



Lesson 4: Conducting an In-class Simulated Presidential Election

Lesson Overview

Simulated elections have been conducted by teachers in varying forms for many years. Your department or school may have plans to hold a simulated election in conjunction with the general election on November 6, 2012. Ideally the simulation will allow students to experience a process similar to what voters will experience on Election Day by replicating some of the basic elements of a polling site and using actual ballots. Should this approach be possible, you would need to contact the registrar's office (or the local board of elections) early in the fall to determine what materials (ballots, voting mechanisms, etc.) it could provide you. In many areas, the office of the registrar can send a representative to your class to discuss election procedures. In the absence of a full-scale simulation, the registrar's office may be able to provide you with diagrams and a ballot you can use in your classroom. Should you decide to perform a full-scale election, lessons and resources for [high school](http://new.civiced.org/cns-teachers/lesson-plans) classes can be found online at <http://new.civiced.org/cns-teachers/lesson-plans>.

This lesson helps students understand the setup of a polling place and the role poll workers serve at these sites. Based on the research and work done in previous lessons, students will make an informed decision and cast a vote during their own in-class presidential elections.

Suggested Grade Level: High school (grades 9–12)

Objectives: By the end of the lesson students should be able to

- read and use a ballot;
- explain the physical requirements of a polling place;
- describe the role of poll workers;
- compare the types of mechanisms used to record votes;
- discuss, orally or written, the need for polling places to be apolitical; and
- summarize the process of counting and verifying the votes.

Materials Needed

- Teacher Resource 1 (Diagram of a Polling Place)
- Teacher Resource 2 (Roles)

Estimated Time: One class period

Procedure

1. *Introducing the lesson.* Begin the lesson by asking students:

- Have you ever been to a polling place on an election day?
- What did you see?
- Who was there?

Have them describe the entire experience. Ask those who have not been to a polling place what they imagine it would look like. Write the comments on the board.

2. *Reading a ballot.* Election Day is all about “casting a ballot”; therefore students should be given a copy of the ballot that will be used on November 6. Share with students where and how the ballot was attained.

Review the layout:

- What does the ballot look like?
- In what order are items placed? How are things grouped?
- How is it used?
- How is it different from those in another state?

Review the content:

- What positions are being voted for?
- For what levels of government are the positions?
- What measures, initiatives, referenda, etc., are also on the ballot?

3. *The Polling Place.* Where do you go to vote? Review with students the types of locations often used as polling places and why these are chosen. Discuss differences that might exist across the state and the country.

Review the Place:

- How is the polling place designed? Use the diagram provided in Teacher Resource 1 (or a diagram obtained from your local election board) to get students acquainted with how polling places are set up.
- Ask students to comment on the functionality of the design.
- Compare the setup of places where machines are used versus paper ballots.
- What items are found there (i.e. registered voters list by alphabet/by address, multilingual ballots and explanation sheets, etc.)? What are the functions and importance of these items or documents?

(Note: If a formal simulation is going to be held, indicate to students what space in the school is going to be used and explain how they would convert that space to resemble an actual polling

place as closely as possible. Explain what items would be replicated—perhaps a student roster would act as a registered voter list.)

Review the Workers:

- What roles do poll workers serve? Use Teacher Resource 2 to go over the types of roles filled by poll workers. Try to compare the items in the generic list to those found in your locality.
- How does one become a poll worker?

(Note: If a formal simulation is going to be held, at this point, students would be assigned the various roles plus additional roles needed to facilitate the election at the school.)

4. *The polls as neutral territory.* Ask students:

- Who else besides poll workers and voters would they expect to see at the polling sites?
- Who would they not expect to see?

This is a good point to have a brief discussion about keeping polling places “apolitical.” What are the rules about campaigning in and around polling places? Why do such rules exist?

5. *Tallying the Vote.* Once the polls close, the counting begins—or does it? There are very specific rules and regulations on how to count votes. Discuss the process with your students:

- How are votes counted in your county/state?
- When does the counting begin?
- Who does the counting and who else is present during the count?
- How are votes verified?
- Where is the information sent? Where are the ballots stored?

Have students decide what process and procedure they will use to collect, count, and announce the results of the votes taken in your class.

6. *Vote.* Pass out the ballots created for this lesson or use the ones distributed to students at the onset of class and ask students to vote. Then collect and count the ballots in the manner determined by the class and announce the results.

7. *Analysis.* Post the results of the class election in the room. As a homework assignment, ask students to reflect on the results and discuss the following points:

- Were they surprised at the outcome or was it as they thought or predicted?
- Did the outcomes reflect their own voting pattern? How?
- Why do they think the class voted the way it did?

After the Election

Once the actual election is completed, ask students to draw a comparison between their class outcomes and those of the county and state. Were there any similarities—are they a microcosm of the state? Where did the greatest differences lie? Why might that be?