"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.

Audience: Secondary.

Benchmark Addressed: Civics 3 [Citizenship] - Students will understand that citizens are individually responsible for keeping themselves informed about public policy issues on the local, state, and federal levels; participating in the civic process; and upholding the laws of the land.

Assessments: See Handout 4 (rubric included).

Content: Standard 3 deals with citizenship. The American political system is grounded in the principle of popular sovereignty. As a people, we cherish and have committed ourselves to self-government. This commitment to self-government carries with it an obligation to remain informed.

At the high school level, students are expected to understand why citizens in a democratic society have a responsibility to remain informed. Failure to remain informed involves serious risks. We often hear the phrase "power corrupts." History has shown that there are many people who will abuse power if left unmonitored. A vigilant citizenry is a powerful check against those who would threaten our rights and liberty, as well as the fundamental values to which citizens in a constitutional democracy commit themselves. When citizens in a democratic society are uniformed, chance prevails over prudence and liberties erode.

Essential Question: Why should people take time out of their busy lives to learn more about candidates for office?

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).
- Transparency of Appendix 4: Morning News Report.
- Copies of Handout 5: 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.

8. Teach for transfer. Explain to students what transfer is. A developmentally appropriate explanation might be that transfer involves the process of using or extending knowledge or skills acquired in one situation to complete new tasks or solve new problems.
    Ask students if they can think of any situations other than elections in which it might be important to remain informed.

9. Display a copy of **Appendix 4** on the overhead or LCD but reveal only the first sentence (italicized). Tell students that today's newspaper is reporting that the state legislature has introduced a bill that addresses problems relating to energy waste, rising fuel prices, and dependence on foreign sources of energy. Lead a

discussion on the costs and benefits of the bill. Have students "vote" on whether the bill.

10. After tallying the votes, pretend that you had a mental lapse and tell the students that you forgot to explain the rest of the bill. Reveal the second sentence in the bill (not italicized) which states that those who own or purchase a car that does not get at least 30 miles per gallon shall be required to pay an annual energy tax of $1,000. Ask if anyone in the room has changed their minds about the bill based on a fuller understanding of its provisions.

11. Debrief Phase II of the lesson. Ask students what they think is the "big idea" or enduring understanding that they should take from the voting bill exercise. Field responses then explain that you want students to understand that it is just as important to remain informed about public policy issues as it is about candidates for office. Note that the failure to do so has its costs.

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.
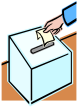
Tips from the Teacher: Field testing suggested that students are least inclined to select Candidate D in the "Election" exercise (Procedure 1). However, this may not be the case in your classroom. Consequently, you may want to cover up the candidate letters on Handout 2 and simply present the candidates in a manner of your own choosing so that the "best" candidate (Mother Theresa) appears to have received the least number of votes.
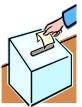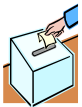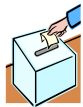
This lesson can be modified easily for use with younger students. Simply change the candidates to television or literature characters who are familiar to younger audiences (e.g. the Joker from Batman, Valdemort from Harry Potter, Swiper from Dora etc.).

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

Handout 1: Election Ballots

The Election Ballot Place a check next to the candidate for whom you wish to vote. Vote for one candidate only. ____ Candidate A ____ Candidate B ____ Candidate C ____ Candidate D	**The Election Ballot** Place a check next to the candidate for whom you wish to vote. Vote for one candidate only. ____ Candidate A ____ Candidate B ____ Candidate C ____ Candidate D	**The Election Ballot** Place a check next to the candidate for whom you wish to vote. Vote for one candidate only. ____ Candidate A ____ Candidate B ____ Candidate C ____ Candidate D
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Candidate A

Hello. My goal is to create an agricultural utopia. This will require me to get rid of those who might oppose my plans. We shall start by getting rid of all Buddhist monks, Western educated intellectuals, people who appear to be intelligent (for example, individuals with glasses), the crippled and lame, and ethnic minorities.

People who live in cities are like parasites that prey on those who live in the countryside. So, I shall destroy all cities and move anyone who lives there to the countryside. They shall provide the labor that will build our agricultural utopia. If they survive, no gain; if they die, no loss. If they resist, we must kill them. We must save bullets. So, anyone who resists my plans shall be ordered to dig their own graves. We shall then beat them to death or bury them alive. All religions are to be abolished and minorities are forbidden to speak their own language or practice their customs.

I almost achieved my dream in Cambodia during the late 1970s when my followers killed approximately 2.3 million people out of a population of 8 million. My name is Pol Pot.

Thank you for not being informed and casting your vote for me.

Candidate B

Hello. My name is Idi Amin. I'm from Uganda and I'm a former soldier for the British Empire in Africa. I'm really brave and charismatic, and I received a high rank in the Army. I'm also a former professional swimmer and a champion boxer. A lot of people like me. I've also killed a lot of people and done some really horrible things, but for some reason nobody ever pays any attention to that. Right now I'm just the leader of the Army, but I really want to be President for Life.

When I seize control of the country, I will have all of my opponents in the government and army killed. Then, I will establish a special government agency that sounds harmless, but which will actually kill people, including judges, priests, leaders, scholars, and ordinary people. I've promised to hold free elections and establish a democracy, but I don't really intend to do it. I will also kick most Asian and non-African people out of my country (even citizens whose grandparents first moved here) and send the rest to special camps in the countryside. I think Hitler was a great leader and agree with everything he did. I will also support terrorists and invade my neighbors.

In the 1970's I achieved all of this. Over 300,000 people died during my rule. If you had looked into it, I'm sure you would have known all this. My name is Idi Amin.

Thanks for voting for me.

Candidate C

Hello. I believe that the German race is superior to all other races on the planet and I want to unify all the German people under one great empire. In order to create this empire, I'll need lots of room, so I intend to attack all the countries in Eastern Europe. First I'll act like I'll quiet down and go away if people give me want I want, and when it's too late, I'll attack anyway. People are scared and very easy to fool.

Because I think other races are inferior, I intend to enslave them or kill them. I hate the Jews the most, and I blame them for all the problems my country has ever had. I intend to kill them all. But they aren't the only ones I'll get rid of. I'll eliminate anyone who opposes me, or anyone who is different, including people from different political parties, religions, races, and the physically handicapped or mentally ill.

I almost achieved my dream in the 1940s. I conquered most of Europe. I had over 6 million Jews and other people murdered. In the war that I started, over 60 million people died. Oh yeah, and unlike those other "dictators," I was actually *elected*. I even wrote a book saying exactly what I intended to do, but few people actually cared enough to read or believe what I promised to do in my book. My name is Adolph Hitler.

Thanks for voting for me (again).

Candidate D

  Hello. My mission in life is to help the poorest of the poor all over the world. When I was twelve I decided that I wanted to be a nun. When I was eighteen I joined an Irish missionary order and traveled to India to teach and to care for the poor. I was so moved to help the poor there that eventually I started my own order and spent the rest of my life working for the poorest of the poor. I have established many hospice houses around the world, and attracted many other people who supported my cause.

  I think that helping and serving other people is the most important thing in the whole world.

  I have received many awards for my work, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. I have also been called the "most admired person of the 20th century." Despite being criticized by some people for my conservative religious views, I think that these views have given me the courage to do what I have done. My name is Mother Theresa.

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

Handout 3: Becoming Informed

Prompt	Responses
Task 1 Create a list of things that voters should know about before they cast their ballots.	
Task 2 Create a list of ways that people can become informed about candidates for office.	
Task 3 Create a list of risks one faces in not knowing about candidates for office.	

Appendix 4: Morning News Report

"State Legislature Plans to Reward Those Who Buy Fuel Efficient Cars"

House Bill 17

Henceforth, those who are purchase motor vehicles that get at least 30 miles per gallon in the city shall receive a $500 discount on the purchase of their motor vehicle.

Those who currently own or purchase motor vehicles that get less that 30 miles per gallon in the city shall pay an annual surcharge of $1,000.

Handout 5: Assessments

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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