

## LESSON PLAN – WHAT ARE NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

**Subject:** What are National Conventions

**Grade Level:** 6-8

### Standards:

USG.3.13 Explain the electoral process in terms of election laws and election systems on the national, state, and local level.

USG.3.14 Examine the progression of political parties and their ideologies and the broad political spectrum in the American governmental system and analyze their functions in elections and government at national, state, and local levels of the federal system.

USG.5.2 Analyze the roles and responsibilities of citizens in Indiana and the United States.

USG.5.6 Explain and give examples of important citizen actions that can impact local, state, and federal government as individuals and members of interest groups.

USG.5.7 Explain how citizens in the United States participate in public elections as voters and supporters of candidates for public office.

USG.5.8 Describe opportunities available to individuals to contribute to the well-being of their communities and participate responsibly in the political process at local, state, and national levels of government.

### Materials Needed:

Students will need access to:

Computer and internet

Ability to participate in group discussions (where applicable)

Paper and pencil or access to computer with ability to complete assignments

### Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to explain the purpose of national conventions.
- Students will be able to state the difference between the Republican national convention and the Democratic national convention.
- Students will be able to define “delegate” as it relates to national conventions.
- Students will be able to define “super delegate” as it relates to the Democratic national convention.

### Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

We have made it through the primary elections and caucuses. The candidates started campaigning at least a year ago. And now – we have the big parties to determine the

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people running for president and vice president for each of the major political parties. The national conventions are a bit like the semi-finals in basketball. The candidates (like a team) are close but do not quite have the prize (elected as President). We will learn about how these national conventions work (and it is not like a semi-final basketball game!).

### Body of Lesson:

Simple Civics Video – What are National Conventions (2:44 minutes)

<https://www.pbs.org/video/what-are-national-conventions-uucdkb/>

What is a National Convention?

Both major political parties (Republicans and Democrats) hold national conventions. In a presidential election year, these conventions are held in the summer after the primaries and caucuses are finished. Each party selects a city to hold the convention. The locations of the conventions change each presidential election year. The main purpose of the conventions is to select one candidate to run for President of the United States.

Delegates are selected to attend the national conventions. Delegates are people that are elected or chosen at the state or local level to support or vote for a candidate at the convention. Each candidate earns delegates based on the percentage of votes he or she received in the primary. The delegates then attend the national convention and vote for the candidate they were pledged to. The candidate with the majority of delegate votes becomes the nominee – the person selected to run for President of the United States.

The Democratic party has additional delegates called Super Delegates. These people are former presidents, vice-presidents, party leaders, governors, congressmen, or other elected officials. They are invited to the convention. They do not vote on the first ballot to select a candidate. If a candidate gets more than 50% of the vote on the first ballot, that person becomes the nominee, and the Super Delegates have simply attended the convention and can go home. This is what usually happens. If there are more than two candidates and no one gets more than 50% of the ballot vote, then a second ballot is held. The Super Delegates get to vote in this second ballot. They can vote for any of the candidates. They are not bound to a candidate like the delegates.

Super Delegates are very rarely needed. They have not had to vote at a Democratic National Convention for more than 70 years. If they were needed, then that convention would be called a “contested convention”.

This website summarizes the functions of national conventions and how they work.  
National Conventions – usa.gov website

<https://www.usa.gov/election#item-212585>

Conventions (video 9:22 minutes)

This video discusses how the conventions work and their purpose and focuses on the 2008 conventions.

<https://indiana.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/5576902a-7711-46a4-a0a7-34b5b360c13a/5576902a-7711-46a4-a0a7-34b5b360c13a/>

### Activities

This can be an in class discussion. The discussion can be the class as a whole, or the class can be organized into smaller groups.

If using smaller groups, then have the students discuss the questions and report back. This activity can also be used as an assignment where each student or group submits a written report.

The students should respond to these questions:

1. What is the difference between the Republican and Democratic national conventions?
2. What is the purpose of the national conventions?
3. Have the rules of the conventions been the same throughout history?
4. What is a Super Delegate?
5. Do you think Super Delegates are a good solution when a decision is not reached on the first ballot?
6. How can you as a citizen participate in a convention?

### Summary/Closure

The two main political parties in the United States are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Both of these parties hold national conventions to select a candidate to run for President of the United States. Each party has different protocols for conducting their convention. People from each state are delegates that vote for a candidate. It is a complex process that can be very routine or very controversial.

### Extension Activities

This is a short video about the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and the riots that occurred in the city.

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1968 Creates Need for Change (2:56 minutes)

[https://indiana.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/iptv\\_caucusiowa\\_02\\_1968/iptv\\_caucusiowa\\_02\\_1968/](https://indiana.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/iptv_caucusiowa_02_1968/iptv_caucusiowa_02_1968/)

This is a video about the two parties (Democratic and Republican) that gives general information about the platforms of each.

Party Over Here, Party Over There ! | On the Campaign Trail (4:04 minutes)

<https://indiana.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/f634eb4d-5669-43e1-ae9d-8281005bc7c2/party-over-here-party-over-there-on-the-campaign-trail/>

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