

“We the People”

**Grade Leve**l\_6-12\_

**Length of lesson:**\_Multiple days - approximately four 60-minute class periods\_\_   
  
**Lesson Title: “We The People,” the Voting Process**

**Content Standards:**

CIV 9–12.2 **Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system**, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans’ participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.

**Student Learning Objective(s):**

O1: Students will identify and participate in the steps of the election process. By determining the nominees on a ballot, debating and promoting the nominees, voting and counting votes, students will identify the human components of the election process.

**Assessment:**

A1: Your piece of our democracy - student artifact hunt

A2: We the People: election simulation written reflection

**Materials/Resources:**

* **Voter eligibility cards**
* **Class Poll**
* [**Official class ballots**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GczM8TyiTMYFlx2omXfuUmVn1A_ksLsVwjnAG5P3b7I/edit?usp=sharing)
* **Ballot Box**
* **Class list printed with space to sign for voter “check-in”**
* **“We the People” gregmiller.com\*\*\***
* **Access to computer and internet**
* [**election laws in different states**](https://www.usvotefoundation.org/vote/state-elections/state-voting-laws-requirements.htm)
* **examples of political advertising or political debates** (teacher discretion/choice)
* Elections simulation reflection

***Day 1:*   
  
Initiation:**-Write/ display the question: *which animal makes the best pet?*  
-Ask students to silently brainstorm their answer to the question.  
-Tell students that we will use their answers to the questions about what makes the best pet to learn more about the election and nominating process in today’s class and following class periods.  
- Tell students we will collectively decide on the baseline for the activities to follow, and participate in choosing an appropriate nominee, and finally making a nominee into a candidate.

**Lesson Development:**

-Ask students, by a show of hands, how many students selected either *‘cat’ or ‘dog’* as their choice for animal for the best pet (teacher note: dog and cat are both mandatory candidates for the “best pet” vote for the lesson- the ‘third party pet candidate’ will be determined by the class later).  
-Ask students to use their personal experiences to provide a reasoning for why they selected ‘cat’ or ‘dog, call on a few students to volunteer their personal experiences.  
-Ask the remaining students that did not select ‘cat’ or ‘dog’ as their best pet answer to give their answers for what makes the best pet.  
-Explain that we will discuss and vote.  
-write/ display all student responses (tell students that they must be an actual legal pet in the state of Connecticut, ie; no monkeys or alligators).  
-After all third party pet candidates eligible for nomination are written, ask students by a show of hands, which should the third party pet candidate ***(only students who didn’t write cat or dog can vote or ALL students can vote).***-the majority third party pet choice with the MOST votes (doesn’t have to be a majority, just the most total) will be the third party candidate.  
-tell students that after we have the names of the three best pets- ‘cat’ or ‘dog’ or the ‘other’ choice  
We have to consider the following questions when deciding on the best pet-  *How often does the pet need to be walked?  
 How often does the pet need to be fed?  
 Will your vote be based on love of the pet or other factors like fear of or repulsion for the other   
 ‘Best pet’ choices?*-Tell students that the next part of an election process after determining the candidates to be listed on the ballot is to take a “pulse” of the people- what people are thinking/ feeling at that moment- a “snapshot.”  
-To get a “public opinion poll”/ baseline snapshot for “will of the people” we can answer the question:  
*‘If you were to vote today for the animal that makes ‘the best pet’, which would you vote for?’*  
-Use the class poll handout or have students write their answer on a piece of paper/ submit their answers electronically via email or google doc to the teacher- this can be anonymous.  
-Teacher counts the answers and keeps them secret for later, this will be the class baseline vote but keep the results secret for now.  
-Tell students to remember their vote choice from today for later discussions.  
  
**Closure:**  
-Ask students what ‘*will of the people’* means.  
-Ask students how we determine *‘will of the people?’*  
-Ask students why in a democracy leaders may be interested in finding out *‘the will of the people?’*

***Day 2:*Learning Activities:**

**Initiation**

-Ask students to recall the question on which we are voting/ simulating elections (which animal makes the best pet?)  
-Ask students to recall the three candidates (two ‘major’ party candidates- cat and dog and third party candidate \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_).  
-Ask students in an election cycle/ season (the period of time where an election happens) how do candidates/ parties get their messages out to attract voters?  
-Accept answers like: debates, commercials, mail, events they sponsor.  
-Tell students that all of the activities candidates take place in are to change the ‘hearts and minds’ of the public.  
-Ask students what it means to change ‘hearts and minds.’  
-Tell students that today we will focus on convincing voters in class to vote a certain way for a certain animal.  
 **Lesson Development**-Divide students into three groups depending on which candidate they want to vote for (dog, cat, third party).  
-Have each group select a representative from their ‘party’ to speak to the class about why their candidate is the best.

-Have the class return to their original places in class so they are no longer grouped by “best pet” preference  
-Allow the “cats,” “dogs” and third party representatives to make their argument. Encourage these students to target “undecided” voters or possible “swing” voters when making their pitch.

-Allow or encourage a bit of argument or “debate” cats vs. dogs vs. third party.

-Following the debate about the best candidates ask the class these de-briefing questions:  
 *\*Did your mind change? If so, what changed your mind?*

*\*What would it take for someone to change your mind?*

*\*How much do your personal feelings play in your decision?*

*\*Which sort of arguments seem to work best to change your mind - an appeal to reason or appeal   
 to emotion?*

*\*Did any of the representatives from the parties make an especially strong point or general  
 argument? If so, what was effective about their argument?*

-Transition to the idea that part of running elections and campaigning takes place outside of candidates to the policy/ legal level of making voters eligible or ineligible to vote. Describe the difference between a *registered* voter and an *eligible* voter (but not registered) and an *ineligible* voter (perhaps too young, not a citizen, or incarcerated).   
-Ask students *what impact it could have if more people were eligible to vote?* (accept answers like- there may be more of a representative viewpoint in voting, more people may come out to vote making it more democratic with more participating, or a younger demographic group would have more influence over the type of laws that were passed, changing to priorities or agenda of candidates when they campaign and of lawmakers in office - other students may focus on potential issues: younger, less informed voters may choose a candidate for less legitimate reasons or lines on election day may be longer, etc.).  
-Ask students *what happens if less people are eligible to vote?* (accept answers such as- parts of the population may not be represented by the choices for candidates, less people may be voting which means less people are involved in decision making, making it less democratic).

-Tell students that next we will look at voting groups over time, who was given access when, who has access now, etc.  
-Tell students *While the 15th amendments and 19th amendments of the Constitution prohibits the US or states from denying anyone the right to vote, the Constitution explicitly leaves the ultimate determination of voter eligibility with the states so long as the states do not deny someone the right to vote based on race or sex. Factors that might disqualify a person from voting include age, length of residency, ability to establish residency or whether a person is a convicted felon.*

-If students have not already done this in a previous lesson, allow students time to research. If students have already researched this topic in another lesson (Connecticut and Federalism lesson), ask students to review prior knowledge.

-If the teacher feels it appropriate, group students into research teams of 3 or 4 students and assign each research team to a different state.

-Ask students to select a note-taker in each research team who will write down a series of “eligibility requirements” in the state they were assigned to.   
-Students should consider age, party registration (for primaries) residency, registration deadline and possible disqualifications such as current or previous incarceration.

-Encourage students to use the Secretary of State’s website in the state they are researching

Consider the following states: Connecticut, Georgia, Texas, Florida, California, New Hampshire.

-After researching/ discussing voting eligibility in states, tell students that in our class election for best pet, we will have the same voter eligibility as many states (eligible voter, does not have voter ID, and convicted felon/ ineligible voter)  
-Tell students that to achieve this we will be given voter cards when the election takes place to simulate voter eligibility

-Tell students we will continue the election process next classes, but to end class we will discuss ideas about voter eligibility.  
 **Closure**-Ask students the following questions either as a whole class debrief, partner activity or take home activity*-Should teenagers and children be denied the right to vote because of age? Is that fair? Why or why not?*

*-What could be the impact of restricting the hours/days of voting in an area, access to absentee ballots or the location of polling places, for example? Why might some states be moving or have moved to restrict voting in these ways?*

*-Consider asking students to analyze the legitimacy of limiting early voting, reducing the number of polling locations in a state, requiring voting ID, and age and incarceration restrictions to voting, etc.*

*-How can the constitutional amendments studied earlier (15th and 19th amendments) be circumvented by state laws? And why would legislatures want to do that?*

-Tell students we will continue the election in the following classes.

***Day 3***

**\*\*\*Note to teachers - before this class period begins, it will be helpful to have at least one printed copy of your class roster, official ballots for each student as well as a box you can use as a ballot box for the election\*\*\***

**Initiation:**

-Ask students to recall from the previous class: *What is the difference between an “eligible” voter, a “registered” voter and an “ineligible” voter and which sort of demographic groups are more likely to be eligible vs. ineligible?*

-Tell students that some of them will be eligible and registered in the upcoming class election on the best pet but others will not.

**Lesson Development:**

-Before voting can take place, set up the election by assigning a student “moderator” who will oversee the poll workers.   
 -Select a student to be moderator who you expect can be impartial and will be responsible in

their role.   
-That moderator is also eligible to vote unless their eligibility card disqualifies them.   
-Additionally, select a student “poll checker” to check in other students who will vote.   
-The student who checks-in other students will ask them to sign their name next to their printed name on the class list and then will hand them an official ballot.   
-Once they hand them the ballot, they will check off their name on the student roster. Also assign a student to oversee the ballot box (use a box that is not see-through).   
-If possible, give that student stickers, candy, or slips of paper with “I voted today” printed on them to hand out to students after they cast their vote.   
-It is also the responsibility of that student to make sure that ballots are cast properly and the ballot box is not interfered with.   
-The poll checker and student who oversees the ballot box are also eligible to vote once they sign-in with the poll checker (as long as their eligibility card lets them vote).  
 -Teacher distributes “eligibility cards” that have “eligible voter” (60%), “no voter ID” (11%) “convicted felon” (2%) (Depending on size of class, teacher may include other factors like distance to local polling place, not being able to take time off of work, etc.) If more than 20 students in a class, make additional copies of the eligibility cards.

-Students receive one card each (randomly distributed), but do not look at the card.

-Have students reveal their eligibility cards.  
-If disqualified, the student will have to sit out from the voting.

-If there are specific instructions about the time a student will have to wait to vote, they must follow the directions and either wait to vote or decide not to vote.

-If eligible, students will line up to vote.

-Students will first go to the registrars table where the student checkers will ask them to sign their name and give them an official ballot (hand out official ballots to students who have signed in).

-Next, students will be given privacy to select their candidate and fill in their ballot.

-Students will be directed to fold their official ballot so that it remains private, and then drop it into the ballot box.

-After all students have voted, tape over the ballot box so that it cannot be opened or tampered with. Place the ballot box in a place that students can see it.

-Debrief after all students have voted:

-Questions to ask:

*Ask students who were denied a ballot: how did it make you feel to be denied eligibility?*

*Tell students in class that the format for voting in this class election followed key elements of the  
 way local polling places set-up for elections. Ask students who did vote how it felt to take part in  
 this process?*

**-**Tell students the next part of the election process is to count the votes

- Students will research the vote counting process and participate as poll workers, tallying the final count of the vote.

-Divide students into groups of 5-6 and designated as counting groups.

-Groups will research election day procedures and vote counting and present key findings to the class.

-Useful research resources:

* + - * <https://portal.ct.gov/en/SOTS/Common-Elements/V5-Template---Redesign/Elections--Voting--Home-Page>
      * <https://portal.ct.gov/SOTS/Election-Services/Navigation-Pages/Moderators-Certification> (the “Moderator’s Manual” may be especially helpful - it is far too long to expect students to read through the entire thing but the index is useful in guiding students to key information and this also gives a sense of how carefully election day procedures are outlined).
      * Groups should share key findings after time is offered to research.

-Swear in all students to be vote-counters using the following oath:

​​*You solemnly swear (or affirm, as the case may be) that you will faithfully discharge, according to law, your duties as an Election Official to the best of your ability; and that you will serve in this election or primary (as the case may be), as an official, completely impartial with respect to any candidate or any political party; so help you God (or upon penalty of perjury).*

-Open the ballot box up again (tear off tape)

-Each group will:   
1) count the number of signatories on the list (class roster / list of voters) against the number of total votes cast;   
2) the total number of votes each candidate received and   
3) make a note of their count on a piece of paper with the signatures of the members of the group.

-Groups will keep their tallies private until all groups have completed their counting.

-After the first group has completed the process, the ballots will be returned to the ballot box and will pass to the next group. Once all groups have completed their count, the groups will come together to verify that the individual group counts match up and “certify” their count as a class, determining the final vote count.

-If there is a discrepancy in the final vote tally that would impact the winner or that brings the final results between the leading two candidates within 5% (in most states the threshold is 1% difference or .5% difference in candidates that triggers or allows for a recount) of the total vote, there must be a recount and the vote counting process begins again.

-You may choose in this circumstance to select a representative from the leading two candidates to oversee the recount - these students will be called “election canvassers” or “recount observers”. -They may watch but they may not interfere and if they are concerned by the recount process they can bring their concern to the teacher.

-The certified count will then pass to the teachers who can serve as “Secretary of State” and certify that the results are official.

**Closure:**-Debrief with students and have them discuss the final results.  
-Post (or write/ display) the final tally of candidates.  
-Reveal to students the “initial baseline poll” of the “best pet” from the first day of the lesson.  
-Ask students:

* + - * *Does/Did the vote counting process meet your expectations?*
      * *Why do you think your teacher asked you to take part in this simulation? What does it show about the way elections take place?*
      * *Does/Did every vote count?*
      * *What are the ramifications of the disparity (between initial poll and final count)? What does this reveal about elections and how voters select a candidate?*

-Tell students we will consider the elections process more next class...

***Day 4***

**Initiation:**

-Tell students that they will next see a video created by a photographer who lives in Connecticut and who has taken pictures of elections in the past.

-Ask students if they have ever gone to watch their parents vote or if they are old enough, if they have voted in person? If so, what did they observe? In what ways was it similar or different to the class vote? Allow time for several responses.

**Lesson Development:**

-Give students the following article:  
<https://time.com/4542711/election-voting-polls/>

-Tell students we will be watching Greg Miller’s views on photographing elections

-Show Greg Miller video introduction - “[We the People](https://vimeo.com/666584408?ref=em-share)”

-Following the video, ask:

* + - * *Would you consider participating in any part of this process when you are over 18? Which one? Why?*
      * *What do Miller’s images reveal about elections?*
      * *What emotions were captured by Miller in his photographs and how do those compare to your own feelings or the feelings of your classmates during the in-class election?*
      * *Why do you think Miller titled this activity “We the People”?*

**Closure:**

-Give students the Simulation Reflection:

* + - [“We the People” / Election Simulation Reflection](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OmUEeHZs9s_3BaMmUwdiWcUwPZ62gtGaFX-azlZGZCo/edit?usp=sharing)

-Ask students to reflect on these activities in writing.

* + - [“Your Piece of Our Democracy”](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BbvVFwdmi0hx2-VCPwkwUcsnnBVzPWpf6_AoDgl_yuo/edit?usp=sharing)

-As an extension ask students to find an artifact about voting from their life (their families, friends, etc)

-Additional, alternative extension: Give students a copy of this printed lesson plan and ask them to annotate it with they key elements that compare and contrast with the actual process of electing candidates in Connecticut for Governor, State House or Senate, etc. You might also ask students to annotate key elements of the lesson and what those portions of the lesson revealed about American or Connecticut State democracy.