Elections and the Youth Vote

ADL.

Compelling Question: How can we inspire more young adults to vote?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	Reading: R1, R2 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2, SL4, SL5 Language: L4, L6
MS	**HS**		

LESSON OVERVIEW

During every election cycle, the "youth vote" captures the attention of pollsters, political reporters, those running for office, and young adults themselves. In 1971, with the ratification of the 26th Amendment, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18. The following year, in 1972, 52% of young people between the ages of 18 and 21 voted in the Presidential election, representing the highest percentage ever for that age group. After that year, the youth vote dropped significantly until it reached a low point in the 1990s. Following that decline, there has been a steady increase among young adults who vote.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the role and importance of the youth vote, consider barriers to the youth vote, and propose ideas for taking action to increase the youth vote.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

○ Students will understand more about the historical context of "the youth vote."

○ Students will reflect on a series of interviews with teenagers about elections and voting and then consider their own thoughts and ideas.

○ Students will identify obstacles to youth voting and then work with others to address at least one of those barriers.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

○ Background Information on Youth Voting

○ *SRL Presents Turning Out: The Youth Vote* YouTube Video (1 min., PBS News Hour, www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=66&v=mWg-vmxDf4c&feature=emb_logo)

○ Turning Out the Youth Vote Stories (PBS News Hour's Student Reporting Labs, https://studentreportinglabs.org/youth-vote/)

○ "Challenges Facing Student Voters" (League of Women Voters, https://www.lwv.org/blog/challenges-facing-student-voters, one copy for each student)

○ Action Plan Organizer (one for each student)

PROCEDURES

Information Sharing

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *Have you ever had the opportunity to vote in a school election? Why or why not did you vote? What was it like to vote?*

Web Related Connections

Lessons
Election Caucuses: Who's In and Who's Out?
What is the Electoral College?
Voting Rights Then and Now

Other Resources
9 Ways to Teach about the Election: A Social Justice Approach
Teaching about Elections

Key Words

discrimination
dismantle
disproptionately
eligible
empowering
exponential
hurdles
lawsuits
legislatures
redistricting
suppression
verification

2. Engage students in a brief discussion about elections by asking: *Have you ever voted in a U.S. political election? If you could vote in the next election, would you? If so, what made you decide to vote or not to vote? What was that like? If not, have you ever gone with anyone (family members, friends) to vote? What was that like? Have you heard the term "the youth vote?" What do you think it means?*

3. Share some or all the background information on youth voting.

4. Watch the video, *SRL Presents Turning Out: The Youth Vote*. After viewing, engage students in a brief discussion by asking:

   ○ What did you think and feel while watching?

   ○ What do you agree with and why? What do you disagree with and why?

   ○ Do you think the youth vote is important? Why or why not?

   ○ What is your biggest takeaway from the video?

▶ Video Viewing: What Teens Think about Voting and Elections

1. Share a link with students to Turning out the Youth Vote Stories and explain that it includes videos of teenagers from around the country that reflects how they feel about voting and elections. Have students each select 2–3 of the videos to watch or assign them so video watching is evenly distributed. Provide students 15 minutes to watch and take notes on what they heard.

   Note: If you do not allow phones or devices in your classroom, have students watch the videos on their own for homework the evening before. If you are teaching online, watch one or two of videos together during class time and then have students watch others on their own.

2. After students watch the videos, engage them in a brief discussion by asking some or all of the following questions. Based on the discussion, as students share barriers to youth voting, record them on the board/smart board.

   ○ What do you take away from hearing teenagers' thoughts about voting and elections?

   ○ Which are some quotes or ideas that most resonate with you and why?

   ○ What are some of the barriers or issues to voting that the young people highlighted?

   ○ What are some of the ideas you heard for making voting easier or more likely for young adults?

   ○ What insights do you have about what teenagers think about voting?

   ○ Do you think your school or community does enough to inform and encourage voting among young people? Please explain.

   ○ If you were interviewed about voting and elections, what would you say?

3. Working with a partner, have students create their own videos that respond to the question, "How do you feel about voting and elections?" First have students write down some notes for how they would respond to the question. Then have them share their ideas with their partner. Next, have each practice what they would say, and partners can give each other feedback. Finally, have one student in the pair share their thoughts while their partner records their response. You can then compile all the videos together and make one cohesive video for your school or class.

📖 Reading Activity

1. Distribute a copy of the article "Challenges Facing Student Voters" to each students and give them 10–15 minutes to read it silently.

2. Engage them in a discussion by asking some or all the following questions:

- What did you learn that you didn't know before? What are some of the challenges facing young people who are trying to vote?

- What are young people doing to address these challenges?

- Among the list of challenges, which ones resonate most for you and why?

- Are there other challenges that are not included that you think should be?

- Have you or someone you know ever faced one or more of these challenges? What happened?

- What is your biggest takeaway from reading this article?

Addressing Youth Voting Barriers

1. Return to the list of barriers to youth voting. Add to the list by asking: *What are other barriers or obstacles to young adults voting?* Create a list of 6–8 identified obstacles, which could look something like this:

   - They don't feel that the issues they care about are being addressed by candidates.

   - They don't know how to register or don't know you have to register before voting.

   - They don't understand or believe that voting makes a difference in their lives.

   - They face structural barriers to voting (i.e., they need to vote absentee because they're in college, voter ID requirements, etc.)

   - They don't like or feel connected to either of the main political parties.

   - They are generally turned off by politics.

   - They don't know enough about the candidates.

   - They feel negative peer pressure (i.e., they don't know anyone else who votes).

   - They don't feel like they know enough about the issues.

   - They internalize the stereotype that young people are "apathetic" (i.e., they aren't interested).

2. Divide students into small groups of 4–5 students and allow each group to choose one of the barriers. Using the Action Plan Organizer, have them come up with a list of strategies to address the barrier. Their action ideas can include what can be done at schools and colleges, their community, society in general, or in the digital world.

3. After they have generated ideas, each group should determine a way to present their ideas to the class. Options can include a PowerPoint (or Google slides) presentation, letter to an elected official, speech, infographic, or another idea (to be approved). Provide a week or more (some class time and some for homework) for groups to complete their projects and then present them to the whole class.

Closing

Have students share one idea they have for getting more young adults to vote.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- The Youth Vote in the 2024 Election (CIRCLE, Tufts)
- "An Expert on Gen Z's Surprise Votes" (The Guardian)
- Behind Biden's 2020 Victory (Pew Research Center, June 30, 2021)
- "Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins" (Pew Research Center, January 17, 2019)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
SL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
SL5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
Language
L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

CASEL'S SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.

Background Information on Youth Voting

○ In July 1971, the 26th Amendment was ratified, which lowered the voting age from age 21 to 18. Since then, 18-year-olds have been eligible to vote.

○ Following the lowering of the voting age in 1971, 52% of people between the ages of 18 and 21 cast ballots in the 1972 Presidential election between incumbent President Richard Nixon and Senator George McGovern, the highest percentage ever recorded for young voters.

○ After 1972, voting among young people dropped significantly. In the 1990s, voter turnout among young adults reached its lowest point, dropping to 32% in the 1996 Presidential election. After that, the youth vote began to steadily increase. During the 2004 Presidential election, 49% of voters between the ages of 18 and 29 voted, a 9% increase from 2000. During the 2008 Presidential election won by Barack Obama, the first Black president, 51% of young adults under age 30 voted. This number represented the third consecutive election in which the percentage of young voters increased.

○ During the 2018 midterm elections, voter turnout among 18–29-year-olds increased from 20% in 2014 (the previous midterm election year) to 36% in 2018. This increase was the largest percentage increase for any age group in 2018. Midterm elections are general elections held at the midpoint of a president's four-year term, including all House of Representative elections and about one-third of Senate elections.

○ During the 2020 presidential election, it is estimated that 50% of young people, ages 18-29, voted, which is an 11-point increase from 2016 (39%) and likely one of the highest rates of youth electoral participation since the voting age was lowered to 18. (https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/half-youth-voted-2020-11-point-increase-2016).

○ During the 2024 presidential election, it is estimated that 42%* of young people, aged 18-29 voted, an 8-point decrease from 2020. (https://circle.tufts.edu/2024-election#overall-youth-turnout-down-from-2020-but-strong-in-battleground-states) *Note more definitive numbers will be available in the early months of 2025.

○ The term "youth vote" generally refers to voters who are between the ages of 18-29. There are approximately 52.6 million people (15.7% of total population) in this age group in 2024.

○ Over the past few years, a movement has been underway to lower the voting age to 16 or 17, especially for local elections. This is already taking place in some municipalities. Some of the reasons for lowering the voting age include: (1) increasing voter turnout overall, (2) many young people who are 16 and 17 can drive, work and pay taxes, (3) high school is an important time to establish civic engagement like voting and at age 18, many are going through a transition and/or disruption in their lives, (4) they are impacted by political issues so they should have a say about election, and (5) there is precedent with several countries (e.g., Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Scotland, Sudan and others) where young people begin voting at age 16 or 17.

Action Plan Organizer

Name of students in group:

_____   _____

_____   _____

In your own words, describe the barrier or obstacle that impacts youth voting. What is the problem and why is it a problem specifically for young adults? Include statistics, quotes or other supporting information.

What are your ideas to address this barrier…

    a.   In schools (K-12 and college)?

    b.   In communities or neighborhoods?

    c.   In society at large?

    d.   In digital spaces?

Of these ideas, which ones can you help put into practice or persuade others to put into practice?

How will you present your ideas to the class? Circle one:

PowerPoint Presentation   Letter to an elected official   Speech

Infographic   Other (please describe): _____

List tasks needed and a timeline to complete your project.	
Task	Date/task due