

The Electoral College

Grade(s):
3–12

Time:
1–2 weeks

Subject(s):
Math
Social Studies

Standards

Math

Students will collect, organize, display, and analyze data in order to make decisions and predictions; determine the theoretical and experimental probability of an event to make predictions and solve problems; and interpret, evaluate, and communicate information obtained from a wide variety of sources.

Social Studies

Students will be able to exercise the intellectual skills needed to understand, analyze, and judge civic and political processes and events as informed, responsible citizens.

OVERVIEW

Students learn about the history, selection, and workings of the Electoral College. Students create a table or graph of the United States and the number of Electoral College votes each state is allotted, discussing how this affects each state's influence in the election. They compare the popular vote to the Electoral College vote, comparing and graphing both results. Finally, students create an informational pamphlet, presentation and/or Web site designed to educate present and future voters about the Electoral College.

Driving Question: How does the Electoral College affect the outcome of the presidential election?

Skills and Knowledge: Graphing, geography, history, data analysis, writing

Co-nect Rubric: Project Report

Final Product: Students will create an informational pamphlet, presentation, and/or Web site designed to educate present and future voters about the Electoral College.

INSTRUCTION

The History of the Electoral College

Have students learn about the history of the Electoral College, including how it was formed, what purpose it served, and how that may have evolved over time. Have students use Web sites listed in the resource section to research and take notes and then present what they learned informally to their peers.

How Is the Electoral College Selected?

Different states have different rules determining how their Electoral College representatives are selected. What are your state's rules? Have your students research how your state's electors are selected and what laws and guidelines regulate the selection and voting process.

How Many Votes Does Your State Represent?

What is the breakdown of Electoral College votes among states? How is that determined? On what is it based? Has it changed over time? Have students research the answers to these questions and create a chart or graph showing the 50 states and the number of Electoral College votes each is allowed.

How Are the President and Vice President actually Elected?

What is the process for the actual election? How do the Electoral College representatives from each state cast their votes for the President and Vice President? What are the guidelines for this process? What happens if no candidate receives a majority of the Electoral College votes? Can unusual events change the course of the election? Have students research and answer these and other related questions.

Popular Vote vs. Electoral College Vote

Have students compare the results of the “popular” vote with the numbers of Electoral College votes that the candidate receives. In most cases, the ticket that wins the popular vote in a given state will receive all the Electoral College votes allocated to that state. As voting results come in, students will see which candidate wins each state and the amount of Electoral College votes he receives. Students can keep track of the Electoral College votes for each candidate and determine when the candidate has enough votes to win. Have students put together a table showing each candidate’s popular vote and Electoral College vote. Did the winner of the popular vote win the election? Has there ever been an election where the winner did not win the popular vote?

How Does the Electoral College Influence the Presidential Election?

What are the ramifications of the Electoral College system? Have students reflect on and discuss how this process influences and impacts our political process. Is it fair? What if the popular vote has different results? Should all states have equal votes? Why do we have this system? Is it outdated? Does it work?

Spreading the Word

Have students share the information they learned about the Electoral College with present and future voters. Students can prepare an informational pamphlet or brochure, an electronic slideshow, and/or a Web site. Have students present their information to a variety of audiences, including parents, community members, and peers.

Reflection

Finally, have students reflect on what they’ve learned in this project about the Electoral College and its impact on the presidential election. Have students consider and answer the project’s driving question. Did this project help them understand more about the election process? Did it help them better understand the voting process and the impact of a single vote? What would they do differently next time in order to make the project more meaningful, more exciting, more fun, and more of a learning experience?

RESOURCES

Elections: All About the Electoral College
<http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/sec/ele/elecoll/collidx.htm>

The Electoral College—Federal Election Commission
<http://www.fec.gov/pages/ecmenu2.htm>