



TAKE ACTION: REMOVE BARRIERS TO VOTING

Distance Learning Lesson Plan

Lesson Overview

We are in an unprecedented moment in our history. Beyond impacting their everyday lives and experiences, this pandemic will shape young people's faith in government and how responsive it is to community needs. **That's why, in the midst of all of this, we want students to hear this message loud and clear: in a crisis, our democracy doesn't pause.** At this moment, our young people have thoughts, feelings, and reactions - and we know civics can provide students with an authentic space and guidance to express those responses and use their voices to advocate for their community.

In “Remove Voting Barriers”, middle and high school students read and synthesize historical and contemporary examples of barriers to voting, and brainstorm ways to advocate for greater access to voting for all. They will start by watching a video and discussing the implications of voting—why does voting matter? What impact does voting have on our lives? Then, students will learn about historic barriers to voting, and how civic participation and advocacy helped overcome those barriers. Utilizing this knowledge, students will explore current barriers to voting and learn from local experts about how they can participate in advocacy to overcome these barriers and increase access to safe voting, in particular during the time of COVID-19.

Note for Teachers: We understand that states and local municipalities have different laws around voting—who can vote, how they can vote, and more. Procedures for addressing voting concerns in a time of COVID-19 are accordingly diverse. We also note that this lesson is being released at a time when many primaries have already occurred (May 2020), some remain on the calendar, some have moved, and the general election is on the horizon. In this lesson, we focus on skills for accessing information about these procedures and policy changes, as well as how to advocate for policy change regarding voting. **Prior to engaging in this lesson, we strongly encourage you to review the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's guide for Talking to Students About Coronavirus (<https://bit.ly/2wEUrS1>).**

Students will consider the following:

Civic Knowledge Current elected and appointed officials representing one's community.

Civic Skills Communicate persuasively, both orally and through written work, to mobilize others.

Civic Values A responsibility to balance individual interests with broader collective aims.

Remove Barrier to Voting Lesson Plan

Materials and Preparation:

- **Day 1 Materials**
 - **Why Vote? Your Place in the History of Voting** (PDF <https://bit.ly/2WCP7sF> or Google Doc <https://bit.ly/3bBbJhk>)
 - **Optional: Timeline: A Brief History of Voting Rights In The US** (PDF <https://bit.ly/2WvgDbb>)
 - **Lyrics: Yellopain, My Vote Don't Count** (PDF <https://bit.ly/2T6ehgP> or Google Doc <https://bit.ly/2z3zgdB>)
 - **Music Video: Yellopain, My Vote Don't Count** (<https://bit.ly/2y4cx06>)
 - **Video: Suppressed: The Fight to Vote** (<https://bit.ly/2T5JK2T>)
 - **Transcript: Suppressed: The Fight to Vote** (PDF <https://bit.ly/2T6ehgP> or Google Doc <https://bit.ly/2TbhWdk>)
 - **Contact A Voting Expert** PDF (<https://bit.ly/2z3AOEr> or Google Doc <https://bit.ly/2yZL9RL>)
 - **State Voting Expert Directory** (PDF <https://bit.ly/2XdX0E3> or Google Doc <https://bit.ly/3bBmMH6>)
 - **Optional: State Voting Requirements & Information** (<https://bit.ly/2VbXpqD>)
- **Day 2 Materials**
 - **Vote411** (www.vote411.org)
 - **Transcript: Wisconsin Primary Continues Despite COVID-19** (PDF <https://bit.ly/2y6jiPj> or Google Doc <https://bit.ly/3dQaxZ2>)
 - **Video: Wisconsin Primary Continues Despite COVID-19** (<https://bit.ly/2T5ytzD>)
 - **Write to an Election Official** (PDF <https://bit.ly/363IHqt> or Google Doc <https://bit.ly/2LwOUki>)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Examine historic and contemporary barriers to voting.
- Analyze how COVID-19 is affecting access in local elections.
- Evaluate information regarding voting policies at various levels (local, state, national).
- Advocate for the elimination of local barriers to voting.

Day 1 Agenda

- ❑ **Do Now:** Why Vote?
- ❑ **Mini-Lesson:** A Brief History of Voting Rights in the US
- ❑ **Worktime:** Local Barriers to Voting
- ❑ **Wrap-up:** Choose a Focus Issue

Day 2 Agenda

- ❑ **Do Now:** When is Your Next Election?
- ❑ **Mini-Lesson:** Analyze Effects of COVID-19
- ❑ **Worktime:** Write to an Election Official
- ❑ **Wrap-up:** Tactic: Post on Social Media

DAY 1 LESSON PLAN

Take a look at this sidebar for instructional tips!

TIP: If using virtual facetime (ex. Zoom or Google Hangouts), ask students to speak their answers, or share their responses using the “chat” feature.

TIP: Remind students that while voting is a powerful way to be civically engaged, it is not the only way. For example, lobbying a decision-maker, writing an opinion essay and submitting it to a local newspaper, and attending a town hall meeting.

DO NOW 10 MINS

Why Vote?

Frame:

- Lessons about voting as a right and a responsibility often skip over why voting actually matters to you. So we’re starting there. This activity will give you a chance to reflect on your feelings about voting and explore the ways voting can impact your day-to-day life, even if you or your family are unable to vote.

Task:

- Watch **Music Video: Yellopain, My Vote Don’t Count** and follow along with the **Lyrics: Yellopain, My Vote Don’t Count**

Debrief:

- Use **Why Vote? Your Place in the History of Voting** to respond to the following prompts:
 - What have you heard about voting from friends and family? And does that make you think of voting as related to your life or unrelated to your life?
 - Based on Yellopain’s explanation, why is it important to vote? Use the following quote from the video for reference:
 - *“We gotta focus on the Legislative Branch, yeah, they the ones that make the laws. Yeah they the ones write how much food stamp money you get on the card...See their election every two years but we don’t ever even go to those. The congress, they can raise minimum wage, but don’t even really know it though.”*

TIP: As you engage in discussions around voting rights, keep in mind that students and their families may be unable to vote for various reasons. For example, they may not be U.S. citizens or if previously incarcerated, may be unable to vote. In any case, be sure to not assume all families have the right to vote.

TIP: Consider engaging students in civil discourse on voting topics such as:

- *Felon voting rights* bit.ly/35WhG7o
- *Lowering the voting age* bit.ly/2T4wYBL
- *Electronic Voting Machines* bit.ly/2T5wzyQ

MINI-LESSON 15 MINS

A Brief History of Voting Rights in the US

Frame:

- Before contacting local experts to learn about contemporary voting requirements where you live and analyzing how requirements can either prevent people from exercising their right to vote or expand their access, explore this brief history of barriers to voting across the U.S. for context.

Task:

- In **Why Vote? Your Place in the History of Voting** turn your attention to the **Timeline: A Brief History of Voting Rights In The US**. Carefully read the timeline and answer the questions beside it.
 - Question: In what year did women gain the right to vote?
 - Answer: 1920, however this mainly meant white women as native american and asian women were not yet allowed and many restrictions such as poll taxes and literacy tests were being enacted to keep African Americans from exercising their right to vote.
 - Question: Over time, has voting become available to more or fewer people in the United States? What have been some barriers to growth?
 - Answer: As you can see from the timeline, over time people have advocated for the US government to recognize their right to vote. Groups such as women, African Americans and Native Americans, and many other previously disenfranchised persons have had their voting rights *legally* recognized by the federal government. However, even while voting rights have expanded at the federal level, local governments have passed laws and regulations that make it difficult (and in some cases impossible) to practice the right to vote. Over the years these laws have included the implementation of poll taxes, literacy tests and voter identification laws, and more.

WORK TIME 30 MINS

Local Barriers

Frame:

- The right to vote in the U.S. has expanded over the country's history to include many groups who were originally excluded—such as white men who don't own land, black men, women of all races and ethnicities, and 18-21 year olds. The barriers that remain are often created by voting regulations that make it easier for some people to vote than others. This can include some people having better access to polling stations, better access to information, and having a shared culture around the importance of voting.

Task #1:

- Watch the video **Suppressed: The Fight to Vote** until at least the 7:40 mark and follow along with the **Transcript: Suppressed: The Fight to Vote**
- Answer the following questions in the **Contact A Voting Expert, Part 1**
 - What is one barrier to voting described in the documentary that the state of Georgia created or attempted to create?
 - How did people advocate to remove that barrier?
 - After watching the clip or full documentary, what is one question you have about voting rights and regulations in your state?
- Reflect
 - Just like in Georgia, there are ways for you to advocate to remove barriers to voting in your state or to advocate for increased access and participation. Task #2 gives you a chance to learn from local experts about what some of those barriers and opportunities are.

Task #2:

- Use the **State Voting Expert Directory** to look up your local or state election officials, a local election advocacy group, or voting rights organization. (You can also use this website if you prefer: **State Voting Requirements & Information** (bit.ly/2VbXpqD))
- Use the **Contact a Voting Expert Part 2** to prepare a call to your local election board/advocacy group. Choose questions from the list provided to gain some of the following information:
 - What are the regulations around voting in your area?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who is in charge of making decisions about voting policies? ○ What rules around voting might keep people from voting? ● Use the Contact a Voting Expert, Part 3 to reflect on what you learned from your interview. <p>Debrief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What information did you learn from the official or officials you spoke to? ● What's one piece of information you found interesting or surprising? ● What does this information make you want to do?
<p>KEYWORD: <i>Inclusive</i>: does not leave out any group of people or section of society</p> <p>KEYWORD: <i>Accessible</i>: easy to get to, easy to use, easy to understand</p>	<p>WRAP-UP 10 MINS</p> <p>Choose a Focus Issue</p> <p>Frame:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The second part of this lesson is about advocating for a policy change that would make elections more inclusive and participatory in your state. Effective advocacy focuses on a very specific issue that can be addressed by changing one policy or law. <p>Task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use the Contact a Voting Expert, Part 4 to review your notes from the voting expert interview and to choose a Focus Issue, either one barrier to voting you want to advocate to remove or one opportunity to expand voter participation that you want to advocate for. <p>Debrief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Why did you choose the barrier or opportunity that you did?

DAY 2 LESSON PLAN

Take a look at this sidebar for instructional tips!

DO NOW 10 MINS

When is Your Next Election?

Frame:

- Effective advocacy is specific. Knowing when people in your city or state are next going to vote will help you make a successful argument about removing the barrier you've identified or increasing access and voter participation before that vote.

Task:

- Answer the question "When is the next election in my state/city? What is the election for?" by using one of the following methods
 1. Visit [vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org).
 - a. On the home page, scroll down to "Personalized Voting Information"
 - b. On the right side of the page, enter your information in the section titled "Enter Your Address to Get Started:" and click "Submit"
 - c. Once you are sent to the next page, find the date of your next election under the heading "Upcoming Election & Registration Dates"
 2. Ask another member of your household if they know when the next local or state election is in your area.
 3. Ask your teacher when the next election will be held.

Debrief:

- Based on what you know about your city and state's response to COVID-19, and the examples of voting you saw or read about in **Suppressed: The Fight to Vote**, how do you think voting and elections will be impacted by the pandemic?
 - A few reminders about the in-person voting process:
 1. Poll workers hand ballots to voters OR Voters use an electronic voting machine that other people have used
 2. Voting booths are often set up next right to one another
 3. Lines can become very long as people wait to vote

TIP: There is space to answer the Debrief questions in **Write to an Election Official, Part 1**; students may also choose to write their answers on their own paper/notebook.

MINI-LESSON 15 MINS

Effects of COVID-19 on Voting

Frame:

- Local election officials and advocacy groups may have more power and incentive to change voting processes and/or requirements during a state of emergency than under traditional circumstances. Crises expose priorities and deficiencies, which makes this a strategic opportunity to advocate for more inclusive, accessible elections. Barriers that may have been clear to some before the pandemic are now more likely to be clear to all.

Task:

- On Tuesday, April 7, 2020, the state of Wisconsin held their primary elections for the Democratic and Republican nominees for the President of the United States. Primary Elections, also called simply, “primaries”, are the first stage in the voting process. Primaries are the election when voters within a single party indicate their preference for the person who should represent their party in the general election. The general Presidential election is held on the same day everywhere in the U.S., but states decide for themselves when to hold primaries.
 - Watch **Video: Wisconsin Primary Continues Despite COVID-19** or read **Transcript: Wisconsin Primary Continues Despite COVID-19** describing Wisconsin’s presidential primary vote during COVID-19.
 - Use the **Write to an Election Official, Part 1** to reflect on what you learned about additional barriers to voting created by COVID-19.
 - What are some of the unique challenges of hosting an election during a pandemic?
 - What approaches were attempted to address the barrier to voting in the video?
 - Could those new barriers make the barrier you want to remove worse? If so, how?
 - Are there changes to the voting process that could keep people safe during COVID-19 and make elections more inclusive and accessible moving forward?

	<p>WORK TIME 30 MINS</p> <p>Send an Email or Letter to Your State’s Top Election Official</p> <p>Frame:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Now that you’ve wrapped your head around a barrier to voting that you want to remove, and the ways COVID-19 might make that barrier worse. It’s time to share the change you want to see with your state’s top election official. <p>Task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify your state’s top election official. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review your notes from the Contact a Voting Expert, Part 3 to find the name and contact information for the person or group of people in charge of making decisions about voting and election policies in your state. ● Use the Write to an Election Official, Part 2 to prepare your advocacy to your election official(s). ● Send your email or letter. <p>Debrief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do you think voting access would be different if more young people advocated like you did?
<p>TIP: Many students do not have social media accounts for a variety of reasons. Consider polling your class using Google Form or Strawpoll prior to engaging in this lesson.</p>	<p>WRAP-UP 10 MINS</p> <p>Tactic: Post on Social Media</p> <p>Frame:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● You can inspire others. Tell everyone—your friends and family, neighbors and co-workers—that you are advocating for the elimination of a voting requirement that makes it harder for people to exercise their voting rights. <p>Task:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Post a screenshot or photo of your email or letter on social media. ● Don’t forget to add #democracydoesntpause and tag @generationcitizen on Instagram or @gencitizen on Twitter ● Consider including a call to action for your followers to retweet, repost, or send their own message to encourage removing voting barriers. ● Tag your state’s head election official; they may respond!

