



## Middle & High School Lesson One

### Introduction to Voting

**Objective:** To introduce how low voter turnout can affect the outcome of an election and how that outcome affects everyone.

**Materials:** 3-4 types of treats, pencils, paper, students' journals

#### Can one vote really make a difference?

Yes! While most times, an election is not decided by only one or two votes, there are many instances throughout history where one vote has determined the outcome of an election or a major decision for a State or the country. Here are some examples:

- In 1868, President Andrew Johnson faced being removed from office after being impeached. It required a 2/3 majority vote in the House of Representatives in order to remove Johnson as President—the measure failed by one vote. (I bet both President Johnson and Senate President Pro Tempore, Benjamin Wade, thought that one vote was pretty important.)
- In 1839, Marcus Morton was elected Governor of Massachusetts by one vote. 102,066 votes were cast; Morton received exactly 51,034. Had he received one less vote, the election, by law, would have been decided by the State Legislature.  
[www.ourcampaigns.com](http://www.ourcampaigns.com)

Even if an election does not come down to the difference of a single vote, which most do not, how many candidates actually win by a margin of more than 33%; what about 42%? In the 2008 presidential election, only about 58% of eligible voters actually turned out at the polls. [<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php>] How different could past elections have been if that missing 42% had gone out and been heard? Each person who decides his or her vote is not important adds to the epidemic—to the tune of almost 100,000,000 votes. What political candidate couldn't use those!? How different might our Congress have looked if the opinions of those 100,000,000 had been voiced? Maybe everything would be the same, maybe not.

*Introduce voting to the class by asking a few basic questions.*

1. What is voting? (voicing an opinion or preference)
2. What motivates people to get out and vote? (many issues are decided based on a vote—elections for federal to local officials, referendums [bond issues, taxes, constitutional initiatives, etc.]
3. What is being decided in the 2012 vote? (President, Members of Congress, certain Mississippi Supreme Court Justices will run for election, various state, municipal and county official special races)
4. Why is it important that all eligible citizens be allowed to vote? (many of the decisions, whether an election or referendum, can/will directly affect the population of the United States)
5. What are some current issues facing the United States that could be affected by the 2012 election? (health care and Medicaid, immigration, military presence in Middle East, tax rates, energy)

#### Activity I – Voting Affects Us All

1. Show students at least three different sets/bags of treats. Tell them that you have planned to share only one kind of treat with the entire class. How can we choose the type of treat that will be shared? (Students should respond or be prompted to respond, “We can vote!”)

2. Write the three choices on the board and have students write on slips of paper his or her preferred choice. Walk around the room taking note of how students are voting. Select approximately 1/3 of the class and have their ballots put aside in a separate pile when collecting votes. These votes will not be counted to demonstrate that voter turnout is only about 60% of the eligible population. Without the students knowing, try to make this where it will change the outcome of the election if they were all counted.
3. Have the results tallied on the board for everyone to see. Have students graph election results on the board as a group or individually at their desks.
4. Ask students from the un-included 1/3, "Did the voting turn out the way you wanted?" Open the discussion to the rest of the class. Ask students who did vote, "How do you feel about the feelings of those who decided not to vote?"
5. Some students may be dissatisfied with the choice. Some students may have strong feelings about election because their opinion was not considered or feel their "candidate" lost because not everyone voted. (Encourage them to respectfully share their feelings. It will only make the discussion better.)
6. Explain to the students, because elections often effect an entire population, it's important to have everyone vote. (If you don't take the time to vote, you are allowing others to make decisions that directly affect you with no regard to your personal opinion or how it will affect you. Your vote could have changed the outcome.)
7. Add the votes from the set aside pile and see if the outcome changes.
8. Have students write a short essay explaining why it is important that everyone who can vote does vote and what affects low voter turnout can have on issues currently facing the country.

**Activity II- Discussion/Debate "Why is my vote so important?" (Not everyone always had the opportunity to vote and many people have fought and died for that freedom, it should be a right we cherish.)**

Allow class to decide what they think voting rights should be.

- Pros/Cons of current requirements
- What new ones would they add
- What requirements would they take away

### **Activity III - Observations**

Close the lesson by having the students comment in writing about how they would feel if they were not allowed to vote or if they realized that their vote wasn't counted.