

# American Experiments

## Where Do You Stand? Voting

Since the founding of the American republic, when the power of the nation was entrusted not in a monarchy but in its citizens, each generation has questioned and considered how to form “a more perfect union.”

The American Experiments suite of educational games builds off of this question by challenging students to think about their roles and responsibilities within their democracy. *Where Do You Stand?* asks students to formulate opinions on fundamental American rights while listening to and learning from the ideas and experiences of their peers.

The learning begins with the guiding question: *What does the right to vote mean to you?*

Through an interactive and movement-based activity, students investigate this question and examine how in many instances there are no black or white answers. *Where Do You Stand?* challenges students to critically think about the nuances and complexities of issues and learn from the experiences and reasoning of their peers as they form their own opinions in response to a series of prompts about voting. Through this, students will:

- Practice skills for engaging in civil discourse and active deliberation of challenging topics with peers.
- Form and voice their own opinions and, by listening to different viewpoints, modify their stances to reflect new understandings.
- Analyze how complex issues and topics can elicit a range of non-binary responses and evaluate why this matters.

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## Aligned Standards

### College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards

- D2.Civ.7.9-12. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.
- D2.Civ.9.9-12. Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings.
- D2.Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

### Common Core Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1. 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.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.4. 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.

## Assessments

This lesson builds discussion-based skills and knowledge of how Americans can participate in their democracy to affect change. Throughout the lesson, students' learning can be formatively assessed through their participation in the spectrum and discussions. This can be recorded using a simple table like the one below. This formative assessment table could be completed by teachers or individual students to record their own progress.

Student Name	Participating in the learning task	Practicing skills of civil dialogue	Evaluating multiple perspectives	Identifying and evaluating nuances and complexities	Analyzing voting as a way to effect change
Student A	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Student B	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓

A summative assessment can be done using the *Reflection* portion of the lesson. Students can create reflective pieces that are verbal, written, artistically rendered, or some other type of portfolio creation. See page 8 for a sample set of reflection questions.



## Pacing Guide

*Where Do You Stand?* is a flexible lesson that can be conducted over the course of one or several class periods. The pacing guide below shows an example of how to run the activity during a 45- or 90-minute block of time.

Learning Task	45-Minute Lesson	90-Minute Lesson
Warm Up Task	5 minutes	10 minutes
Review Game Procedures	5 minutes	5 minutes
Facilitating the Game	30 minutes	65 minutes
Reflection	5 minutes	10 minutes
<b>Total</b>	<b>45 minutes</b>	<b>90 minutes</b>

## Glossary of Terms

**Ballot:** A slip of paper used to cast a vote.

**Citizen:** An inhabitant of a particular place (for the purposes of this activity, legal status of an individual does not need to be considered).

**Discussion:** The action or process of talking about something with the purpose of exchanging ideas.

**Engaged Citizen:** A person who feels responsibility for a community and takes informed action to promote positive social change.

**Issue:** A problem that is in dispute between two or more parties.

**Private Issue:** A problem affecting only an individual.

**Public Issue:** A problem affecting a group, the community, or society at large.

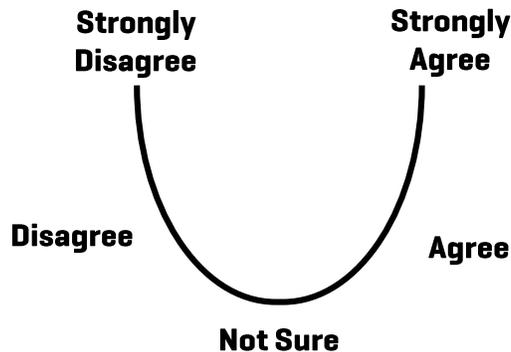
**Vote:** The selection made by an individual, typically on a ballot, to indicate which candidate they would like to see elected or their preference on how an issue should be addressed.

**Voter Registration:** The process through which a person who is legally eligible to vote registers or enrolls to be on the list of eligible voters for an election.



## Room Arrangement

Create a space in the classroom where the students can stand along a U-shaped line. Place signs along the line as shown in the diagram below.



## Warm-Up Task: Mini-Exhibit Investigation

Ask students: What words come to mind when you hear the term “voting?” Record their answers on the board.

Introduce the concept of voting using the three mini-exhibits found at the end of this guide. Give each group of students one mini-exhibit to examine for a few minutes. As they study the objects and information, have them think about and record their answers to the following questions using the note-taking sheet included at the end of this guide. A collection of the objects included in the mini-exhibits and the note-taking sheet can also be found in the Smithsonian Learning Lab collection for this activity (<https://s.si.edu/2EChZoA>).

Explain to students that they may not have all of the answers in their exhibit and will have to learn from the information shared by their peers.

- How has the number of people who are legally eligible to vote in American changed?
- Why might voter turnout be less than 100%?
- How has the process of voting in American changed?
- Before a voter can cast a ballot, what must they first do? What else should they do before voting?
- What do you think the experience of voting is like? What emotions might someone feel while casting a ballot?
- What are some reasons that people want to vote?

Afterward, have groups describe their exhibit and findings through a whole-class presentation or in small jigsaw discussion groups. As students talk, record their answers on an anchor chart for students to refer back to during the activity.



## Game Procedures

Prepare students for the activity by reviewing the following. These procedures will help build community and ready students for a discussion that is productive, civil and open-minded.

**Student Role** Students will step into the role of engaged community members or citizens. They will have to think carefully about the actions they would, or already do, take as active participants in civic life.

**Teacher Role** The teacher will move the game forward, make observations, and challenge students to analyze responses through discussion and critical-thinking questions.

**Facilitation Tip:** This game provides a platform for meaningful conversations about diverse viewpoints on complex topics. Moving the game forward at a fast pace and encouraging students to move at the same time across the center of the spectrum will help to create a fun learning atmosphere that can spark ah-ha! moments, energetic discussion, and new insights.

**Process** Throughout the activity, students will be asked to form an opinion on a series of prompts, then evaluate those choices and ultimately decide if they will stay in the same place or move to a new position to reflect how their stance has or has not changed.

**Goal** The goal of this game is to engage in active deliberation, learn about the thinking of others, and consider the nuances and complexities of challenging questions and topics.

**Norms** To help foster a thoughtful, reflective, and responsive discussion, have students create a class set of behavioral norms. (They can also be used in future lessons!)

Some suggestions include:

- Be respectful and open to new ideas.
- Share the floor.
- Stay on topic.
- Everyone participates.
- Seek first to understand, then to speak.

Once the list has been created, post it somewhere visible. As the authors, students are responsible for adhering to these norms and reminding their peers to follow them.



## Facilitating the Game

Follow the steps below to get students moving, thinking, and discussing.

**Prompt** Display and read aloud a series of prompts related to voting, which can be found on the following page. Slides with these prompts can be found at this link <https://s.si.edu/2ECJ62T> and at the Learning Lab collection for this activity: <https://s.si.edu/2EChZoA>.

**Move** Have students immediately and independently move to the space along the spectrum that they feel best represents their opinion. Once students have moved, make observations about where they are standing. For example, note if there is a large group of students in one area or if there is an empty space along the line and ask why that might be.

**Facilitation Tip:** Explain that “not sure” is not the same as not having an answer. “Not sure” is a good place to stand if a student has evaluated several perspectives, but has strong reasons why they cannot pick one. If students choose to stand on “not sure,” have them explain their choice and the different options that they weighed.

**Reflect and Respond** Invite students to share why they have chosen to stand where they are. Be sure to include students from all parts of the spectrum during this. Encourage students to be persuasive and respectfully respond to each others’ explanations.

**Facilitation Tip:** Provide gambits to help students effectively engage in the discussion. Post these somewhere in the classroom to help students start their discussions and have more thoughtful responses. Gambits can include prompts like “Can you tell me more about ...?” or “I agree with you, because...”

**Move Again** After listening to the experiences and reasoning of their peers, provide an opportunity for students to re-rate their opinion on the original prompt. Once students have moved, make observations about what transpired and ask: Did stances change at all? Why or why not? What new information or arguments swayed the most people? Were you surprised by how people did or did not move?

**Discuss** Periodically, engage students in small- or large-group discussions using the critical-thinking prompts listed below each prompt. Small groups can be composed of students who hold like-minded or opposing viewpoints, and should challenge students to identify areas where they disagree or agree with each other, respectively.



# Game Prompts

## 1. Voting should be mandatory.

*Critical Thinking Questions:* What does it mean if something is mandatory? What problem could this solve? What problems might it create?

## 2. People should be automatically registered to vote.

*Critical Thinking Questions:* What does it mean to “register” to vote? How does this requirement help create a more organized and efficient voting system? How might it make it difficult to cast a ballot?

## 3. Sixteen-year-olds should be able to vote.

*Critical Thinking Questions:* How old do you have to be to vote in U.S. elections? Why do you think that is? What power and responsibilities come with having the right to vote?

## 4. Convicted felons who have completed their sentences should be able to vote.

*Critical Thinking Questions:* How could reinstating a convicted felon’s voting rights after they complete their sentence positively or negatively impact our society and democracy? Are all felonies equal?

## 5. You can be a good citizen and not vote.

*Critical Thinking Questions:* How would you describe the characteristics of a “good” citizen? Why would voting be a part of good citizenship? What are reasons that people may choose to not vote?

## 6. People should vote online.

*Critical Thinking Questions:* How could voting online lead to better voter turnout? What are the risks that come with casting a ballot through the internet? Who would or would not have easy access to an online voting booth?

## 7. My vote makes a difference.

*Critical Thinking Questions:* What does it mean to make a difference? How could one vote change the outcome of an election? If someone chose not to vote, how could that impact the outcome?



## Reflection

After the last prompt, guide students to reflect on this experience and how they might apply what they have learned to their own lives in and out of school. The following prompts can be used to have students think individually or in small groups, and through writing, artistic, or verbal reflections.

### Game Review (the what)

- What did it feel like to share your opinion with others?
- How was your opinion affected during the game? Did it change or was it reinforced?
- Did everyone generally agree or were there a variety of opinions? What prompted people to change their stances?

### Connections to Democracy (the so what)

- Why is it important to remember that perspectives can change depending on new information or looking at a topic in a new light?
- How can listening to and understanding the reasoning behind the opinions of others help strengthen our democracy?
- How has participating in this game changed the way you think about complex and nuanced topics?

### Next Steps (the now what)

- How can you apply what you learned in this game, about the opinions you hold and those held by others, to future conversations about public issues?
- What advice would you give to someone who is preparing to vote for the first time?

**We'd love to know how you are using this lesson!  
Email us at [HistoryTeachers@si.edu](mailto:HistoryTeachers@si.edu) with questions,  
feedback, and suggestions.**

**The American Experiments lesson plans are made possible  
by a gift from the Julie and Greg Flynn Family Fund.**



## Suggested Modifications

- Small Groups** Facilitate this activity in small groups. For each group, use a string with labels that represent the spectrum from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” This strategy can work well for classes of students that are not as comfortable with large-group discussion or need more small-group instruction.
- Whiteboard Spectrum** Put a spectrum line on the board or along a wall. Have students contribute their answers by placing a sticky note to mark their answer to the prompt. This shows more of an overall picture of the class’s opinions, rather than showing the perspectives of individual students.
- Create Additional Prompts** Develop new prompts or topics. All prompts should be framed to be unbiased and lead to a respectful discussion that includes multiple perspectives. An unbiased prompt is something like “I will vote when I am 18,” as opposed to a statement of opinion like “Voting is a waste of time.” A good way to check the quality of a prompt is to reflect on if it would spark a discussion or a debate. If it would lead to a thoughtful discussion, you’re on the right track. If it would likely draw the students into an oppositional debate, reframe the prompt or create a new one.

## Extended Learning Opportunities

- Voting in American History Investigation** Dig deeper into the history of voting in the United States using the National Museum of American History’s *American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith* online exhibition section on “A Voice, A Vote” (<https://s.si.edu/2qq27R4>). Have students critically examine the questions: Who votes? Why do we vote? How do we vote? Students can share their findings through a fishbowl or panel discussion on the purpose and power of voting. Conclude the project by having students participate in the *Where Do You Stand?* activity again to see if and how their opinions have changed.
- Your Vote Matters** Young voters (ages 18 to 24) often have the lowest voter turnout of all age groups. Engage students in an inquiry project to examine the reasons why youth vote at lower rates than older Americans and identify ways that this could be addressed. Have students develop solutions for their school or community to encourage young people to register and vote. Students can compile findings and recommendations in a how-to guide that can be distributed to their peers or published online and shared with a larger audience.
- Keep the Discussion Going** Reflect on the guiding question for this lesson: What does the right to vote mean to you? Have students think about whether or not this was a good question to ask, and evaluate if there are other questions that might be better for helping students think about voting and civic participation. Have students develop their own “big questions” and examine them through facilitated discussions.



# Facilitation Strategies for Teachers

The American Experiments interactives provide students with the opportunity to lead and engage in their own conversation in which they can examine concepts and issues, learn through discussion, encounter new perspectives, and find common ground with others. As the facilitator, your role is to guide this discussion.

## What does it mean to be a facilitator?

Your job is to support the students as they think critically and engage in thoughtful discussions about complex concepts of democracy. Being a facilitator can be a challenging position to be in during a lively and engaging discussion because it requires you to be a neutral guide rather than a participant with an opinion.

But being neutral does not mean that the facilitator is passive! You are impartial about the topic, but not about the process. The facilitator must pay close attention to both the spoken and unspoken dynamics of the conversation to ensure that students feel welcomed and engaged, that the discussion remains civil and thoughtful, and that the activity achieves its intended goals.

This **to-do list** can help you get started:

- Be Prepared**
  - Understand the activity thoroughly. Brainstorm what ideas and views might be brought up and what might not be said. Be prepared to carefully present unvoiced perspectives to help the class dig deeper in to a question or prompt.
  - Prepare prompting questions in advance, like “What do you think?” “Can you explain your thoughts?” “What example or evidence could you share to help us better understand what you are describing?”
  
- Set the Scene**
  - Go over the objectives so students understand their expectations and the goals of the activity.
  - Review any procedures or rules.
  
- Manage the Discussion**
  - Keep track of who is talking.
  - Take notes to capture points, thoughts, and tensions. Use your notes to develop questions and illuminate connections.
  - Interject only as needed to clarify statements, move the conversation forward or deeper, defuse tension, and ensure all voices are heard.
  - Keep an eye on time and know when to start winding down the conversation so that there is sufficient time to reflect individually and as a group.
  
- Coach your Students**
  - This can require the most energy during the discussion. See the next page for tips on managing a few specific instances that might come up in your classroom.



## Facilitation Strategies for Teachers, continued

Below are tips you can use when students:

### Don't stick to the class norms

- Keep the class norms posted where all participants can see them! Students will often moderate each other by reminding everyone of the rules.
- Take a five-minute break. During this time, invite a rule-breaking student to be a co-facilitator and talk with them about what it means to moderate the conversation. Putting a student in a new role may help them see the conversation differently.

### Dominate the conversation

- Ask the student to pause and invite others to react to what has been said.
- Give a general reminder that the goal is to hear all voices and a range of discussion, meaning the floor must be shared.

### Choose to not participate

- Start by going around the room or table and having each student say something. Simply saying a few words out loud in front of a group can release a bit of the pressure a student might be feeling and make it easier for them to speak later on.
- During the discussion, let the student know that you are going to ask for their thoughts after the next few people talk. This gives them time to either check back into the conversation or prepare what they want to say.
- Explain that part of this learning experience is to understand that even if someone opts out, they are still making a conscious choice to participate or not—which is a key concept of democracy. If a student chooses to not participate, ask them to explain their choice to “sit this one out,” or invite them to be a co-facilitator.

### Struggle to explain their thoughts

- Encourage students to think of an example that could illustrate what they are thinking. For example, a student might not be able to say which amendment gave women the right to vote, but they may be able to describe the woman suffrage movement.
- Pause the activity for a ten-minute research break. During this time, students can grab a textbook or access the internet to pull together evidence that might help them make their case.

### Are ready to find common ground or reflect

- As the conversation or available time winds down, encourage students to reflect on what they learned about themselves as a member of a democracy and about the role of discussion in making wise decisions about public issues.
- Ask students to share their thoughts on why discussion is an important part of a thriving democracy. Identify where students' ideas overlap—in other words, where do they share common ground?



## Mini-Exhibit: Who votes?

When it was established, the United States of America boasted more eligible voters than ever before. But it was still just a fraction of the new country's population. Throughout American history, voting rights have expanded, contracted, and expanded again. Below are examples of how voting rights have been expanded to include more people. However, having the vote does not guarantee keeping the vote. Today millions of otherwise eligible voters cannot vote because of felony convictions.



### **The Fifteenth Amendment, Celebrated May 1870**

Five years after the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery, the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, giving African American men the right to vote.

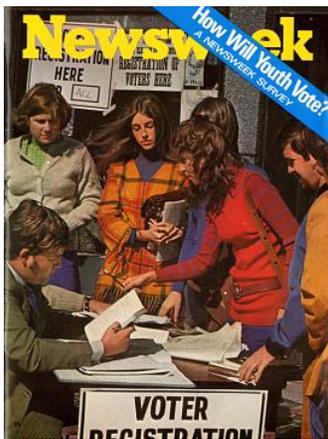
*National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; Gift of Warshaw Collection of Business Americana*



### **Alice Paul's Jailed for Freedom pin, 1917**

The woman suffrage amendment was first introduced in 1878. During a 1917 protest to support women's rights, many suffragists including Alice Paul were arrested and jailed for obstructing traffic as they stood outside the White House. The federal woman suffrage amendment was ratified in 1920.

*National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; Gift of Alice Paul Centennial Foundation, Inc.*



### **Newsweek magazine, October 25, 1971**

"Old enough to fight, old enough to vote" was the rallying cry for lowering the voting age from 21 to 18. During World War II and the war in Vietnam the issue gained momentum. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment establishing 18 as the legal voting age was ratified in 1971.

*National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*



### **Button, Vote!**

Earnest pleas, lighthearted jokes, and the occasional touch of guilt all play a part in encouraging Americans to vote. Behind the seemingly innocuous reminders is a serious concern. More Americans than ever before are eligible to vote but many do not go to the polls.

*National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*

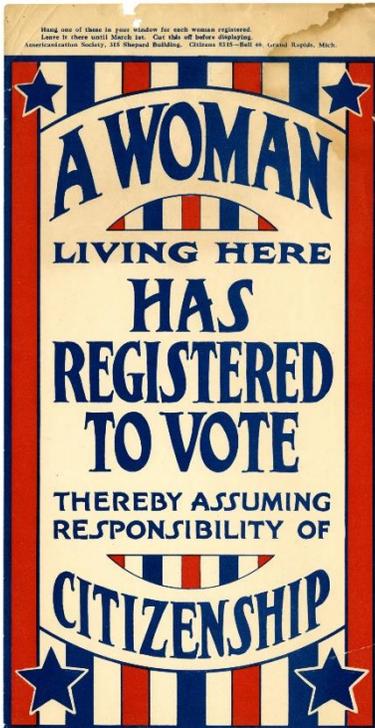
## Mini-Exhibit: Why do we vote?

Voters' motivations are as varied as their circumstances and experiences. Some vote to support or change their laws and leaders. Others are motivated by a sense of duty. Many see their first vote as a rite of passage or the final mark of adulthood and American citizenship. Whatever their reasons, Americans who stand in line at the polls make a personal decision to participate in hopes of bettering their lives and their country.

Advocates for a wide variety of constituencies and causes work to build a sense of community among like-minded voters and encourage them to turn out on Election Day. High voter participation can make a group a force to be reckoned with and can pressure politicians to pay attention to their concerns.

### Stickers, APIA Vote 2000

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution



### Button, "Vote For Me Too"

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

### Sign, "A Woman Living Here Has Registered to Vote", 1919

This sign was designed to be placed in the window of a home so that all who passed would know that the woman within had exercised her right under the 19th amendment and registered to vote. It also served as a reminder to other women to do the same.

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution



### Vote Buttons

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

## Mini-Exhibit: How do we vote?

The earliest elections in the United States were conducted by voice vote or with paper ballots put into ballot boxes. These paper ballots, called “party tickets,” listed names from just one party, and they were counted under the watchful eye of local party and election officials. As the United States grew and the electorate expanded in the decades following the Civil War, improvements appeared including ballots that listed the names of all candidates, ballot boxes with mechanical security features, and mechanical ballot counters.



### Glass ballot jar with a lockable wooden housing, 1884

The glass ballot jar became a symbol of the honesty and openness of democratic self-government. This 1884 glass ballot jar is typical of the devices, literally and figuratively transparent, used to secure paper ballots.

*National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*

### Automatic voting machine, 1898

By the 1890s voting had moved from a public declaration to a secret ballot. This machine’s gear mechanism and curtain were designed to ensure accuracy, security, and privacy.

*National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; Gift of Rockwell Manufacturing Company Automatic Voting Machine Division*



Advocacy groups and public service organizations, as well as state and local election offices, work to register, educate, and assist voters.

**Poster, Registrese y Vote**  
**Poster, Register and Vote (Native American)**  
**Poster, The Time is Now, 1972**

*National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*

## Mini-Exhibit Note-Taking Sheet

Closely examine and discuss the mini-exhibit with your group. Use this sheet to record your findings. As others present their information, listen carefully and take note of any information that may be missing.

1. How has the number of people who are legally eligible to vote in America changed?
2. Why might voter turnout be less than 100%?
3. How the process of voting in America changed?
4. Before a voter can cast a ballot, what must they first do? What else should they do before voting?
5. What do you think the experience of voting is like? What emotions might someone feel while casting a ballot?
6. What are some reasons that people want to vote?

