Unit 2: Politics and Voting

Content Area: **Social Studies**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Trimester 1**
Length: **4 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Summary

The civics course prompts students to examine the fundamentals of our democratic republic, including institutions, founding documents, essential rights, and civic responsibilities. Students explore how they can become more civically engaged in different capacities and during different phases of their life. Problem-based learning is a hallmark of the course where students are encouraged to explore issues currently affecting the communities they operate in and how they might solve or address them. Students leave the course with greater civic competence needed to be a productive and proud citizen in their local, national, and global communities.

This unit is part of the larger aforementioned course sequence and specifically focuses on politics and voting where students will understand that the United States democratic system requires active participation of its citizens and effective government representatives must translate the wants and needs of their constituents into lawful actions and policies. By the end of this unit, students will be able to evaluate how and why citizenship is gained, highlighting the significance of voting as a right of citizens. Moreover, students will be able to assess the functionality of our current voting system through investigation of the electoral college and gerrymandering, where they will evaluate the extent to which these systems uphold or challenge democratic ideals. Students will utilize argumentation and critical thinking skills throughout the unit to draw conclusions regarding the voting process where they will use researched-based evidence to support their stances and conclusions.

Revision Date: August 2023

Standards

6.3.8.CivicsPD.1: Deliberate on a public issue affecting an upcoming election, consider opposing arguments, and develop a reasoned conclusion.

6.3.8.CivicsPR.5: Engage in simulated democratic processes (e.g., legislative hearings, judicial proceedings, elections) to understand how conflicting points of view are addressed in a democratic society.

6.1.8.HistoryCC.3.b: Explain how political parties were formed and continue to be shaped by differing perspectives regarding the role and power of federal government.

9.4.8.CI.3: Examine challenges that may exist in the adoption of new ideas (e.g., 2.1.8.SSH,

6.1.8.CivicsPD.2).

9.4.8.GCA.2: Demonstrate openness to diverse ideas and perspectives through active discussions to achieve a group goal.

RH.6-8.1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions

RH.6-8.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

RH.6-8.6. Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

RH.6-8.7. Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

WHST.6-8.1. Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

- A. Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
- B. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.
- C. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- D. Establish and maintain a formal/academic style, approach, and form.
- E. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

WHST.6-8.2. Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

- A. Introduce a topic and organize ideas, concepts, and information using text structures (e.g. definition, classification, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, etc.) and text features (e.g. headings, graphics, and multimedia) when useful to aiding comprehension.
- B. Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other

information and examples.

- C. Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
- D. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
- E. Establish and maintain a formal/academic style, approach, and form.
- F. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

WHST.6-8.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, voice, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

WHST.6-8.5. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

WHST.6-8.6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.

WHST.6-8.7. Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

WHST.6-8.8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

WHST.6-8.9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

WHST.6-8.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, metacognition/self correction, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

In accordance with New Jersey's Chapter 32 Diversity and Inclusion Law, this unit includes instructional materials that highlight and promote diversity, including: economic diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and

belonging in connection with gender and sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, and disabilities.

This unit challenges students to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively. Information literacy includes, but is not limited to digital, visual, media, textual, and technological literacy. Lessons may include the research process and how information is created and produced; critical thinking and using information resources; research methods, including the difference between primary and secondary sources; the difference between facts, points of view, and opinions, accessing peer-reviewed print and digital library resources; the economic, legal, social, and ethical issues surrounding the use of information.

This unit is aligned to the English Language Development (ELD) standards for kindergarten through grade 12 since multilingual learners develop content and language concurrently, with academic content in a classroom where the language of instruction is English. As a result, language learning and language as a means for learning academic content are interchangeable. The following ELD standards are relevant for this unit and course of study:

- Standard 1: Language for Social and Instructional Purposes: English language learners communicate for social and instructional purposes within the school setting.
- Standard 5: Language for Social Studies: English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies.

The standards in this unit reflect a developmental progression across grade levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including the humanities, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship.

Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings

Essential Questions:

- To what extent is voter representation and the voting process equitable?
- How does informed citizenship support democratic government?
- To what extent is “civic virtue” necessary for democracy to survive?
- To what extent are political parties necessary to democracy?

Enduring Understandings:

- The United States democratic system requires active participation of its citizens.
- Effective government representatives must translate the wants and needs of their constituents into lawful actions and policies.

Objectives

Students will know:

- Terms, concepts and individuals (including, but not limited to): Citizenship, naturalization, Census, Electoral College, Bipartisan, Partisan, Constituents, Representatives, Political Parties, Democrat, Republican, Third-Party, Ballot, Voting, Board of Electors, Gerrymandering, Redistricting, Popular Vote, Voter Suppression, Redistricting, Incumbent, Disenfranchisement
- Citizenship is granted automatically to those born in the United States and those who have at least one parent who is a U.S. citizen and has resided in the United States.
- Citizenship can be obtained through the process of naturalization, which has many steps and is a comprehensive process.
- Citizens are granted rights, but also have civic responsibilities.
- The electoral college is used to determine the president of the United States.
- The electoral college has benefits and detriments, which have been the subject of bipartisan debate.
- The United States is unique in its use of the electoral college rather than the popular voting system.
- Political parties were created to represent the interests of different groups of people.
- Platforms of political parties change over time to represent shifting demographics and interests of those within their party.
- The electoral college system has led to the development of a two-party system within the United States.
- The voting process varies for local, state, and national elections both within and among states.
- Voters have certain rights that should be protected and upheld during elections; it is important to know one’s rights as a voter.
- Throughout history there have been attempts to expand and suppress voting rights throughout the country, which continue today.
- Black Americans and people of color have disproportionately been impacted by voter suppression and are impacted by voting regulations at disproportionately high rates.
- Gerrymandering is the manipulation of voting maps (using census data) in favor of one political party; both parties have historically engaged in gerrymandering.

- Gerrymandering is one of the factors that contributes to imbalance within the federal government.
- Gerrymandering is a form of disenfranchisement that has existed throughout the majority of United States History.
- Elected officials are responsible to their constituents.

Students will be skilled at:

- Understanding how residents can obtain citizenship through the process of naturalization and that there are certain benefits to being a US citizen.
- Analyzing census data that is collected and used to make many different decisions in terms of both funding and voting.
- Understanding that the electoral college is the system used to determine the president of the US and the positive and negative aspects that come with this system.
- Analyzing different political parties that represent the interests of different groups of people.
- Researching different political leaders and their viewpoints on current issues.
- Comparing and contrasting the voting process for local, state, and national elections.
- Understanding your rights as a voter.
- Analyzing citizen voting rights and the efforts to both expand and suppress them throughout history.
- Analyzing the history of gerrymandering and the effects it has on the people.
- Understanding that elected officials are responsible to their constituents.

Learning Plan

This unit includes, but is not limited to, the following learning strategies:

Examining the Path to Citizenship: Students will assess the steps required to obtain citizenship by first analyzing the ten step process. Students will examine Form N-400, take a practice naturalization test, and examine questions asked to those applying for citizenship during the interview process. Students will attempt to answer as many questions correctly as possible and then reflect on their results. Afterwards, students will consider the following questions: “To what extent is the naturalization process challenging?” “Is the question difficulty appropriate? Why or why not?” “What, if any, changes should be made to the naturalization process?”

Citizenship Inquiry Activity: Students will assess the question, "To what extent is the naturalization process fair to people trying to become U.S. Citizens?" Students will examine primary documents relating to the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens, as well as first-person accounts on their pathway to citizenship. Students will reflect on both the benefits to citizenship as well as the difficulties it takes to become a U.S. citizen through the naturalization process.

How do I Count?: Students will first read and annotate an article about the creation of the census and the census process. Students will then examine census data on the state and national level, and act as government officials to propose changes that reflect the data collected. Students will compare findings to actual action made based on census reports and write a reflection.

Electoral College Analysis: Students will analyze the role of the electoral college and why it was created. Students will then listen to bipartisan debates from individuals on whether or not the electoral college should be amended, and as a class, hold a "Floor Meeting" on what should be done to the Electoral College using evidence from their findings and original analysis. The class will attempt to create their own resolution based on discussion.

Should Voting Be Easy? Student Debate: Students will read about a current debate on the voting process and whether or not it should be easy to vote. Students will complete a graphic organizer reflective evidence for both sides of the debate, and create their own claim reflecting their findings. Students will engage in a class discussion/debate on the topic of whether or not voting should be easy based on their findings.

Voting Regulations Map Analysis: Students will examine how laws for voting differ throughout the country by examining maps that report on when voters can register, how they are able to vote, and ID verification. Students will analyze where it is easier and more difficult to vote, and reflect on how this impacts individuals ability to vote. Students will also reflect on why some regulations are in place through supplemental reading.

Voting Rights History: Students will explore the history of voting rights in the United States by examining a reading with landmark changes. Students will apply the new knowledge of how voting legislation evolved to individual scenarios through a class activity why they brainstorm ideas to get more voter turnout.

The Journey of a Vote: Students will practice preparing to cast a vote by examining the Cranford Regulations for local elections. Students will use a district map and the Union County Board of Electors Website to determine what district they are a part of and where their voting location is. Students will also determine how long it would take them to get to their voting location if they were in different situations (i.e. Walk to polling location, work late, incorrectly mail in ballot, etc.) Students will reflect on the voting process as well as analyze ways in which voting is made more or less accessible.

Two Party System Reading Analysis: Students will analyze why the two-party system exists and how the electoral college has contributed to it. Students will assess to what extent they think this is an effective system

based on their analysis.

Inquiry Lesson- Third Parties: Students will examine one case study in which third-parties gained significant support in presidential elections. Students will address the questions, "How can third parties influence the two-party system? To what extent do third parties change the platforms of the two-party system?" Students will share findings with one another to compare and contrast the influence of third parties.

Gerrymandering Hexapolis: Students will act as lawmakers in charge of redistricting "Hexapolis" where their goal is to create districts which give their associated political party power. Students are to follow the districting regulations to attempt to create a districting map that gives their party as much power as possible. If students succeed, they are met with the message, "Good for your party, not so good for democracy." Students will reflect on the extent to which gerrymandering is difficult and how it can be used to challenge democratic ideals.

Impacts of Gerrymandering: Students will analyze how Gerrymandering has historically suppressed the votes of marginalized groups such as Black, Latino, and other people of color's votes. They will then connect this to present day attempts at racial gerrymandering and the Supreme Court's decision to strike down such attempts.

New Jersey Gerrymandering: Students will analyze New Jersey Maps from 2011 and the new map created in 2021. Students will analyze how New Jersey has gerrymandered and how it has impacted recent elections. Students will assess the extent to which this is a problem in New Jersey and compare it to other examples throughout history.

How to Hold Your Elected Representative Accountable: Students will first read five ways to hold their elected official accountable, considering why it might be important to do so. Then, students will do an investigation into their own representative and their voting patterns to examine to what extent their voting patterns are reflective of the values of their constituents.

Note: Other strategies to address the learning objectives may include, but are not limited to direct instruction, primary and secondary source analysis (including annotations, critique, questioning and close reading strategies), self and peer review, think-pair-share activities, creating visual representations, debates, film analysis, Socratic seminars, small group discussions, simulations, mapping activities, jigsaw activities, gallery walks, web quests, and/or inquiry or problem based learning projects.

Assessment

When taking a Social Studies course, students demonstrate differentiated proficiency according to their ability to answer the essential questions through formative and summative assessments. Many of the performance

tasks below can be implemented as formative and/or summative assessments. As teachers strive for students to demonstrate proficiency, they will need to create additional or alternative assessments based on demonstration or absence of skill.

Formative Assessments:

- Naturalization Process Analysis
- Critical reading (via annotations) of assigned readings
- Census Data Comparative Analysis
- Electoral College Analysis and Simulation Reflection
- Current Voting Process Analysis (graphic organizer)
- Analysis of NJ Voting Maps
- Voting Laws by State Comparative Analysis
- Proposed Laws to Increase Voter Turnout
- Analysis of Cranford Voting Laws

Summative Assessments:

- Gerrymandering in the United States Project: Working in groups, students will pick a state and investigate how Gerrymandering has impacted voting and representation. Students will address the question, "To what extent does gerrymandering suppress the interests of American voters?" Students will address whose votes are suppressed, how gerrymandering has impacted representation in the state, and propose a solution to the issues they research. Students will engage in comparative analysis with their projects, where they assess the extent to which gerrymandering is a national issue.

Benchmark Assessments:

- Analytical Writing Responses:
    - To what extent would our country be different if the Constitution had granted all adults voting rights when it was written?
    - To what extent is the naturalization process challenging? Is the question difficulty appropriate? Why or why not? What, if any, changes should be made to the naturalization process?
    - How can third parties influence the two-party system? To what extent do third parties change the platforms of the two-party system?

Alternative Assessments:

- Civics Concepts Curation Project: Throughout the course, students can select key artifacts from various forms of media to highlight key historical concepts as related to the unit. For each artifact, they must compose a narrative explaining how the curated piece reflects the assigned concept.

Materials

The design of this course allows for the integration of a variety of instructional, supplemental, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available In addition to the materials below, the following link connects to district approved textbooks and resources utilized in this course: Core Book List.

The following are approved resources that teachers can include to further unit related objectives:

- Gerrymandering Lesson w/ Video - TedED
- Civics Curriculum from Rutgers w/ Lessons
- Scope and Sequence iCivics
- NewsELA (articles can vary and be leveled)
- Naturalization Test: Smithsonian
- Form N400 and the 10 Steps to Naturalization: USCIS
- Electoral College Videos: TedED and Vox Explained
- Electoral College Debate: PBS Newshour
- Electoral Decoder: PBS
- Voting Regulations Map
- Voting Rights Lesson Plan (history): iCivics
- American Party Animals (Formation of the Two-Party System) Video: PBS LearningMedia
- Third Parties Lesson Plan - iowa.gov
- The Supreme Court Upholds the Provision Prohibiting Racial Gerrymandering: NPR
- Can You Gerrymander Your Party to Power?- The New York Times

- How Maps Reshape American Politics: New York Times
- Redistricting Maps in New Jersey: CNN

Any additional resources that are not included in this list will be presented to and reviewed by the supervisor before being included in lesson plans. This ensures resources are reviewed and vetted for relevance and appropriateness prior to implementation.

Suggested Strategies for Modification

This link includes content specific accommodations and modifications for all populations:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Pp6EJOCsFz5o4-opzsXpQDQoa6aClW-bkRGPDRHXVrk/edit?usp=sharing

These additional strategies are helpful when learning Social Studies content and skills:

- Highlighter for close reading and annotation strategies
- Bolded terms in directions
- Reading texts aloud for students to assist in comprehension and analysis
- Providing opportunities for text-to-speech for written responses.
- Use visual presentations of all materials to include graphic organizers for writing.