

Topic: III. Candidates, Parties, and Ballot Measures

What the students do: Explore at least one current ballot measure and participate in a structured discussion to analyze the proposed measure and reach their own conclusions.

CA History-Social Science Standards: 11.11; 12.2.4, 12.6.4, 12.6.5

CMS Promising Approaches: 1, 2, 3

Thanks to: Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago's international program Deliberating in a Democracy

Deliberating in a Democracy: Engaging Students in Civic (and Civil) Discourse

Overview

This lesson engages students in learning about and discussing ballot measures using a structured academic controversy model we call “Deliberation.” Through their participation in the Deliberation process, students will analyze the proposed initiative/proposition, examine different points of view on the issue, and form and express their own opinions.

The Deliberation model is the centerpiece of an international program, *Deliberating in a Democracy* (DID), funded by the U.S. Department of Education. For more information and lessons using the Deliberation model, please visit: <http://www.deliberating.org/>.

Materials/Preparation

To prepare for this lesson, teachers (or students) will need to select at least one ballot proposition or initiative and collect background information on the issue, including supporting and opposing arguments, rationales, impact statements, etc. It is important that the different points of view are presented in a balanced, non-partisan way for the students so that they can reach their own conclusions based on the background information.

Several websites will be helpful in collecting this information:

The California Secretary of State provides information on initiatives:

http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_j.htm

The League of Women Voters also provides information on ballot measures on its Easy Voter site: http://lwvc.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=easyvoter_guide_propositions

The home pages for each of the sites listed above:

Secretary of State: <http://www.sos.ca.gov/>

Easy Voter: <http://www.easyvoter.org/site/evguide/>

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Make copies of the following handouts:

Handout 1: “Deliberation Guide”—1 per student

Handout 2: “Deliberation Summary”—1 per student

Handout 3: “Student Reflection on Deliberation” —1 per student

Teacher Instructions for the Deliberation

Step One: Introduction

Explain that voting on ballot measures is an important part of California’s democratic process because they provide an opportunity for citizens to directly impact public policies and laws. Many ballot measures impact our personal pocketbooks, the environment, transportation, and schools. Explain that though they may not be of voting age yet, they still have the right (and responsibility) to know about the issues being discussed and what is at stake.

Tell them that today they are going to have an opportunity to really examine and decide for themselves if they would support or oppose at least one current ballot measure.

Introduce the ballot measure(s) and ask if the students have seen political ads related to them. Discuss the difference between getting information about ballot measures through campaign ads vs. seeking information about ballot measures through non-partisan sources.

Tell the students that to become informed about ballot measures, they need to understand the positions of those who support **as well as** those who oppose the measure.

If you are going to have students locate their own background information, assign this now.

Next, inform the students that they are going to participate in a sophisticated discussion about at least one ballot measure using a format called “Deliberation”.

Distribute and go over **Handout 1: “Deliberation Guide.”** Review the Rules of Deliberation with the students and post the rules in a prominent position in the classroom. Emphasize that the class will deliberate and then debrief their experiences.

Step Two: Reading the Background Information

Distribute copies of the Background Information you or your students prepared. Have students read the information carefully and underline facts and ideas that they think are important and/or interesting. **(Ideally for homework.)**

Step Three: Grouping

Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Group members should share their important facts and interesting ideas with each other to develop a common understanding of the information.

Step Four: Introducing a Deliberation Question

The students will address a Deliberation Question:

Should the voters vote YES on the following ballot measure (insert language of ballot measure).

Give the Deliberation Question to the class and display it in the classroom. Distribute **Handout 2: “Deliberation Summary,”** to each student. Have everyone write the Deliberation Question in the space provided (The Deliberation Question) and remind them of the Rules of Deliberation on Handout 1.

Step Five: Learning the Reasons

Divide each group into two teams, Team A and Team B. Both teams should reread the background information. Team A should find the most compelling reasons to **support** the Deliberation Question. Team B should find the most compelling reasons to **oppose** the Deliberation Question. Each team is responsible for selecting the most compelling reasons for its position. Make sure that everyone on the team is prepared to present at least one reason.

Step Six: Presenting the Most Compelling Reasons

Each team will present the most compelling reasons in support of or in opposition to the Deliberation Question. The teams may not believe in or agree with their reasons, but they should be convincing in presenting them to others.

Team A will explain the reasons they selected to **support** the Deliberation Question. If Team B does not understand something, they should ask questions but NOT argue.

Team B will explain the reasons they selected to **oppose** the Deliberation Question. If Team A does not understand something, they should ask questions, but NOT argue.

In preparation for the next step, Reversing Positions, have each team listen for the most compelling reasons.

Step Seven: Reversing Positions

Explain that the next step is for each team to take the opposite view and have Team B explain to Team A what they believe to be the best reasons in support of the Deliberation Question. Have Team A do the same to Team B.

Step Eight: Deliberating the Question

Students now drop their roles and begin deliberating the question as a group. Remind the class of the question. Each student can (1) use what he/she has learned about the issue and (2) offer his/her personal experiences and formulate opinions regarding the issue.

After deliberating, students should find and record areas of agreement in their group in the space provided on Handout 2 (“Areas of Agreement in My Group”).

Invite students as individuals to express to the group their personal position on the issue and write it in the space provided (“My Personal Position”) on Handout 2. **Important:** Individual students do NOT have to agree with the group.

Step Nine: Debriefing the Deliberation

Reconvene the entire class. Distribute **Handout 3: “Student Reflection on Deliberation,”** as a guide. Ask students to discuss the following questions: **(5 to 10 minutes)**

- What were the most compelling reasons for each side?
- What were the areas of agreement?
- What questions do you still have? Where can you get more information?
- What are some reasons why deliberating this issue is important in a democracy?
- What might you or your class do to share what you have learned about this or other ballot measures? Options include teaching others about what they have learned, taking a poll about the measure at school, writing an editorial for the school or community paper, or conducting additional research.

Consider having students prepare personal reflections on the Deliberation Question through written, visual, or audio essays.

Step Ten: Student Poll/Student Reflection

Ask your students: “Do you agree, disagree, or are you still undecided about the Deliberation Question?” Students fill out **Handout 3**.

Deliberation Guide

What Is Deliberation?

Deliberation (meaningful discussion) is the focused exchange of ideas and the analysis of arguments with the aim of making a decision.

Why Are We Deliberating?

Citizens must be able and willing to express and exchange ideas among themselves, with community leaders, and with their representatives in government. Citizens and public officials in a democracy need strategies and opportunities to engage in the public discussion of controversial issues in order to make informed decisions. It is important to keep an open mind in order to reconsider a decision based on new information.

What Are the Rules for Deliberation?

- Read the material carefully.
- Focus on the deliberation question.
- Listen carefully to what others are saying.
- Check for understanding.
- Analyze what others say.
- Speak and encourage others to speak.
- Refer to the reading to support your ideas.
- Use relevant background knowledge, including life-experiences, in a logical way.
- Use your heart and mind to express ideas and opinions.
- Remain engaged and respectful when controversy arises.
- Focus on ideas, not personalities.

Deliberation Summary

Deliberation Question:

Areas of Agreement in My Group:

My Personal Position (Include reasons to support your opinion. You may suggest another course of action or add additional ideas to address this problem)

Student Reflection on Deliberation

Large Group Discussion: What We Learned

What were the most compelling reasons for each side?

Side A:

Side B:

What were the areas of agreement?

What questions do you still have? Where can you get more information?

What are some reasons why deliberating this issue is important in a democracy?

What might you and/or your class do to address this problem?

Individual Reflection: What I Learned

Which number best describes your understanding of the focus issue? [circle one]

1 2 3 4 5
NO DEEPER MUCH DEEPER

What new insights did you gain?

What did you do well in the deliberation?

What do you need to work on to improve your personal deliberation skills?

What did someone else in your group do or say that was particularly helpful?

Is there anything the group should work on to improve the group deliberation?