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# ***History of the Vote***

## ***Voting in Minnesota***

Lesson Plan Suggestions :

Prepared by the Office of Secretary of State

in Cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Education

1988

## Preview of Main Points

Our democracy is founded on the principle of government by the people. Our government relies on the participation of its citizens and the right to vote is the centerpiece of this participation. The vote is the means by which the people retain the power they have given to their government, the elected officials they place in office by their vote.

Voting is one of the few avenues of political influence that is available to every adult citizen regardless of wealth, educational level, occupation or age (once reaching voting age of 18). But nationally only a slight majority of citizens over age 18 vote in most elections; only 46% voted in the 1986 elections. In 1984, the last presidential election, only 53.1% voted.

This lesson will review voting as it has progressed since the writing of the Constitution. It will review the Constitutional Amendments that have effected voting rights and have enfranchised groups over the years. The lesson will provide for a discussion around the questions: why vote?; what guarantees the right to vote?; what barriers remain to voting?; what are the procedures for voting? The 1988 presidential campaign can be used to learn more about the electoral college, campaign issues and voting patterns.

The goal is to stimulate interest in the student to become involved in the election process, understand their vote can make a difference leading them to become regular voters as adults.

### Objectives:

Students are expected to:

1. have an understanding of the importance of voting; one vote can make a difference.
2. know the eligibility requirements for voting in Minnesota.
3. identify barriers to participation and voter registration that still exist in 1988 in many states.
4. know the 11 Constitutional Amendments related to elections since the U.S. Constitution was written in 1787.
5. know the number of electoral votes allotted to Minnesota, and the number of electoral votes needed to win the presidency.
6. list the Constitutional Amendments to the Minnesota Constitution on the 1988 General Election ballot with a brief description of each amendment.

## Outline

- I. Why Vote?
- II. What Guarantees the Right to Vote?
- III. What Are Voting Procedures in Minnesota?
- IV. What Barriers Remain to Voting?
- V. Presidential Election in 1988  
Pros and Cons of the Electoral College
- VI. What will be on the Ballot in 1988?

### I. Why Vote?

Voting is a right not a privilege. Citizens should be given every opportunity to cast a vote for the candidate of their choice and have the assurance that their vote is counted correctly. Many registration restrictions are a major barrier to participation. Statistics show that if a person is registered they are more likely to vote than if they are not registered. Specific barriers are presented later in this lesson plan.

People vote or choose not to vote for many different reasons. Some suggest that voter participation is the reverse image of voter satisfaction--the greater the voters sense of well-being, the lower the turnout. They point to countries such as El Salvador, Argentina, and the Phillipines where life and death hinge on elections. In America the stakes are not nearly as high.

Some reasons people vote--and these could be expanded in discussion groups with students:

- concept that the voter can have an impact with their vote;
- one vote can make a difference;
- role of citizenship -civic responsibility;
- sense of duty
- "pocketbook issues" - job or vocation depend on certain things happening;
- social conscience - many groups have no one speaking on their behalf in the governmental process, especially the poor and the homeless.

Some reasons people do **not** vote:

- registration barriers; fear of the system; unaware of procedures; inconvenient registration location and hours;
- boredom; turned off by politics;
- doesn't make a difference; all candidates are the same;
- my vote doesn't count; races are never that close;
- religious; some groups do not believe in voting;
- sickness (absentee voting procedures).

Voting has been shown to be the lowest common denominator political act. People who don't vote tend not to participate in other forms of political, civic or social activity.

The age group with the lowest participation is the 18-24 year olds. That age group makes up 17% of the voting age population but makes up approximately 24% of the non-voting population. Unlike all previously enfranchised groups, whose participation once given the right to vote tended to increase, young people as a group have been voting at a diminishing rate since they received the right to vote. George Bush identified the younger voter as a reason in selecting his vice-presidential choice.

Over the years, many groups have fought for the right to vote. The goal of high participation for all groups is laudable. Special emphasis on young people in their formative years--years when habits are set--is worth the effort. The vote should not be thrown away.

## II. What Guarantees the Right to Vote?

The U.S. Constitution in its first three articles established how our government is organized: the legislative, the executive and judicial branches of government. The Constitution provided not only how our government would be organized but also how the government would be chosen and who would be allowed to participate in the process.

Legislative powers were placed in the U.S. Congress which was to consist of the Senate and House of Representatives. The House of Representatives was to represent the people of each state and members were elected by those qualified in each state. The U.S. Senate, made up of two Senators from each state, was to represent state's rights and members were elected by the legislators of each individual state.

The executive power was placed in the President of the United States. Electors from each state would vote for two persons. The person receiving the highest number of votes, if a majority, was declared president. The person having the next highest number of votes was declared vice-president.

The judicial power is the power to decide cases under the law through legal procedures. It interprets statutes and the constitution, and has affected elections by way of judicial decision and statutory enforcement.

In the late eighteenth century the vote was restricted to white males over twenty-one and many states also required property ownership.

History shows the enlarging electoral franchise coming basically by Constitutional Amendments. Eleven of the Constitutional Amendments have directly affected elections. The amendments that enlarged the franchised groups include:

1. 15th Amendment (1870) - Right to vote not denied because of race, color or servitude.
2. 19th Amendment (1920) - Right to vote not denied because of sex.
3. 24th Amendment (1964) - Removal of poll tax as a provision of voting in federal elections. As part of the Civil Rights Voting Act this was generally viewed as franchising a large number of poor people.
4. 26th Amendment (1971) - Right to vote for citizens eighteen years of age or older not be denied because of age.

The other Constitutional Amendments that changed election procedures are as follows:

1. 12th Amendment (1804) - Separate vote for president and vice-president by Electors.
2. 14th Amendment (1868) - Prohibited states from denying citizens equal protection under the law.
3. 17th Amendment (1913) - Popular election of Senators.
4. 20th Amendment (1933) - Terms of President, Senators, Representatives.
5. 22nd Amendment (1951) - Limit terms of President.
6. 23rd Amendment (1961) - District of Columbia electors to cast votes for President and Vice-president.
7. 25th Amendment (1967) - Filling a vacancy in office of Vice-president.

### III. Voting in Minnesota

The responsibility for setting eligibility requirements for voting was given to the states. In Minnesota as in many other states, that responsibility is in the office of Secretary of State.

General information on voting in Minnesota:

1. Registration eligibility requirements:

- a. 18 years of age;
- b. Citizen of the United States;
- c. Minnesota resident 20 days;

You are **not qualified** if:

- a. You are convicted of treason or a felony and not yet restored to your civil rights;
- b. You are under guardianship of your person;
- c. You are found by a court of law to be legally incompetent;
- d. You are not registered to vote.

2. General data:

- a. 4085 precincts in Minnesota;
- b. Approximately 2.4 million registered voters in 1988;
- c. Voting age population approximately 3 million;
- d. Different types of ballots, paper, punch-card, machine;
- e. Pre-registration closes 20 days before election;
- f. Polls open 7 am to 8 pm;
- g. Election day registration.
- h. Provisions for handicapped voters:
  - polling places accessible
  - may vote from vehicle
  - absentee ballot instructions in large print, braille or cassette
  - each county has TTY device for providing voter registration information.

3. Primary Election:

- a. When? First Tuesday after the second Monday in September in even numbered years;
- b. What is the purpose?
  - nomination of partisan candidates
  - narrow candidates to two for each office for nonpartisan races;
- c. Voters can vote for candidates of **one** political party only.

4. General Election:

- a. When? First Tuesday after the first Monday in November in even numbered years;
- b. Voters can vote for candidates of more than one party.

5. Election Laws:

- a. Administered by Secretary of State in Minnesota. Secretary of State is chief election official in state of Minnesota;
- b. County auditors have responsibility in each of the counties;
- c. Secretary of State conducts training for auditors and clerks who in turn train election judges across the state.

#### IV. What Barriers Remain to Voter Registration?

Minnesota has been a leader both in voter turnout and in legislation that allows citizens to register in many ways. In the 1976, 1980, and 1984 elections Minnesota had a higher percentage of votes cast for president than any other state in the nation. For example: in 1976 the national average was 53.5% while Minnesota voted 75.4%; in 1980, the national average was 52.5% while Minnesota voted 71.0%, and in 1984 the national average was 53.1% while Minnesota voted 69.5%.

There is a strong push nationally to remove barriers to voter registration. In some states registration is more difficult than voting. Minnesota stands as a model for voter registration laws which allow for mail registration, election-day registration, registration cards included in state tax booklets, attached to driver's license applications, and cards are available in all state agencies. Statistics show that voters who are pre-registered are more likely to vote. They know ahead of time where their polling place is, that they have met the eligibility requirements for voting, and there is not the uncertainty that voters in some states experience.

The following are barriers that are present in many states and how Minnesota has removed the barrier in their election laws.

1. In many states only registrars can handle voter registration. There often is only a small number of registrars, so going out to community sites is not reasonable. On the other hand, in Canada the government mandates that government workers go door-to-door to get voters on the registration rolls. Once a citizen reaches voting age they are placed on the registration roll. (In Minnesota anyone can conduct voter registration. Example of groups that carry out registration drives:

- candidates
- political parties
- League of Women Voters
- banks and large businesses
- 7-11 stores
- post offices)

2. Registration must be done in person at registrar's office. These offices usually have business hours of 9am - 5pm. (Minnesota allows registration by mail. This is particularly helpful for voters who work the traditional office hours, for voters who are handicapped and voters who are older. Minnesota also has voter registration forms in each of the state of Minnesota Tax Instruction booklets, and as part of a driver's license application or renewal form that can be mailed. The philosophy in Minnesota is to bring voter registration to where the people are, rather than have the voter figure out where in the bureaucracy the voter is to go to register.)



3. Preregistration. Our society is becoming more and more mobile, so long pre-registration periods can be a barrier and can disenfranchise large numbers of people. Nationwide, the pre-registration period varies from 10-50 days. Two states other than Minnesota have election day registration. (Minnesota has a 20 day pre-registration cut-off to allow for processing of voter registration cards. Minnesota allows people, with proper identification, to register and vote on election day. There are stiff penalties for attempting to register fraudulently.)

4. Residency requirements. Twenty states now have no residency requirement (although they may have a pre-registration requirement) and Arizona has the longest requirement of 50 days. (Minnesota has a requirement that you must be a Minnesota resident 20 days before an election in order to vote in the state.)

5. Dual voter registration systems for local and federal elections. Dual registration requires voters to register twice, once for federal elections and once for state elections, in order to vote. (Minnesota has a single voter registration system.)

The citizens of Washington, D.C. have perhaps the biggest barrier of all in 1988. They do not have the constitutional right to vote for representatives in congress. They continue to have taxation without representation. It wasn't until the passage of the 23rd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1961 that they were allowed to vote for U.S. President. The D.C. Amendment was sent to the states for ratification in 1979. The amendment did not receive the necessary ratification by three-fourths of the state legislatures in the required seven year period.

#### V. Presidential election in 1988

The 1988 presidential election provides the forum to look at a number of issues surrounding political campaigns. What are some of the voting blocks that candidates are focusing on in their campaigns? Who makes up the "Yuppie" group? What is the "gender gap"? Do large numbers of women support only women candidates? What led to Jessie Jackson's success and his inability to be nominated? Did people vote for or against Jackson solely because of his race? What are the themes of the presidential campaigns, and which of the voting constituencies are they attempting to reach?

1. Examples of voting constituencies:
  - a. senior citizens
  - b. women - "gender gap"
  - c. "baby boomers" and "yuppies"
  - d. minority groups
  - e. "religious right"
  - f. lobby groups - PAC's

2. Voting patterns:

- a. party voting
- b. issue voting
- c. coalition building.

3. Electoral college:

- a. Article II of Constitution  
Number of Electors equal to the whole number of Senators and Representatives elected to congress.
- b. Majority of electoral votes needed to elect
- c. Meet in each state capitol on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December at noon;
- d. State's role - the method of selecting electors is decided by the states. Political parties have strong influence in the selection.
- e. Elector's role - "pledged not bound"; Electors are pledged to vote for the candidate of the party they are affiliated with, but legally no elector is bound to vote for any particular candidate. The elector can vote for any candidate they choose. Examples of "faithless electors" in recent years:
  - In 1968, a Nixon elector in North Carolina voted for George Wallace, the American Independent Party candidate;
  - in 1972, a Nixon elector in Virginia voted for John Hospers, the Libertarian Party candidate;
  - in 1976, a Ford elector in the state of Washington, voted for former governor Ronald Reagan of California.
- f. Debate:
  - 1. majority take all
  - 2. big vs small states
  - 3. violates one man one vote doctrine (each state entitled to at least 3 votes)
  - 4. direct election of president by the people of several states.
- g. Examples of elections:
  - 1. 1876 Tilden more popular votes, but Hayes more electoral votes - Hayes elected President;
  - 2. 1888 Cleveland more popular votes, but Harrison majority of electoral votes - Harrison elected President;
  - 3. 1984 "Reagan Landslide" 53% of eligible voters voting; Reagan: 54,281, 858 - 525 electoral votes; Mondale: 37,457,215 - 13 electoral votes.

VI. Minnesota Statewide Ballot for 1988:

1. U.S. President (to elect Minnesota's 10 Electors);
2. 1 U.S. Senator;
3. 8 U.S. Representatives in Congress;
4. 1 State Senator (due to resignation);
5. 134 members Minnesota House of Representatives;
6. 1 Associate Justice of Supreme Court;
7. 1 Judge of the Minnesota Court of Appeals;
8. 3 Constitutional Amendments (General Election);
9. Local races, district judges, county offices and city offices.

1988 Proposed Amendments to the Minnesota Constitution:

1. **201** amendments have been proposed since 1858;
2. **109** amendments have been passed by the electorate since 1858;
3. Majority of all who vote needed to pass the amendment. (A **non-vote** is counted as a "no" vote).
4. Amendment One:

**ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST FUND: TO ESTABLISH:**

"Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to establish a Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund for environmental, natural resource, and wildlife purposes?"

5. Amendment Two:

**JURIES: TO ALLOW LESS THAN TWELVE MEMBERS**

"Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to allow the use of juries of less than 12 members in civil and nonfelony cases?"

6. Amendment Three:

**STATE LOTTERY: TO PERMIT LEGISLATURE TO AUTHORIZE**

"Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to permit the Legislature to authorize a lottery operated by the state?"

## **Suggested Special Projects**

### **Electoral College**

-Have students do independent research on recent presidential elections finding % of votes versus electoral votes candidates received.

-Have students plan a strategy of what states' presidential candidates should concentrate on, in order to be successful in gaining a majority of electoral votes.

-Debate electoral college versus direct election of president.

-How are Minnesota's electors chosen? Interview one or more of Minnesota's electors;

-What happens if no presidential candidate receives a majority of the electoral votes?

### **Special Interest groups**

-Have students identify special interest groups and decide which of the 1988 presidential candidates the group supports.

-Identify themes of the presidential candidates that relate to special interest groups.

-Cut news articles that relate to the special interest group.

-View presidential commercials and evaluate what groups are being solicited.

### **Civil Rights Movement**

-Have students critique Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

-What did the Civil Rights Voting Act of 1965 contain?

-How many people of color serve in the U.S. Senate? In the U.S. House of Representatives? In the Minnesota Legislature?

-Who is Rosa Parks? What did she do?

### **Women's Suffrage Movement**

-Compare the Suffrage Movement in gaining the right to vote to the Women's Movement of the 1970's.

-ERA; Has there been a retreat from support?

-What are the current statistics on women elected officials?

-What is the "gender gap"?

-What impact will women have on the 1988 presidential election?

### D.C. Amendment

- "Taxation without representation in 1988";

- A barrier that remains for the citizens of the District of Columbia in that they do not have representation in congress;

- What are the issues that surround this amendment? Why did it fail?

### Why vote?

- Have brainstorming sessions of issues that involve students at present time. Include city government as well as state and federal government.

- Possible areas: parks; bike license; curfew; driving age; mandatory school attendance; drinking age; college loans; military service; age of majority. What changes would students like to see in current law?

- Have students draft "laws" for school procedure.

- Discuss the concept of voting as a **right** not a privilege.

### Voting in Minnesota

The following information is easily available from county auditors or city clerks. Having students research them will help students understand how elections are carried out.

- What is a precinct? How many in the state? How many in the student's county? How many in the student's city (or township?) Where is student's polling place?

- What do election judges do? Are they paid? How do you become an election judge?

- What will be on the ballot in the precinct where the student lives in 1988?

- Research the Constitutional Amendments on Minnesota's ballot in 1988.