

Free and Fair Elections Lesson

Overview

A mark of a successful democracy is a peaceful transfer of power after free and fair elections. This activity covers the necessary components of electoral integrity in a democratic society.

Teacher Directions

1. First, introduce the concept of universal human rights:

Human rights are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings - they are not granted by any state. These universal rights are inherent to us all.

2. Next, as a class, read The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Article 21 and ‘unpack’ what it means by leading a whole class exploration of the following questions:

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Article 21 reads:

“The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”

Discuss:

- What does it mean to have periodic elections? Why does frequency matter?
 - What about genuine elections? What does that mean to you?
 - What would universal and equal suffrage look like in our country?
 - Why do you think it matters that votes are secret?
 - If voting procedures are ‘free,’ what does that mean to you?
3. Explain that, because of federalism, in the United States there are many ‘layers’ of government that collaborate to ensure free and fair elections. Break the students into groups of 4-6. Have them examine the Department of Homeland Security election flowchart and come up with their group’s recommendations to both the Department of Homeland Security and the Oregon Secretary of State’s pages on election security and discuss the following:
<https://www.dhs.gov/topics/election-security>
<https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Pages/security.aspx>
 - Which of the components of our elections process do you think is the most vulnerable and in need of oversight? Explain your reasoning.
 - Oregon’s Secretary of State oversees the election process in our state. What advice would you give to the current elected official in that important position?
 4. Have each group report out using either a poster or a slide so the whole class can see their thinking.



5. Extend the lesson. In 2020, Facing History and Ourselves published this primer on the 8 standards for free and fair elections from Facing History & Ourselves.

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/free-fair-elections>

- Ask students to evaluate and update the primer based on what they are reading in this week's current event news resources.
 - i. What has changed since 2024?
 - ii. How can we respond to the realities of the present in order to ensure election integrity?