DEMCOCRACY

CLASS

POWERED BY ROCK THE VOTE

LESSON PLAN

WWW.DEMOCRACYCLASS.COM
Thank you for bringing *Democracy Class* into your classroom! The goal of this 45-minute (one class period) program is to give high school students (1) the skills to navigate our country’s elections process, (2) the context to understand what it means to be an active citizen, and (3) ultimately register them to vote so eligible students can participate in future elections.

**Materials in your downloadable Democracy Class toolkit include:**

- Democracy Class lesson plan
- PowerPoint presentation which supports the lesson plan
- Democracy Class video and transcript
- National Voter Registration Form
- Sample Ballot sheet for the mock election
- Rock the Vote membership sign-up sheet
- Five Golden Rules for Registering to Vote

Note: If you did not download the full toolkit, you can do so at [www.democracyday.com/resources](http://www.democracyday.com/resources).

**Preparation Needed:**

- Download the “History of Voting” video at: [www.democracyday.com/resources](http://www.democracyday.com/resources) and setup the video to play either through a laptop computer connected to an LCD projector with speakers or save the video on a CD/DVD and play via a TV. Note: an internet connection is not required as long as you download the video in advance.
- Print and make photocopies of the sample ballot sheet (3 copies), National Voter Registration Form (one per student), the membership sign-up sheet (4-5 copies), and the ‘Five Golden Rules’ (one copy).
- Review the state-by-state voter registration instructions and contact information for your state’s elections officials available at: [www.democracyday.com/resources](http://www.democracyday.com/resources) to prepare for the voter registration section of the lesson plan (sections 8-10).
- Ask your students to bring their social security card or driver’s license so they can register to vote.
- Gather approximately 10 “incentives” to use as part of the mock election. This could be candy, school supplies like a pen/pencil, money, etc. (Reference sections 12-14 of the lesson plan for more information on how these will be used during the lesson).
## OVERVIEW (45 MINUTES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video: The History of Voting</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion: Connecting Issues to Voting</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register to Vote</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mock Election</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrap-Up</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

(SLIDE 1 - DEMOCRACY CLASS)

1. Warm-up question (pick one):

   **Question 1:** “Who has voted before?” Prompt students to think about things that they vote on all the time in their lives – winner of American Idol or The X Factor, Facebook ‘likes,’ who is on the NBA All-Star team, what movie they see with their friends.

   “You vote on things all the time, but perhaps the most important vote you have is who you elect to represent you…”

   **Question 2:** “What is ‘politics’?” Ask the students to write a word or phrase that comes to mind, and then ask them to share their answers.

   “The dictionary defines politics as ‘the art or science of influencing people on a civic, or individual level, when there are more than 2 people involved.’ In other words, it is the way we ‘choose government officials and make decisions about public policy’.”

   “Harold Lasswell, a famous political scientist once said – Politics is about who gets what, when and how. It is all about the acquisition and application of power. Today we will learn more about politics, and the power you have to influence it.”

2. Introduce Rock the Vote’s *Democracy Class*: “Rock the Vote, which is the nation’s largest young voter organization, has put together a classroom program called Democracy Class to talk about the right to vote, how we got it, and the power that comes with it.”

   Introduce Rock the Vote and its mission: Rock the Vote’s mission is to engage and build political power for young people in our country.

   Rock the Vote works with artists and musicians to engage young people in the political process. Over the last two decades, Rock the Vote has registered more young people to vote than any other organization or campaign, including more than a million people in the 2012 Presidential Election, and has become the best-informed place online where young people can find out what they need to know before casting a ballot.
After years of declining participation at the polls, a new generation of young voters has arrived. Millions of new voters between the ages of 18 – 29 cast ballots in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012. Rock the Vote is dedicated to building the political power and clout of this Millennial Generation by registering and turning out young people, by forcing the candidates to campaign to them, and by making politicians pay attention to youth and the issues they care about once in office.

**VIDEO: THE HISTORY OF VOTING** (5 minutes)

4.] Play the video.

**DISCUSSION: CONNECTING ISSUES TO VOTING** (10 minutes)

(SLIDE 2 - WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR YOU TO VOTE?)

The video ends with the question: **What will it take for you to vote?** This is where our discussion begins. The goal is to get students to express strong opinions on issues they care about as well as to start thinking critically about how they want these problems addressed.

“In the video we saw they touched on some issues that impact our country and our lives. What issues do you care most about?”

Ask “Why?” or “What about that issue concerns you?” when an issue is raised. And ask about potential solutions: “What would you do about it?” and “Does anyone else have a solution?”

Get local: “Let’s make this local, and think about our school, our neighborhood, city or state. What do you want to see addressed on a local or state level that your elected officials decide? It could even be in our schools.”

Write the issues discussed on the board, get at least five.

**NOTE FOR EDUCATOR:** A list of sample issues for discussion can be found at the end of the lesson plan, for your reference.

**OPTIONAL EXERCISE:** If you have longer then 45 minutes, you can add the additional interactive exercise - Vote with Your Feet – here. This can be found at the end of the lesson plan.
Now that the students have talked about their concerns and expressed opinions on how they should be addressed, let's connect those issues to voting and democracy.

“Now we are going to have an election. But first let’s talk about how elections influence these concerns we have. Let’s talk about power.”

“In an election, who has the power? The VOTERS. Why? The candidates need our votes to win.”

“Once in office, these candidates represent us and we give them the authority to make decisions on our behalf on all of these issues that we just discussed. So, whom we elect can have a serious impact on which issues are addressed and how.”

“The fight for this power, to pick who makes decisions about our lives, is what sparked the American Revolution, which we saw in the video. Remember the Declaration of Independence?”

(SLIDE 3 - DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE)

“It states that when people feel like the country is going in the wrong direction or feel that they are being treated unjustly, they have the RIGHT to protest and change things through voting. This is how and why our democracy works in the United States.”

“Can someone read this for me?”

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

“Thank you. Ok, so look at that part in bold: deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. What does that mean? First off, what does it mean to have ‘consent?’”

“Ok, so permission or approval. So they get their power by having the permission or approval of the governed – who are the governed?”

“Exactly, us, the citizens, the people who vote. So they have our permission to have this power, to make decisions for our country, or this state, or our city. It wasn't like President Obama just drove into Washington and started unpacking his sofa into the White House. He has our permission to run the country until 2016. The consent of the governed. And when the next presidential election comes, we will see candidates spend their money, time, and energy to win our permission for them to govern us again. It is our responsibility to vote for the candidate that we believe in, and give them our permission to make decisions for our country.” (Note: you can use other examples of mayor, governor, congressperson or senator, too).“ In other words, elected officials work for us! But only if you are a voter.”
7) Select candidates for mock election: “We’re going to have our own election now, so we need two volunteers who will be running to represent us. Do you have ideas on how to make changes around the issues we listed?” Pick two candidates to run for office!

To the candidates: “You need to convince the class that you have great ideas to address their concerns. You need their votes to win!”

TIP: Run for mayor or city council or governor and address the more local concerns raised during the discussion.

REGISTER TO VOTE (10 minutes)

NOTE FOR EDUCATOR: Included on the educator resources section of the website (www.democracyday.com/resources) is detailed information for each state’s guidelines for conducting voter registration. If you are not comfortable handling paper registrations for your students, you may direct them to www.rockthevote.com to register to vote or make sure they sign up for our free membership program. Every student who signs up will be sent a link to register to vote. The sign-up sheet is included in your toolkit. Please remember to return the completed sheet(s) to Rock the Vote at info@democracyclass.com.

8) Hand out voter registration forms and pass around the “Rock the Vote membership sign-up” sheet. “Now, before you can vote for a candidate, you have to register to vote!”

“These are actual voter registration forms. The forms give you the power and the privilege to vote in any election, for: mayor, governor, congress, senate and president. If you are a citizen and will be eligible by the next election*, you can fill it out now, then I will mail your form in for you and you will be registered to vote in ALL elections! If you are not eligible, you should still fill out the form now so you can see how it is done.”

“Also, the sheet being circulated is a membership sign-up list for Rock the Vote. If you are interested in the benefits of membership such as exclusive music, free concert tickets, volunteer opportunities and all the information you need to know about elections then sign-up. If you are not 18, they will email or text you a voter registration form on your 18th birthday. It’s easy, cool, and FREE. They will not send you spam or give out your number.”

* Be sure to check your state guidelines for age and registration specifications. Some states allow young people to register earlier than 18. Check your state guidelines by going to www.democracyday.com/resources and finding your state specific information.

Have questions? Give Rock the Vote a call at 202-719-9910
Walk students through a sample registration form. Let them know that the biggest mistakes that people make are putting today's date in for their birthday, putting their birthday in for today's date, and most of all - forgetting to sign the registration form.

Explain to students, “In reality, you and you alone can determine if you have a say in our democracy or not. Who will be eligible to vote in the upcoming election?”

“Here are Rock the Vote's Five Golden Rules for Registering to Vote.”

**TIP:** Included within the toolkit download is a word document titled “Five Golden Rules for Registering to Vote.” If you do not have access to a projector please print this document to give to your students or read them to your class now. You can also access this document at [www.democracyday.com/resources](http://www.democracyday.com/resources).

**TIP:** Make sure that all pertinent boxes are filled in before collecting. Refer to the state-by-state instructions for guidance on what students should enter for boxes 6, 7, 8. Where the form asks, “Will you be 18 years old on or before Election Day?,” please refer to the final column. If a student qualifies under your state’s rules, have the student mark “Yes.”

Collect the voter registration forms and the membership sign-up sheet. Hand out the ballots for the mock election.

**TIP:** Be sure to check your state’s policies for sending in Voter Registration Forms (some have short turnarounds from when young people fill them out to when they must be submitted). For more information on primary voter registration deadlines check out Rock the Vote's Election Center at [www.rockthevote.com/election-center](http://www.rockthevote.com/election-center).

**Mock Election** (10 minutes)

“Ok, now that we are registered, let’s have an election.”

**Candidate forum:** “These two (say their names), are running for (say office that they’re running for), and we’re going to have an open forum where you can ask the candidates about your concerns.” (Have them come to the front of the class) “Right now they need your vote so they can win the election. YOU have the power if you are a voter. You’ll want to ask questions to see how they can make your community or your future better if they win.”

Take 3-5 questions, with the candidates each answering the question, alternating who goes first. Let the candidates each make a final comment if time allows to wrap-up the forum.

**TIP:** If student questions are too vague, ask them to focus on the local concerns written on the board.
12) “Now it’s Election Day…but wait! There are two things that I want to do.”

- Send 50% of the students to the back of the room. Explain that actually only half of young people voted in the last presidential election, letting the others take their power and decide for them. These students represent the non-voters.

- Give each candidate 3-5 “incentives” and tell them to distribute them to the students (any student they want). Explain: “Before we have the election, candidates have some gifts to give out to anyone they want in the class.”

13) Implement the election: Ask students with voting ballots to write down the name of whom they’re voting for. Remind the students in the back of the room: “Sorry, you are representing the non-voters. You don’t get a say.” Collect the ballots.

14) Discuss the results:

Ask the students who didn’t vote:
“How does it feel to do all that work, and have issues that you care about, but not be able to have a say in the election?” “Did you know that in the last major election, only half of all eligible young people under 30 voted, but over the past couple elections, young voter turnout has been on the rise, meaning more and more power and influence for all of you. You have to be the ones that keep up that momentum in future elections.”

Ask the candidates:
“What do you think the buttons represent?” It could be jobs, money, promises to address and support the voter’s issues. The idea is that politicians do things for the people that vote for them.

“Do you think that politicians know who votes and who doesn’t? Of course they do! They know who registers and who votes; it is all public information.”

“Do you think that politicians spend time with or do things for people who don’t vote? No way. They need votes to win.”

15) Count the ballots and announce the winner!

TIP: If you purchased additional materials to support the lesson plan, this is when you can hand out T-shirts to both of the candidates.
WRAP-UP (5 minutes)

(SLIDE 6 - FOLLOW US ONLINE!)

16] “OK, before we finish: Take out your cell phones! If you are interested in learning more, text “ROCK” to RTVOTE (788683).”

17] Wrap-up: Write the website (www.democracyclass.com) on the board. Remind students to check out www.democracyclass.com where they can receive more voter and election information. In addition, voter registration forms are always there; remind students that if you change your address, you need to re-register, and when you turn 18 you can always go there to get a voter registration form. There are also links for running or joining voter registration drives. Even more information and updates can be found on Rock the Vote’s Facebook page and by following Rock the Vote on Twitter.

facebook.com/rockthevote | @rockthevote
ATTENTION EDUCATORS!
THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT

We need you to turn in the completed voter registration forms. When the class is finished, please take the following steps within 24 hours to make sure that the voter registration forms are processed and do not expire.

- Mail the completed Voter Registration Forms to your State Elections office. There is a document with state specific instructions available at: www.democracyday.com/resources. You can mail or drop off the forms directly to your county election officials. If you have any questions, you can always call us! 202-719-9910.

- Email or mail the completed membership sign-up sheet to Rock the Vote. Please send to info@democracyclass.com or use the mailing address below. Rock the Vote will use this information to send voter registration information to your students when they are eligible to vote in your state (or right now if they already are!) and add them to the Rock the Vote list to receive key election information.

- Please complete a short evaluation to help us improve the program moving forward. You can access the survey at www.democracyday.com/resources/evaluation

Thanks!

Our info:

Rock the Vote
Attn: Democracy Class
1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, #640
Washington, DC 20036
202-719-9910
www.democracyclass.com
www.rockthevote.com
SAMPLE ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

Should undocumented immigrants or others who enter the country illegally be granted citizenship? If yes, under what conditions?

Should there be universal healthcare for everyone?

Should the city/state/country rebuild our infrastructure or leave it to private industry? What are the pros and cons of each method?

Should English be the official language of the U.S?

Should taxes be raised to pay for programs and the national debt? If yes, whose taxes should be raised?

Should we pass an Amendment to the Constitution defining marriage as being only between a man and a woman? Should gay couples have the same rights as heterosexual couples in areas such as inheritance, healthcare, and taxes?

Should a woman have the legal right to an abortion?

Should we increase investments in renewable energy sources to help reduce our dependence on foreign oil?

Should we expand safe-sex education in schools, as opposed to abstinence-only education?

Should violent video games be regulated?

Should the minimum wage be increased to $10.10 across the country?

Other issue areas, for local discussion: Public safety, public education funding.
Optional Exercise: Vote With Your Feet

Goals:
- To practice debating and persuasion skills while introducing current issues being decided by our elected officials.
- To illustrate that you must be registered in order to vote.

You will need:
- “Incentives” such as buttons, etc. for a third of the class.
- Floor space.
- Two statements – examples below.

How to:

1. Introduce the game
   Explain to the group that you’re going to make some statements and that they should ‘vote with their feet’ by moving to one side of the room if they agree and to the opposite if they disagree. Those that are unsure or don’t know should stay in the center of the room.

2. Pose the statements
   Make the statements easy to understand, with clear arguments on either side and thought provoking (local or current issues are a good way to draw out opinions - for example local transportation, crime, recent news events). See examples of statements below.

3. Using the “incentives”
   During the first debate, distribute “incentives” at random to a third of the class. After the second debate, those with and without an “incentive” should be separated.

4. Conclude the game
   Explain to the group that those with “incentives” represent young people who are registered. They can vote and therefore have a voice, and will decide the issue. Those without cannot vote.

Tips for Educator: When you introduce the game, be sure to explain that you are going to make a statement about an issue currently being debated by our elected officials. If students agree with the statement, they should go to one side of the room; if they disagree, go to the other side of the room; and anyone that is not sure should stay in the middle.

Pose your statement and then ask people to make their stand.

---

1 This exercise is modified from a lesson plan used in the UK by Rock the Vote partners Bite the Ballot (www.bitetheballot.co.uk)
**Example Statement #1:**

“The 2nd Amendment to the US Constitution grants all Americans the right to bear arms. There should be no restrictions on gun ownership.”

Once students have made their decision, ask their reasons and invite them to change places if they want to after the debate.

Prompts: What if there were criminal background checks in place, is that enough? Proposed restrictions include banning high capacity magazines, automatic assault rifles and military style guns. If these are the only restrictions, does it change your mind?

Note: Distribute “incentives” to a third of the group.

**Example Statement #2:**

“Government is not doing enough to protect online privacy.”

Once students have made their decision, ask their reasons and invite them to change places if they want to after the debate.

Prompts: What information should corporations and the government have access to? Does the fact that you knowingly share personal data change anything? Does that make it better or worse? What role should the government play in such discussions? What role should private companies play?

After the debate, ask anyone without an “incentive” to go to the back of the room. Everyone else should remain in their places. People without a badge represent the majority of young people who are not registered and cannot vote.

Therefore, those with a badge would have made the decision on behalf of everyone. How do the students feel about that?
ROCK THE VOTE MISSION STATEMENT AND HISTORY

Rock the Vote’s mission is to engage and build political power for young people in our country. Founded twenty-three years ago at the intersection of popular culture and politics, Rock the Vote has registered more than six million people to vote and has become a trusted source of information for young people about registering to vote and casting a ballot.

After years of declining participation at the polls, a new generation of young voters has arrived. Millions of new voters between the ages of 18 – 29 cast ballots in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012. Rock the Vote is dedicated to building the political power and clout of this Millennial Generation by registering and turning out young people, by forcing the candidates to campaign to them, and by making politicians pay attention to youth and the issues they care about once in office.