

Electing your Representatives

Subject and Grade Level: High School Social Studies
Time: 60-90 minutes

Guiding Question: What qualities are important in an elected representative?

Overview

Our government is a representative democracy, rather than a direct democracy. This means that instead of voting directly on policies we primarily elect people who represent us in the government and make policies for us. One of the most important roles of a citizen is to choose the person who will represent them in this decision making process. At the state level each citizen is represented by one person in the State Assembly and another person in the State Senate. This lesson encourages students to consider the important qualities of a representative, and to learn about the candidates who are currently running for office using the WisEye candidate interviews, as well as other available sources. As an extension students could also produce an issue based advocacy ad, video, letter, or other piece of campaign materials from the perspective of an interest group likely to support the candidate.

Objectives

Knowledge

- Students will describe the structure of representation in the state government.
- Students will explain the importance of at least three different issues at stake in the upcoming election.

Skills

- Students will analyze an argument and evaluate the strength of supporting evidence.
- Students will synthesize multiple sources of information and form an opinion on an issue.

Dispositions

- Students will embrace the responsibility of citizens to make informed choices when voting.
- Students will look forward to the opportunity to vote when they turn 18.

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards:

- C.12.8 Locate, organize, analyze, and use information from various sources to understand an issue of public concern, take a position, and communicate the position.
- C.12.10 Identify ways people may participate effectively in community affairs and the political process.

Wisconsin Disciplinary Literacy Standards

Writing Standard (Grades 9-10 and 11-12)

7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Materials

- PPT Slides with background information about the Wisconsin Legislature.
- Representation Brainstorming Graphic Organizer, Candidate Profile Notes Sheet.
- Candidate interview video on WisEye website in the Campaign 2016 area.
- External Resources for Candidate information;
 - Local Newspapers
 - League of Women Voters WI Branches: <http://lwv.org/get-involved/local-leagues/wisconsin> and <http://www.lwvwi.org/Home.aspx>
 - Address Search to see Example Ballot

<https://myvote.wi.gov/Address/AddressSearchScreen.aspx>

- Elected Officials in WI <http://www.wisconsin.gov/Pages/electedOfficials.aspx>
- Find your State Legislators: <http://maps.legis.wisconsin.gov/?single=y>
- Vote411 <http://www.vote411.org/>
- Ballotpedia https://ballotpedia.org/Wisconsin_elections,_2016

Plan of Instruction/Lesson Procedures

1. **Introduce** Use the “Representation in Wisconsin” PowerPoint slides to introduce students to the concepts of representation and the structure of the Wisconsin Legislature.
 1. **Brainstorm:** Have students work in groups of two or three to complete side one of the Qualities and Qualifications worksheet, as directed on the PPT slides.
 2. **Visuals:** Show pictures of State Capitol.
 3. **Your District:** Find your senate and assembly districts using the link provided in the PPT, and determine who is currently running for office in your district.
 4. **District Maps:** As a class look at the Senate and Assembly district maps. As students to make observations about the way districts are drawn. Point out that in Wisconsin these maps are drawn by the majority party.
2. **Research:** Students create Candidate Profiles through independent research and in class videos.
 1. Assign homework or provide class time for students to use the internet to find information from at least two sources about each candidate. See links in the materials section above and on the PPT for some possible web based resources. Provide extra copies of the Candidate Profiles sheet if you are focusing on both Senate and Assembly races.
 2. Watch the WisEye Candidate interviews in class. Access these interviews through the Campaign 2016 section of the wiseye.org website, choosing the race that you are investigating, and your district, to find interviews for the candidates in your area. Have students add to their Candidate Profiles as they watch.
 3. Use the Wisconsin Eye website search tool search for each candidate by name. You may be able to find additional video footage from candidate forums, floor sessions, hearings or other sources.
3. **Homework/Assessment:** Students use the information from the Candidate Profiles as well as their brainstorming about qualification of a representative to write their Voter Reflection, which serves as an assessment.
4. **Wrap Up:** When students return to class, ask for volunteers to read their reflections supporting each candidate, and facilitate a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate based on the students research, observations and opinions.
5. **Optional Extension:** Outside Money in Politics- Assign this short article on Citizens United and the influence of outside money in political campaigns.

<https://www.publicintegrity.org/2012/10/18/11527/citizens-united-decision-and-why-it-matters>

Work as a class to brainstorm interest groups or organizations would support or oppose each candidate in your local race. Have each student produce an issue-based advocacy ad, video, letter, or other piece of campaign material from the perspective of that group. Share these with the class. End with a discussion about the following question: *Should outside groups be allowed to spend unlimited funds on political campaigns?*

Assessment or Reflection

After gathering information about both candidates, students write up their Voter Reflection, supporting their opinions about the candidates using evidence from the interviews and other research.

Qualities and Qualifications of a Representative

We use representation as a way to organize democratic decision making at all levels of our society, from student council to the presidency. Think broadly about all of the different kinds of representatives, and work with a partner to brainstorm as many ideas as possible for the following questions.

1. What are the major roles and responsibilities of a representative?
2. What skills and experiences would be ideal for a representative?
3. What personal qualities should a representative possess?
4. What personal qualities would be problematic in a representative?

Roles and Responsibilities	Skills and Experience	Positive Personal Qualities	Negative Personal Qualities

Today we are focusing on those who are elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly and Senate to represent us in making decisions about Wisconsin laws and policies. The personal qualities and experience of a candidate are important, but opinions on individual issues may also sway your support. List as many issues, personal values and opinions that are important to you, and that you might want your representative to share?

Candidate 1 Profile Democrat / Republican (circle one)

Name _____ Running for Senate / Assembly (circle one) District ____

Ideas and Policy Positions	Positive Personal Qualities	Negative Personal Qualities	Skills and Experience

Sources of Information:

Candidate 2 Profile Democrat / Republican (circle one)

Name _____ Running for Senate / Assembly (circle one) District ____

Ideas and Policy Positions	Positive Personal Qualities	Negative Personal Qualities	Skills and Experience

Sources of Information:

Voter Reflection

Reflect on which candidate you support and why, in the context of your thoughts about what makes a good representative and what issues and ideas are important to you. Write two organized paragraphs describing why you would vote for one candidate over the other. Use at least four pieces of evidence from your Candidate Profiles as support. If you are undecided please discuss the factors that make it difficult to choose one candidate. You may also include questions you have about which you would need to gather more information before making a choice.