

LESSON PLAN – History of the Electoral College

Subject: History of the Electoral College

Grade Level: 6-8

Standards:

C.6.5 Identify and explain essential ideas of constitutional government, which include limited government; rule of law; due process of law; separated and shared powers; checks and balances; federalism; popular sovereignty; republicanism; representative government; and individual rights to life, liberty and property; and freedom of conscience and religion.

C.6.11 Describe the primary and general election process for local, state, and national offices, including those used to select congressional and presidential office holders.

C.6.12 Identify and explain the duties of and selection process for local and state government officials who make, implement, and enforce laws.

C.6.23 Explain ways that citizens can participate in the election process (political parties, campaigns, and elections) at the national, state, and local levels.

Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

Computer, laptop, or tablet

Pencil, pen, paper

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe the Electoral College.
- Students will be able to explain why the Electoral College was developed.
- Students will be able to describe at least two positive aspects of the electoral college and two negative aspects of the electoral college.

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

What is the Electoral College?

Why was it developed?

Should we continue to have it?

These are questions that people in this country still have today. Does the Electoral College allow more equal voting than just one vote for one person?

LESSON PLAN – History of the Electoral College

In this lesson you will learn more about the history of the Electoral College and why it was developed.

Body of Lesson:

Watch the video on History of the Electoral College: <https://video.wfyi.org/video/history-of-the-electoral-college-afnous/?continuousplayautoplay=true>

The Electoral College was developed when the United States was created. The democracy of the United States was a new and revolutionary concept. Each new state was very different in terms of geography and citizens. The new government worked to develop a way for elections to be fair to all. There are many questions about whether it is still fair to all.

The United States had just fought and won a war so they would not be ruled by a king. The founders wanted to make sure that people had an equal opportunity for their vote to count. Unfortunately, only white males who owned property were allowed to vote. Women and people of color did not have the right to vote in 1789 during the first presidential election. In many Southern states, a large part of the population was made up of slaves. To allow for this group of people, slaves were counted as 3/5 of a person. This was called the 3/5 Compromise. This compromise was seen favorably by the Southern states and allowed them to ratify or approve of the Constitution. Ultimately this compromise allowed continued division over slavery and led to the Civil War.

The founders of the country were concerned that one vote per person would result in a split vote with no candidate receiving a majority of the votes. Thus they created the Electoral College.

How does the Electoral College work?

The Electoral College applies only to presidential elections.

Each state selects a group of people known as electors. On election day, the people of the state vote for a candidate. In most states, if the popular vote is in favor of a candidate, all of the electoral votes cast by the electors also go for that candidate.

In Maine and Nebraska, the winner of the popular vote gets two of the electoral votes.

One elector from each district votes for the popular vote winner of that district.

Candidates must receive at least 270 Electoral College votes to be elected as President of the United States. A presidential candidate may win the popular vote but not the Electoral College vote.

Pro's of the Electoral College

1. The founding fathers developed this method because they felt it was the most fair way to elect a president.
2. It ensures that all parts of the country are a part of the presidential election.
3. It eliminates the need for a national vote recount which would be a very tedious and long-term thing.

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Con's of the Electoral College

1. The reasons for developing the Electoral College may no longer be relevant.
2. It gives too much power to swing states.
3. It allows the election to be decided by just a few states.
4. It does not always represent the will of the people.

<https://www.britannica.com/story/pro-and-con-electoral-college>

Class Activity

Divide into groups. Have each group decide if they are in favor or opposed to the continued use of the Electoral College. Each group should state specific reasons for their stance and why their approach is best for the benefit of the country.

Summary/Closure

The use of the Electoral College in presidential elections has undergone changes over the years. Initially only white men who owned property were allowed to vote. That has expanded to all citizens, male and female, of any race or ethnic group.

We have had elections where the winner of the Electoral College did not win the popular vote. Is this the best way to represent the citizens of the country? These are very divisive questions that continue to plague our country.

Extension Activities

Can the Electoral College actually be abolished?

Review this article by the American Bar Association and discuss the legality of abolishing the Electoral College.

<https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/publications/youraba/2019/october-2019/q--the-electoral-college--is-it-open-for-interpretation-by-the-c/>

Listen to a podcast presented by the National Constitution Center on the pro's and con's of the Electoral College.

<https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/publications/youraba/2019/october-2019/q--the-electoral-college--is-it-open-for-interpretation-by-the-c/>

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