



# High School Lesson

## How Does the Electoral College Work?



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## *How Does the Electoral College Work?*

### Target Grade Levels:

High School (9-12)

### Lesson Length:

Approximately 40 minutes

This lesson is correlated with state and NCSS standards. Please reference the Standards Master Correlation document for a more detailed and comprehensive description of all correlated standards.

## State Standards

- California
  - Goal of Knowledge and Cultural Understanding
    - Socio-Political Literacy
  - Goal of Democratic Understanding and Civic Values
    - Constitutional Heritage
    - Civic Rights, Values, and Responsibilities
  - Goal of Skills Attainment and Social Participation
    - Participation Skills
    - Critical Thinking Skills
- Florida
  - American History Strand
    - HS Standard 1, SS.912.A.1.6
  - Civics and Government Strand
    - HS Standard 2, SS.912.C.2.14
  - Geography Strand
    - HS Standard 1, SS.912.G.1.4
    - HS Standard 6, SS.912.G.6.1
- Massachusetts
  - History and Geography
    - Concept and Skill 4
    - Concept and Skill 7
    - Concept and Skill 9
- New York
  - Standard 1
    - Key Idea 1
  - Standard 5
    - Key Idea 1
    - Key Idea 2
    - Key Idea 4
- Texas
  - High School, Geography, Standard 5
  - High School, U.S. History, Standard 20
  - High School, U.S. Government, Standard 8
  - High School, U.S. Government, Standard 10



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### **NCSS**

- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

### **Objective**

- Students will compare the Electoral College's principles and actual implementation.
- Students will support whether or not the Electoral College truly reflects American ideals of democracy, engaged citizenship, and other core values.

### **Rationale**

By this point in their education, most students will be familiar with the concept of the Electoral College. However, as they near voting age, students should begin to think deeply about government institutions, and evaluate the political system of which they are about to become a part. Students should be encouraged to inform their decisions with research, and develop their own opinions about the world around them, in order to prepare them to be critical consumers of information.

### **Procedure**

#### *Anticipatory Set:*

As students come in, ask them to take out a sheet of paper and define the words "democracy" and "representation" in their own words. Have them share with the person next to them, and then have several students share their responses for each term. Write brief descriptions of the responses on the board. Finally, close by showing students how these terms can be interpreted many different ways. This serves as a transition into the content for the day.



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## Comprehension and Free-writing Exercise

1. Have students read through a handout version (see attached text at bottom of lesson plan) of the “Electoral College Primer” from the application, providing them with the text up through the section entitled “Role of the People.” At the same time, project the Electoral College Primer onto the screen. Ask students to summarize what they have read, to refresh and activate prior knowledge.
2. Ask students to explain the difference between electoral votes and popular votes. Indicate on the interactive map in the application where these numbers are located, visually demonstrating the difference in the two concepts. Have students explain how it would be possible for a candidate to win the popular vote, but lose the electoral vote, and lose the election.
3. Assign students into groups to briefly research the elections of 1876, 1888, and 2000. Provide them with additional reading materials (either in print form or electronically), as well as rotating through groups to allow access to the historical section of the application. Have each group write a short paragraph explaining how the Electoral College’s existence affected the results of their election. See talking points, “Winning the Electoral College with less than a Popular Majority.”
4. Break students up into 2 groups (for larger classes, use 4 groups to ensure student participation). Explain to students that the debate over the Electoral College continues to this day, and that there are intelligent people arguing for both sides of the issue. Have one group (or pair of groups) research the arguments in favor of keeping the Electoral College as it exists today (or with some minor alterations), while the other group (or pair of groups) researches the arguments against the Electoral College. Provide the rest of class time to allow students to do their research (with print/electronic materials, as well as any other resources available).



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Also provide each group with time to explore relevant components of the application, such as the rest of the “Electoral College Primer” and various historical elections that support their position. Conduct the debate the following day.

### **Assessment**

- Informal assessment of group discussion and participation.
- Evaluation of the debate the following class.

### **Talking Points:**

*“Winning the Electoral College with less than a Popular Majority.”*

1. One way a President can be elected with less than a majority of the popular vote is if the country were deeply divided politically and there were three or more candidates who shared the popular vote. See the elections of 1824, 1948 and 1968.
2. Another way a President can be elected with less than a majority of the popular can occur when one candidate’s popular support was heavily concentrated in a few States, while the eventually winner secured slim majorities in enough States to win Electoral College vote. States. See for example, the elections of 1888 and 2000.
3. Perhaps a third way a President can be elected with less than a majority of the popular vote can occur when a third-party candidate draws enough votes away from the top candidates ensuring the neither candidate secures a majority of the votes. See 1912, 1916, 1948, 1960, 1968, and 1992.