

RAISING RESPONSIBLE AMERICANS: HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN TO BE GOOD CITIZENS



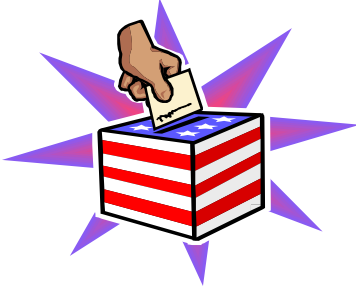
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This year, the people of the United States of America will elect a president through a democratic election process. This president will be the leader of our country for the next 4 years and will help to determine the well-being of our citizens and our relationship to the world around us.

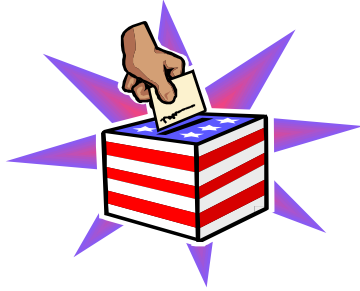
Each citizen of our country is responsible for contributing to the common good by exercising his/her civic responsibilities. These include:

- Becoming informed and knowledgeable about issues that are important to our country.
- Assessing and judging the candidates and making a decision about whom to support.
- Voting on Election Day.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that the majority of our 12th graders have only a basic knowledge about our political process and how it works, and only ½ of them can demonstrate the knowledge needed to be an informed and responsible citizen. **What can you do as a teacher to ensure that the young children with whom you work get a good start on becoming that responsible citizen so that by the 12th grade, they are ready to participate in our democratic society?**

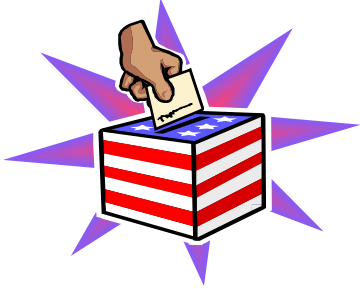
As we approach a Presidential election in 2008, take the time to ensure that some part of your curriculum provides the basic information about our political process that young children can understand. They're seeing it on television and hearing the discussions about the election; perhaps they are participating in some election activities with their parents. We have put together some ideas that we think will be useful to you in developing those classroom or home activities, and we know that your creativity and imagination can take these basic ideas and make them "bloom" for children.

Don't forget as you work with the children to include the parents as well. Informed and participating citizens make our democracy work and parents sometimes need a little support and information to participate fully in the process. Have fun: help *"Raise Responsible Citizens."*



Some Facts To Share

- ✓ We have local, state and national elections.
- ✓ The election for mayor of your city is a **LOCAL** election; the election for Governor of your state is a **STATE** election; and the election for President is a **NATIONAL** election.
- ✓ People who run for office are called **CANDIDATES**. Candidates are qualified people who choose to run for office because they think they can help improve the lives of the citizens that they represent.
- ✓ The process of getting a candidate elected is called a **CAMPAIGN**. The vast majority of campaign workers are volunteers who want to help the candidate get elected.
- ✓ As part of the campaign, the candidate's ideas are put together into a **PLATFORM**. This tells the voters how the candidate thinks problems and issues should be resolved.
- ✓ Volunteers/supporters who participate in a campaign often wear **BUTTONS** and display signs in their yards letting people know which candidate they support.
- ✓ **ELECTIONS** are how people select the candidate they want to lead their country.
- ✓ Each person gets one (1) vote and they use a **BALLOT** to vote on Election Day for the person who they think will do the best job.
- ✓ The candidate who receives the **MOST** votes is the winner of the election. (This applies to local and state elections. The national election is conducted by the Electoral College and popular vote may not elect a candidate.)
- ✓ After the election, the winner **THANKS** everyone for selecting him/her. He/She also thanks those people who worked for his/her campaign.
- ✓ The candidate that is not elected **CONGRATULATES** the winner and agrees to work with him/her to help the country.

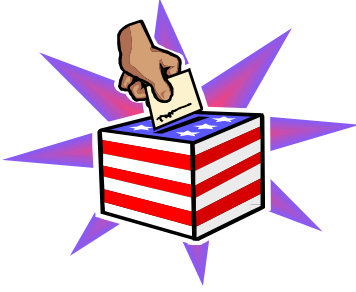


Concepts/Ideas You Can Teach

- ❑ Personal Responsibility
- ❑ Responsibility to Others
- ❑ Decision Making
- ❑ Volunteer Participation
- ❑ Sportsmanship
- ❑ Teamwork

Where to Find Free Resources

- 1) Contact your Governor's Office, Secretary of State or other state legislative office to ask about free resources they may have. Most states have a children's guide to state history. You can find an address, e-mail or phone # for your Governor's office on the SECA website at www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org (Click on The SECA States and select your state.)
- 2) Contact the local campaign offices for the Presidential candidates. They usually have "give-aways" that will be useful in putting together your classroom. (Be sure you contact BOTH offices and display materials from BOTH campaigns to avoid a partisan appearance.)
- 3) Contact your local election official. They may have sample ballots, a map of election districts, etc. that you can use.
- 4) Check the websites listed on the next page to find out if any "free" resources are available.
- 5) Check with local sign companies. They may have some leftover sign or banner material that they would be willing to give you to develop your own "campaign" signs.
- 6) Contact your local library. They have a wealth of information that's free to the public and are happy to share.
- 7) Contact your local Cooperative Extension office. They have materials that are free and may have something appropriate for your curriculum.



Resources on the Internet

www.kidsvotingusa.org
<http://bensguide.gpo.gov/k-2>
<http://teacher.scholastic.com>
www.kidsource.com
www.kids.gov

State Websites for Children

Make sure that the activities you select from any of these sites meet the standards of good early childhood practice and are appropriate to the ages of the children with whom you work.

Alabama Archives Web Page for Kids

www.archives.state.al.us/kidspage/kids.html

Arkansas Kids

www.arkansaskids.com

Florida Kids

<http://dhr.dos.state.fl.us/kids/>

Louisiana—Just for Students

www.louisiana.gov

North Carolina's Kids Page

www.secretary.state.nc.us/kidspg/

Texas SenateKids

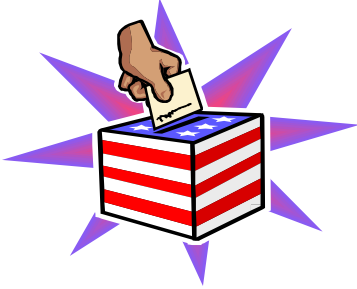
www.senate.state.tx.us/kids/

Virginia-Kids Commonwealth

www.kidscapcommonwealth.virginia.gov/home/

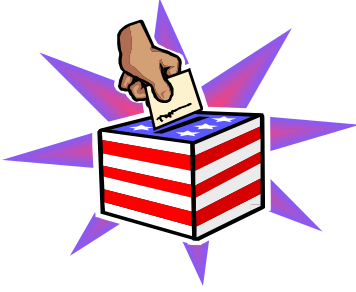
West Virginia Kids' Page

www.legis.state.wv.us/kids/kids.html



Activity Ideas

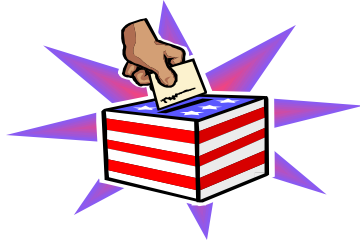
- Invite the local mayor or political candidate to visit your home or program. Ask them to explain to the children about being a candidate and take the added opportunity to introduce them to your early childhood program. They may be the elected official making a decision that will affect you in the future. Let the children meet them “up close and personal” and see if the local newspaper won’t come by. The children will love seeing themselves in the local paper and you can discuss how the newspaper/media help to keep us informed.
- Schedule a field trip to one of the following:
 - Mayor’s office
 - State Capitol
 - Congressman’s office
 - Election office (ask for a hands-on demonstration of a voting machine or ballot)
 - The local library and ask the librarian to do a story hour using one of the books that are listed on page 9.
- Hold a mock election. You will find some suggestions about how to put this election together on page seven.
- Create a “voting chain” to hang in your classroom. Ask the children to vote on some issue. (It can be as simple as which snack to have that day.) Use different colors to indicate how many votes each option received. Let the children count the votes and the chain links. You can do a chain each day for a week to demonstrate how voting can differ and the results can be different depending upon the issue. Chart the results.
- Let the children make “campaign buttons” to wear. They can be simple construction paper buttons or, if you have a button maker, they can be more permanent. Let them decorate the button to reflect their opinion on an issue. Let them select the issue but make sure to give them some suggestions.



Holding a Mock Election

Let children participate in an election as a final activity in your curriculum. You can build up to the election in several ways.

- 1) Let children select an issue on which they would like to vote. It can be anything that you feel is appropriate to their age and level of understanding. This can help develop critical thinking skills as they work through discussing and selecting the issue. Help them decide on an issue that is easily illustrated so that you can do several art activities during the week.
- 2) Introduce the children to campaign signs, bumper stickers and other campaign materials. Let them design their own campaign materials---campaign posters, bumper stickers, etc. Hang these in your room or home.
- 3) Schedule a time to hold the election and notify the children well in advance when the vote will take place. Also, send a note home with parents letting them know what you're doing. Ask parents to talk to their children about their experiences in voting in an election. (Send page eight of this document home as a parent handout.)
- 4) Design a space in the classroom that mimics the voting booths at your local polling place. If you can hang a curtain to provide some privacy, they'll love getting to pull aside the curtain to go into the booth to cast their vote!
- 5) Create a ballot that utilizes symbols instead of words to give the options for the vote. (For example, if children are voting whether they like white or chocolate milk ,dogs or cats, etc) best, put these pictures on the ballot with the words beneath so that they can readily make their choice. Be sure to give the children plenty of exposure to the ballot so that they will understand how to make their choice. Provide pencils or crayons that children can use to mark the ballots and demonstrate to them how it's done prior to the "election".
- 6) Create a ballot box where children can deposit their ballot. Ask a parent or your principal or director to count the votes and announce the results.



What Parents Can Do To Help Their Children Become Responsible Citizens

Parents are a child's first teacher and the most influential teacher of civic values and attitudes. A child learns the value of citizen participation and discussion at home as they watch and listen to their parents. Lessons from home usually set the example for later learning about civic responsibilities and citizen participation. You, as parents of young children, can help your children learn more about being responsible citizens by:

- ❖ Setting a good example. Participate in the political system and volunteer for community service projects. Include your child in activities that are appropriate for his/her age.
- ❖ Showing interest in civic affairs and government by including your child in conversations about what's happening in the world.
- ❖ Requiring children to perform duties regularly at home to demonstrate the value of contributing to the common good of the family. Pre-kindergarten children can clean their rooms, pick up toys at night, set the table, etc.
- ❖ Teaching children to recycle and not to litter. Civic responsibility for the environment is an idea that can be taught early.
- ❖ Reading to your child from books that promote the concepts of responsibility, good citizenship, teamwork, etc. Check with your local library and try these titles: *Arthur Meets the President* by M. Brown, *Swimmy* by L. Lionni or *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* by D. Hopkinson.
- ❖ Ensuring that your approach to parenting is fair and consistent. If children learn fairness and consistency from you, they are sure to apply it to other areas of their lives.

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Children's Books

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- Barnes, P.W. & Shaw-Barnes, C. (1996). *House mouse, senate mouse.* New York: Scholastic Inc.
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- Canizares, S. & Chesson, B. (1999). *Red, white and blue.*New York: Scholastic, Inc.
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- Fradin, D. B. (1985). *A new true book: Voting and elections.* Chicago: Children's Press
- Hopkinson, D. (1995). *Sweet Clara and the freedom quilt.* New York: Dragonfly Books
- Key, F. S. (1973). *The star-spangled banner.* New York: Scholastic, Inc.
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