

LESSON PLAN – How Does the Electoral College Work

Subject: How Does the Electoral College Work?

Grade Level: 6-8

Standards:

U.S.G.1.8 Evaluate the importance of a written constitution in establishing and maintaining the principles of rule of law and limited government.

U.S.G.292 Understand the concept of compromise and evaluate its application during the Constitutional Convention.

U.S.G.3.13 Explain the electoral process in terms of election laws and elections systems on the national, state, and local level.

U.S.G.3.16 Explain and evaluate the original purpose and role of the Electoral college and its relevance today.

Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

Computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone

Paper and pen/pencil

Learning Objectives:

- The students will be able to explain what the Electoral College is
- Students will be able to explain how the Electoral College works
- Students will be able to identify at least one reason for continuing with the Electoral College
- Students will be able to identify at least one argument for eliminating the Electoral College
- Students will be able to explain why the Electoral College process was started

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

The Electoral College is a process. It is not a place.

When the Founding Fathers of the country wrote the Constitution, the Electoral College was a compromise. One group wanted the President to be voted on by popular vote of the qualified citizens. Another group wanted the President to be elected by a vote in Congress. The two groups agreed on the Electoral College. There are still arguments being held today both for the process and opposed to the process.

Body of Lesson:

Watch Simple Civics video: How Does the Electoral College Work? At www.wfyi.org/simplecivics

Electoral College is used every 4 years to decide the President. Each state is allotted a certain number of Electoral votes based on the number of people living in the state. This is why the Census is so important. Each state selects individuals to be electors. Each state has its own process for picking electors. The U.S. Constitution states that an elector cannot be a Senator or Representative or a person holding an office of the government. The 14th Amendment states that anyone who engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the United States or who has given aid to enemies of the United States may not be electors. This amendment was passed after the Civil War.

There are currently 538 electors. A majority of 270 votes is needed to be declared the winner and President. Each state has the same number of electors as it does U.S. Senators plus U.S. Representatives. The District of Columbia has 3 electors. It is not a state but is treated like a state for the Presidential election.

How does the process work?

On election day, people vote for the candidate of their choice. The Presidential election is held every 4 years on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

Voting for a candidate is actually voting for an elector.

In most states the candidate with the most votes get all of the electoral votes in the state. Maine and Nebraska can give some votes to one candidate and some to another based on percentages.

After election day

The state Governor prepares a Certificate of Ascertainment. This document lists all the candidates and the number of votes each person received. It also lists the electors from the state. The electors meet on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December and cast their votes for President and Vice President on separate ballots.

These ballots are counted in a joint session of Congress on January 6. The Vice President of the United States is the President of the Senate. The Vice President watches over the count and declares the winners.

The President-elect is then sworn in as the new President on January 20.

Controversy

The creation of the Electoral College was a compromise. Today, it continues to be controversial. In 2020 Pew Research conducted a survey that showed 58% of adults felt the President should be elected by popular vote and not by the Electoral College process. This would require a Constitutional amendment. People who are opposed to the Electoral College say that it does not uphold the “one person, one vote” principle.

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They feel it is not a democratic process. It is possible for the candidate who received the largest number of actual individual votes to lose the election based on the electoral votes. This has happened five times in history.

In 1824, Andrew Jackson received more individual votes; however, John Quincy Adams received the majority of the electoral votes. In 1876 Rutherford B. Hayes won the electoral votes even though he did not have the majority of individual votes. In 1888 Grover Cleveland won the popular vote by more than 90,000 votes but lost the electoral vote to Benjamin Harrison (from Indiana).

In more recent history, George W. Bush received more than 500,000 fewer popular votes than Al Gore but won the electoral votes. In 2016 Hillary Clinton received 2.8 million more popular votes than Donald Trump but lost the electoral vote.

Class Activity

This can be done in person or as an assignment. Students can work individually or in groups. If done as a group, divide into groups of 3 to 5 and have students respond verbally or in writing to the following questions.

1. How important do you think it is to vote in elections?
2. What did you learn about the Electoral College that didn't know before?
3. What are the best arguments for and against the Electoral College today?
4. Do you think the Electoral College is fair? Why or why not?
5. Do you think the Electoral College should be kept, ended, or modified? Explain your answer.

Summary/Closure

The Electoral College was a compromise when the United States was founded. It was controversial then, and it continues to be controversial. It is complex. Many citizens have difficulty understanding it. Being knowledgeable about this process is important for voters.

Extension Activities

For more detailed information, go to the National Archives website: [What is the Electoral College? | National Archives](#)

An online teaching tool from the National Archives: [Flaws of the Electoral College System | DocsTeach](#)

The segment on Voting Rights, the Constitution, & Representative Government found on this website take 30-60 minutes: [Middle School Distance Learning Programs | National Archives](#)

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