

## **Why Voting Matters**

**It makes us equal.** Each of us has one and only one vote. During elections, the act of voting is one of the few times when all adults in the U.S. have an equal say. No matter how much money you have or who your friends are, you only get one vote.

**Each vote sends a message.** Even if the person or issue you vote for loses, your vote matters because it lets winners and losers know who supports their points of view.

**Politicians notice who is and isn't voting.** In the U.S., the highest voter turnout is among seniors. So it's no surprise that politicians are going to spend a lot of time on issues that are important to older people, like Social Security and Medicare. Younger voters, 18-24 year-olds, haven't voted in high numbers recently, so it's easier for politicians to pay less attention to the issues that are important to young people.

**Whoever wins has the power to impact your life.** The government is in charge of making important decisions that impact almost every aspect of your life, like...

- Your school such as what gets taught, how many kids are in your class
- The environment including how clean your air and water will be
- Your health including whether or not you and your family can get health insurance
- Who gets to visit, work and live in our country
- Your safety including how big your police and fire departments are
- How much money we spend on the military and whether we go to war

## **How the Process Works**

### **Registration: Sign Up!**

Before you can vote, you have to register as a voter in your state. Registration helps your local polling office keep track of who can and did vote. This also helps them to make sure no one votes more than once or tries to vote under someone else's name. In Florida, voters must be registered at least 29 days in advance of a primary or election and voter registration is canceled when one registers in another state, dies, or participates in no election contests, including primaries and special elections, for at least ten years.

### **The Parties: Sizing up the Competition**

In the U.S., most of our elected officials are from two large parties, Democrats or Republicans. However, there are also people who run for office that are not from either one of those parties. These other candidates come from what are called 'Third Parties' like the Communist Party, Green Party, Libertarian Party, and Socialist Party.

### **The Primaries and Caucuses: Narrowing Down the Pack**

Only one candidate from each party can run in the final election. That's where primaries and caucuses come in. Between late January and early June during the year of a general election, a few states hold caucuses, but most states choose their candidate using primary elections. Caucuses are small groups of people getting together to decide whom they want to support as their party's candidate. Primaries are elections where everyone in the party who is interested votes for the party candidate. In Florida, you must be a registered member of a party in order to participate in the primary. If none of the candidates earn at least 50% of the vote, a runoff primary takes place.

### **The Conventions: Party-Time, Politicians Style**

During a presidential election, after the primaries and caucuses, the major parties hold

conventions to officially nominate their candidate for president.

After the candidates are nominated, their names are officially submitted to each state's chief election official so that they will appear on the general election ballot.

### **The General Election**

Now that each party has determined their candidates, the general election process begins.

Candidates spend weeks campaigning in an attempt to win the support of voters. Even though a voter may belong to a particular party, he or she may vote for candidates from any party.

Finally on Election Day, people exercise their right to vote.

In Florida, registered voters vote for candidates for local, state, and federal offices. They also vote on amendments, or changes, to the Florida Constitution. Voters also decide if justices of the Florida Supreme Court and judges of district courts can retain, or keep, their position on the court.

### **Notes from Class Discussion**

Adapted from: <http://pbskids.org/zoom/fromyou/elections/elections101.html>, Accessed November 2013 and <http://thefloridavoter.org/files/download/175>