

Voting with your Feet

Constitutional Amendment Voting Activity for Students



Introduction

Every election cycle, 1.6 million Arkansans head to the polls to vote. But not everyone votes on statewide ballot issues. Many voters discover the proposed laws or constitutional amendments as they receive their ballot on Election Day. Others may have heard about an issue on TV or on social media, but aren't familiar with all the details or potential consequences of the law passing or failing.

This activity provides students an opportunity to learn about Arkansas ballot issues and discuss their decisions in a respectful manner. Students will watch short YouTube videos on ballot issues prepared by the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's Public Policy Center before voting and discussing the measures. This exercise provides students with a forum to discover direct democracy and use public speaking skills.

Objectives

Participants will:

- Learn what a ballot issue is.
- Practice and develop communication, problem solving, and receiving/analyzing skills.
- Understand the need to search for neutral information about a proposed ballot issue.

Main Teaching Points

- Research helps voters make an informed decision on ballot issues.
- Communication skills are necessary to effectively express yourself and impact others.
- Show that they can respect each other in discussions.

Lesson Materials

- Public Policy Center YouTube Videos (<https://www.youtube.com/user/ARextension>)
- Computer and monitor to play videos
- Internet access
- Arkansas Ballot Issue Voter Guide (A copy can be downloaded at www.uaex.edu/ballot)
- Pens and paper for students to use if they want to write anything down while watching videos

Suggestions for Teaching

The Public Policy Center posts videos to YouTube explaining ballot issues a few months before the election. If current videos are not available, consider using videos from past elections.

- Ensure you have a working Internet connection and can play the YouTube videos ahead of time to reduce technical difficulties and lost activity time. Have videos cued up and ready to play before starting activity.

1. Introducing Ballot Issues

Start by asking students to raise their hand if they know what a constitutional amendment is. Ask a student who raised a hand to define his/her understanding of a ballot issue.

Explain how a constitutional amendment is a change to the Arkansas constitution, or fundamental rules that the state operates under, initiated by state legislators or voters.

Discuss how legislators have the authority to refer three constitutional amendments each election cycle to voters to approve or disapprove.

Discuss how voters have the right to propose constitutional amendments or new state laws to voters on the statewide ballot. These issues only appear on the ballot if supporters are successful in gathering a certain number of signatures from registered voters.

2. The Role of the Public Policy Center

Explain how the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service researches each ballot issue and publishes a fact sheet or report on the statewide issues to help voters make an informed decision on Election Day. Reinforce that these are neutral reviews that don't take a side and don't tell people how they should vote.

Explain how campaigns can define the issue differently depending on their views, and how someone who has not done their own research or critical review of the issue can be misinformed about the potential consequences of a ballot issue passing or failing.

Voting with Your Feet Activity

- Play YouTube video describing a ballot issue.
- Use the voter guide to cover key points about the issue just to make sure they all understand what the ballot issue is.
- After the video ends, ask students to stand up and move to one side of the room if they are “for” the ballot issue and to another side of the room if they are “against” it.
- Give multiple kids the opportunity to defend their decision.
- Moderate the discussion. If the discussion becomes loud or heated, consider asking one of these questions:
 - What’s the difference between discussing and fighting?
 - Is it a good or a bad discussion when people yell? Why or why not?
 - Are discussions better when people have reasons and evidence to support their ideas?
 - How can people show they respect each other in discussions?
- Wrap up an issue by asking if anyone has changed their stance on the issue after hearing everyone’s opinions.
- Move on to another video and repeat steps.

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