

VI: Getting Informed

Topic: VI. Getting Informed

What the students do: Research, participate in “scavenger hunts,” and create products using information they have found to educate others about topics related to voting and elections.

[CA History-Social Science Standards:](#) 12.6.4

[CMS Promising Approaches:](#) 1, 2 and potential parent involvement

Thanks to: [Constitutional Rights Foundation](#)

Searching and Surfing for Facts

Overview

Young people, of voting age or not, need opportunities to participate in democratic processes.

[Research](#) from the *California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools* shows that discussing political issues in the classroom, with friends, and at home increases civic knowledge, skills, and positive dispositions. [Research](#) from the League of Women Voters shows “that when people have dialogue about the issues they care about, they develop a sense of their own role in making change and are much more interested in learning about voting.”

Effective civic education mirrors participatory citizenship. Students take content knowledge to the next level: grappling with issues, practicing decision-making, problem solving, and working with others. It is important to help students gather accurate and balanced information about candidates, ballot measures, and other election-related topics. In addition to the many opportunities presented in *Democracy Central: A Teacher’s Guide to the 2008 Elections* for students to research and gather information, here are some additional ideas to get them searching and surfing:

1. “Scavenger Hunts”

Choose items from the **Question Bank** to help students gather information about selected topics. It is important that the students have some purpose for gathering the information. Some ideas to consider:

- Divide students into teams and have a “Surfing Competition” to see which teams can complete the hunt accurately and on deadline. After the competition, each team generates a set of questions and answers it thinks are important for all (citizens, high school students, community members, parents) to know and creates a brochure to distribute or poster to display.
- Have students interview at least one adult at home to find out what he/she thinks are the most important things voters should know before they go to the polls. Students and the adults they interviewed then work together to gather the information. Students bring the information back to class, work in small groups to compile their findings, and create brochures to distribute back to their families or others. (Contact your local League of Women Voters to find out if they would volunteer to help with this project, provide guidance on creating non-partisan and accurate brochures, etc.)

2. Operation Outreach

Engaging students in activities that educate others not only provides an opportunity to increase their own knowledge, but can also impact civic skills and dispositions as a service-learning project.

Here are some ideas to get your students educating others:

- Students organize a [DebateWatch](#) using suggestions from the [Commission on Presidential Debates](#).
- Students could organize a project similar to this: Twelfth-grade government students at Belmont Senior High in Los Angeles thought it was important for new citizens to be more involved in the democratic process. As the students studied the process of democratic elections in their classwork, they realized the importance for new citizens to understand the variety of political parties and the importance of registering to vote. On the day that 6,000 (six thousand!) new citizens were to be sworn-in at the Los Angeles Convention Center, the Belmont students brought educational displays they had created, written in six languages, to the plaza in front of the Convention Center. As the newly sworn-in citizens exited the building, surrounded by their families, the Belmont students approached them and asked if they could help explain anything about the voting process.

These 30 students registered 1,500 new voters and held engaging discussions about the impact of voting, about political parties, and about the structures of our state and federal governments. Students reinforced their social studies content and met a need for engaging more community members as active participants in a democracy.

- Students organize a mock election for a local middle or elementary school. They create age-appropriate and balanced materials to help the younger students learn about candidates before they “vote.”

Question Bank

Here are some questions to get students searching and surfing. Teachers are encouraged to modify the questions to meet their instructional needs!

VOTING

3. How do you register to vote?
4. Where do you register to vote?
5. What is the name and address of your county registrar of voters?
6. What are the qualifications for registering to vote?
7. When do you have to re-register?
8. Why register at all? Why not just show up on Election Day?
9. How many polling places are there in your county?
10. What is absentee voting and how does it work?
11. What times do the polls open and close?
12. Where is your household's polling place for the next election?

CANDIDATES & OFFICES

1. What offices are on the ballot?
2. Who are the major candidates running for _____?
3. Is this a non-partisan office? or To what parties do the major candidates belong?
4. Who is endorsing the major candidates?
5. What issues are the candidates discussing?
6. What issue are you most interested in?
7. Where do the major candidates stand on the issue you are most interested in?
8. Which candidates seem most interested in issues affecting youth?
9. What is the most interesting thing you found out about the candidates?
10. What is the best resource you found for learning about the candidates? Why?

BALLOT MEASURES

1. What is a ballot measure?
2. What measures are on the ballot?
3. Which ballot measures are you most interested in? Why?
4. Choose one ballot measure and find out how it came to be.
5. Who supports it? Who opposes it?
6. What does it mean to vote "YES" on this ballot measure?
7. Describe any economic impact this measure might have.
8. How might this measure impact your community, someone you know, or your life?
9. What is the most interesting thing you learned about this ballot measure?
10. What was the best resource you found for learning about this ballot measure? Why?

GENERAL

1. What type of election is coming up? (National, Local, Primary, General, Special)
2. Find three resources you think people should use to learn about what is on the ballot.

(Continued)

3. Find three resources you think people should use to learn about the candidates.
4. Find three resources you think people should use to learn about issues being discussed.
5. What age group has the highest voter turnout in your state?
6. What age group has the lowest voter turnout in your state?
7. What is the most interesting or useful poll or survey you have found? Why?
8. What are the top three issues in the news concerning the election/campaigns?
9. What types of media are candidates using to reach out to young voters?
10. Where do you get your information about the election? Why?