</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Place a check next to the candidate for whom you wish to vote. Vote for one candidate only.</p> <p>___ Candidate A</p> <p>___ Candidate B</p> <p>___ Candidate C</p> <p>___ Candidate D</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Election Ballot</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Place a check next to the candidate for whom you wish to vote. Vote for one candidate only.</p> <p>___ Candidate A</p> <p>___ Candidate B</p> <p>___ Candidate C</p> <p>___ Candidate D</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Election Ballot</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Place a check next to the candidate for whom you wish to vote. Vote for one candidate only.</p> <p>___ Candidate A</p> <p>___ Candidate B</p> <p>___ Candidate C</p> <p>___ Candidate D</p>
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Handout 2: Candidate Biographies

Candidate A



Hello, my name is Lord Voldemort. I am the arch-villain of the Harry Potter series. I am the Dark Wizard bent on getting unmatched power and living forever through the practice of the Dark Arts. I am the most feared wizard in the world of wizardry. In fact, I am so feared that my name is considered to be unspeakable .

Thank you for not being informed and voting for me.

Candidate B



Hello. My name is Count Olaf. **Count Olaf** is the main villain from Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* series. I am filthy, cruel, and unscrupulous. I have a wheezy voice, shiny eyes, one long eyebrow, and a tattoo of an eye on my ankle. I am mean to children and they see me as a short-tempered and violent man.

Thanks for not being informed and voting for me.

Candidate C



Are you prepared for a long cold winter without holidays?

I am Jadis, the White Witch, in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I have abused power over the land of [Narnia](#) and magically forced Narnia into a never-ending winter, which has lasted for a hundred years. Even though it had been winter for one hundred years, I saw to it that there had never been a [Christmas](#) during that time. My evil led the Narnians to complain that it was, "Always winter, but never Christmas!"

Thanks for voting for me and stay warm, ha, ha, ha!

Candidate D



Hello. I probably do not need an introduction but here it goes. Some of you know me as quiet and humble Clark Kent. Others know me as the greatest superhero of all time. Yes, I am Superman and I will assure you that while you are in my care, good will always prevail over evil and you and your family will always be protected from danger.

Considering the other three candidates in this election and the fact that you did not even know you were voting for the best candidate, those of you who voted for me should consider yourselves very lucky.

Too bad a majority of you did not vote for me because now you are to be led by the force of evil.

Handout 3: Becoming Informed

Prompt	Responses
<p data-bbox="363 407 477 449"><u>Task 1</u></p> <p data-bbox="240 506 602 737">Create a list of things that voters should know about before they cast their ballots.</p>	
<p data-bbox="363 905 477 947"><u>Task 2</u></p> <p data-bbox="248 1003 594 1234">Create a list of ways that people can become informed about candidates for office.</p>	
<p data-bbox="363 1430 477 1472"><u>Task 3</u></p> <p data-bbox="248 1528 594 1717">Create a list of risks one faces in not knowing about candidates for office.</p>	

Handout 4: Assessments



1. Brief Constructed Response Prompt: Why should citizens in a democratic society keep themselves informed? Use an example to illustrate your response.

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Rubric

- 2** = This response gives a valid explanation with an accurate and relevant example.
- 1** = This response gives a valid explanation with an inaccurate, irrelevant, or no example.
- 0** = inaccurate or no response