WHY YOUR VOTE MATTERS

Teacher's Guide

NORTH DAKOTA SECRETARY OF STATE

GRADE LEVEL

9 - 12

DURATION

1 class period (50 minutes)

SUMMARY

This lesson introduces students to the following civics concepts:

- Voting as a civic responsibility
- Reasons people choose to vote
- Why voter turnout matters

This lesson also incorporates some North Dakota election laws - including voter ID requirements.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain why voting is important in a democracy
- Analyze why people choose to vote
- Explain why voter turnout matters
- Describe ways to prepare to vote

MATERIALS

- Why Your Vote Matters PowerPoint
- Be Ready to Vote Cards
- Voting Scenario Worksheet
- Exit Ticket
- At Home Reflection Activities

NORTH DAKOTA STATE STANDARDS

This lesson is aligned with the following 6-12 Civics and Government standards:

C.6_12.4 ***Investigate the role and responsibilities of citizenship in society.***

This lesson explores the role of citizens in a constitutional republic by focusing on voting as both a right and an important civic responsibility. Students consider why voting is important in a democracy, the reasons people choose to vote, and how participation in elections gives citizens a voice in their government and communities.

C.6_12.4.1 ***Explain how citizens can influence government.***

Students learn that voting is one of the primary ways citizens influence government by choosing representatives and having a voice in decisions that affect their communities. Through discussion of voter turnout and participation, students consider why each vote matters and how individual participation contributes to the collective voice of voters.

C.6_12.4.3 ***Explain how citizens' personal and civic responsibilities are important to the preservation and improvement of United States constitutional republic.***

Students consider voting as a civic responsibility that supports representative government. They examine why voting is important and the different reasons people choose to participate. Students also consider why voter turnout matters and how participation gives citizens a voice in choosing the leaders who represent them.

C.6_12.4.5 ***Demonstrate active participation in civic life.***

Students consider how they can prepare to participate in future elections by learning about candidates and issues, reviewing voting information, understanding what to expect when voting, and making a plan to vote. Students also reflect on the reasons people choose to participate and how being prepared supports active civic participation.

STEP-BY STEP INSTRUCTION

Opening
0-3 minutes

Instructional activity: Before showing the first slide, give students a choice: 5 minutes of free time or a 5 minute class game.

Tell the class: *"We are going to vote, but only students on this side of the room may participate."*

Count only those votes and announce the result. Then ask: "*Even if the vote was counted correctly, was the outcome representative of the class?"*

Explain: *"An election can be administered correctly, but low participation can still affect the outcome."*

Slide 1
3-4 minutes

Display slide one and introduce the lesson, **Why Your Vote Matters**.

Slide 2
4-5 minutes

Read the four "I can" statements out loud and tell students they will revisit these at the end of class. Ask *"How many of you have watched an adult in your life vote, or talk about voting?"* Check hands, no discussion yet.

Slides 3
5-7 minutes

Slide 3, define democracy in your own words, then read the slide's definition.

Slide 4
7-10 minutes

Go through the five reasons voting matters - for each one ask for a real or hypothetical example before moving to the next bullet.

Slide 5
10-13 minutes

"Voting rights are legal protections that help ensure eligible citizens can participate in elections fairly."

Reference the images on screen: a postcard celebrating the passage of the 15th amendment, a political cartoon against women voting, a newspaper sketch illustrating that Native Americans did not have the right to vote.

"Voting rights in the United States have expanded over time, giving more citizens the opportunity to participate. Having the right to vote creates the opportunity; choosing to vote is up to each citizen.

Slides 6
13-16 minutes

"What motivates people to use their right? Why do people choose to vote?" Let students discuss.

Slide 7
16-26 minutes

"People participate for many different reasons. But even when someone is eligible to vote, they may choose not to participate. Why do you think some eligible voters don't vote?" Discuss.

"Some of these are personal decisions. Others are things voters can prepare for ahead of time. Let's look at simple ways voters can be ready for Election Day."

Be Ready to Vote breakout activity. Divide class into 5 groups. Assign each group a Be Ready to Vote card. Have each group brainstorm as a team for a few minutes and come up with a solution to present to the class.

Wrap up: *"As future voters, one of the best things you can do is prepare. Being prepared helps you know what to expect and what to do. Instead of asking, 'Why is voting difficult?' let's ask, 'What can we do now so we're ready to participate when it's our turn?'"*

Slide 8
26-28 minutes

Pose the discussion question and take a quick show-of-hands vote, then ask 2 or 3 students to explain their reasoning either way.

Slide 9
28-32 minutes

Tell the class: *"Voter turnout is the percentage of eligible voters who actually cast a ballot in an election. Think of it this way: if 100 people are eligible to vote and only 60 vote, the voter turnout is 60%."*

"*Let's see how many people voted in the 2026 ND Primary Election."*
Click to reveal eligible voters: 625,000
Ask students to guess how many eligible voters voted.
Click to reveal votes cast: 125,000
Ask students if they are surprised? What percentage of North Dakotans voted? **Click to reveal 20%**

Make it visual: If there are 30 students in class, ask 6 to stand. This represents a 20% voter turnout.

Slide 10
32-34 minutes

Ask the students the question. Have them shout out a few answers. **Click to reveal the answers on the slide.**

Explain: *"Low turnout does not make an election invalid. It can mean that a relatively small portion of eligible voters may determine the outcome."*

Slide 11
34-36 minutes

Read through the examples of past close elections listed on slide 11.

Explain: *"The strongest argument is not that every election will be decided by exactly one vote. It is that election outcomes are built from individual participation, and close contests can be decided by relatively small margins."*

Slide 12
36-38 minutes

Why preparation matters. Read through the slide.

Slide 13
38-43 minutes

Voting in North Dakota. Explain voter qualifications and identification requirements in North Dakota.

Give students a scenario handout:
"Jordan is 19, a U.S. citizen and moved to ND two months ago. Jordan works until 5:30 p.m., doesn't have a car, and wants to vote for the first time.

What can Jordan do to prepare and make a plan to vote in North Dakota?"

Give students a few minutes to write down their answers. Ask a few students to share their answers.

Slide 14
43-45 minutes

Read through the steps to prepare to participate.

Slide 15
45-50 minutes

Recap and read the questions on the slide without answering them. Hand out ***Exit Tickets.*** Have students fill out their exit ticket and hand it in on the way out of class.

Let students choose an at home reflection activity to complete:
-Future Voter Reflection
-I Used to Think, Now I Think
-Future Voter Survival Guide

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This guide is designed to support educators in facilitating the ***Why Your Vote Matters*** lesson. It includes suggested talking points, low-prep interactive activities, discussion questions, and reflection prompts that align with each slide in the presentation.

These ideas are intended to serve as a jumping-off point. Teachers are encouraged to adapt, expand, or create their own activities to best meet the needs and interests of their students.

Additional resources, including official North Dakota Secretary of State materials and other reputable civic education organizations, are provided to further explore the themes of democracy, civic participation, elections, and informed voting.

Suggested Websites

www.vote.nd.gov
- Official source for North Dakota election information.

www.constitutioncenter.org
- Student-friendly explanations of the 15th, 19th, 24th, and 26th Amendments including how voting rights expanded over time.

ed.icivics.org
- Free lesson plans, simulations, vocabulary activities, and classroom resources about elections and civic participation.

Suggested Videos

North Dakota Secretary of State - Elections 101
Series of videos for North Dakota voters.
All videos under 2 minutes.

Crash Course U.S. Government & Politics #1 – Introduction to Government
Foundations of American government and democracy.
Run time: 6:46

TED-Ed - Does Your Vote Count? The Electoral College Explained
How votes are counted on state and national levels.
Run time: 5:05

iCivics - The Poll Picture
Why we have public opinion polls and how they work.
Run time: 1:54

BE READY TO VOTE

TIME

Taylor works until 5:30 p.m. on Election Day and isn't sure when they will have time to vote.

How could Taylor prepare ahead of time?

VOTER ID

Morgan plans to vote for the first time but isn't sure if their ID has everything needed to vote in North Dakota.

How could Morgan prepare ahead of time?

TRANSPORTATION

Alex wants to vote but doesn't have a car and isn't sure where the polling location is.

How could Alex prepare ahead of time?

BALLOT

Riley gets to Election Day and realizes there are candidates and issues on the ballot they haven't researched.

How could Riley have prepared ahead of time?

INFORMATION

Casey wants to vote but doesn't know where to vote, when the polls are open, or what to expect.

How could Casey prepare ahead of time?

MAKE A PLAN TO VOTE – *VOTER SCENARIO*

Meet Jordan, a 19 year old U.S. citizen who moved to North Dakota two months ago. Jordan works until 5:30 p.m., doesn't have a car, and wants to vote for the first time.

01. Is Jordan eligible to vote? YES NO

02. Before Election Day, what should Jordan do? *(Check all that apply)*

- Make sure they have an acceptable ID.
- Find their polling location.
- Learn about the candidates and issues.
- Nothing, just show up.

03. What is a challenge Jordan might face?

04. What is a solution that could help Jordan overcome that challenge?

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NAME DATE

EXIT ticket | *Why Your Vote Matters*

Reflection

01. What is one new thing you learned about voting or elections today?

02. Which idea from today's lesson do you think is most important? Explain why.

03. What is one question you have about voting, elections or civic participation?

Rate Your Understanding

1 Not Yet 2 Somewhat 3 Confident

- I can explain why voting is important.
- I know why people choose to vote.
- I understand what voter turnout means.
- I know how to prepare to vote.

Look Ahead

What is one thing you can do to become an informed future voter?

REFLECTION | *Why Your Vote Matters*

Today's lesson explored why voting is an important part of democracy.

Choose ONE of the three options below. Your work should demonstrate thoughtful reflection and include ideas or examples from today's lesson.

Future Voter Reflection

Write a one-page essay responding to the following prompt:
What should every first-time voter know before participating in an election?

In your response, include:

- One important idea from the lesson
- One thing a first-time voter should plan for before Election Day
- One step a voter can take to prepare
- An explanation of why informed participation matters

Requirements: Your response should be at least 8-12 complete sentences.

I Used to Think, Now I Think

Explain how your understanding of voting or civic participation changed as a result of the lesson. Complete the following statements: *Before this lesson, I used to think... Now I think...*

In your response, include:

- One idea from the lesson that changed or strengthened your thinking
- Something you now understand about why people participate in elections
- An explanation of why informed participation matters

Requirements: Your response should be at least 8-12 complete sentences.

Future Voter Survival Guide

Imagine you have been asked to create a "Future Voter Survival Guide" for someone voting for the first time. Your guide should be creative, informative, and visually appealing. You may create it as a comic strip, infographic, brochure, poster, or another approved format.

Your guide must include:

- Three reasons why voting matters
- Three things a first-time voter should know before voting
- Three ways a voter can prepare before Election Day

Requirements: Use short explanations, images, symbols, or illustrations to communicate your ideas. Your guide should be accurate, easy to understand, and designed for a first-time voter.