

Lesson Plan #2—Social Studies

Title: ONE VOTE

Introduction:

The statement that is heard every year at election time is: “What difference is my one vote going to make?” One vote is all we get. One. That’s it. Sound familiar? The belief that only one person with just one vote can’t make a difference is probably the most common of all reasons people stay away from the voting booth.

Does one vote really count? Yes. In fact, contrary to what people may believe, election histories prove that just one vote is often the difference between victory and defeat for a candidate or issue. This exercise is designed to give students the opportunity to recognize significant incidents in history where one vote made an impact on the political system of America.

Voting gives people a feeling of freedom and independence by knowing that their voices will be heard and that they have the right to vote. When people exercise their right to vote they have a feeling of empowerment to stand up for what they believe in. It helps them express their rights as citizens and be part of the political process. Voting also gives people a chance to make a decision on which party they believe should be in office. It is important for people to vote because **each vote makes a difference.**

Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Recognize the importance of the individual vote in the political process.
- Practice researching information on the Internet.
- Utilize a graphic organizer as a visual aid.
- Present their findings emphasizing the importance of one vote.

Session time: 50-60 minutes

Materials:

- Markers
- Printer paper
- Tape or glue
- Internet access or preprinted information

Methods: Guided discussion, Internet research, cooperative learning, interactive participation, student presentation

Procedure:

1. Discuss the importance of one vote by asking the question; *"What difference is my vote going to make in the political process?"*
2. Tell the students that they are going to have the opportunity to explore the importance of one vote and develop a graphic organizer in the form of a time line to represent their findings.
3. Have the students tape 8 pieces of white printer paper end to end to make a banner.
4. Tell the students to construct a timeline that starts in 1775 and ends in 2006.
5. Divide the class into groups and assign parts of the timeline to each group.
6. Have them research on the Internet to find specific instances where one vote made a difference and record the instances on the timeline by taping or pasting computer graphics, or using drawings, and/or text. (If Internet access is not available, the instructor can provide strips of paper with the information provided later in this lesson.)
7. Have each group report on their findings emphasizing the importance of one vote.

Possible Timeline Answers

- According to folklore, one vote gave America the English language instead of German. (1776)
- One vote by the U.S. House of Representatives elected Thomas Jefferson President over Aaron Burr. (1800)
- One vote kept President James Monroe from being elected president without dispute by the Electoral College. (1820)
- One vote by the U.S. House of Representatives elected John Quincy Adams as President over Andrew Jackson when one representative from New York changed his vote. (1824)
- Texas was annexed to the Union by two votes. (1845)
- One vote decided on war with Mexico. In 1846, the Mexican army invaded Texas and President Polk asked for a Declaration of War. The Senate did not want to go to war and the declaration passed by only one vote. (1846)
- One vote confirmed the purchase of Alaska from Russia. (1867)
- President Andrew Johnson retained his office by one vote short of the constitutional two thirds required for removal. (1868)
- One vote admitted California (1850), Oregon (1850), Washington (1889), and Idaho (1890) into the Union.

- One vote elected Rutherford B. Hayes to the Presidency, and the man in the Electoral College who cast that vote was an Indiana Representative also elected by one vote. (1876)
- One vote in each of the voting areas of California reelected President Wilson. (1916)
- The National Socialist German Workers' Party voted 553 to 1 in favor of taking Hitler back on his terms. (1921)
- The active-service component of the Selective Service Act of 1940 was extended by a margin of one vote. (1941)
- One vote per precinct (districts that a state is divided into for the purpose of voting) gave Truman the presidency. (1948)
- One vote per precinct would have elected Richard Nixon, rather than John Kennedy, President. (1960)
- Hubert Humphrey lost and Richard Nixon won the presidential election by a margin of fewer than three votes per precinct. (1968)
- The 2000 U.S. Presidential election was decided by an extremely narrow margin. George W. Bush won the state of Florida by just 537 votes, making him the next President of the United States. Close to 6 million voters went to the polls in Florida. It might not have been one vote, but certainly every vote counted!

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***.

