LESSON TITLE: Why Vote?

Location/s: United States
Time Period: Contemporary
Grade Level: 11 and 12

Keywords: voting, elections, voter registration,
Subject: Voting

LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW
Summary: This lesson is designed to help get out the youth vote. Students consider reasons people don't vote and reasons that they do, explore a map-based presentation on voter turn-out in 2016, and register, if they choose to, at the end of the lesson. Included is a link to a slide presentation that walks students through the stages of the lesson.

Time Commitment: 100 minutes in one block or between 2 class meetings

Essential Question/s:
Why vote?
Who are non-voters?
How might the electoral participation of previous non-voters affect an election and social policies?

Objective/s:
Students will consider arguments for voting and not voting, examine demographic data related to voters and non-voters, and explore the effect of eligible non-voters on a presidential election.
Some students will feel motivated to register to vote and have their own reasons for doing so.

Curriculum Standards
Astonishingly, the Massachusetts History and Social Studies Curriculum Frameworks is virtually silent in requiring voter preparation in grades 11 and 12. Even in the suggested high school elective in "United States Government and Politics", there is no section devoted to accessing the elective franchise and why it matters. However, there are statements of general standards in the frameworks as a whole and within the United States Government and Politics Content Standards that provide an argument for including specific learning engagements with students related to preparing them to vote in local and national elections, including registration. These are excerpted here.

> ***Standards for History and Social Science Practice, Pre-K–12***
> 1. Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
> 2. Develop focused questions or problem statements and conduct inquiries.
> 3. Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources.
> 4. Analyze the purpose and point of view of each source; distinguish opinion from fact.
> 5. Evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and relevance of each source.
> 6. Argue or explain conclusions, using valid reasoning and evidence.
> 7. Determine next steps and take informed action, as appropriate.

United States Government and Politics Content Standards59 [GOV]
Building on knowledge from previous years, students should be able to:
> • describe and compare important facts, concepts, and theories pertaining to U.S. government, politics, and the role of the U.S. in world affairs
> • explain typical patterns of political processes and principles that provide the foundation for various government structures and procedures
> • interpret basic data relevant to U.S. government and politics (including data presented in charts, tables, and other formats)
> • critically analyze relevant theories and concepts, apply them appropriately, and understand their connections to other aspects of history and social science

Materials and Sources
Most handouts are included in this document following the lesson plan. Handout 3 is only accessible via the link below.

In advance,
- print Handout 1, one-sided. Tape the sign that says "Not at all." on one wall of the classroom and "Extremely." on the opposite wall. Make sure the room is arranged so students can stand in a line between the signs.
- print, one-sided, as many copies of Handout 2 as you need to have one for each small group of 3 - 5 students, each copy cut into strips and clipped together.
- print enough copies of Handout 3, two-sided on 11x17 paper, as you need for every partner pair to have one.
- have the Why Vote? slide presentation ready to project in the classroom.
- if in Massachusetts, print this Massachusetts voter registration info guide and registration forms, enough for each student. Registration forms in other languages available here.

SEQUENCE OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES
This lesson moves quickly. If you are able to have students in a block period for at least 100 minutes, that's great. If not, two class periods are necessary. To slow down and take more time for discussion, add as much time as needed in any section, knowing that an additional class period will be necessary.

Text in italics indicates a possible teacher/facilitator script that can and should be adjusted to fit your circumstances and your own style.

Lesson Steps

1) 1 minute (Slide 1) - Intro
Introduce the lesson in a way that works for you, but being up front about the motivation behind the lesson is important. Just don't take too long doing it. One minute!

One version might look something like this: *Voting is not the only way to be a politically engaged citizen, but this lesson hopes to motivate you to contribute your voice to our democracy through the electoral process.*

2) 25 minutes or less (Slide 2) - Continuum Share

Show **Slide 2**. Have students line up across the room according to where they fall on the spectrum in response to this statement: *To make changes in the world that I care about, local to global, **voting is important***. Prod students to find their spot quickly.

Once everyone is in place, each person has 20 seconds or less to give a reason. Time them to keep to 20 seconds. "I don't know" is an ok reason if it means "I don't know how I feel about this, so I'm in the middle." (30 students will take 15 minutes or less, including time to line up). Make sure **everyone** shares a reason, even if it's restating what someone else has already said.

After everyone has spoken, allow people to move based on what they have heard. Ask those who moved to say why they moved.

After everyone has shared their thinking, have students sit in groups of 3 to 5. There is no need to ask for reflection or take-aways at this point.

3) 10 minutes (Slide 3) - How convincing is this argument?

Tell students: *The first exercise told us what the range of opinions are in the room—getting the lay of the land, in a way. Now we are going to examine a few ideas from other notable people—in the entertainment industry and/or activists—and evaluate those reasons more closely. Each group has a packet of strips. Distribute them randomly to your group members. You will go around and read the strips out loud.* Show **Slide 3**. *After each one, the group will rate the argument on a scale of 1 to 5 - 1 is not at all convincing and 5 is very convincing. Read and rate as many as you can in 6 minutes. You can write your rankings right on the strips. Try to reach a group consensus on the rankings, but it's more important to hear a number of strips than it is to spend all your time arguing over one.* (1 minute)

Stop students after 6 minutes and ask for a few share outs: *What argument was the most convincing to your group and why? Did anyone disagree with the group and want to say why?* (2 minutes)

Transition: *Again, we see that there is diversity among voters about why they think voting matters and what reasons we think are most convincing. Now we are going to look at the last presidential election to explore who voted, who didn't, and consider the impact of both.* Hand out two-sided sheets.(Handout 3) (1 minute)

4) 15 minutes (Slide 4 and 5) - Bar graphs of voter participation/Pair exercise

Find a partner. We're going to start with the side of the sheet with the graphs before we get to the maps, and we're going to start by looking at the graph on the top. (**Slide 4**) *This graph shows the composition of voters who voted for the Republican and Democratic candidates in the 2016 presidential election. The bars show proportions, but notice that even though they are the same length, the bars do not represent equal numbers of voters overall. The length of the bars represent 100% of the voters for each candidate. Spend two minutes exploring the graph*

with your partner. What are you struck by? What jumps out at you? What questions do you have? (1 minute explanation)

Students explore the graph (2 minutes).

Students share out a few noticings or questions (2 minutes).

Explain second graph: *Now explore the graph at the bottom.* (**Slide 5**) *It shows the composition of voters and non-voters, regardless of who the voters voted for. Again, the bars do not represent equal numbers but 100% of all voters and 100% of non-voters.* (30 seconds)

Students explore the graph (2 minutes).

Students share out a few noticings or questions (2 minute).

How do the graphs inform each other?: *When you think of these two graphs together, what connections can you draw? What questions? How might the participation of non-voters have impacted the election?* (5 minutes)

Here is a good place to end the first part of the lesson if you are presenting it in two sessions. If you are teaching the lesson in two parts, in the second meeting it is important to start with a review of the graphs before moving to the maps.

5) 15 minutes (Slides 6-9) - United States of Apathy

Students are sitting in their partner pairs. Show **Slide 6** so students know what map to investigate. *Turn the page over, and let's move to considering voters and non-voters by looking at maps. Let's look at the map on the top.* Show **Slide 7** that explains the map. Read the slide text out loud. *What ideas can you take away from this map? What questions do you have?* (4 minutes)

What is "wrong" with this map or what's missing? What doesn't it tell us? If students don't have any ideas about this, you can tell them that the map doesn't show how many people voted in each county, just what candidate got the majority of votes. In this way it may be misleading, making it look like Donald Trump received disproportionately more individual votes than the number he actually did receive (i.e. land doesn't vote). Also, the map does not take into account the "winner take all" nature of the Electoral College in all but two states. (3 minutes)

Show **Slide 8**. *The bottom map corrects for the reality of the Electoral College in the continental United States. In this visualization, "Nobody" wins 445 electoral votes as opposed to 72 for Hillary Clinton and 21 for Donald Trump.* Show slide 9 and read it out loud. *What ideas can you take away from this map? What questions do you have?* (3 minutes)

Now consider the graphs that provided information about voters and non-voters. This step is hard and requires comparing different kinds of information represented in different ways. Look for possible connections and relationships. How do the graphs contribute to your thinking about the maps, and in what way do the maps contribute to your thinking about the graphs? What ideas do you have about voter participation? (5 minutes)

NOTE: You may want to take a minute here and address the fact that it's not just apathy that keeps people from voting. They may not have an ID or may risk losing their job if they take time off work to vote. They may have to care for a sick family member and can't get to the polls. They may face state voting regulations that make it very difficult for them to cast their vote.

6) 5 minutes (Slides 10 and 11) - Issues

Transition: *You've heard many arguments for voting and you've explored data about voters and non-voters in the last presidential election. But voting is not just about individual candidates. It's about knowing what policies the candidates stand for.*

Show **Slide 10** and ask students to raise their hands if there are any issues they are personally invested in. Ask a few to share which ones and why.

Show a slide that highlights issues in a local election, **Slide 11**. Ask students to raise their hands if there are any issues they are personally invested in. Ask a few to share.

Remind students that voting is just as important, if not more so, in local elections as it is on a national level. And if students are not able to register because they are too young, or are undocumented, or are exchange students, remind them that there are lots of ways to participate in elections: getting informed about issues that matter to them and campaigning for candidates, get-out-the-vote drives in the school or community, organizing local candidate forums, getting family members registered and making sure they know where, when and how to vote.

7) 30 minutes (Slide 12) - Registration rules in MA/forms/collect

This time is reserved for registering any students who choose to do so. The registration materials in this lesson are for Massachusetts. You can create a registration and voting guide similar to the one in this folder for any state. Be sure to inform students a few days in advance that they will be able to register in class if they want to and what kind of ID they should bring if they want you to submit their forms for them, which we recommend. You can have envelopes and stamps ready. If you print them on card stock, you do not need envelopes. Though for security, it's a good idea.

As a wrap-up at the end of class, ask students to share one issue they are hoping to influence with their vote.

LESSON PLAN MATERIAL SOURCE LINKS

Musicians share reasons for voting
https://pitchfork.com/features/lists-and-guides/musicians-on-why-theyre-voting-in-the-2018-midterm-elections/?page=2

Pew Research on 2016 voters in the presidential election
https://www.people-press.org/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/

United States of Apathy maps
https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=95f38693320c408a87dbb33762d82e82

Extremely.

Not at all.

A.

Several years ago, my law office was fighting for the release of a black man who had been condemned, at the age of 16, to die in prison. Matthew was one of 62 Louisiana children sentenced to life imprisonment without parole for nonhomicide offenses. But a case I'd argued at the Supreme Court was part of a 2010 ruling that banned such sentences for juveniles, making our clients eligible for release.

Bryan Stevenson - lawyer, activist, writer
August 14, 2019 *New York Times*

The President nominates the judges on the Supreme Court and the U.S. Senate gets to vote to approve the nomination or not. Americans vote on who the president is and who the senators are. Five out of nine Supreme Court judges also ruled to weaken the 1965 Voting Rights Act, making it easier for states to pass more restrictive voting laws, like requiring certain kinds of IDs or making voter registration drives difficult--both of these things disproportionately affect people of color and poor people.

B.

If voting doesn't matter, then I'd like someone to explain to me why some politicians work so hard to make it so difficult. What are they afraid of? If it doesn't matter, why would they care? Well, it does matter a lot! What they're afraid of is how radically our country would change if all the decent and fair-minded citizens who have disenfranchised themselves by convincing themselves it's pointless to vote stopped giving their rights away willingly. Vote! If you weren't allowed to, I'm pretty certain you'd want to real bad.

Jeff Tweedy - musician, *Uncle Tupelo* and *Wilco*
November 1, 2018 *Pitchfork*

C.

I am a man of color who grew up in a household that wasn't the wealthiest. I worked in kitchens alongside immigrants. I had family with debt due to medical bills. I refuse to be afraid to vote. My grandmother had to sneak out of her mother's house to vote during the civil rights movement because her mother wouldn't let her vote out of fear that something bad would happen. Sometimes it feels helpless, but things do not fix themselves. We have to show up and do the work and make our voices heard.

Leon Bridges - R&B musician
November 1, 2018 *Pitchfork*

D.

*I'm voting to really learn more about how I can affect the environment around me. I know that sounds so canned, but I've known very little about the people representing me and where I live [New York City] in government. Some of that is from being so **transient (moving around a lot)** but also from being completely disillusioned by the whole system. These past few years I've found myself trying to read and learn more about local government. Even if it's a steep learning curve, it's fulfilling to know and help people around me who might not know.*

<div align="right">

Roberto Carlos Lange/Helado Negro - musician
November 1, 2018 *Pitchfork*

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E.

If you truly can't manage to care about voting for your own sake, then please do it for someone else. Think of the homeless, the trans people whose basic civil rights are at risk right now, the children being separated from their parents at the border, the kids who are scared to go to school and people afraid to pray because of our horrifying gun violence epidemic.

<div align="right">

Amber Coffman - musician, *Dirty Projectors*
November 1, 2018 *Pitchfork*

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F.

We need to use our influence to put the right people in power—leaders who are focused on creating stronger prison rehabilitation programs and updating old probation policies. That's why I'm encouraging everyone to vote this year, and to support lawmakers who are committed to changing the criminal justice system and improving our inner-city communities.

<div align="right">

Meek Mill - rapper, activist
November 1, 2018 *Pitchfork*

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G.

I always vote in the morning. Two reasons: First, so the day won't get away from me—I don't want there to be any excuse not to get into that booth! Second, I love that I VOTED sticker, because it proclaims that I exercised a right denied to so many for so long. On Election Day, I vote with them in mind. I rock my sticker and ask everyone I see, 'Did you vote?'

Ava DuVernay - filmmaker, *Selma*
OPRAH.com

H.

I never voted in a presidential election until Obama. I just wasn't excited about anyone. But the lesson I've learned is that you can't just vote when you're excited. When you say 'I'm not gonna vote,' you are voting—to hand over your power.

Tyler Perry - actor and director
OPRAH.com

I.

I'm voting to assure that no child has to fall asleep to the sound of roaring gunshots. I'm voting because 100 years ago I wouldn't have been able to.

Jaclyn Corin - Parkland student activist
November 4, 2018 *marieclaire.com*

J.

I believe we can quickly combat climate change if we elect officials with the courage to put effective regulation into place. I believe it is possible for us to live in a world where everyone feels safe regardless of their religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or race. I believe we can take care of each and every citizen; imagine if the United States prided itself on the fact that not one soul was left to die alone in the streets from drug abuse or mental illness. Imagine if not one family was left bankrupt because of some unforeseen accident or illness. Every single vote matters, especially with so many elections seemingly being stolen right out from under our noses. Races are won by small margins, so please get out and vote with your heart for the best candidate available at the time. If you do not vote, you are a part of the problem. We cannot afford to stay silent on the sidelines.

Jim James - musician, *My Morning Jacket*
November 1, 2018 *Pitchfork*

Registering to Vote in Massachusetts

1) Types of ID
Best
Drivers License/MA ID - no copy needed, just the number
Social Security Card/Number - no copy needed, just the number

OK - submit a copy with your application
Current Photo ID - school ID is OK
Current Utility Bill (in your name)
Bank Statement
Paycheck
Any Other Government Document (showing your name AND address)

2) The first question on the form asks you to state that you're a citizen
If you are undocumented, there are a lot of ways you can participate in elections, from campaigning for candidates to getting out the vote for issues that matter to you.

3) Students 16 and 17 years old can pre-register and will be notified by mail when they are moved onto the voter rolls.

4) To vote in any election, you must be registered 20 days before the election.
For the September 1st, 2020 Massachusetts state primary, that is August 12, 2020. For the general election on November 3rd, including electing the next U.S. president, the registration deadline is October 14th.

5) To vote, students must be 18 by the day of the election.

6) First time voters should have identification of some kind with them when they show up to vote, even if they submitted that information with their registration form. Put it aside some place safe where you will remember it so you can bring it with you on election day. You don't want a poll worker to challenge your vote! If anyone DOES challenge your vote, be sure to let us know so we can look into it.

Early voting will also be available before the general election in November.

To check your voting status, where to vote, and to see who your elected officials are:
https://www.sec.state.ma.us/VoterRegistrationSearch/MyVoterRegStatus.aspx
https://www.nonprofitvote.org/states/massachusetts/

Some studies have shown that one of the most effective ways to get young people, or any people, to the polls is peer support (gentle pressure!). If you think voting is important, let your friends know in person and on social media. Better yet, help them register and find their polling information.