

America Votes Teacher's Guide

For Feature 3: “Primaries and Caucuses”

America Votes Quote: "The hand of the people...has proved that government to be the strongest of which every man feels himself a part." - *Thomas Jefferson, 3rd President of the United States of America, 1801-1809 (1743-1826)*

Purpose:

The purpose of the feature is to provide an interactive format in which students can monitor the presidential primary and interpret and organize information about the election process.

Newspaper Activities:

1. Follow the in-paper instructions for “THE RACE TO THE NOMINATION.” Or, use it as the basis for a bulletin board or journal. Check off and date the lines on it (example: Qualifications, Media Coverage, etc.).
2. Use the newspaper articles and pictures on the bulletin board in journals or to create an election timeline.

Other Activities:

1. Chart how many delegates are in contention in each state. See sample at www.usnewsclassroom.com.
2. Choose a candidate and keep a campaign journal as if you were that candidate.
3. In groups, monitor the election by charting a candidate’s campaign stops on a map. For each campaign stop in a new state, identify the following:
 1. Does the state have a caucus or primary?
 2. What is the date of the caucus or primary?
 3. How many party convention delegates does each state have?
 4. Who are the candidate’s opponents in the state?

Discussion Questions:

Who are the major candidates?

Is your favorite candidate still in the race?

What sort of help do candidates need to be elected? Who helps them? Could you help?

What is the job of a TV or newspaper reporter who covers the caucus or primary?

What is the job of a delegate? What is the job of a candidate?

What is the job of a voter? How do voters decide which candidate they want?

Does Ohio use the primary or caucus system to choose candidates?

Who appeared to be the front-runners at the beginning of the race?

Who are the final candidates?

Why do you think these final candidates emerged as leaders?

Do you think most voters are satisfied with the quality of the candidates?

Did your opinion of the candidates change during the race? Why or why not?

“Vote”abulary Words: (Underlined words appear in newspaper feature.)

Candidate – a person who seeks a political office

Caucus – a meeting of party members for the purpose of selecting a candidate for elected office (or deciding questions of policy)

Delegate – a person given power or authority to vote for others at the party nominating convention

Election Campaign – a series of operations and activities designed to win votes for a certain candidate, party or proposal

General Election – the fall statewide or national election to choose from among candidates previously selected in a primary election or by a party (The General Election is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.)

Independent Voter – a voter who does not belong to a political party

Nominate – to propose or offer the name of someone for political office

Nominee – the person that a political party names, or nominates, to represent it in a general election

Political Affiliation – the party in which a voter is registered

Party – an organization working to support its principles and candidates for office and to gain control and run the government

Party Convention – an official gathering of the delegates of one party to select candidates for office and formulate party policies or the party’s platform (National party conventions are held during the summer before November presidential elections. The presidential and vice-presidential candidates are nominated by the delegates attending their party’s national convention. Delegates come from each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the various U.S. Territories.)

Political Party – a group of people who join together because they share many ideas about what government should do

Primary Election – the preliminary election, held in the winter or spring, in which party members choose the candidate to represent their party on the general election ballot

U.S. Constitution Tie-ins:

Article 2 explains the requirements for being a presidential candidate, the election process, the impeachment process and the presidential oath.

Amendment 12 explains electoral votes and the election of the president and vice president.

Amendment 20 lays out the terms of service for the president and the vice president.

Amendment 22 lays out the limit of presidential terms.

Amendment 25 explains what happens if the president cannot fulfill his/her term (succession of terms).

Internet Resources:

www.politics1.com - a comprehensive online guide to American politics, including a calendar of every primary and caucus for the 2004 presidential election

fpc.state.gov/c9752.htm - U.S. Department of State site, with links to election calendars, trivia, public opinion polls, political party sites and more

www.geocities.com/Athens/Agora/8088/ElectPandC.html - a site with election maps of the outcomes of primaries and caucuses from 1972 to 2000

www.usnewsclassroom.com/resources/activities/primaries/guide.html - a guide to the primaries

Kids Voting Resources:

“The Race”

“Primary Opinions”



Primaries and Caucuses Middle School



Activity

The Race

(a few minutes on several days)

Objective

Students will monitor an actual caucus or primary election to interpret, organize, and analyze information about the process.

Get Ready

- ✓ Make a copy of *The Race* for each student or for groups of three. Choose either the primary or caucus graphic to best follow your state.
- ✓ Or use the graphic as the basis for a bulletin board, perhaps adding each part as it occurs in your state.

Monitor the Primary or Caucus

- ✓ Instruct your students about the basics of the primary or caucus process. (see History of Primaries and Caucuses for information)
- ✓ Ask them to fill in the candidate name boxes and the information boxes as they follow the primary or caucus process.
- ✓ Ask them to date the boxes as they fill them in.
- ✓ Allow them to fill in the untitled boxes as they wish or as circumstances occur in each election, for instance an important news report.

Questions

- ☆ *Who appeared to be the frontrunners at the beginning of the race?*
- ☆ *Who are the final candidates?*
- ☆ *Why do you think these two candidates emerged as leaders?*
- ☆ *Was every step along the way necessary?*
- ☆ *What do you think could be changed?*
- ☆ *Were your predictions correct?*
- ☆ *Do you think most voters are satisfied with the quality of the candidates?*
- ☆ *Would you consider this a clean election?*
- ☆ *Was this process too long? too costly?*
- ☆ *Do you think all states should be required to have similar systems?*
- ☆ *Did your opinion of the candidates change during the race? Why or why not?*

More

Assign students to choose a candidate and keep a campaign journal as if they were that candidate.

Assign groups of students to monitor the election by charting a candidate's campaign stops on a map.

Help your students fill in a map of the US with the following information for each state as it is available: (see appendix)

1. the name of the state
2. caucus and/or primary?
3. the type(s) of primary (see glossary)
4. the date(s) of the caucus or primary
5. each party's number of delegates
6. each party's candidate

The Race - Primary



Qualifications:

My Predictions:

Announcing

Media Ad:

Polling:

Issues:

Slogans:

Media, Discussion:

Jokes:

I Hear People Say:

The Race - Primary

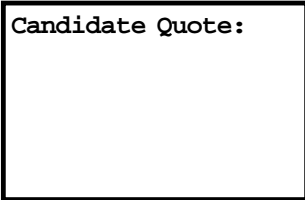


Empty box for Election Night.

Election Night

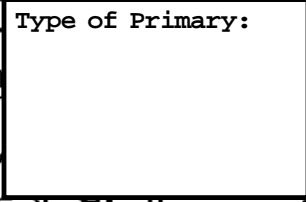
On to the General

Candidate Quote:



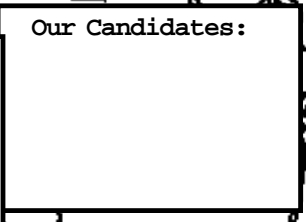
Empty box for Candidate Quote.

Type of Primary:



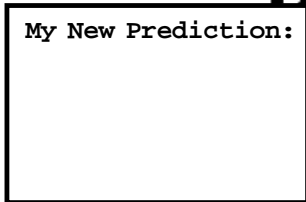
Empty box for Type of Primary.

Our Candidates:



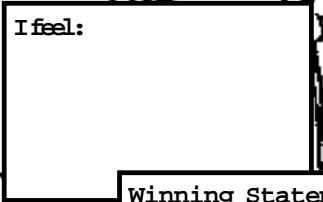
Empty box for Our Candidates.

My New Prediction:



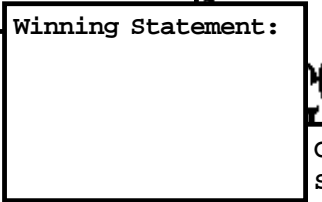
Empty box for My New Prediction.

I feel:



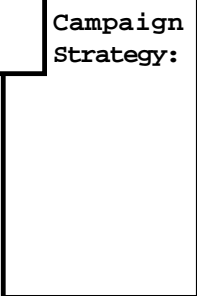
Empty box for I feel.

Winning Statement:



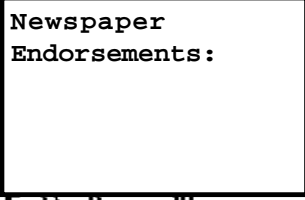
Empty box for Winning Statement.

Campaign Strategy:



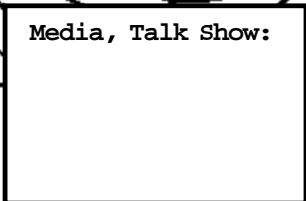
Empty box for Campaign Strategy.

Newspaper Endorsements:



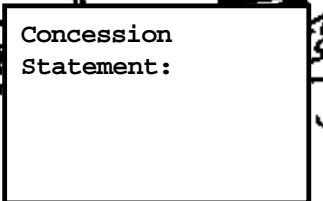
Empty box for Newspaper Endorsements.

Media, Talk Show:



Empty box for Media, Talk Show.

Concession Statement:



Empty box for Concession Statement.



Primaries and Caucuses High School



Activity

Primary Opinions

(two 30 minute periods)

Objective

Students will consider opposing viewpoints about the nomination process to form their own opinions.

Get Ready

- ✓ Make a copy of the following two articles for every three students.

Form an Opinion

- ✓ Divide the students into groups of threes. Give each group a copy of each article and have them read both aloud in the group.
- ✓ Ask questions designed to develop critical thinking skills about forming an opinion, such as:
 - ☆ *What were the opinions of the writers of each article? What facts did they use to support their opinions?*
 - ☆ *What types of propaganda did the articles contain? Did you find any testimonials, card-stacking, scare tactics, or slanted words or phrases? Did these distract you from the whole picture?*
 - ☆ *What are the cause and effect statements in the articles? Are they complete and logical? Or are they exaggerated or irrelevant?*
- ✓ Assign the students to:
 1. decide pro or con individually
 2. reach consensus within the group
 3. choose a spokesperson to deliver the group's opinion with supporting facts

- ✓ Allow time for the students to prepare.
- ✓ Invite each group to announce and support their opinion within an appropriate time frame.
- ✓ Allow students to vote for or against the current primary system in a secret ballot. Tally and post the results.

Questions

- ☆ *Did you all agree within your group?*
- ☆ *What did you do to reach consensus?*
- ☆ *How did it feel to have your opinion announced when you dissented?*
- ☆ *Do all members of the Supreme Court agree on every decision? What can a dissenting justice do? Would you like that privilege, now?*
- ☆ *How is this process democratic? Did every one get to participate in the decision?*
- ☆ *What were some of the problems in reaching consensus? Are any of these applicable to the primary election process? Can any be eliminated? How?*
- ☆ *Did you change your opinion at any point of this civic discussion? Where? Why?*
- ☆ *Do you think your opinion might have been different had you read the articles individually and then voted pro or con secretly without any discussion?*
- ☆ *Was this activity more like a caucus or a primary vote? Why?*
- ☆ *What part of this process can you use to form an opinion about a candidate? about any decision you make?*



Primaries and Caucuses High School



The Primary System Works

When a job candidate applies for a job, he or she must impress a potential employer during an interview. The potential employer uses the interview as a way to judge the candidate's qualifications, personality, and fit with the job opening. Primaries allow voters to judge candidates in much the same way that a job interview allows an employer to judge a potential employee. The primary system is an effective way to select a president because politicians must outline their specific proposals before the public and media.

Primaries force candidates to prove themselves to the public. Candidates must answer tough questions and face important issues. They must explain exactly what their policies are and how they hope to make them work. Reporters continually challenge candidates on their political stances, personal inconsistencies, and their track records, if they hold other offices. The debates and speeches during a primary let the public know what a candidate thinks and what he or she will do if elected.

The skills needed to win during the long, grueling primary process are the same skills needed to run the country. The simple fact is that no better process exists to choose our presidents. As Everett Carl Ladd of the *Christian Science Monitor* writes, "No convincing practical alternative has been found." If primaries were shortened or candidates selected differently, the public might not get a chance to thoroughly examine those who want to become president.

Other systems of choosing leaders that are used in many Western European countries are not as democratic. In Britain for example, voters do not vote for candidates, but for the party they would like to see in power. The party with the most votes chooses the prime minis-

ter. The British Labor and Tory parties do not choose a prime minister on the basis of public acceptance. They reward politicians who have been loyal to the party or who are popular with their colleagues. This means that a person could become prime minister and yet be hated by the people.

In the United States, citizens get to vote directly for their government officials. It is not the Democratic or Republican party leaders who chooses the president, but the people themselves. This allows voter to select leaders who appeal to them. It makes the public directly responsible for putting their leaders in power.

The primary system gives every politician an equal chance. It allows politicians from all over the United States a chance to win. Jimmy Carter, for example, was a little known governor from Georgia before he became president in 1976. The election of former actor Ronald Reagan was equally surprising. The primaries gave voters an opportunity to show their support for these political outsiders. Had it been left to party leaders, neither Carter nor Reagan would have been nominated. Instead, party leaders would have chosen candidates well known to them - candidates who had spent their careers inside Washington, D. C., pandering to party leaders. Through primaries, voters let it be known if they want a change from insider politics.

Primaries work. They allow almost any well-organized politician a chance to run for president while quickly weeding out those who are not serious or whom the public does not want. The primary system remains the best means of selecting our presidential hopefuls.



Primaries and Caucuses High School



The Primary System Does Not Work

Sex Scandals. Draft dodging. Drug use. Tax returns. Are these tabloid topics? Hardly. These and other sensational topics have become the focus of presidential primaries. The primary system has become so warped and twisted that it no longer serves a useful purpose. It does nothing more than reward political survivors and fence-sitters while discouraging candidates who offer innovation and change.

Primaries do not work because they promote shallow politics. Rather than expressing views, candidates vie for popularity by staging a variety of publicity stunts that are an embarrassment to American politics. Candidates milk cows, work on assembly lines, tour hospitals, and eat chili at state fairs. During these events candidates mindlessly mouth slogans and empty rhetoric. They desperately try to avoid saying anything of substance. This style of campaigning favors politicians who look good on television while discouraging those with something to say. People like Ronald Reagan, often labeled "The Great Communicator," flourish under this system, while thoughtful politicians like Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts suffer.

The primaries are a burden to American society. John Chancellor, a commentator for NBC News writes, "Presidential campaigns last too long, cost too much, and too often produce poor candidates." Primaries waste time and money. Candidates who hold office while campaigning neglect their work so they can give speeches and kiss babies from coast to coast. They spent anywhere from \$1 million to \$10 million trying to gain the public's favor. These disadvantages are not outweighed by quality results. Usually, the public ends up with two tired politicians whom few want to see as president.

The primary process makes a mockery of democracy. Instead of allowing everyone to choose, primaries place undue emphasis on the election results in the tiny states that hold their primaries early. The voters of New Hampshire and Iowa have an unfair influence simply because they vote first. Candidates who do poorly in these states often drop out of the race, leaving the rest of the country with fewer choices. In essence primaries are only democratic for those people likely enough to vote early. Californians, with one eighth of the country's population have little say in selecting Presidential candidates because their primary falls "late" in June.

The job of picking presidential candidates should be left to the experts. Let party leaders and political pros select the best person for the job. They know the politicians, their histories, and their ability to handle the pressure of leadership. Fellow politicians understand who is effective and who is not. The public only understands what it sees on television. John Chancellor states that voters would be better served by abolishing primary elections and party caucuses. He writes, "There is nothing in the Constitution that requires primary elections. The best reform would be to let party professionals and elected officials choose the party's candidate for the fall campaign." Primaries do not produce the best candidates. They produce politicians who try to appeal to everyone at once. Once the primaries are abandoned, the election process will become much more meaningful.