

2006 Election Day Advent Calendar Educator's Guide

Dear Teachers: We are so pleased that you have chosen to use the Election Day Advent Calendar in your classroom. We hope you find it useful in engaging your students in discussions about democracy, politics, voting and civic responsibility. Below you will find some suggestions for activities and discussions to accompany the calendar. Of course these are only suggestions; you know your students and their interests best, as well as the objectives of your particular class. We hope you can build on our suggestions and find opportunities to create meaningful learning opportunities derived from the Election Day Advent Calendar.

Before you get to the Educator's Guide, just a few notes...

1. **Planning ahead:** We know you need to plan your lessons ahead of time, so we have opened all of the doors in advance JUST FOR YOU. This gives you a chance to look at each of the doors and see how certain ideas fit into the larger themes of your curriculum.
2. **Selective usage:** We also know you are busy with other important curricula in your classes. While we suggest that you take a moment each day to share the ritual of opening a door with your classes, we do not expect you will make each door the focal point of that day's lesson. Some of the activity guides could become the outline of an entire lesson or several, but they are self-contained lessons that while building on one another, do not require being taught all inclusively or in a sequence.
3. **Thematic groupings:** The "windows" are listed thematically by content, not by date. This allows you to identify the particular themes you are most interested in, and organize your schedule around the dates when those topics appear.
4. **Age appropriateness:** This guide is intended for secondary students, but many of the ideas can be modified for elementary classrooms. For activities more geared towards younger students, check out <http://pbskids.org/democracy/> and <http://www.kidsvotingusa.org> (this one requires that you register through your district).
5. **Your suggestions:** This is a work in progress, so we are eager to receive constructive feedback. If you have any thoughts about how the guide could be more useful send us an email at ben@gerrymanderpresents.com. We'd love to hear your comments!

The Educator's Guide:

October 10: Forms of Government

"Many forms of Government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." Winston Churchill

Discussion & Activity Guide:

- Brainstorm a list of different forms of government with your students. (This discussion might generate the need for *defining* “government” – an equally interesting task!)
- Have students break into groups and assign each group one form of government. Ask students to write an evaluation of the trade-offs of an ideal enactment of that form: i.e. what are the challenges that might come along with this form of governance, in what areas can this form of government fall short, in what ways does this form support and promote its citizens and their well-being?
- *Homework:* Have each group do a research project of an historical or current example of their form of government in action. How did the reality match up against their ideal potential?
- Lead a discussion detailing the ideals bound up in the idea of democracy and how the United States’ enactment of democracy compares.

Resources:

- Types of Government—<http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/20c-govt.htm>

October 11, October 20: Accessibility of the Vote

To vote in colonial America you had to be a white male who either owned enough property or paid enough taxes. Moreover, five colonies restricted Catholics from voting and four barred Jews.

After the passage of the 15th Amendment, many southern states passed laws to sabotage the voting rights of African Americans. “Literacy Tests” make it difficult for undereducated voters to register, and “Grandfather Clauses” restrict voting rights to those whose grandfathers had been eligible to vote—a requirement that descendants of slaves cannot possibly meet.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Generate a discussion of some of the *current* obstacles to voting.
 - Time: Some countries consider election day to be a national holiday so that no one has to go to work, while other countries hold elections on the weekends, and still others hold their elections over two or more days, all to allow people easy access to the polls. Is one Tuesday from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm restrictive?
 - Geography: In less-populated districts, voters may have to travel far distances, where public transport is not available. Is not being able to vote if you don’t own a car restrictive? Some urban voting districts require voters to vote out of the bounds of what they consider their neighborhood. Is making someone leave their comfort zone in order to vote restrictive?
 - Two-party system: In many primaries, only registered Democrats and Republicans are able to vote. Is not having third (fourth, fifth...) parties on the ballot for primary elections restrictive?
 - Disability access: Read and select some parts to share from Government Accountability Office report on voting accessibility (press release at <http://harkin.senate.gov/archive/news.cfm?id=179584> with a link to the report)
- *Homework:* Have each student go home and interview their parents or, if possible, their grandparents about their voting histories. Do they vote in current

elections? Why or why not? Do they see any obstacles to voting in the present? Did they experience any obstacles in the past?

Resources:

- Report on race and ballot rejection rates in the 2000 presidential election in the state of Florida:
<http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/vote2000/report/appendix/lichtman/ltrpt.htm>
(This is an academic paper, probably not appropriate in its entirety for a class, but the content is very provocative and some of the tables might be useful in class.)
- Report on voting accessibility by the government accountability office
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02107.pdf>

October 12 and November 1: What Can One Person Do?

“A vote is like a rifle; its usefulness depends upon the character of the user.” Theodore Roosevelt

“The only title in our democracy superior to that of President is the title of citizen.” Louis Brandeis

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- What does Brandeis/Roosevelt mean by their quote?
- Ask students to write out their own definition of “citizen.” How do students’ definitions compare? Why is it important to understand what a citizen is?
- Compare the branches of government and their roles and focus on the system of checks and balances. What can citizens do to “check” their government?
- Have students take a blind vote (heads down and hands raised or written ballots in a hat) as to who plans to register and vote when they become eligible. Compare the percentage to the approximately 50-55% of the population who typically vote in presidential elections, and fewer than that in exclusively local elections. Ask students why they plan to register, vote, or not.
- If it doesn’t come up on its own, ask students if “one vote matters.” Let the sparks fly!

Resources:

- Other interesting and thought provoking quotes from Theodore Roosevelt:
<http://www.theodoreroosevelt.org/life/quotes.htm>
- Comprehensive biographical information on Theodore Roosevelt is available at
<http://www.theodoreroosevelt.org/life/lifeoftr.htm>
- Find a short biography of Louis Brandeis at
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAbrandeis.htm>

October 13 and 14: The Physical Act of Voting and Counting

Mechanical lever voting machines debuted in 1892 in Rochester, New York. The new technology, it was thought, would make the process of casting and counting votes secret and accurate.

“It’s not the voting that’s democracy, it’s the counting.” Tom Stoppard

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Find out how much your students know about the famous “hanging chad” incident of 2000. Lead a discussion on various methods of voting throughout history and across the world. What forms do students feel most comfortable with? Why? Do students feel the need for a “paper trail”?
- What does Tom Stoppard mean by his quote? Do students think he’s right, or is he being overly cynical?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the various form of vote counting systems? Compare different methods, including manual counting, electromechanical and optical scan counting, mechanical counting, and direct recording voting counting.

Resources:

Learn about the history of voting technology in the USA at:

- <http://americanhistory.si.edu/vote/index.html>
Learn about different voting systems at:
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vote_counting_system
Find out about other models of voting from other countries at:
- <http://www.electionworld.org/> and
- <http://www.ifes.org/>

October 15: Popular versus Electoral Vote

The Electoral College, the body that actually elects the president, has on four occasions chosen the candidate who did not win the popular vote: 1824, John Quincy Adams; 1876, Rutherford B. Hayes; 1888, Benjamin Harrison; 2000, George W. Bush.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Help your students understand both sides of the debate over the Electoral College and debate the issue themselves.
- Along with your students, define “democracy.” Compare this to other people’s, organization’s and nation’s definitions. Ask students if they feel that our electoral system fits their definition of democracy.
- Defenders of the Electoral College say that it protects voters in smaller states by forcing candidates to campaign where they might not if a pure popular vote system were used. Discuss the implications of campaigning and representation if the Electoral College were abolished.
- Discuss the role of “run-off” elections used in other countries. Have students break up into four groups, each assigned to one of the above elections (1824, 1976, 1888, 2000). Have them project who would have won if run-off elections had been allowed, presenting the details of their projection to the larger group.
- Explain the notion of statistical significance to the class. Ask them if an election is not statistically significant, should it still determine the election outcome. Discuss possible alternatives?

Resource:

- Download a resource discussing the electoral college at <http://www.idea.int/publications/esd/index.cfm>

October 16: Gerrymandering

“Gerrymandering,” is the practice of redistricting to support partisan ends. It was coined in 1812 to describe a particularly odd salamander-shaped district created by the Massachusetts state legislature under Governor Elbridge Gerry.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Explain the idea of gerrymandering to your students. A simple definition with links to other resources can be found at <http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/index.php/Gerrymander>
- Have students read about a recent attempt at gerrymandering, as covered and commented on by the BBC at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3724372.stm> and by the New Yorker at http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?031208fa_fact
- Redistricting and reapportionment is a complex and difficult challenge; discuss the various methods for grouping voters by district and their implications for representation. Reference the “one man, one vote” principle that is often invoked in the context of apportionment.
- Use the Gerrymander exercise by Peter Pappas found at <http://www.edteck.com/rigor/lessons/gerrymander.pdf>

October 17 & October 20: Women and the Vote

“It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union ... Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less.” Susan B. Anthony
After the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 over 8 million American women vote for the first time.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Ask students if they feel women are now fully equal under the law. Visit www.momsrising.org for one organization’s perspective. This site could be a good discussion starter.
- Can students imagine what the rationale was for not allowing women to vote?
- *Homework:* Have students speak to their mothers and grandmothers about their histories with gender equality – or inequality.

Resources:

- To see the entire text of Susan B. Anthony’s speech, see <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/anthony.htm>
- For an international perspective, have students look at this international timeline of women’s suffrage http://womenshistory.about.com/od/suffrage/a/intl_timeline.htm
- For more on Women’s suffrage see <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/woman-suffrage>

October 18 & October 30: Racial and Ethnic Minorities and the Vote

Five years after the end of the Civil War, the 15th Amendment guarantees that “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

The 1884 Supreme Court decision in Elk v. Wilkins ruled that Native Americans can be denied the right to vote because they do not “owe allegiance to the United States.” They would have to wait 63 years before every state granted them this right.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Today it may seem inconceivable to many students that the government could so blatantly discriminate against certain racial or ethnic groups. You could begin conversation asking if you think a government today could still get away with such actions. Then you could take this conversation in one of two directions:
 - International Perspective: Have students research governments who currently give or recently gave certain racial or ethnic groups more political power than others. Examples could include Kurds, Shia, and Sunnis in Iraq, Hans and Uyghurs in China, Hispanics and Indians in South America.
 - National Perspective: Ask students to think of ways in which government still restricts access to voting for certain populations. To begin this conversation, ask students to read the op-ed about current disenfranchisement at http://www.civilrights.org/campaigns/election_reform/details.cfm?id=46489

Resources:

- US Constitution
Online—<http://www.usconstitution.net/constamnotes.html#Am15>
- Read about Native Americans and the Voter Rights Act at <http://www.civilrights.org/issues/voting/details.cfm?id=43407>

October 19: Unity and Division

“The pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States. But I’ve got news for them. [...] We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.” Barack Obama

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Draw a line down your chalk board and title each side “Red” or “Blue.” Ask students to brainstorm what comes to mind when they think of each political category. Then ask students to individually make a list of the political issues and stands most important to them. When they finish, ask students how many of their papers exactly reflect one of the two on the board. Lead a discussion about the nuances and oversimplification of political discussions in America.
- Have students ask their parents if they have always voted for the same party, and if there were aberrant elections, have them find out the circumstances.

Resources:

- “Purple America” Maps by Prof. Vanderbei, Princeton. <http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2004>
- Senator Barack Obama <http://obama.senate.gov>

October 21: Democracy and Human Potential

“Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man’s inclination to

injustice makes democracy necessary.” Reinhold Niebuhr

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Have students discuss the meaning of this quote.
- Ask students to do historical and current events research to find examples of each side of Neibuhr’s suggestion. When has a fight for justice led to increased democratic rights? When have people’s wrong-doings been countered by democratic progress?

Resources:

- The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, 1944 <http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=446>

October 23 & November 3: Educated Electorate

During his 1956 presidential campaign, a woman called out to Adlai E. Stevenson, “Governor, you have the vote of every thinking person!” Stevenson called back “That’s not enough, madam, we need a majority!”

“Fifty percent of people won’t vote, and fifty percent don’t read newspapers. I hope it’s the same fifty percent.” Gore Vidal

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Ask students about the role of humor in campaigning. Is it appropriate for a candidate to be funny? Does it help? How? Are there any current or recent political officials who they think of as funny? What effect does that humor have on how the public sees those officials?
- Why does Gore Vidal think it’s important for the voting public to read newspapers? What is the role of newspapers (television and the internet) in electoral politics?
- Ask students if they believe there should be “intelligence tests” or “current events tests” that one needed to pass in order to vote. (You only need one student to consider such a scenario to provoke a very heated discussion. For help in teaching about controversial topics in the classroom, see http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/teachers/controversial_issues/index.htm)

Resources

- For more quotes from Adlai E. Stevenson, go to http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/adlai_e_stevenson.html
- For biographical information on Adlai E. Stevenson, see <http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/unitarians/stevenson.html>

October 24: African American Suffrage: Voting Rights Act

On August 6, 1965 President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act. By the end of the year 160,000 new African-American voters in the Deep South alone had been registered.

Activity and Discussion Guide:

- George W. Bush recently renewed the Voter Rights Act. Ask you students if they feel the Act is still necessary. Read the Washington Post’s coverage of the debate over its renewal, as well as the new discussion around English language ability as

a requirement for voting at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/21/AR2006062101910.html>

Resources:

- See the ACLU's "Voter Rights Act Timeline" at <http://www.aclu.org/votingrights/gen/12999res20050304.html>
- Voting Rights Act—http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/intro/intro_b.htm
- Read about Native Americans and the Voter Rights Act at <http://www.civilrights.org/issues/voting/details.cfm?id=43407>
- <http://renewthevra.civilrights.org>
- <http://www.votingrightsact.org/>

October 25: Creating Leaders Who Inspire

“And so we shall have to do more than register and more than vote; we shall have to create leaders who embody virtues we can respect, who have moral and ethical principles we can applaud with enthusiasm.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Ask students how we can do what Martin Luther King implores us to do? How does our society teach leadership? Do we provide enough opportunities for leadership?
- Ask students to brainstorm ideas for what makes a good leader. Have students compare their visions for leadership.
- *Homework:* Have students research at least two of the current political candidates for races in their district. How do the candidates compare to their vision? Where do the candidates fall short? Where do they meet the requirements for a good leader?

Resources:

- See full texts of Martin Luther King's speeches and letters, as well as other biographical information at <http://www.mlkonline.net/> and <http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/> (see "Document Search" at the bottom of this page for an extensive collection!)

October 26: The Consequences of Apathy.

“Well, I cannot run the political machine; I have enough on my hands without that. It is the people's business, the election is in their hands. If they turn their backs to the fire, and get scorched in the rear, they'll find they have got to sit on the blister!” Abraham Lincoln

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Ask your students why Abraham Lincoln holds such an esteemed place in American history. How do we still feel the effects of his leadership today?
- You can relate this quote to the themes introduced in the section on "Compulsory Voting." Ask students what the consequences of apathy are. Do people who do not vote and otherwise engage in civic and political matters have a right to complain about "the fire"? what is the fire????

Resources:

- For a short and accessibly biography of Abraham Lincoln, see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/al16.html>
- For more in depth biographical information, focusing on quotes from those who knew him, visit <http://www.abrahamlincolnsclassroom.org/Library/lincolnface.asp> - this is an excellent article that can help students see the great man and a real man.
- You can find classroom activities from The Lincoln Institute at <http://www.abrahamlincolnsclassroom.org/index.asp>

October 27: Youth and the Vote

In 1971, at the height of the Vietnam War, the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18 from 21. It was ratified in just over two months, the quickest ratification in history.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Ask students why they think so many young people turned out to vote during the Vietnam War.
- Ask students to write an individual response to the prompt: “What challenges do I foresee in my future? What scares me about the next 1, 5, 10...50 years of my life?” Ask students to share some of their responses with the whole group, and write these on the board. (These might not be easy to share – if students are reticent, try using small groups for sharing.) Once people have shared some of their fears, ask students if any of their fears could be addressed by governmental policy. This may require some help from you: if students talk about not being able to afford college, you could speak about college loan programs; if students speak about financial stability, you could speak about debates around the minimum and “living” wages. If you cannot think of legislation that relates to your students’ concerns, have them research ways in which their concerns for the future are related to governmental policies.
- Have students discuss what it means to be too young to vote:
 - You can ask, “are young people still citizens, even if they cannot vote?”
 - Lead a discussion about how people younger than 18 can still get involved in politics and civil life.

Resources:

- <http://www.kidsvotingusa.org/>

October 28: Democracy is a Verb

“I grew up with the idea that democracy is not something you believe in or a place to hang your hat, but it’s something you do. You participate. If you stop doing it, democracy crumbles and falls apart.” Abbie Hoffman

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- What does Abbie Hoffman mean in this quote?
- Beyond voting, how do you participate? How can you engage civically between elections?
- Why would democracy fall apart without engagement?
- Are Americans actively engaged today? Are young Americans?

- Have students find out a little biographical information about Abbie Hoffman and his ideology. Have students discuss the place of extreme politics within the political spectrum. Can students think of any modern day “Abbie Hoffmans”? How are they changing the face of politics today?
- The accounts of Abbie Hoffman’s life vary greatly from one source to another. Having students gather different accounts may be an interesting exercise in the nature of “biography.”

Resource Guide:

- For more quotes from Abbie Hoffman, see http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/abbie_hoffman.html
- For a short biography, see http://www.thebiographychannel.co.uk/biography_story/758:1036/1/Abbie_Hoffman.htm

October 31: Popular Participation

63.5 million votes were cast to select the ‘06 American Idol—more votes than have been cast to elect any president in the history of our country.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Have students answer the following two questions:
 - What motivates people to vote for American idol?
 - What motivates people to vote for their elected officials?
- Ask students why the answers to the first question are apparently more compelling than those to the second question.
- What does this fact say about the American people?

November 2: Felony Disenfranchisement

3.9 Million Americans are not allowed to vote because of felony disenfranchisement laws. Many of those citizens have fully completed their sentences, but still aren’t allowed to vote. Only two states—Maine and Vermont—allow prison inmates to vote.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Have students research and debate these laws.
- Did students realize this law existed? Do they think it makes a difference in whether or not someone chooses to commit a crime?
- Talk about what someone who has committed a crime can expect from society and what society expects from them.
- What are the consequences of having an entire group of people disenfranchised? Who works and speaks on their behalf? Do politicians have an interest in helping former felons?

Resources:

- The Sentencing Project—http://www.sentencingproject.org/issues_03.cfm
- If they did not read the article for the “Minorities and the Vote” section, ask students to read the article on disenfranchisement at http://www.civilrights.org/campaigns/election_reform/details.cfm?id=46489

October 29 and November 4: Help America Vote and Motor Voter

Nicknamed Motor Voter, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 requires states to make the voter registration process easier by providing registration services at motor vehicle and social service agencies. Still, in 2004, only 72 percent of eligible citizens were registered to vote.

Drafted (at least in part) in reaction to the contested 2000 presidential election, the Help America Vote Act guarantees the right of individuals to cast a provisional ballot even if they do not appear on voter registration rolls.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Help students understand the need for these Acts. If they did not read any of Lichtman's article for "Accessibility and the Vote," <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/vote2000/report/appendix/lichtman/ltrpt.htm>, introduce them to some of it here.
- Highlight some of the ways, legal and otherwise, that frustrate our ability to vote, from registration challenges at the poll, to long lines and to disinformation.

Resources:

- To find out more about the Help America Vote Act, go to: <http://www.demos.org/page14.cfm>
- To find out more about the National Voter Registration Act, go to: <http://www.motorvoter.com>

November 5: Image vs. Substance

"In politics we presume that everyone who knows how to get votes knows how to administer a city or a state. When we are ill ... we do not ask for the handsomest physician, or the most eloquent one." Plato

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Have students discuss this quote. Can they relate this to personal experiences with students running for school offices?
- Have students take a blind vote – How many students think George Bush (or a local official students would know) is attractive? How many students agree with his politics? (See if it is the same groups for each!)
- Try to find both video and transcript of a political debate. Have half the class watch the video, while the other reads the transcript. Have each group write out a justification for the winner of the debate. Have the groups compare their justifications. (Excellent classroom activities similar to this one, with resources, are available at the website below.)

Resources:

- Politics in the Age of Television: <http://www.museum.tv/debateweb/html/curriculum/communication/classroom.htm>

November 6: Compulsory Voting & Voting Turnout

In the United States, in most elections scarcely half the eligible population votes, while in Australia, which has compulsory voting, participation reaches 95 percent. In

Belgium, people who do not vote in at least four elections can lose the right to vote for 10 years.

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Ask students if they believe voting should be compulsory in the United States, and allow them to debate.
- Connect this issue to larger issues of “individual rights” and privacy, such as wearing seatbelts or a bicycle helmet. Should people be forced to do something that we know is good for them?

Resources:

- To learn about compulsory voting, visit http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm

November 7: Promoting Voting

“Alright guys, I want to get out there and vote tomorrow. And not because it’s cool, because it’s not. You know what is cool? Smoking. Smoke while you vote.” Jon Stewart

Discussion and Activity Guide:

- Visit the “Rock the Vote” website at www.rockthevote.org. Be sure not to miss the merchandizing section – especially the brand-new “I love Social Security” babydoll tee. Lead a discussion on the tradeoffs of promoting voting in such a way.
- Have students design their own voting PR campaign for a particular audience. For extra credit, have them carry out their campaign before the election!
- Discuss the role of satire in politics with your students. If appropriate, have them read “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift (<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/modest.html>) as well as look at some political cartoons (links below).
 - Find out if students feel that satire has a place in politics. What can it achieve that politics-in-earnest might not?

Resources:

- The Onion: <http://www.theonion.com>
- The Daily Show: http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/the_daily_show/index.jhtml
- Find some history of political cartoons at <http://www2.truman.edu/parker/research/cartoons.html>
- For links to political cartoons go to <http://www.creators.com/editorialcartoons.html>