

First-time Voter Guide: Minnesota

I am a citizen; now, how do I vote?



Audio-visual Curriculum on Elections and Voting in Minnesota For English Language Learners, Adult, High-School and Citizenship Classes

Thousands of students who are involved in English Language Learning, Adult, High School and Citizenship classes are, or will be, eligible to vote in the upcoming election. Even if students are not eligible to vote, they can encourage and coach others in the voting process.

These lessons are designed for residents of Minnesota, whether they are long-time citizens and have never voted, or immigrants and foreign-born residents who have passed the rigorous examination to become citizens. Now they have the opportunity to vote in elections, and you, as a teacher, have the opportunity to help their participation by preparing them to vote.

The basic message of these lessons is the importance of voting as one way to be involved in one's community and country. Voting is a right of all citizens. It is the responsibility of all citizens to be informed about the issues and candidates prior to voting.

First-time Voter Guide is a primer on the basics of voting. It is developed for students with intermediate through advanced English language proficiency. These lessons are relevant for all students, even if some students in the class are not citizens. They can still learn about the issues, have opinions about candidates, and talk to others about their views.

In these lessons, students develop skills in reading, listening, writing and speaking, and critical thinking, while they learn about a significant facet of life in the United States – voting and elections. All lessons include an original audio-visual story, vocabulary, a worksheet with questions for discussion, an activity, and relevant information for the instructor. Each lesson takes 25-30 minutes, depending upon discussion time.

Links are provided to websites for more information on the election process and candidate information. Pre-registration forms are included and absentee ballots may be downloaded; websites are included.

- **Lesson 1 *Registering to Vote: Hawa learns*** about eligibility and voter registration. A registration form in English is included in the lesson, with instructions for downloading the form in ten languages. Teachers are encouraged to actually register eligible voters in class, up until 20 days before the election. Otherwise, students can fill out a registration card in class, and take it with them when they vote.
- **Lesson 2 *Learning about Levels of Government:*** Bria uses a map to teach about boundaries for federal, state, and local jurisdictions so students can better understand what levels of government handle various issues, such as foreign policy, climate change, etc.
- **Lesson 3 *Learning about Candidates and Issues:*** Carlos explores ways to become informed about the candidates. The subject of political issues is introduced to help students discern what positions candidates support. In this case, the issue is obtaining a Minnesota Driver's License.
- **Lesson 4 *Making a Choice:*** William continues the quest for information in deciding how to vote. Students learn how to find information about candidates, the political parties and their platforms, so they can make their own decisions.
- **Lesson 5 *Election Day:*** Nhung, Mai and Tran follow procedures for voting, both absentee and going to the polls. Included is a sample polling place diagram and an application for an absentee ballot. Students end the lesson series when they make a sticker to wear that says "I Will Vote!" or "I will encourage others to vote!"

Recommended sources for you and your students:

- Secretary of State's Office: www.sos.state.mn.us Elections and Voting, or directly to election and voting information www.mnvotes.org. This official site has forms for voter registration and absentee voting, links to candidates' websites, and an on-line video, "Voting in Minnesota: What You Can Expect".
- League of Women Voters of Minnesota *Voter Guide*: statewide nonpartisan publication that includes, in one issue, biographies and photos of candidates for statewide offices for all the major and registered minor parties; and responses to questions asked by the League of Women Voters of the candidates: www.lwvmn.org.
- *Voter's Guide*, published by the StarTribune prior to the election. It is available at public libraries and other locations, free of charge; StarTribune newspaper voter's guide: www.startribune.org

First-time Voter Guide *I am a citizen; now, how do I vote* was written by Meredith Sommers, ESL/English Language and Citizenship Teacher, Centro Guadalupano, Minneapolis, MN
It is offered freely as a contribution to democracy and education.

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Teacher Instructions: *Registering to Vote*

Any person can provide registration cards and assistance to help register new voters, and the ESL, Adult, High School and Citizenship classrooms are excellent places to do voter registration. When new voters take this first step of filling out the registration form, they are more likely to actually cast their vote on the day of the election or to vote absentee before election day. Teachers have a good opportunity to pre-register eligible voters. You can keep a list of names and phone numbers of the people you register to call and remind to vote the day before the election.

Eligibility requirements in Minnesota are:

- 18 years of age or older
- A citizen of the United States
- Have lived in Minnesota for at least 20 days before the election
- Have any felony conviction record dismissed

Pre-registration is accepted up to 20 days prior to an election. Voters who register by this deadline will receive a postcard in the mail with information about their polling location. Eligible voters who have not pre-registered can register at their polling place on the day of the election. In order to vote, residents need a Minnesota driver's license or a Minnesota ID. Seventeen-year-olds can pre-register if they are 18 by election day.

Note: U.S. citizens may not be deprived of the right to vote because they cannot read, write or speak English.

Teacher preparation: Make copies of the following story, questions and sample voter registration form for all students. You also may get a supply of actual voter registration cards, available in English, Hmong, Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, Lao, Khmer, Chinese, Oromo Amharic and Russian, at one of the following locations:

- County Government Center
- Local Library
- City Hall
- Secretary of State's Office on-line www.sos.state.mn.us

Lesson Preparation:

- Write the four Minnesota voter eligibility requirements, listed above, on the board or Power Point for all students to see.
- Set up student computers for on-line viewing of audio/visual story.
- If computers are not available for everyone, try to project the stories so all can hear and see.
- If computers are not available, hand out a copy of the story and worksheet to each student.

Warm up: Introduce the topic of Elections and Voting as a right and responsibility of all citizens. Ask students if they have ever voted before and to describe the experience. Where did they vote? What did the ballot look like? Were there many people voting?

Vocabulary: Write these words on the board and tell students to notice when the words are used. Either before or after reading the story, explain the words and how they are used.

Voter registration, pre-registration
Eligibility
Polling place
Secretary of State

Story: *Hawa Registers to Vote.*

If all students have access to a computer, use the audio-visual stories on-line, or read story aloud while students follow along.

1. Ask if there are words or phrases students don't understand and then explain and clarify as you go along.
2. Give students time to go over the story a second time and to underline anything they don't understand or want explained. Work with the vocabulary or phrases students underlined to help them understand the concepts in the story.
3. Read the story aloud again, asking students to take turns reading.

Worksheet Questions: Have students work in pairs to write answers to questions on the worksheet, using complete sentences. Ask for volunteers to write answers on the board. Use questions as a catalyst for discussion.

Activity: Hand out the attached sample Minnesota Voter Registration Form to all students. Go over the form step-by-step and ask all students to complete it whether or not they are citizens. Students can use the form to interview a partner and fill in the card for the partner (without their signature).

OR get official Minnesota Voter Registration Forms at the Post Office or on-line. Help eligible voters complete them. Bring stamps and mail to: Secretary of State, 60 Empire Drive, suite 100, St Paul, MN 56103

OR use computers to pre-register. Go to www.sos.state.mn.us. Explore the information that is available for registration on this website. Pre-registration may be done on-line providing an email address is provided.

Closure: Review vocabulary and main theme of the lesson that voting is a right and responsibility of all citizens, and registering to vote is the first step.

Remind students that this is pre-registration. They can also register at their polling place on Election Day.

Teacher Instructions: *Learning about Levels of Government*

Students often are confused about the different levels of government and what decisions are made at different levels. The vocabulary and concepts are difficult, and it helps if you have a U.S. map to provide a visual image of political boundaries. Be prepared to talk about which level of government handles different issues, like foreign policy, driving laws and local parks. Some issues are handled at many levels, like education.

Teacher preparation:

1. Bring a map of the United States and pin it on the wall, or use a projected map.
2. Set up computers for students to watch and hear the story, or make copies of the following story and questions for all students.

Review previous lesson: Write vocabulary words they learned in the previous lesson on the board to review. Ask students to reconstruct the story of the previous lesson, and then ask for questions or thoughts about this lesson. Help them if they need further help submitting pre-registration forms.

Warm up: Ask students to go to the U.S. map and identify where they have lived and where they live now. Explain that there is the same government for all people living in the United States, called the federal government. Each state also has its own government, as does every county and every city. Point out the geographical areas of the nation, Minnesota and the city or area in which they live now.

Vocabulary:

Federal Government, President, Senators and Representatives

State Government, Governor, Senators and Representatives

City Government, Mayor, Council

Elected officials

Candidates

Story and Questions: *Bria Studies a Map*

Activity: Copy the grid of levels of government from the story onto the board and use the map to show the boundaries, or jurisdictions, of government. You may want to expand the information by including other responsibilities of government and other jurisdictions.

Closure: Review the vocabulary words, and repeat the main themes of the lesson. Ask students if they know which levels of government are being decided in the up-coming election. For example, is there an election for governor, or mayor of their city? If there is confusion, review the terms of office.

Ask students to talk about one thing they learned today.

Teacher Instructions: *Learning about Candidates and Issues*

Teacher preparation: Bring to class any kind of information that is related to candidates in the upcoming election, such as articles in the newspaper, voters' guides, campaign literature, party platforms, web sites, etc. Make sure you have materials on all the major candidates running for the same office. You may want to choose to focus on the presidential, state or city elections.

Make copies of the following story and questions for all students

Review of previous lesson: Write vocabulary words you learned in the previous lesson on the board for review. Ask students to reconstruct the story of the previous lesson, and then ask for questions or thoughts about that lesson.

Warm up: Introduce this lesson by asking students if they have ever voted, either in the U.S. or their country of origin. Ask how they decided upon a candidate. Explain there are many ways in the U.S. to learn about the candidates and the issues. Show the materials you have brought to class as an example of ways to learn about the candidates.

Vocabulary

Campaign literature

Voter's Guide

Party platform

Issues

Story and Questions: *Carlos Studies the Issues*

Activity: Go for a walk with students to look for lawn signs, billboards, bumper stickers, candidate flyers, etc. Upon return to the classroom, ask what they saw or heard. Do they think this advertising gives important information about the candidates? Does it help them make a choice?

If it is not possible to take a walk, before next class, ask students to pay attention to various kinds of advertising for candidates, as listed above. What did they learn from this about the candidates? Do they think this is a good way to get people to vote for the candidates?

Closure: Show again the materials you brought to class about candidates. Review the vocabulary words you learned, and repeat the main themes of the lesson. What is one thing they learned today?

For more information on the political parties, go to their individual websites

Also, go to www.mnvotes.org and www.lwvmn.org for information on Minnesota candidates.

Teacher Instructions: *Making a Choice*

Teacher preparation:

1. If the election is within a month, get copies or on-line link to *Voter's Guide* for students. These are produced by the League of Women's Voters www.lwvnmn.org. The Star Tribune and other newspapers also publish a Voter's Guide that is available at no charge in libraries and other public places.
2. If the newspaper endorses candidates, bring this to class for students to look at as another way to get information.
3. Make copies of the following story and questions for all students.

Review of previous lesson: Write vocabulary words they learned in the previous lesson on the board for review. Ask students to reconstruct the story of the previous lesson, and then ask if they saw many bumper stickers, billboards, flyers, etc. about candidates. Do they have examples of candidate advertising? Did this give them important information? Have their opinions about any candidate changed?

Warm up: Write on the board this incomplete sentence and brainstorm with students what some of the things they can do before they make a choice, such as get information, talk to friends, etc. *Before I make a choice, I _____*

Vocabulary

Endorse

Liberal

Conservative

Democratic Party (DFL)

Republican Party (GOP)

Party Platform

Story and Questions: *William Makes a Choice*

Activity: Hand out sample voters' guides. Show students how the guide is organized and what information is available. Explain abbreviations that are used, such as DFL and GOP. Then have students work in pairs to get information about a candidate who is running for office in their city, state or nation. Have students report back, and when all have finished, have a mini-debate about the candidates. For homework, ask students to complete the sentence written above.

Closure: Review the vocabulary words they learned, and repeat the main themes of the lesson. Ask students to talk about one thing they learned today.

Extension lesson: Arrange for computers for students so they can go into websites of candidates by googling their names. They can look up their positions and platforms on issues of their interest. Encourage them to choose one issue to investigate so they can make a comparison between candidates.

Teacher Instructions: *Casting a Vote*

Basic information about voting: Citizens may choose the way to vote, either absentee or at the polls. Absentee, or early voting, starts 46 days prior to the election and their ballot must be received at the county office on or before election day. As of 2020, the voter must go on-line for an absentee application, then it will be mailed to the voter. It is not necessary to be registered to apply for absentee voting. An excellent guide to information about elections and voting, including absentee voting, is a short video at www.mnvotes.org. If computers are available for students, direct them to this website.

For voting at the polling place on election day, citizens either need to be pre-registered, or they can register at the polling place, as long as they have proper identification. Depending on when you registered to vote, you may need to bring proof of residence to the polling place.

One of four methods for identification may be used:

- Accepted identification with current name and address in their home precinct
 1. MN driver's license or permit or Minnesota ID card
 2. Student ID card or fee statement with current address
- Photo ID with current utility bill that is due within 30 days of election and has voter's name and current address
- Vouch by a voter registered in the precinct, if the voter doesn't have one of the above authorized proofs of identity

To find one's polling place or address of county office for absentee address, go to the Secretary of State's website www.mnvotes.org. Sample ballots and information on candidates also can be found there, under Elections and Voting.

Teacher preparation:

1. Make copies of the sample polling place diagram for all students. Bring coins to class to use for the "game," two coins per student.
2. Write the methods for identification to register on election day on the board.
3. Bring blank stickers (2" x 3") and markers to make I WILL VOTE or I WILL TELL OTHERS TO VOTE badges

Review of previous lesson: Write vocabulary words you learned in the previous lesson on the board for review. Ask students to reconstruct the story of the previous lesson, and then ask for questions or thoughts about that lesson.

Vocabulary:

Accepted identification
Polling place (poll)
Absentee or early voting
Roster
Voting booth
Cast a vote
Vote tabulator

Story and Questions: *Nhong, Mai and Tran Cast their Votes*

Activities:

1. “Casting your Vote” game. Hand out the polling place diagram to each student, or have them work in pairs. Use two coins for each map and have students use the coins take Mai and Tran through the voting procedure while you reread the story. Use one coin for Mai and another for Tran.
2. If computers are available, have students go to www.mnvotes.org. to watch a video on the voting process and to get information regarding absentee voting. The ballot for absentee voting is not accessible on-line and needs to be mailed to the applicant.

Closure: Review the vocabulary words they learned, and repeat the main themes of the lesson. Ask students if they plan to vote. Do they know where their polling place is? Will they go to vote with a friend or family member? What time do they plan to go? How will they get to the polling place?

Wrap-up: Hand out blank stickers and markers to students. Ask them to decorate a sticker and write I WILL VOTE, or another phrase of their choosing on the sticker, then put it on their clothing.