**Voting Matters to Me**

This lesson encourages young people to get involved in the electoral process by ranking issues that matter most to them and then seeing how voter turnout impacts the issues they care most about.

Grades: 6-8, 9-12

Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies

9.1.1.1.1 Demonstrates skills that enable people to monitor and influence state, local and national affairs.

9.1.1.1.2 Demonstrate the skills necessary to participate in the election process including registering to vote, identifying and evaluating candidates and issues, and casting a ballot.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

* Students will examine topics and rank how much the topic matters to them personally.
* Students will evaluate the impact of voter turnout on the topics they care most about.

MATERIALS

* Student survey ranking topics.
* Class Signs for 6 topics to be posted around the room.
* Voter Cards to be distributed to students. See chart for breakdown of voting cards reflecting voter turnout.

DURATION

1 class period (about 1 hour)

PROCEDURE

1. Ask students about issues that matter to them. Ask, “What would you like to see changed in our community?”
2. Hand out a list of suggested changes. Directions, “For each change, rank how important that change is to you personally. You may choose from three options: very important, important, not at all important. Be prepared to explain your choices. At the end, choose the topic most important to you.”
3. Select 6 topic signs and post them around the room. Choosing only 6 topics will cluster students creating a stronger impact. You may want to tell class that these are the most important issues in this particular election cycle.
4. Ask students to stand up by the issue that matters most to them. If a student’s top choice is not one of the 6 signs posted ask them to stand by their second choice topic. Randomly hand out voting cards to each student (draw out of a hat). For this adaptation use two color cards, Millennials and Baby Boomers.
5. While students are standing, ask students to explain to each other why they picked this issue.
6. After all generation cards are handed out, ask class why they chose to stand by their issues. Probe their interest, how does this issue concern you? Opinions on the issues will vary and may be part of the discussion, but it is their beliefs about its importance that are the basis for the next step.
7. It is now election day and voters vote for elected officials who make decisions about these issues. Look at your voting card. Here is what happened on election day 2014.
* If you have a card that says Millennials hold it up. You are voters ages 18-24. In the 2014 midterm election only 20% of 18 -24 year olds who were eligible to vote actually voted.
	+ So for every 5 millennial voters standing only 1 of you actually showed up to vote. So we will count off by 5s - 1,2,3,4 (sit) and #5 (stay standing).
	+ So now 80% of Group Millennials are back in their seats.
* If you have a card that says Baby Boomers hold it up. You are voters born between 1945 and 1965, the generation following WWII. What do you predict will be voter turnout in their generation?
	+ Baby Boomers had the highest voter turnout of any age group, almost 80%.
	+ So let’s count off by 5s and this time #1,2,3,4 remain standing and #5 sits down.
	+ So now 80% of Group Baby Boomers are still standing.

6. Ask students to look about the room and see which issues have people left standing.

* Explain statistics on voter turnout used here are from the 2014 “midterm” election. Midterm elections take place every 2 years because it is in the middle of a 4-year presidential term. Historically, voter turnout in midterms is much smaller. Why?
* In 2014, only 36.4% of all registered voters nationwide actually voted and in Minnesota it was 50%. Compare this to the 2012 Presidential election, national voter turnout was 58.7% and 76.1% in Minnesota.
* BUT . . . most issues that people care about are decided by Congress and state legislatures – the law-making branches – and we elect representatives every 2 years SO midterm elections are very important on how government responds to issues you care most about.

7. Ask the class:

* Which issues are going to be important to the next term of Congress or Minnesota Legislature? Which issues will be ignored?
* What happened to your top issue? Will it be a priority for lawmakers?
* If you like the policies of the current President and in the midterms the opposite party wins a majority in the House/Senate, what will happen to the President’s ideas for laws? Or if you don’t like current policies, how can you change direction?
* Do you trust the half of your class standing to decide issues that matter to you?
* Remember young people are only 20% of the people standing. Do you want your grandparents deciding your issue?

**So, why vote? It matters to you!**

1. ASSESSMENT
* Students complete graphic organizer answering:
* Who votes? Why or Why not vote? What happens if you don’t vote? Solutions to voting obstacles.
* Follow-up activity on issues (deliberations, political party platforms)
1. RESOURCES
* Minnesota voting statistics can be found in the ‘Election Results’ section at **mnvotes.org**
* Minnesota General Election Turnout by Age Group at: <http://www.sos.state.mn.us/index.aspx?page=1804>

[file:///C:/Users/JoEllen/Downloads/Minnesota-General-Election-Estimated-Turnout-by-Age-Group-2008-2014%20(2).pdf](file:///C%3A/Users/JoEllen/Downloads/Minnesota-General-Election-Estimated-Turnout-by-Age-Group-2008-2014%20%282%29.pdf)

* Total Voter Turnout and Polling Place Voting, by county and U.S. Voter Turnout, by state at: <http://www.sos.state.mn.us/index.aspx?page=1859>

[file:///C:/Users/JoEllen/Downloads/US-Turnout-2014%20(1).pdf](file:///C%3A/Users/JoEllen/Downloads/US-Turnout-2014%20%281%29.pdf)

* U.S. Census Bureau at **census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/index.html**
* United States Election Project: **electproject.org/**

**ISSUES THAT MATTER TO ME**

Read each question and determine how important the topic is to you. Be prepared to explain your choice.

**VI** = Very Important **I** = Important **NA** = Not at All Important

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Should marijuana use be legalized?

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Should all cell phone use be banned (not allowed) while driving?

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Should the U.S. continue its use of drone strikes abroad?

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Should the federal minimum wage be increased?

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Should certain pesticides be banned in order to protect honey bees?

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Should junk food be banned from school lunches?

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Should there be drug testing in schools?

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Should unaccompanied children entering the U.S. be automatically deported?

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Should the draft be reinstated (brought back)?

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. Should the gas tax be repealed (taken back)?

\_\_\_\_\_ 11. Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

\_\_\_\_\_ 12. Should the age of retirement be raised from 66 to 70?

Look at the questions you marked **Very Important**. Now decide which topic is **THE MOST IMPORTANT** to you. You will be asked to stand by the issue you care most about.