

Question Addressed: What are two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy?

Lesson Title: How to Participate in a Democracy

Target Audience: Third Grade Classroom

Lesson Objective: Students will be able to name at least two ways that Americans can participate in their democracy and describe how those actions can help make a difference.

Standard: Citizenship includes civic rights and responsibilities.

Students will learn that *"Active, engaged, and informed citizens demonstrate an understanding of the significance of civic values, the rights of citizenship, and the role of the individual in a democratic society."*

5.6a: *Citizens have rights and responsibilities. These include respecting the rights of others, voting, and being informed about and involved in the political process.*

5.6b: *Effective, informed citizenship is important for maintaining a democratic society, which includes participation in activities such as community service, voting, and advocacy.*

Material:

- Teacher Created Slides
 - Download the slides here:
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1KUGPk3j806c_AaU-b1_-VTC5v3lfsdYCrVkSwbZe-1Q/copy?usp=sharing
- Chime or Music
- White Board/Marker or Smart Board
- Ballot slips and box
- Chart paper and markers for posters
- Letter templates
- Laptop/tablets for blog posts (optional)
- Exit Ticket Slips

Procedure: Warm Up: Who's the Boss? YOU are! (5-7 minutes)

Students imagine the classroom as a democratic country in which the teacher in charge was someone they had voted for.

Prompt: *"What's one thing you want to tell me as your leader that you would change or add to make our classroom an even better place for everyone? Think for a minute."*

Mingle- Pair-Share: Students walk around the room while music plays. When the music stops, they find a partner and share their idea. Repeat the Mingle-Pair Share a second time so students share with a new partner.

Class Share: Invite 2-3 students to share their ideas or their partner's ideas aloud. Examples might include: *"We should have longer recess!" "We should vote on classroom jobs!" "We should play more math games!"*

Class Vote: Let's vote to see which idea is most important to you? Create a T-chart on the board based on their suggestions. Invite students to come up and place an X under the idea they choose. Quickly tally votes.

Transition to Lesson: "Did you notice how we just decided on the most important idea together by voting? That's something people do in real life too! In America, the people help decide the rules, that's called a **democracy**. But besides voting, there are other ways regular people, like you and me, can help make decisions or create change! That's what we're going to learn today!"

Lesson: (10-15 minutes)

Scenario 1: "Meet Sara! Sara is a 5th grader at a NYC public school. She notices that the school playground is old, broken, and sometimes even unsafe. She and her friends have few places to play, and the broken equipment makes recess less fun. Sara decides she wants to do something about it.

First, Sara talks to her teacher and classmates about how important a safe playground is for exercise, fun, and mental health. Together, they come up with ideas for new equipment and ways to improve the space.

Sara then writes a **letter to her local City Council Member** explaining the problem. In her letter, she describes the broken equipment, explains why having a safe playground matters for students, and politely asks for help in getting the playground fixed. She even includes a few suggestions for new equipment and cleaner spaces.

To build more support, Sara also helps create a **petition** for students, teachers, and parents to sign. She collects signatures to show that many people care about this issue.

Finally, her class presents the petition and Sara's letter to the principal, who agrees to help contact the City Council Member and the Parks Department. Sara feels proud because she learned that even as a 5th grader, she can use her voice to make a difference in her school and community. Sara feels proud because she learned that even as a 5th grader, she can use her voice to make a difference in her school and community."

Turn & Talk: "What are some ways Sara worked to solve the playground problem?"

(Higher Order Thinking Question "What did Sara do that shows she was participating in our democracy?"

Teacher: “Yes, Sara did all of these things to participate in our democracy. She created a community group, we call this a civic group. A civic group is a group of regular citizens, like you and I, who volunteer their time to help make their neighborhood, city or country a better place. She also wrote a letter to an elected official to address the community issue.”

Scenario 2:

“Aliya is a third grader in a NYC public school. Every morning, when she walks to school, she notices that the sidewalks around the school are full of trash and broken glass. Aliya and her friends feel upset because it makes their neighborhood look dirty and unsafe.

Aliya decides she wants to do something about it. Her teacher encourages her to write a **letter to the local newspaper** explaining the problem. In her letter, Aliya describes how the litter makes it dangerous for kids to walk to school and asks for more garbage cans and regular cleanups.

She also helps her class create a **school blog post** where they share pictures of the litter and ask neighbors to help keep the streets clean by posting online.”

Turn and Talk: How is Aliya participating in our democracy? How are Aliya and her classmates using their voices to make a difference?

Answer: “That’s right, writing to a newspaper or posting on a blog shows participation in our democracy. Aliya and her classmates are using their voices to make a difference by **writing a letter to the local newspaper** to share their concerns about the litter around their school. They are also **posting on their school blog** to show pictures of the problem and ask the community to help keep the neighborhood clean. By speaking up and raising awareness, they are participating in democracy and trying to make their community safer and better for everyone.”

Summary: Today, we just learned a few ways that people can participate in a democracy! We learned that you can vote, join a civic group, write to an elected official, write a letter to a local newspaper or even post about it online!

“Before we do our group work, let’s quickly review some of the vocabulary words we learned today.”

Bridge to Practice: Participation in Democracy Stations (20 minutes)

“Today, we’re going to practice ways people can participate in a democracy by rotating through 4 fun centers. Each center shows a different way you can make your voice heard and help your community.”

Center 1: Voting Booth

In this center:

You will practice voting by choosing your favorite class improvement idea (like longer recess or

more art time). Fill out a simple ballot, place it in the ballot box, and tally the votes when everyone is done.

** This shows how people participate by voting to make decisions.*

Center 2: Create a Civic Group

In this center:

You will work with your group to think of a problem in your school or neighborhood (like litter or playground safety). Together, brainstorm a name for your civic group and make a mini-poster that shows the problem you want to fix and how you'll help.

** This shows how people join together to improve their community.*

Center 3: Write to an Elected Official

In this center:

You will write a short letter to a real or imaginary elected official (like the mayor or city council member) about a problem you want them to fix in your neighborhood or school. Be sure to explain the problem and ask them to help!

** This shows how people share their opinions with leaders.*

Center 4: Write to a Newspaper / Start a Blog

In this center:

You will write a short letter to a newspaper OR create a blog post sharing your opinion about a problem in your community. You can include a drawing or title to get people's attention!

**This shows how people raise awareness by sharing ideas with the public.*

Closing Circle: (5 minutes)

Do a gallery walk of what the students came up with during their center work

Assessment: (2 minutes)

Formative: Observation during centers, turn and talks and class discussions

Summative:

- Products of center activities
- Exit Slip: "Name two ways you can participate in a democracy and explain how it helps your community"

Differentiation:

Advanced Students:

- Challenge students to propose multiple solutions to their chosen problem

- Encourage more detailed letters or posters with persuasive language.

ENL Students:

- Provide sentence starters, visuals, and vocabulary cards (e.g., "I think we should...", "Dear Mayor...").
- Pair with supportive peers for partner discussions.

Students with Disabilities:

- Offer modified templates for writing tasks.
- Allow drawing or verbal dictation instead of full writing.
- Provide extra time or use scribing if needed.

Visual Learners

- Use anchor charts with images to explain civic actions
- Provide illustrated examples of letters, posters, and ballots.
- Visual steps for station tasks posted at each center

