



TEXELECTS

A CREATIVE APPROACH TO DEMOCRACY

Guide to Texas Midterms in 4 Steps

Overview

Three things to know...

Suggested Lessons: Collectively, the following sequence of lessons are designed to develop nuanced understandings of political participation and inspire students' final pieces. They are not mandatory, but may be valuable if students lack an understanding of the electoral process, Texas midterms, and the importance of voting. If students do not understand the purpose and mechanics behind the electoral process it will be difficult to create a message that compels others to engage in the process.

Art as a Tool: The lessons do not teach specific art skills (i.e writing a narrative poem or figure drawing), but rather uses the arts as a tool to understand the who, what, where, when, why, and how of voting. The purpose of this design is to allow educators flexibility in the implementation of the project and to allow artists autonomy in how to use their talents to create a message.

Educator Flexibility: Educators or facilitators can adapt this project to meet their curricular or program needs. For example, if students are studying allegory, invite them to create an allegorical piece that encourages voting in midterms. Lessons may also be broken up to fit schedule needs.

Goals

- Students will increase civic knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to engage effectively in the electoral process.
- Students will shape perspectives on why one should consider voting.
- Students will understand the mechanics of voting in Texas.
- Students will create a visual art piece, film, or creative writing piece that brings awareness to and encourages one to vote in midterm elections.

Getting Started

- Identify an educator to work with. TexElects lends itself to interdisciplinary teaching, this will enhance the program experience and effectiveness.
- Have students create a "TexElects Journal" to document work created throughout the lessons. They will use their collective work to inspire their final piece.
- Prepare a "TexElects Word Wall" that students can add words/ideas to as they move through the lessons. The word wall will serve as a source of inspiration for their final pieces.



Contents

Step 1: Begin the Conversation	3
Activity One: Perspectives in Democracy.....	3
Activity Two: Texas Midterm Elections.....	4
Step 2: Register	5
Activity One: Where We’ve Been, Where We Are, and Where We’re Going.....	5
Activity Two: The Power Narrative.....	6
Activity Three: Sign Me Up.....	7
Step 3: Get Informed	8
Activity One: Welcome to the Party.....	8
Activity Two: Know the Issues.....	9
Activity Three: Partisan vs. Non-Partisan.....	9
Step 4: Vote	10
Activity One: Voting Skills.....	10
Activity Two: Voting Culture Reimagined.....	11



STEP 1: Begin the Conversation

TEXELECTS PROJECT CONNECTION

When creating a message, the first step is to establish a *goal*. The goal of TexElects is to create a message that encourages participation in the 2018 Texas Midterm Elections. The next step is to clearly understand and identify the need. After completing Step One, students will better understand midterm elections and why Texas needs TexElects messages to drive voter turnout.

STEP 1 OBJECTIVES

Students will relate classic poetry to perspectives in democracy.

Students will deepen understanding to what makes a democracy work.

Students will explore the aspects of Texas Midterm Elections.

STEP 1 TEKS

Art (*Level II*)
1.d, 2.d

U.S. Government
14.b, 14.c, 15.c

ELA
3, 9.c

Activity One: The Purpose of Democracy (45 Minutes)

Focus Question: What does participating in a democracy mean to me?

Materials

“[The Cold Within](#)” Poem by James Patrick Kinney
Colored Pencils, Markers
TexElects Student Journal

Engage

Ask students to free-write on the question, “What is a democracy?” in their TexElects journal. Set a timer for 5 to 10 minutes. Tell them to write whatever comes to mind - words, ideas, personal stories and tell them not to worry about grammar or structure, just write non-stop without pausing or second guessing.

Process

1. Project the poem, “The Cold Within” by James Patrick Kinney for all to see. Conceal the title of the poem. Have students read the poem.
2. After reading the poem, on a blank piece of paper or in their journal, give students 5 minutes to jot down interesting, important or insightful ideas (these can be themes/messages) about the poem. Allow students to share one idea with the class.
3. Color, Symbol, Image:
 - Ask students to select a color that captures the mood, tone or essence of the poem and write the name of the color below the interesting, important or insightful ideas explaining why they chose that color. Allow students to share with the class or with a partner.
 - Ask students to draw a symbol (a simple representation) that best captures the essence of the poem and write an explanation for the symbol. For example, a circle might represent completeness. Allow students to share with the class or with a partner.
 - Finally, ask students to create an image that captures the essence of the text. Images do not include words. Encourage students to use their symbols and colors for inspiration. Allow students to share with the class or with a partner.
4. Explain to students that many perceive the purpose of a democracy is to serve the **common good**. Read the following quotes to your students:
 - “A nation is formed by the willingness of each of us to share in the responsibility for upholding the common good. A government is invigorated when each one of us is willing to participate in shaping the future of this nation. In this election year, we must define The “Common Good” and begin again to shape a common future. Let each person do his or her part.” – **U.S. Representative Barbara Jordan**
 - “Politics appears to be the master art for it includes so many others and its purpose is the good of man. While it is worthy to perfect one man, it is finer and more godlike to perfect a nation, which has the purpose the common good of men.” – **Aristotle, circa 320 BCE**
5. Discuss: Ask students, “What does each quote mean? Can you interpret each quote in your own words? Do you agree with each quote? Why or why not?”

Reflection

In your opinion, does one have a responsibility to serve common good of society? If so, what are those responsibilities?
Can you relate “The Cold Within” to your community? To a democracy?

REMEMBER: Invite students to add words or ideas to the TexElects word wall.

Activity Two: Texas Midterm Elections (30 Minutes)

Focus Question: What are midterm elections?

Materials

Chart Paper
Digital Device with Internet Connection for Student Research

Engage

Ask the students to guess the answer to the following questions:

- 1) Out of all the 50 states plus the District of Columbia, what did Texas rank in voter turnout for the 2016 Presidential Election? Collect several guesses before revealing the answer. **Texas came in 47th, which this is an improvement from 2012, where Texas came in 49th.**
- 2) What did Texas rank in voter turnout for the 2014 Midterm Election? **49th**

Process

1. Tell students voter turnout is traditionally lower during midterm elections. Ask students if they are familiar with Midterm Elections. Explain that midterm elections are general elections in the United States that are held two years after the presidential elections where voters choose members of congress, as well as state and local elected officials. Things to know:
 - 36 states will elect governors in the 2018 Midterm Elections, including Texas.
 - Midterm elections determine which political party will control the two chambers of the U.S. Congress for upcoming two years. (All 435 seats of the house and 1/3 of the senate seats will be contested in 2018). In 2018, Texas voters will choose 36 U.S. House members and 1 U.S. Senate member.
 - State and local winners will likely have a greater effect on everyday life of Texans in their communities than US congress winners. For a list of all local and state offices up for election in 2018 please visit the Texas Secretary of State [here](#).
 - Midterm election turnouts are often a reflection of how the public views the President's performance and often results in the President's opposing political party controlling one or both chambers of Congress.
2. In pairs, assign students one "office" from list of offices up for election in 2018. Allow groups 10 minutes to research at least one responsibility for the office they were assigned and note something interesting to them about the role of the office. For example, one group will be assigned to research the Lieutenant Governor and another would be assigned to research the Attorney General.
3. Create a three-columned "Midterm Election Chart" on chart paper. Title the first column "Office," the second "Responsibilities/ Something Interesting," and the third "Impact on Day-today Life"
4. After allotting time to research, ask each pair to write their findings on the chart and to share their findings/ideas with the class.
5. To go deeper, ask students to create a skit, write a short story, or create a symbol to communicate how an office holder's decisions impact their lives.

Reflection

What are the implications of low voter turnout?

List the ways in which the Midterm election outcomes could affect your community and the issues that are important.

Why do you think midterm elections have such a low voter turnout compared to the presidential elections?

REMEMBER: Invite students to add words or ideas to the TexElects word wall.

*"Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves and the only way they could do this is by not voting."
-- Franklin D. Roosevelt*

STEP 2: Register

TEXELECTS PROJECT CONNECTION

When creating a message it is important to understand your audience - which in this case is the Texas electorate. Step Two invites students to consider obstacles and opportunities for electoral engagement, cultivating empathy for and understanding of Texas voters. They will also discover, who can vote, who does vote, and how to register to vote.

STEP 2 OBJECTIVES

Students will learn who is eligible to vote in the U.S.

Students will learn how to register to vote in Texas.

Students will create Stories that bring to life the difference seen in Texas political participation.

Students will use art as a primary resource to understand historical perspectives in voting and inform their current perspective on voting.

STEP 2 TEKS

Art (*Level II*)

1.a, 3.a, 4.b

U.S. History:

9.a

U.S. Government

14.d, 15.c

Activity One: Where We've Been, Where We Are, and

Focus Question: Who can vote?

Materials

Images of historical perspectives in voting, choose from the following or select an image you prefer that illustrates a historical perspective in voting: [The First Vote](#), [The 1920s . . .](#), [The Migrants Arrive and Cast Their Ballots](#), [Mrs. Woodhull asserting her right to vote](#)
TexElects Journals

Digital device with internet connection to project images

Engage: Display an image depicting historical perspectives in voting, invite students to study the image.

Process

1. “3-2-1 *Bridge Activity*”: In their TexElects journals, ask students to write down **3 words** they think of when they look at the image. Then ask them to write down **2 ideas** they have about the image, begin these sentences with, “I think...” Finally, ask students to write down **1 question** they have about the image. Tell students there aren’t any right or wrong answers.

2. Watch the video “[Vote America](#)” produced by the Texas Young Lawyers Association. This resource poignantly chronicles the history of voting rights in the U.S. : The struggles of the civil rights era, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and the 15th, 19th, and 26th amendments to the U.S. (**NOTE:** This video is 28 minutes long, if time is limited, please break viewing into two separate days.)

3. “3-2-1 *Bridge Activity*” *Continued*: Ask students to write down **3 words** they think of when they look at the image. Then ask them to write down **2 ideas** they have about the Image, begin these sentences with, “I think...” Finally, ask students to write down **1 question** they still have about the image.

4. Have students explain to a partner how and why their thinking has changed.

Reflection

Invite students to step inside the perspective of a person from the image. What might this person care about, how do they feel about voting, what are their motivations?

Who is eligible vote in the US?

What is your vision for voting in America 20 years from now?

REMEMBER: Invite students to add words or ideas to the TexElects word wall.

Activity Two: The Power Narrative (30minutes)

Focus Question: Who votes, who doesn't, why?

Materials

TexElects Journals

“Age and Political Participation” Graph

Engage: Texas Voters Activity:

A. Take a class vote. Ask everyone who would vote for the following policy to raise their hand “The legal age for playing video games will be 16” (note: this policy choice is optional, choose one that would motivate a student majority vote against.) Raise your (the educator’s) hand to vote for the policy.

B. Tell students that if this was a real policy up for a vote in Texas, Texas voting trends tell us that it would pass. Display the following data: **Only 32% of 18-24 year-olds voted in the 2016 election, compared to 69% of citizens over the age of 65.**

C. Finish by reading the following quote. After reading, ask students who has power in Texas? *“People often say that, in a democracy, decisions are made by a majority of the people. Of course, that is not true... Decisions are made by a majority of those who make themselves heard and who vote— a very different thing.”*- **U.S. Rep. Walter H. Judd of Minnesota**

Process

1. Display the “Age and Political Participation” graph. In groups, ask students to study the graph and answer the following question: What is the story this graph is telling us? Ask students to write their thoughts in their TexElects journals. Invite groups to share.
3. Ask groups to create a fictional character (give them a name, occupation, family life, goals, hobbies, etc.) for 2 or the age groups represented. Ask them to consider/imagine what obstacles exist that might prevent their specific characters from participating? What opportunities might they have to participate? Ask teams to select two people from their team to “play” one of the characters. Ask them to stand up and share their fictional narratives. Afterwards, invite groups to explain their character choices—which characters exercised power?
4. Inform students that like age, the probability of a citizen voting also increases as income and education increases. Ask students why they think this is, give ample time for debate and discussion.

Reflection

Why do you think voter turnout in Texas is so low, especially among young people? In what ways does voting give you power?

Activity Three: Sign Me Up! (30 minutes)

Focus Question: How does one register to vote?

Process

1. Review with students the qualifications required to be able to register to vote in Texas. You are eligible to vote if ...

- You are a United States citizen;
- You are a resident of the county where you submit the application;
- You are at least 18 years old on Election Day; This means you can register to vote any time after you have reached the age of 17 years and 10 months so that your registration can be processed in time for an election falling on or after you turn 18 years old
- You are not a convicted felon (you may be eligible to vote if you have completed your sentence, probation, and parole)
- You have not been declared by a court exercising probate jurisdiction to be either totally mentally incapacitated or partially mentally incapacitated without the right to vote.

2. Debate Activity: Ask each question below. Ask students who agree with the statement to move to the right side of the room, and those who disagree to the left.

- The voting age should be lowered to 16?
- Convicted felons should be eligible to vote before they have completed their sentence, probation or parole?
- Citizens should be required by US law to vote.

After each statement. Pair students with opposing views together. Allow each person five minutes to share their reasons why they agree/disagree with the statement. Invite each pair to share out.

3. Contact your **High School Voter Deputy Registrar (HSDR)**, a required position by the Texas Election Code, this is the person on campus that is required to offer eligible students the opportunity to register to vote twice an academic school year. This person is usually the principal, but the principal may designate one person to act as the HSDR in their place. If eligible students have not registered yet, schedule a time with the HSDR to make a class visit and register eligible voters. For more info on how to register to vote in Texas visit

VoteTexas.gov.

4. If time and resources permits, plan a school wide voter registration drive, use the Texas League of Women Voters

[Planning a High School Voter Registration Drive](#) as a resource.

5. **Address Seniors:** High school seniors that will be moving away from home after graduation may register to vote using their parents' address or their new home address. If they use their parents' address they must return to that county to vote or vote early by mail. For additional information on voting away from home please visit VoteTexas.gov.

IMPORTANT: You must register to vote 30 days before an election. This means to vote in the Primary election on March 6, 2018, you must be registered by **February 5, 2018**. To vote in Texas midterm election on November 6, 2018, one must register by **October 9, 2018**.

Reflection

Just over 4.5 million people who are of voting age in Texas did not register to vote. If a person is eligible, why do you think they choose not to register to vote? How would you persuade one to register to vote?

Mark Your Calendars!
March 6, 2018: Primary Election
November 6, 2018: General Election

STEP 3: Get Informed

TEXELECTS PROJECT CONNECTION

TexElects messages must be non-partisan in order to be eligible to compete. Partisan messages can be polarizing and may discourage TexElects supporters. After completing Step 3, students will learn the ideology and imagery that shapes political parties and be better prepared to create non-partisan pieces. Second, students need to know what issues might compel one to vote .

STEP 3 OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze political imagery to understand what symbols and ideologies shape the two major political parties.

Students will create tableaus to illustrate political ideologies on social issues.

Students will deepen understandings of partisan vs. non-partisan.

Students will deepen comprehension of social issues by creating tableaus.

Students will reflect on social issues that matter to them.

STEP 3 TEKS

Art (*level II*)

1.a, 1.d, 4.b

Theatre

1.a, 2.e

U.S. Government

11.a, 15.c

Activity One: Welcome to the Party (30 Minutes)

Focus Question: What shapes the identity of the two main political parties in the U.S?

Materials

1932 Political Campaign Image

Chart Paper & Marker

Engage: Draw an image of a heart or display a heart digitally. Ask students to reflect on what comes to mind when they think of a heart. Provide an opportunity to share their thoughts with the class. Repeat the process for a peace sign. Explain that symbolism is the use of images to convey an idea or qualities. For example, a heart is an organ, but it represents love; a peace sign represents peace.

Process

1. Invite students to study the political campaign image. Ask the following viewing questions:

- What’s going on in this image? What do you see that supports your ideas? (Ask these two questions repeatedly until most students have shared their thoughts.)
- What is the cultural meaning and context of the work of art?
- What symbolic images do you see? What do they represent?
- What message/messages is the cartoonist trying to convey? What do you see that supports your ideas? (NOTE: If students are not yet familiar with the political symbols, focus on using the text and images to interpret the message)

2. The viewing questions above will tap into students’ prior knowledge of our two-party system. After gauging their understandings, if necessary, explain that the two-party system, like the one we have in the U.S., is a political system where two parties dominate the government. In the U.S. those parties are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Note that though other parties do exist - Libertarian, Green and a few others- they have been small players throughout U.S. History. For an additional resource on the two party system watch the We The Voters film “American Party Animals” and discuss.

3. Create a two column chart on chart paper, label one column “Democratic Party” and the other, “Republican Party”.

4. Review political symbolism discovered in the image: colors, text, animals, image positioning. Add findings to the corresponding place on the chart.

Reflection

In what ways does the image studied above show partisanship - favoring one party over the other? How could you change it to be non-partisan?

Activity Two: Know the Issues (45 minutes)

Focus Question: What issues might compel me to vote?

Materials

[Summary of 2016 Party Platforms](#) from KQED News - The Lowdown

(Access entire 2016 Democratic Party Platform [here.](#))

(Access entire 2016 Republican Party Platform [here.](#))

TexElects Journals

Engage: Watch “[The Big Sort](#),” one of the nine films that make up Postcards from the Great Divide - a series produced by PBS that illustrates the political divide in our country.

Process

1. Discuss: Our two major parties have very different ideas for the trajectory of America and the role that government should play in our lives. Being informed of where parties stand on the issues will help inform your decisions at the polls and shape your vision for our country. A **Party Platform** is a set of beliefs, goals and principles created by the party and presented to the public in hopes of garnering support.
2. Divide students into groups of 3 to 4. Explain to groups that they will be assigned to study both parties’ perspectives on an issue. They will then work together to create two tableaus to represent each party’s view on the same issue. A “**tableau**” is a theatrical learning technique where students create a still picture with their bodies to communicate the meaning of an idea or concept.
3. Select an issue from the 2016 Party Platform list. As a class, paraphrase the views of each party on the issue. Ask for three volunteers to come up and work with you to model how to create a tableau. Work with students in choosing gestures, facial expressions, and positions to best capture the idea.
4. Secretly assign each group an issue. It is important other groups do not know the assigned issues of others. Ask groups to paraphrase the both sides of the issue and create a tableau for each side and write their ideas in their journals. Provide students ample time to plan and rehearse.
5. Ask each team to present both scenes to the class. Ask the class questions to determine the meaning, “What’s happening in this scene? What do you see that supports your ideas?” If students are having difficult time interpreting meaning, allow a team member to give a clue. After questioning, allow each team to explain their scene and why they made the choices they made.

Reflection:

Which issues matter most to me? How might decisions on these issues affect me and my community? What questions do I still have about important issues?

Activity Three: Partisan vs. Non-Partisan (30 minutes)

Focus Question: What defines partisan imagery?

Materials

A collection of political art or campaign messages to review, curate your own or select from the suggestions below...

- 1932 Political Campaign [Image](#) (Partisan)
- 2016 Political Television [Ad](#) (Partisan)
- Roosevelt Campaign [Poster](#) (Partisan)
- AIGA “Don’t Gamble on It” [Poster](#) (Non-Partisan)

Engage: For historical context of the two-party system, watch [American Part Animals](#) from *We the Voters*.

Process

1. Inform students that one of the requirements for their TexElects pieces is that it must be non-partisan, **meaning it should not show favor for one party over another.**
2. Select 2-3 political messages for students to analyze, be sure to include both partisan and non-partisan. Ask “Is this partisan? What imagery/ideas support your conclusion?” **NOTE:** If the message has a political candidate, is supporting one party’s beliefs/platform, or is clearly favoring one party’s over the other in any way, it is partisan.
3. Review the attributes that determined a message “partisan.”

Reflection

Many cities have “Non-Partisan Elections,” meaning that candidates must run without a political label. What would be pros and cons of these types of elections? For a list of cities that hold non-partisan election visit the National League of Cities website.

Step 4: Vote

TEXELECTS PROJECT CONNECTION

Step 4 highlights the intersection between art and civics. As students study political art and practice the process of voting, they learn that many of the same skills needed to make meaning out of art are also needed to make informed decisions when voting. Standing in the “shoes” of a voter builds empathy that will enable students to connect emotionally with their audience. These new connections should be considered in the project process.

STEP 3 OBJECTIVES

Students will compare skills needed to interpret art with skills needed to make informed decisions when voting

Students will practice making informed decisions when voting

Students will apply the concept of system to democracy and consider the roles of citizens in a system

STEP 3 TEKS

Art (*level II*)

1.1, 1.d, 2.d, 2.f

U.S. Government

14.c, 15.c

ELA

9.c, 9.d

Activity One: Art, Voting, and Systems (45 minutes - 1hr)

Focus Question: What skills do I need to vote?

Materials

Image to study that portrays citizens in a voting system

-*Suggested images:* [Hand Vote](#), [Kota Ezawa](#), [Brewton Voting Scene](#)

Digital device with internet connection for student research

Engage: Invite students to observe the selected image. Ask, “Do you see a system is being portrayed in this work of art? What do you see that supports your conclusion?” Engage in a class discussion around these questions.

Process:

1. Be the Artist: Invite students to think about messaging from a creators standpoint. Ask
 - What stands out to you about the way the artist chooses to depict the system of voting?
 - What message is the artist trying to achieve?
 - In what ways, if any, do you connect emotionally with the piece?
2. Warm up critical thinking skills: Ask students to reflect on the critical thinking skills below. Which ones did they use to help them interpret meaning in the artwork they studied.
 - **Gathering Information:** Identifying facts, ideas, patterns, issues or themes
 - **Analyzing:** Breaking down a whole into parts and studying how the parts interact
 - **Evaluating:** Forming judgments or opinions based on evidence and new understandings
 - **Synthesizing:** Combining ideas to form a conclusion
3. Informed Voting: Now that students have warmed up their critical thinking skills, it’s time to practice using them to study candidates. Select two candidates that will be running against each other in midterm elections to study, or if completing this activity prior to the March 6th Texas primary election, study all primary candidates for an office. **NOTE:** For the purpose of this activity, we suggest studying candidates that will represent all of Texas, as opposed to districts. For example, candidates running for the [US Senate](#), [Governor](#), [Lt. Governor](#) or [Attorney General](#). (Candidate info from Ballotpedia.com) Ask student’s to visit and explore each candidate’s campaign website. In students’ Texelects Journals, ask students to create a “Candidate Profile” for each candidate. The “**Candidate Profile**” should include the following:
 - Candidates party affiliation
 - Candidate personal info: Were they a teacher, business owner, attorney? What is their volunteer experience? Age? Passions?
 - Candidate views on at least three issues
 - Opinions of candidates
 - Why they would or would not vote for the candidate
4. Ask students to reflect on the same critical thinking skills from above. Which ones did they use to help them reach a decision in who they would vote for.
5. Inform students of the importance of using non-partisan resources when preparing to vote, explore the following resources with your students.
 - **Texas Secretary of State**, [VoteTexas.gov](#)
 - **Texas Tribune**, [Elected Officials Directory](#)
 - **League of Women Voters**, [Voters Guides](#)

Reflection:

Asks students to think about the process of making an informed decision, is it easy? Why or why not? What role can the arts play influencing the way we think and act in a democracy?

Activity Two: Voting Culture Reimagined (45 minutes)

Focus Question: What if?

Engage: Ask students to think about the following quote, “Civic engagement is about reimagining. The arts help us reimagine.”-Sterling Speirn, President W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Process:

1. Ask students to reflect on voting in Texas. Ask the following:
What if every eligible voter in Texas voted, how would Texas be different?
What would it look like and feel like?
How would it impact you?
2. Ask students to complete the “Creating a TexElects Message” worksheet found on the TexElects website.

Reflection:

Create TexElects non-partisan voter message that brings awareness to and encourages one to vote in Texas midterm elections.

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