LESSON PLAN

Election Caucuses: Who’s In and Who’s Out?

Compelling Question: To what extent are caucuses equitable and reflect “the will of the people?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Common Core Standards</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-2</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>45–60 Minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>Reading: R1, R2</td>
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<td>Writing: W1, W2, W5</td>
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<td>Speaking &amp; Listening: SL1, SL3, SL4</td>
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<td>Language: L3, L5</td>
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LESSON OVERVIEW

During the 2020 Presidential election, several states will use caucuses as their method for selecting nominees. An election caucus is a gathering where registered members of a party in a city, town or county get together to choose candidates for an election. A caucus is different than a regular primary where people cast their secret vote for their preferred candidate. Historically, caucuses were the main method used to determine each party’s presidential nominee. In recent years, the number of caucuses has been steadily declining. During the 2020 presidential election, the following states and U.S. territories have caucuses for primary elections: Iowa, Nevada, North Dakota, Wyoming, Guam, American Samoa and the Virgin Islands.

This lesson plan provides an opportunity for students to differentiate between caucuses and regular primary elections, engage in a mock classroom caucus election and write a speech that reflects their opinions about caucuses.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand how an election caucus works.
- Students will engage in a classroom caucus and reflect on its process and results.
- Students will explore their opinions about caucuses by writing and delivering a speech with their point of view.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- “Presidential Caucuses are Complicated. Why do some states use them?” (PBS News Hour, January 9, 2020, www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/presidential-caucuses-are-complicated-why-do-some-states-use-them, one copy for each student)
- Speech Graphic Organizer (one copy for each student)

Key Words

activists, arcane, boycott, caucus, convene, delegates, electability, equity, influential, nominees, persuasion, polling, primary, prominence, realign, restrictions, significance, status, viable, wields
PROCEDURES

Information Sharing: What is a Caucus?

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: What is an election caucus? Explain that an election caucus is a gathering where registered members of a party in a city, town or county get together to choose candidates for an election. A caucus is different than a regular primary where people cast their secret vote for their preferred candidate. Share the following information:
   - The following states have caucuses for primary elections: Iowa (Feb. 3), Nevada (Feb. 22), North Dakota (March 10) and Wyoming (April 4). In addition, the following U.S. territories also have caucuses: Guam (May 2), American Samoa (March 3) and the Virgin Islands (June 6).
   - Historically, caucuses were the main method used to determine each party’s presidential nominee. In recent years, the number of caucuses has been steadily decreasing. Each election season brings new states that have moved from caucuses to regular primaries. The latest states to move to a primary system are Kansas, Maine and Hawai’i.
   - The Democratic National Committee and the Republican National Committee, the governing bodies for the nation’s two major parties, establish their own guidelines for the presidential nomination process. The parties have somewhat different processes.

2. Ask students: How is a caucus different than a primary? Explain/elicit differences between caucuses and primaries.
   - In a caucus:
     - You typically have to show up at a specific time rather than with regular primaries, you have the whole day to vote.
       - It can typically take 2–4 hours to caucus. In a regular primary, you simply show up and vote.
       - The caucus process is as follows:
         - It begins with speeches by supporters for each of the candidates.
         - Voters then gather in groups based on their candidate preference. Voters do not vote by secret ballot. They raise their hands or gather in groups organized by their preferred candidate.
         - If a candidate does not receive a certain percentage of votes (15%), they are considered “not viable.” The members of those groups must then join another candidate’s group. The viable candidates’ group members can try to convince those in non-viable groups to join their candidate’s group. Another option is for all the members of non-viable candidates to join together to help a non-viable candidate reach 15%.
         - Next, the groups are counted again in this second ballot. A mathematical calculation determines how many “delegates” each candidate receives.
     - Voter turnout for caucuses is usually significantly lower than for primaries.

3. If possible, show the video Caucus vs. Primary: what’s the difference? or project this interactive article to illustrate how the caucus works: “How the Iowa Caucuses Work.”

4. Engage students in a brief discussion by asking the following questions:
   - What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
   - What is surprising about what you learned?
   - From what you know so far, what are the advantages and disadvantages of caucuses and primaries?
Classroom Caucus

1. Explain to students that they will do a caucus in their classroom to understand and reflect on how a caucus works. Tell students they will vote by caucus for a new item they want to add to your school’s lunch menu. Include a total of four possible options among one of the following:

- smoothie
- brownie
- ice cream sundae bar
- steak
- build your own pizza

- bacon
- sushi
- milkshake
- other items you think students would like

2. After choosing the four items, engage students in the following caucus process:
   a. Hang signs around the room with the four new menu items.
   b. Have students make short speeches about their preferred menu items.
   c. Ask students to choose their top choice and move to the part of the room where that option is located.
   d. Count the votes based on where the students are standing.
   e. If any food item receives less than 15% of the total votes, have those students choose one of the options left or allow them to join together to help a non-viable option reach 15%.
   f. Count the votes a second time. Whichever option gets the most votes wins!

3. Reconvene the class and engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:

- What was it like to do the caucus?
- What was comfortable and easy about the process?
- What was uncomfortable or challenging about the process?
- If your food item was “not viable” (received less than 15% of the vote), how did you feel? What options did you have?

4. Ask the following questions to get students to reflect on how it might feel to do a caucus for their Student Council President or another election they care about.

- If we held a caucus (instead of a ballot election) for the Student Council President, what would be the pros and cons?
- If we held that caucus on a Saturday, who would be able to participate? Who would not be able to participate?
- If you had to show up at a specific time and stay for several hours (on a Saturday or a weeknight), what students would be able to participate? What students would not be able to participate?
- If the caucus required sharing your thoughts about the candidate and voting publicly, what students would be able to participate? What students would not be able to participate?
- In a caucus, what people can participate and what people cannot? (E.g., people who have more free time, people who are available to come at a specific time, people who feel comfortable sharing their political views publicly, etc.)
- How might the diversity of who can attend and who cannot impact the results?
- Are caucuses fair and equitable? Why or why not?
- What are your overall thoughts and reflections on caucuses?

5. *(Optional)* Have students vote by secret ballot also and have them reflect on the differences between the two processes.
Reading Activity

1. Distribute the article “Presidential Caucuses are Complicated. Why do some states use them?” to each student and give them 10 minutes to read it silently or read aloud as a class.

2. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
   - What did you learn that you didn’t know before?
   - Why do you think so many states no longer use caucuses?
   - What are some of the criticisms of caucuses? What are some of the positive aspects of caucuses?
   - Do you think caucuses are more equitable or less equitable than regular primaries? How so?
   - Would you rather participate in a caucus or a regular primary? Please explain.

Writing Activity

1. Explain to students that they are going to write a speech that brings together what they have learned about caucuses and primaries. First, have them decide how they feel about election caucus voting and choose a point of view (pro or con). You can have them turn and talk with someone sitting near them to discuss their position or you can just have them decide on their own.

2. In order to get students thinking about speech writing, ask them: When you listen to a good speech, what makes it great? What makes it inspirational? On the board/smart board, record their ideas and include these if they are not stated:
   - Engaging facial expression.
   - Warm and expressive tone of voice.
   - Emphasis on some words and phrases (slowing down and/or speeding up, raising or lowering voice volume).
   - Expressive hand and body motions.
   - Be relaxed.
   - Tell anecdotes or stories that illustrate your point.
   - Use humor.
   - Use visual aids.
   - Be yourself (i.e., be authentic).
   - Use eye contact and movement in different parts of the room.

3. Give students fifteen minutes or more (time permitting) to begin working on their speech, using the Speech Graphic Organizer as a first step. Have students complete the first draft of their speech for homework. If time permits, have students conference with each other to improve their speeches and practice delivering the speech with a partner. Assign students the completion of the speech for homework over the next day or days.

4. When the speeches are completed, have students deliver them as class presentations. Consider recording them and making them available on your school or class website.

Closing

If their speeches are done, have students read them aloud. If students are still working on them, have students read the opening line or main point/thesis from their graphic organizer.
ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- “Besides Iowa, These Are the States with Caucuses” (*The New York Times*, February 4, 2020)
- Caucus (Ballotpedia)
- “Caucuses or Primaries? Why States Might Pick One or The Other” (NPR, February 5, 2020)
- “Political primaries and caucuses, explained” (CNN, October 15, 2019)
- “US election 2020: What are primaries and caucuses and how do they work?” (BBC, March 2, 2020)

Common Core Standards

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT AREA/STANDARD</th>
<th>_reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</td>
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<td>R2: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</td>
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<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
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<td>W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</td>
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<td>W2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.</td>
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<td>W5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.</td>
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<td><strong>Speaking and Listening</strong></td>
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<td>SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
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<td>SL3: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.</td>
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<td>SL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</td>
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<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
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<td>L3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.</td>
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<td>L5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</td>
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Speech Graphic Organizer

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<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening line to grab your audience</td>
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<td>State your main point or thesis</td>
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<tr>
<th>MAIN POINTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the issue?</td>
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<td>What is your stance on the issue and why?</td>
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<td>What problem are you trying to solve?</td>
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<td>What facts, quotes, statistics or other information can you provide to convince your audience?</td>
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<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Summarize your main points</td>
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<td>Review central ideas of your position</td>
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<td>Call to Action: What do you want people to do and what do they need to do it?</td>
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