



Advanced Placement Lesson

The Electoral College



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Advanced Placement Lesson

How Does the Electoral College Work?

Advanced Placement:
U.S. Government & Politics,
U.S. History

Lesson Length:
Approximately 40 minutes

This lesson begins with a list of course outcomes for the Advanced Placement United States Government and Politics course and the Advanced Placement United States History course as well as NCSS standards correlated in this lesson suggested as written. Please reference the Standards Master Correlation document for a more detailed and comprehensive description of all correlated standards.

AP United States Government & Politics: Course Outcomes

- Describe and compare important facts, concepts, and theories pertaining to U.S. government and politics
- Explain typical patterns of political processes and behavior and their consequences (including the components of political behavior, the principles used to explain or justify various government structures and procedures, and the political effects of these structures and procedures)
- Interpret basic data relevant to U.S. government and politics (including data presented in charts, tables, and other formats)
- Critical analyze relevant theories and concepts, apply them appropriately, and develop their connections across the curriculum

AP United States History: Course Outcomes

- American and National Identity
 - NAT-1.0 Explain how ideas about democracy, freedom, and individualism found expression in the development of cultural values, political institutions, and American identity
 - NAT-2.0 Explain how interpretations of the Constitution and debates over rights, liberties, and definitions of citizenship have affected American values, politics, and society
- Politics and Power
 - POL-1.0 Explain how and why political ideas, beliefs, institutions, party systems, and alignments have developed and changed



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- POL-2.0 Explain how popular movements, reform efforts, and activist groups have sought to change American society and institutions
- Migration and Settlement
 - MIG-2.0 Analyze causes of internal migration and patterns of settlement in what would become the United States and explain how migration has affected American life

NCSS

- Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices: the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic

Objective

In this lesson students will be able to link the presidential election to the principles of the consent of the governed and federalism; explain the origin of the Electoral College; and describe how the President is elected every four years through the Electoral College.

Rationale

- The lesson assumes that students have prior knowledge of civics, such as branches of government, the Constitution, and the Electoral College;
- It is assumed that students know how the Electoral College works and how it is distinct from a national popular election.

Procedure

Preliminary Reading:

Assign the Declaration of Independence (1776), Federalist No. 39 and Article II of the Constitution for the students to read before class. Have the students note how government is grounded on the principles of equality and consent; Publius' understanding of federalism, especially the distinction between "national" and "federal"; and the powers of the President as well as the mode of election.



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Free Writing and Discussion

Ask the students to free-write for a few minutes describing how the President is elected. Have them explain how the Electoral College works and how it would differ from a national popular vote. Expect that several students will point out that the Electoral College is not democratic. The usual argument against the Electoral College seems to be twofold: First, the Electoral College is undemocratic and second, it allows for the possibility that a candidate who does not win the popular vote could still be elected President. The second, reservation of course is possible, having recently happened in 2000. Still, according to “the rules of the game” the popular vote does not count, that is, all candidates for the Presidency are aware of the arrangement and should conduct their campaigns accordingly, not according to some wished for rule. Opponents to the Electoral College nevertheless persist in their opposition, insisting that this is what makes the Electoral College undemocratic. Ask the students to describe how the “winner-take-all” system works. Does this not suggest that the President is elected through a series of democratic elections, where the winner of the electoral votes is the winner of the direct popular election in the State? Does this not suggest that the election of the President is democratic? Could we say that the election is a federal-democratic election rather than a national election?

What are the limits of a national popular election of the President? Does the Electoral College in its federal emphasis represent the political character better than a popular election that emphasizes the largest population centers?

The Election of 1800

Using the Voters Ed application focus the students’ attention on the Election of 1800. Have them discuss the outcome of the election. Ask them how the Twelfth Amendment Addresses the problems raised by the election of 1800?



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The Election of 2000

Using the Voters Ed application focus the students' attention on the 2000 Presidential election. Did the Electoral College work in the sense that it restricted the problems of the election to Florida? Consider the argument of the Court in *Bush v. Gore* (2000). What are the questions of the case? Evaluate the argument of the Court.

Predicting the Election of 2016

Using the Voters Ed application show the Electoral College map of the 2012 election. Note that if the Democratic Party nominates a strong candidate what States should that candidate expect to win? If Governor Romney was the strongest candidate that the Republicans could nominate in 2012, what States does the next Republican candidate have to win to secure the White House all things being equal? Do the Republicans in 2016 have to win Florida, Ohio, Virginia and Pennsylvania? Would victory in those states be enough for a Republican victory? If not, does this suggest that currently the Electoral College favors the Democrats?

Take Home Writing Assignment #1

The mode of electing the President via the Electoral College has been amended on several occasions: Amendment XII (June 1804); Amendment XX (January 23, 1933); Amendment XXII (February, 1951); Amendment XXIII (March, 1961); and Amendment XXV (February, 1967). Generally, describe the how these Amendments affected the Presidency. Did they fundamentally, change the character of the Electoral College?

Take Home Writing Assignment #2

Using Madison's *Notes from the Constitutional Convention* consider what was said about the election of the President. Suggest to the students that they should pay particular attention to how the Electoral College was a compromise out of several competing alternatives. See Talking points "Framer's Election Modes for the Presidency."



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Talking Points:

“Framer’s Election Modes for the Presidency.”

At the Constitutional Convention, the delegates considered the following modes of election for the presidency before they compromised on the Electoral College.

Mode of Election	Advantages	Disadvantages
Congress chooses the president	President is elected by informed and competent voters; Congress represents the people; Eliminates miscounting of votes; Ensures the States are represented as States and in terms of population	Possible corruption, i.e., bribes; Fear of dividing the Congress; Fear of making the President dependent and subservient to the Congress
State Legislatures choose the President	Gives equal representation to the people; Reduces the chances of miscounting the votes	Fear that federalism would be undermined in exchange of votes
President is elected by direct popular vote	Avenue for majority rule; Ensures the vote is actually for the intended candidate	Impractical—difficult to get every one’s vote; Multiplies the possibility of counting errors and corruption