

Lesson Plan

National Standards for Civics and Government

V. What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

C. What are the responsibilities of citizens?

Cartoon Title

481102 - *Don't forget to take them with you today.*



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Materials

Cartoon graphic
Student Response Form

Background Information

U.S. citizens are not required to vote, nor are they required to be educated about the issues or candidates for which they cast their ballots. While there are age and registration requirements, there are few other restrictions on who can vote – although convicted felons have their voting rights rescinded.

Allow students to discuss the effects of a citizenry who doesn't "use their heads". Students may come to the conclusion that voters should be mandated to be informed before they mark their ballot. Allow them to seek ways of "testing" each voter's level of preparedness, and discuss whether any of these would be legal under our democratic system. Review voting laws in the past and how they have been used to exclude certain segments of the population and debate whether there is greater harm in restricting voters, or allowing for uninformed voters to have the same voice.

Have students monitor the campaign process and explore how information is disseminated to the public. Ask them to monitor a specific campaign and keep a list of information they receive on that issue or candidate. After review of the information ask them to discuss how much of it is factual, appeals to emotion, gives unbiased information, denigrates the alternative choice or candidate, explains the issue or person in non prejudicial language, and/or presents a logical reason for making that choice.

Enrichment Activities

Debate a new law before the senate that would require that all voters pass a verbal or written exam that would ask them to explain the issues and/or candidates before being allowed to cast their vote.

Write a campaign platform for an issue or candidate that would provide voters with clear, unbiased information that does not rely on emotional appeals, or attacks on the opposition.

Design a cartoon depicting the outcome of an American election by voters who didn't use their heads.

Student Response Form

1. In the U.S., who is allowed to vote?

2. What qualifications must U.S. citizens have in order to cast a ballot?

3. What is the artist advising voters to do as they go to the polls?

4. How can the democratic system be improved to ensure voters are being thoughtful when they make their election choices?

5. List ways in which citizens receive information about candidates and issues.
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

 - d.

 - e.

6. Consider whether our current campaign system effectively provides information about candidates and issues and then present a plan to improve the campaign process so voters have the maximum ability to use facts and make sound electoral decisions. Like any good plan, yours must contain a list of specific objectives, and a means for carrying out each of these activities as well as a timeline and a record of responsibility for each area. You may find it helpful to develop a form or chart to organize your ideas.