YOUTH VOTING

A Unit Plan for Teachers
STAGE 1 – OVERVIEW & DESIRED RESULTS

Overview: Students will examine the controversy that surrounds government efforts to increase youth voter turnout, in order to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of government(s) granting people under the age of 18 the right to vote, and to create and prioritize their own youth voting policy.

Central Question: Should voting rights be extended to people under the age of 18? If so, at what level of government?

Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Instructional Outline:

Student Focus Groups (25 minutes)
- In groups, students will consider a set of prepared survey questions.
- Students will share their responses with the entire group.

Structured Academic Controversy (25 minutes)
- Students will read a prepared article from Close Up that explores the controversy around government efforts to increase youth voter turnout.
- Students will use the article to defend both sides of a controversy in order to prepare for more open-ended deliberation.

Open-Ended Deliberation (20 minutes)
- In groups of 8-10, students will deliberate on a prepared set of questions to explore the issue of youth voting fully.
- In those same groups, students will then consider how to prioritize which various actions to address.

Reflection and Wrap-Up (15 minutes)
- Students will share what they discussed during the open-ended deliberation with new groups.
- Students will share their reflections.

Established Goals:

Common Core State Standards

ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 and SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade [9–12] topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7. Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats...in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**National Council for the Social Studies C3 Framework**

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.13.9-12 Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences.

D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.

D3.4.9-12. Refine claims and counterclaims attending to precision, significance, and knowledge conveyed through the claim while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.

D4.1.9-12. Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.

D4.2.9-12. Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanation given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical).

D4.7.9-12. Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.

D4.8.9-12. Apply a range of deliberative and democratic strategies and procedures to make decisions and take action in their classrooms, schools, and out-of-school civic contexts.
# STAGE 2 – MATERIALS REQUIRED

**Prepared for Posting:**
- Central Question (see Attachment 7)
- Agenda (see Att. 7)
- Questions for Supplemental Information (see Att. 7)
- Structured Academic Controversy Procedures (see Att. 7)
- Reflection Questions (see Att. 7)

**Printed Handouts:**
- Focus group questions (one per group – 5-6 students per group, Att. 1)
- Informational Article (Att. 2, two-pages)
- Article Guide (Att. 3, one per student)
- Deliberation Questions Set A – Att. 4 (one per group – 8 students per group)
- Deliberation Questions Set B – Att. 5 (one per group – 8 students per group)
- Supplemental information (Att. 6 – one per group)

**SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 9 - 12**
Lesson # 1 – Youth Voting

Introduction: 1. Explain that students will be examining different policies related to youth voting: “We will be examining the role that different government entities play in granting the right to vote and thinking about what that role should be. We will start by discussing our views and opinions on youth voting, then take a look at how involved governments have been before moving into a more open-ended discussion on what we think the role of governments should be in increasing youth voting.”

2. Review the agenda and central question (both posted on flipchart):

Agenda:
1. Focus Groups: Take surveys in small groups
2. Structured Academic Controversy: Debate the issue from both sides
3. Open Ended Deliberation: Examine what steps should be taken
4. Reflection: Share possible actions and reflect on what’s been discussed

Central Question: Should voting rights be extended to people under the age of 18? If so, at what level?

Estimated Time: 85 minutes

Lesson Procedures:

Student Focus Group (25 minutes)
In groups, students will consider a set of prepared survey questions.
- Explain to students that they will first be discussing a set of survey questions in groups in order to establish a basic understanding of what opinions and experiences they bring to the discussion.
- Divide students into groups of 5-6, have students choose a facilitator for each group.
- Distribute focus group questions (Attachment 1), one per group.
- Explain to facilitators that they should ensure that all group members have an equal opportunity to share why they agree/disagree with each statement, along with sharing personal experiences if compelled.
- As students are beginning to discuss the last question, hand out Attachment 6 to aid students’ discussions with supplemental information.
- Direct students’ attention to prepared flipchart posted with following questions:
  - What does the data tell you about this issue at the national level?
  - How do the experiences of members of your focus group compare with national data?
- Teachers should circulate to hear the main points in each group and, as groups finish their discussions, summarize the main points and interesting ideas raised in the focus groups.
**Structured Academic Controversy** (25 minutes)

Students will read a prepared article from Close Up that explores the controversy around government efforts to increase youth voter turnout. (10 minutes)

- Explain to students that they will be going from discussing personal experiences and impressions of youth voting to looking at different opinions on government involvement in voting rights policy.
- Divide students into groups of four. Make sure to explain the process of structured academic controversy before students begin discussion; answer questions and clarify any confusion about the process.
- Instruct students to divide into two groups: A and B.
- Distribute Youth Voting Background Information Article (Attachment 2) and Article Guide (Attachment 3), one per student.
- Explain that, as they are reading, students in Pair A will first find three compelling arguments to say YES to the central question, Pair B will find three compelling arguments to say NO to the central question.

Students will use the article to defend both sides of a controversy in order to prepare for more open-ended deliberation. (about 15 minutes)

- Check for understanding: clarify any confusion or questions about terms and content. Make sure students understand the question.
- Give students 1-2 minutes to prepare initial statements.
  - Pair A presents their position using supporting evidence (2 minutes).
  - Pair B restates, clarifies, and asks questions (45 seconds).
  - Pair B presents their position using supporting evidence (2 minutes).
  - Pair A restates, clarifies, and asks questions (45 seconds).
- Direct students: All the B’s will rotate to new groups – A’s will stay in place and B’s will move to new groups to take the ideas from the original groups to a new audience.
- Pairs will switch positions, Pair A will use at least three compelling arguments (adding at least one additional reason not raised by previous partners) to say NO to the central question, Pair B will use at least three compelling arguments (adding at least one additional reason not raised by previous partners) to say YES to the central question.
- Give students 2 minutes to prepare statements.
  - Pair B presents their position, using supporting evidence (1 minute).
  - Pair A restates, clarifies, and asks questions (30 seconds).
  - Pair A presents their position using supporting evidence (1 minute).
  - Pair B restates, clarifies, and asks questions (30 seconds).
- Discuss: Students should abandon roles and either build consensus regarding the question or clarify where differences lie, in order to lead into open-ended deliberation. Pose questions, as needed: (3 minutes)
  - Which arguments were the most persuasive on each side?
  - What specific points did you personally find to be more persuasive?
- Circulate and listen for trends and/or disagreements in discussion. Make sure to correct any misinformation.
**Open-Ended Deliberation** (20 minutes)

Explain to students that they will use the information that we’ve gained through these debates in order to explore what policies they think should be put into place. The questions they will discuss here are intentionally open-ended – there are multiple directions in which they could take the discussion.

In groups of 8-10, students will deliberate on a prepared set of questions to explore the issue of youth voting fully. (10 minutes)

- Combine current groups to create groups of 8-10. Appoint a facilitator for each group.
- Distribute “Set A” Discussion Questions to each group (Attachment 4) along with flipchart and markers.
- Alert facilitators that they will lead discussion on these questions, then groups will have the opportunity to share out. Remind facilitators that they should make sure everyone in the group is heard from, and they should take time to consider each entity and what specific actions they could take, recording policy actions as they discuss.
- Remind students that they can refer to informational articles along with Attachment 6 if needed.
- Circulate and monitor groups, help students clarify any questions they may have only if needed.

The open-ended deliberation should be left open-ended: students may move the discussion in a variety of directions. Allow them to come to their own conclusions, but give pushback and structure when needed (i.e. when students either get off task or cite incorrect facts).

- Take responses from groups to get a temperature of the room.

In those same groups, students will then consider how to prioritize various actions to increase youth voter turnout. (10 minutes)

- Distribute “Set B” Discussion Questions to each group (Attachment 5).
- Explain to students that they should think critically about the policies that they have brainstormed and eliminate actions that are not effective and/or practical.
- Remind facilitators that while the goal is to specifically identify effective policies, it is not necessary for the entire group to come to a consensus on all of the policies.
- Alert students that they will move to new groups after this and each person will be responsible for sharing what their group discussed.
- Circulate and monitor groups. Again, help students clarify questions; however, they should take the discussion in whichever direction they see fit.
- For groups that finish earlier than others, assign additional question (USE ONLY WITH GROUPS THAT FINISH DISCUSSION EARLY):
  - How can citizens influence the government to take these actions and put these policies into place?
Reflection and Wrap Up (15 minutes)

Jigsaw students into new groups so that multiple policies are represented. (Hint: If students were in
groups of 8, they are conveniently situated to be counted into 8 new groups.)
• Post the reflection questions: (Attachment 7)
  - Share the policy recommendations that your previous group discussed.
  - How did your views on this issue change, if at all?
  - Did you hear anything from others that helped to inform your view on this issue?
  - What actions will you take as a citizen to address youth voting?
• In groups, have students briefly discuss the reflection questions.
**Attachment 1: Focus Group Questions**

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

*Eighteen is an appropriate age at which people should be allowed to vote.*

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<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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*Elected officials take young people and their perspectives into consideration when making policy decisions.*

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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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*My school has programs in place to help students so that they are ready to vote when they are old enough.*

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*The government has a responsibility to encourage more young people to vote to increase youth voter turnout.*

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*There should be different age restrictions for voting depending on whether it is a national, state, or local election.*

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<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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*Most people my age would vote responsibly if permitted.*

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What are the most important ideas/issues about youth voting that your group discussed?
Attachment 2: Background Information

According to FairVote.org, only about 60% of the eligible population of voters in the U.S. vote during presidential election years, and about 40% during midterm (non-Presidential) elections. This puts the U.S. well below the average turnout rate of 70% among developed nations. In the 2014 midterm elections voter turnout was only 36.4%, marking the lowest rate since World War II. Young people in the United States are also significantly less likely to go to the polls than older citizens. According to the Pew Research Center, about 42% of those ages 50 and older are regular voters, almost double the proportion of 18-29 year-olds (22%).

There are many ways to increase voter turnout: allowing same-day registration, for example, or moving Election Day to the weekend. However, political scientists and civic organizations have shown time and time again that the best way to create long-term, lifelong voters is to develop the habit at an early age. According to Professor Peter Levine of Tufts University, “Once you vote, you are more likely to vote again.” By the same token, not voting is also a habit. If people miss the first election that they face as eligible voters, they are starting off with a habit of nonparticipation. So, getting young people to vote early could be a key factor in raising a new generation of voters. For this reason, there has been a growing movement around the country to lower the national voting age. Allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote, they say, will enable them to vote before leaving home and high school, and establish a life-long habit of voting.

This is not the first time that the issue of youth voting has been considered at the federal level. In 1971, the national voting age in the U.S. was lowered from 21 to 18 through the passage and ratification of the 26th Amendment to the Constitution. This Amendment came about in the wake of the widespread political protests of the Vietnam era, in which people were being drafted to fight before they were old enough to have a say in what policies the country should pursue (“Old enough to fight, old enough to vote” was a common refrain at the time). Of course, this is just the most recent example of a time in which the U.S. extended voting rights to a disenfranchised group of people.

While the voting age for national elections is set at 18, some state and local governments have taken action to further extend voting rights to youth. In twenty-one states and the District of Columbia, people as young as 16 may pre-register to vote so that they are prepared by the time their first election comes around. In 2013, the town of Takoma Park, Maryland became the first municipality in the nation to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in local elections (during that year’s local election 16.9% of eligible voters age 16 and 17 cast a ballot, which is nearly double the 8.5% turnout rate of eligible voters 18 and up). Furthermore, more than 15 states already allow 17 year olds to vote in primary elections to nominate candidates for President, Governor, or Congress.

Several nations, including Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Germany, and the United Kingdom have extended voting rights to 16 year olds for national, regional, or local elections. Evidence from Austria confirms that extending voting rights to people after they turn 16 promotes higher turnout for first-time voters. Proponents of these measures in the U.S. claim that Austria’s experience also shows that 16 and 17 year olds are ready to make sound decisions on public issues and participate fully in their democracy. When Scotland held a public referendum on whether to remain a part of the United Kingdom in 2014, their Parliament voted to allow 16 and 17-year olds to participate in the historic vote; roughly 80% of these newly-eligible young voters cast a ballot.
At the school level, the United States already takes steps to educate youth about civics from an early age. Most high school students in the U.S. are required to take a government or civics course, and recently some states have even passed laws requiring students to pass a civics exam as a requirement for graduation. Many school districts also have programs in place to help high school seniors register to vote. Furthermore, thanks to social media and the widespread availability of news over the internet it is easier than ever before to stay connected to politics. Throughout the United States there are many informed and civic-minded teens who follow the issues and research the positions of different candidates for public office.

In addition to all of these efforts, there are numerous civic and non-profit organizations involved in civic education that have tried to develop effective ways to increase youth voter turnout and try to instill good voting habits from a young age. For example, the non-profit organization Rock the Vote has used music, popular culture and social media to engage and incite young people to register and vote. The Chicago-based group Mikva Challenge has taken a different approach by helping high school students to become more civically engaged by involving them directly in political campaigns and advocacy work.

Those who believe that the voting age should remain the same often say that they do not think most 16 and 17 year olds have the knowledge and experience to be able to vote responsibly. Some believe young potential voters may be pressured to vote in certain ways due to the political beliefs of their teachers and parents, and may also be easily swayed. Ultimately, they claim, it takes time to craft your own political ideology and figure out your way around the political landscape.

At what age should U.S. citizens be allowed to vote? Should people under the age of eighteen be able to vote in national and state elections, or just at the local level? Should governments or schools make efforts to encourage young people to vote when they become eligible? How can we best ensure that young people are ready to participate fully in the democratic process?
Attachment 3: Article Discussion Guide

The Deliberation Question:

*Should voting rights be extended to people under the age of 18?*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>A: Three Reasons to Answer YES</th>
<th>B: Three Reasons to Answer NO</th>
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<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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**WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTS AND MOST INTERESTING IDEAS YOU TOOK FROM THIS ARTICLE?**
Attachment 4: Deliberative Questions For Group A

Open-Ended Brainstorming

What actions can be taken to increase youth voter turnout?

Consider the following entities when answering:
• Schools (School Boards/Administrators)
• Local Government
• State Government
• Federal Government

Groups will share responses to the following questions:
How high a priority should youth voting be for policymakers?

High => Low

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Crisis</th>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>High-Need</th>
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What level of government would best address this issue?

Open-Ended Brainstorming

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What level of government would best address this issue?
Attachment 5: Deliberative Questions For Group B

Prioritizing Policies

What are the obstacles to each of the possible actions that your group discussed?
Cost? Resources? Constitutionality?
Are any of these obstacles insurmountable?

What are the most effective and practical actions that could be taken to address youth voting?
Is this something government should address at all?

Prioritizing Policies

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Cost? Resources? Constitutionality?
Are any of these obstacles insurmountable?

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Is this something government should address at all?
Why Don’t Young People Vote?
Reasons for not voting, registered voters by age (2010)

- 18-29
  - Didn’t like candidates: 5.8%
  - Too busy, conflicting work: 33.5%
  - Not interested, felt my vote would not count: 16.7%
  - Out of town or away from home: 9.2%

- 30+
  - Registration problems: 5.5%
  - 2.6%

Voter Turnout by Age, 1972-2012

Source: CIRCLE’s tabulations from the CPS Nov. Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2012
Attachment 6: Supplemental Information

**WHAT INFLUENCES YOUTH VOTING**

**BEING ASKED**
When young people are contacted or asked, they are much more likely to vote

- **41.6%** would be more likely to vote if a friend asked them
- **46.9%** would be more likely to vote if a parent asked them

Youth Contacted by Campaigns

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<th>Summer</th>
<th>October</th>
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<td>12.6%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
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**INFORMATION**
Knowledge of state voting laws and basic information about the process correlates with increased youth turnout

- **22.5%** know their states’ voter registration deadline

**CIVIC EDUCATION**
Civic opportunities in the classroom can lead to voting and engagement later in life

- **8 states** have statewide, standardized tests specifically in civics/American government

**CONNECTING WITH CANDIDATES**

Feelings about Candidates

- **Admiring**
- **Satisfied**
- **Dissapointed**
- **Angry**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obama</th>
<th>Romney</th>
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<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
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<td>October</td>
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Support for Candidates

- **Understands the problems of people your age**
- **Will stand up for your interests**
- **Will help improve our economy**

Source: CIRCLE poll of youth in June/July and same youth in mid-October
Note: Youth voter turnout as presented in Boxes 7 and 8 of this infographic was taken from exit polls conducted during the 2014 midterm elections and is therefore not the most accurate or current data. Refer to the chart directly above for the most current analysis of youth voter turnout in the 2014 elections by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.
Attachment 7: Background For Teacher: Guidelines for Student Facilitation

Guidelines for Student-Facilitators and Student-led Discussion

Close Up uses a student-facilitation structure for small-group discussions and activities. As part of our commitment to helping students develop the skills and capacities for successful participation in the processes of democracy, during most cooperative learning activities we systematically distribute and rotate opportunities to lead discussion and facilitate group activities among our students over the course of our programs.

To insure that students chosen or appointed to these leadership opportunities clearly understand their role, we establish the expectations and norms in the first session of our program (such as that facilitators help each member of the group contribute to a shared goal rather than act as the boss who directs every action of the group and its individual members; facilitators elicit the ideas of others and contribute some of their own rather than trying to lead the group to accept the facilitator’s own ideas).

We also post/handout a list of facilitation guidelines that selected facilitators can refer to in each activity:

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<tr>
<th>Facilitator is responsible to insure that…</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The group understands the task(s) at hand;</td>
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<td>2. All members of the group are heard;</td>
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<td>3. Group discussion/work is not dominated by just a few members;</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The group stays on-task and makes steady progress to complete its work on time.</td>
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For Close Up students we add an additional guideline point: “Facilitator is responsible for making sure that group work follows the workshop’s rules.” A central element of our instructional method involves having each workshop (class) of students establish the rules that will inform their collective work and discussions. Thus this additional guideline can be added in classes that follow this practice or a similar one.

Facilitators are empowered to lead their group with as little intervention as possible. The expectation is established that the facilitator is to seek help or guidance from the teacher when it is needed and that the teacher will monitor group progress in order to provide guidance when it appears necessary.

Teacher guidance to the group is conducted through the facilitator as needed to help the facilitator maintain the guidelines and lead the group in accomplishing the task. Informational or instructional intervention is similarly conducted on an as-needed basis. Often, the facilitator is provided printed discussion prompts, activity instructions, or group-specific tasks to share with the group.

The overall intent is to provide sufficient scaffolding to allow groups to function as autonomously as possible through the leadership of the student-facilitators.