

Teaching and Learning about the Constitution:

More Perfect Union Newsletter

Volume 1
Fall 2008

This newsletter is a publication of the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago and was developed with support from the Grand Victoria Foundation.

In this Issue:

Will Young Voters Elect the President

Teenagers and the News

Teachers Corner

Curriculum Developer:
Laurel Singleton

For more information, contact:

Marlene Stanley
TLC Project Director
Constitutional Rights
Foundation Chicago
312-663-9057
stanley@crfc.org

To learn more about MPU, go to our website at:
crfc.org/programs/mpu



Welcome to the inaugural issue of ***Teaching and Learning about the Constitution: More Perfect Union Newsletter***.

The newsletter is designed for middle-level educators and students engaged in teaching and learning about the Constitution, especially those who are using the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago's *More Perfect Union* curriculum.

Our goal with the ***MPU Newsletter*** is to provide readings on current "hot topics" of interest to young people, along with suggestions as to how teachers can use the readings as texts for discussion or prompts for various kinds of writing and assessment tasks.

In the future, we also plan to provide ideas for lessons that can be taught with attorneys engaged in CRFC's Lawyers in the Classroom project, as well as success stories from teachers using *More Perfect Union* in their classrooms.



Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago
407 S. Dearborn, Suite 1700 • Chicago, IL 60605
312-663-9057 • fax 312-663-4321 • www.crfc.org

Will Young Voters Elect the President?

“Young people don’t care about our nation’s future. They don’t vote and they’re not well informed.”

Do you agree with those statements? Many older adults would say they are true. But 2008 may be the year that young people show the rest of the nation that they do care. And they can make a difference.

Voting in the Primaries

Did you follow the primaries last spring? The political parties use primary elections to select their candidates for office. In 2008 the primaries involved choosing the presidential candidates for the two major parties.



Turnout was up among young voters in the 2008 primaries. For example, in Massachusetts, 25 percent of eligible voters under the age of 30 voted in the 2008 primary. Only 11 percent turned out for the primary in 2000. In Georgia, the numbers jumped from 7 percent to 21 percent. Growth was smaller in some states. Other states don’t have numbers for the primaries in 2000. Thus, they cannot make comparisons.

Young voters have had an impact on the Democratic primaries. Young Democrats like Senator Barack Obama. He won young voters in primary states by a margin of 56 to 36 percent over Senator Hillary Clinton. On the Republican side, young voters did not favor any one candidate.

The numbers might cause some Republicans to worry. Why? First, many more young people voted as Democrats than Republicans. When surveyed by *Reader’s Digest*, most young voters said they would probably continue voting for the same party in the future. This could cause problems for Republicans in the years to come.

Young voters are also affecting how campaigns are run. Senator Clinton announced she was running online. Senator Obama’s website is interactive. Senator John McCain has a MySpace page. The candidates are talking about issues young people care about.

Issues Important to Young Voters

What issues are most important to you? Think about the following issues and pick the ones that are most important to you.

- ❖ The war in Iraq
- ❖ Jobs for your parents or affordable housing for families
- ❖ Getting a good education
- ❖ Being able to see a doctor when you are sick
- ❖ Protecting the environment
- ❖ Changing U.S. policy about immigration
- ❖ Keeping our country safe

Surveys show that all of these issues are important to young voters. And many of these young voters want to work on solutions to the problems. They are committed to service that will help solve problems. According to a *Reader’s Digest* survey, they are looking for a candidate who believes in service as much as they do and who will ask Americans to serve their nation.

Some Concerns

Will this be the year youth voters decide the election? With 44 million Americans aged 18-29 eligible to vote, it might be. But it might not.

Older voters still turn out at a higher rate than young voters. For example, in the 2008 Illinois primary, 37 percent of voters age 30 and over cast ballots. Only 18 percent of those aged 18-29 did.

Not all young voters are turning out in equal numbers. Of young voters with some college, one in four voted on Super Tuesday (a day when 14 states had primaries). Among young voters with a high school education or less, only one in 14 voted.

The political parties are active at colleges. College students have lots of chances to learn about the issues. Students who go to better high schools sometimes have more opportunities to learn about government and to talk about issues than other students. Those same students, because they went to a better high school, may have a better chance of going to college. Some young people seem to have an advantage when it comes to getting their voices heard.

At least one study suggests that young people in the United States still don't know enough about government and the issues. Without knowledge, young people are in danger of becoming "political dropouts."



What Will You Do?

In just a few years, you and your classmates will be of voting age. What will you do? Will you be a voter? If you are not eligible to vote, how else might you make your voice heard?

The people who fought in World War II are often called The Greatest Generation. They have been given that name because they gave up a lot for their country.

Could today's young people be tomorrow's Greatest Generation? What could you do to earn that title for the young people coming of age in the 21st century?

Sources

Carl M. Cannon, "The Face Book Election," *Reader's Digest* (June 2008), pp. 110-118.

Henry Milner, *The Informed Political Participation of Young Canadians and Americans* (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2008), <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=300>.

Karlo Barrios Marcelo et al., *Young Voter Registration and Turnout Trends* (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement and Rock the Vote, 2008), <http://www.civicyouth.org/index.php?s=young+voter+registration+and+turnout+trends>.

Karlo Barrios Marcelo and Emily Hoban Kirby, *The Youth Vote in the 2008 Super Tuesday States* (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2008), <http://www.civicyouth.org/index.php?s=youth+vote+super+tuesday>.

Teenagers and the News

According to a 2007 survey, the younger you are, the less likely you are to pay attention to the news. Approximately 60 percent of teenagers pay little or no attention to the daily news. By comparison, only 48 percent of young adults (ages 18-30) and 23 percent of older adults are tuned-out.

Teenagers and young adults say they like Internet news sources. However, they still get most of their news from television news programs. This survey debunked the claim that young people get their news from comedy shows. Instead, they watch the same news shows adults watch—just not nearly as often.

Source: Young People and News (Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Harvard University, 2007).

Teacher's Corner

The “Will Young Voters Elect the President?” reading could be used as a supplement to *A More Perfect Union*, Lesson 6.3: Voting Rights and the Constitution. It can be used as the text for a discussion, as a prompt for a persuasive writing exercise, or as the reading for an extended-response assessment item.

Discussion

A number of questions that could be used to stimulate discussion are embedded within the reading. For example, the reading opens with two negative statements about young people and then asks: “Do you agree with those statements?” This question could serve as the starting point for a civil conversation using the reading as a text. Students could be encouraged to look for evidence supporting and refuting the statements within the text. Is the evidence stronger that young people do care about our nation’s future or that they are apathetic and uninformed?

A prep sheet for civil conversations is provided on the last page of the newsletter.

Persuasive Writing

Persuasion and elections are inextricably linked, so practicing persuasive writing on election-related topics is a natural fit. Students could use the reading as a source for developing a five-paragraph persuasive essay answering one of the following questions:

- ❖ Will young voters elect the President in 2008?
- ❖ Imagine you are an advisor to one of the presidential candidates. What would you have told the candidate to do to encourage young people to vote for the candidate’s party?
- ❖ Are today’s young people taking the steps necessary to become tomorrow’s Greatest Generation?

Extended-Response Assessment Item

When combined with the reading, the following questions provide an extended-response assessment:

1. Which statement about young voters is NOT true?
 - a. In Democratic primaries, young voters favored Senator Obama.
 - b. In Republican primaries, young voters did not have a clear favorite.
 - c. Young voters say they are likely to switch parties in the future.
 - d. Young voters are not concerned about the war in Iraq or the economy.
2. Why might youth voting statistics worry Republicans?
 - a. Because more youth are voting than in the 1980s and 1990s.
 - b. Because more youth voted in Democratic primaries than Republican primaries.
 - c. Because California did not see as much growth in youth voting as some states.
 - d. Because older voters still turn out at a higher rate than young voters.
3. How would you summarize the information about teenagers and the news?
 - a. Teenagers are about as well informed as young adults but less well informed than older adults.
 - b. Teenagers use the same basic news sources as adults but don’t use them as often.
 - c. Teenagers get most of their news from comedy shows.
 - d. Teenagers are better informed than young adults and older adults but use different news sources.

4. Aristotle said “If liberty and equality are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.” To what extent do you think young people—both young voters and teenagers—“share in the government to the utmost”?
- a. Scaffolded Prompt: Aristotle said “If liberty and equality are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.” To what extent do you think young people—both young voters and teenagers—“share in the government to the utmost”? Find the **key ideas** in the reading about the participation of young people. **Make references to the text**, and **connect** to other things you have learned about voting and civic participation. **Extend your response** by thinking about current events that may shed light on the question. Use evidence from the reading and your own knowledge to formulate and support your position on the question.

Insights from Research: What Features Make Education About Elections Effective?

Kids Voting is an election-season educational program that research has demonstrated has strong and long-lasting impact. A recent study identified the features of the program that contribute to the long-term impact on young people’s civic development: frequent classroom discussions about election issues, teacher encouragement of opinion expression, and student participation in get-out-the-vote drives. The researchers recommend the following to educators interested in civic development:

- ❖ Incorporate parents.
- ❖ Deploy media in civic learning.
- ❖ Teach to coincide with big political events.
- ❖ Translate classroom instruction into community activism.
- ❖ Promote discussion on topics of greatest relevance to youth.
- ❖ Do not shy away from topical debates
- ❖ Do not give up on low-income students.
- ❖ Promote citizenship beyond voting.

Source: Michael McDevitt and Spiro Kiouisis, Experiments in Political Socialization: Kids Voting USA as a Model for Civic Education Reform (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2006).

Civil Conversation

Rules for Civil Conversations

1. Read the text as if it were written by someone you really respect.
2. Participate in the conversation and invite others to participate.
3. Listen carefully to what others are saying.
4. Ask clarifying questions if you do not understand a point raised.
5. Be respectful of what others are saying.
6. Refer to the text to support your ideas.
7. Focus on ideas, not personalities.

Civil Conversation Reading Guide

Reading _____

Read through the entire selection without stopping to think about any particular section. Pay attention to your first impression as to what the reading is about. Look for the main points and then go back and re-read it. Briefly answer the following.

1. This selection is about _____
2. The main points are:
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
3. In the reading, I agree with _____
4. In the reading, I disagree with _____
5. What are two questions about this reading that you think need to be discussed? (The best questions for discussion are ones that have no simple answer, ones than can use materials in the text as evidence.)

The next two questions should be answered after you hold your civil conversation.

6. What did you learn from the civil conversation?
7. What common ground did you find with other members of the group?

Source: Constitutional Rights Foundation.