

Lesson Plan #3—Math

Title: Using Bar Graphs to Understand Voting Patterns

Introduction:

There is nothing random about who votes and who doesn't. Those who stay home on Election Day do not constitute a random sample of the general population. Rather, they are more likely to be less educated, economically disadvantaged, and members of racial and ethnic minority groups—groups which are well represented in adult literacy classrooms. These groups may feel shut out of a political system that is fueled by money and is run by people who are socially and economically quite far removed from them. However, when people do not participate in the election process, they find themselves in a vicious circle. They become irrelevant to those who are elected. Some people consciously reject voting and have good reasons; others just don't bother to vote. Either way, they are giving up an important right that we all can exercise.



The intention of this activity is to examine the importance of participatory democracy. The graphs offer learners the opportunity to understand voting patterns and to evaluate their implications.

Objectives:

In this lesson, the students will:

- Understand the purpose of a bar graph.
- Demonstrate how data can be represented in a graphical form.
- Interpret data presented on a bar graph.

Session time: 50-60 minutes

Materials:

- Graphs handout
- Blackboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers

Methods: Guided discussion, cooperative learning, interactive participation, visuals, written response

Procedure:

1. Have your students study the first graph. Then have them form a human bar graph of each graph by assigning individuals or small groups (depending on class size) a variable.

2. Ask for one or more volunteers to explain how to read a graph. Help out as necessary.
3. Work with students to extract facts from the graph in the form of simple sentences. (For example, “Most people in the lowest income category don’t vote” or “The highest voter turnout is among those who make \$50,000 or more a year.”) Have individuals share their sentences and write them on the board.
4. Go through the other two graphs in the same way. For example, a sentence gleaned from the middle chart could be: “College graduates are twice as likely to vote as those who have less than a high school education.” Try to get everyone to participate in determining the facts that the graph illustrate. When students share the sentences they created, ask them to explain why they thought those particular facts were important.
5. When learners have finished this process, engage them in a general discussion of the graphs using the discussion questions.

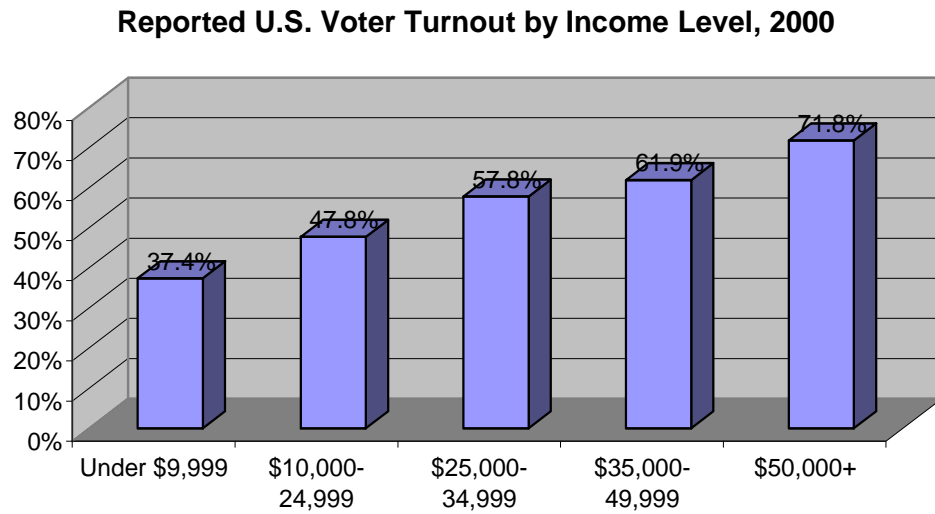
Discussion Questions:

1. What are these graphs about?
2. What does this data tell you?
3. How are the graphs consistent or inconsistent?
4. Are the graphs surprising to you? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think some groups are so unlikely to vote?
6. Which of these groups have the least power in the political process?

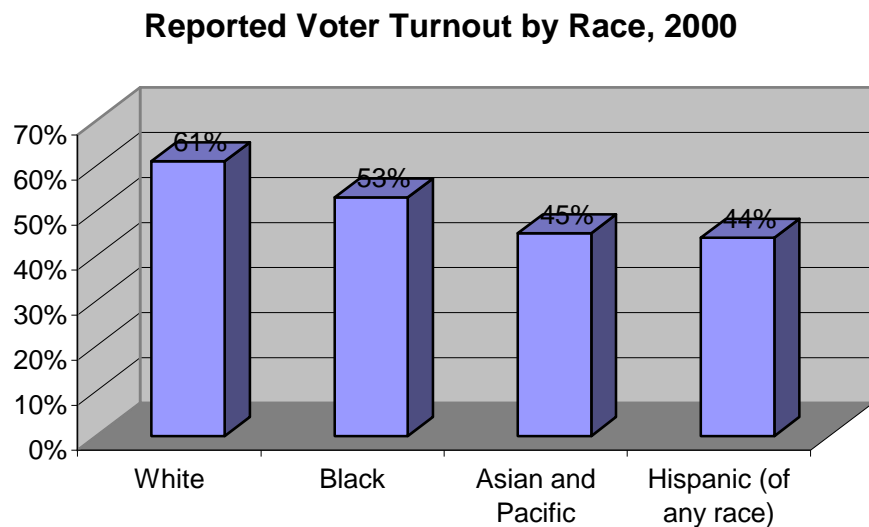
Note: This lesson is included in the workshop, *How to Make the U.S. Constitution Come to Life*, in the *SIPDC Catalog of Professional Development Opportunities*.

USING GRAPHS TO UNDERSTAND VOTING PATTERNS

Graph 1



Graph 2



Graph 3

