



VOTE SMART

JUST THE FACTS

Lesson 5 - Finding and Writing Representatives

Standards: National Council for the Social Studies

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts)

NCSS 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

NCSS 4: Individual Development and Identity

NCSS 3: People, Places, and Environments

Objectives:

SWBAT (students will be able to) construct a search on votesmart.org to find their own representatives.

SWBAT analyze a politician's speeches and interest group ratings.

SWBAT construct a purposeful letter to a representative.

Subject Matter:

Political research, issue positions, speeches, interest group ratings, contacting representatives

Materials:

- Smartboard or Projector
- Computers
- Access to Internet
- Letter Envelopes

Procedure: (115-130 min)

Set/Hook/Warm up - Class Brainstorm

Explain to students that this lesson is all about their own representatives. To warm up, ask students to raise their hands and name any politicians that represent them. Write the names they come up with on the board. Start with the President, and work your way down from there. Ask if anyone knows the names of their senators, House member, governor, mayor, etc. After writing all of these names on the board, tell students that later in the lesson they will have to pick one of their representatives to contact, so they should start thinking about who they will choose.

Lesson Essential Question: Who are your representatives, what are their stances on issues, and how do you contact them?

Activity 1 - Find Your Representatives Worksheet:

Students need access to computers and internet for this activity. Pass the worksheet out to the students, and instruct them to visit votesmart.org. On the first screen of the website, it asks to enter their full address (street address, city, state and zip code). A scroll down menu with the names of politicians will appear. Students should be able to scroll through this list to find all of the answers to the questions on the worksheet. The scroll down menu starts with national level politicians, then state level, and finally local level. The worksheet follows the same order, so students should be able to fill out their worksheets from top to bottom. Make sure to explain to the students what the difference between “challenger” and “incumbent” is. The scroll down list includes challengers for offices, but this activity only works for incumbents.

Activity 2 - Issue Positions Worksheet:

This activity requires a computer and access to the internet. Print and pass out the worksheet labeled “Lesson 5 Activity 2.” This activity aims to teach students about their own representatives, while also helping them develop research skills. The activity starts the same way as the activity above (Type your full address into the search bar and scroll through your representatives). However, in this activity, students actually get to pick one of their representatives and research their stance on an issue of the student's choosing. The students will pick a politician, look through their speeches, ratings and issue positions, and then select an issue. The worksheet asks students to summarize a speech on the issue they choose, find a rating relating to the issue they chose, and find their politician's issue position on the issue they choose. The teacher should do a very quick tutorial of this activity to help clarify the process for students. Visit votesmart.org, type in an address, select the President, and click on the “Speeches,” “Ratings” and “Positions” folders. Once students have observed this process, allow them to do the same on their computers. Make sure to remind students of the hint included on the worksheet - higher level politicians will have more information on the website, so students will have more success if they choose national or state politicians.

Activity 3 – Writing a Letter:

Now that students have a politician and issue that they have researched, the final activity of this lesson is to send that politician a letter. Contact information is provided by votesmart.org under the “Bio” folder. Have students click on that folder - an address will appear on the left side of the page. Once students have written down their representative's address, instruct them to write a letter to their representatives. The letter can be formed around the issue that the student researched in the last activity, or it can be on a different topic that the teacher chooses. Once the students have written their letters, pass out envelopes and instruct students to write the addresses of their representatives in the middle of the envelope, and their own addresses or PO Boxes in the upper left hand corner. If a student does not know his/her own address, it can be substituted with the address of

the school. After students put their letters in the envelopes, collect them and put them in the mail.

Cool Down Exercise:

Have students answer the following questions on a piece of paper:

1. What is the name of the representative that I sent a letter to?
2. What position does he or she hold?
3. Is it a local, state or national government position?
4. What issue did I choose to research?
5. What is one thing my representative can do to help address the issue I chose?

Assessment:

The teacher will collect the “Find Your Representatives” worksheet and issue position worksheet, and give a grade based on completion and accuracy. The teacher will informally assess student comprehension and participation during the writing a letter exercise.

Self-Reflection:

Find Your Representatives Worksheet

Name:_____

National:

President_____

Vice President_____

US Attorney General_____

US Secretary of Defense_____

US Secretary of Treasury_____

US Secretary of the Interior_____

US Senators 1._____ 2. _____

US House Representative _____

State:

Governor_____

Lieutenant Governor_____

State Attorney General_____

State Secretary of State_____

State Treasurer_____

State Senator_____

State House Representative_____

Local:

List Any Local Officials – (Mayor, Council Members, Commissioners, Supervisors)

Position_____ Name_____

Position_____ Name_____

Position_____ Name_____

Position_____ Name_____

Position_____ Name_____

Position_____ Name_____

Position_____ Name_____

Issue Positions Worksheet

Name: _____

Now that you have found your representatives, it's time to do some research on them! Go back to votesmart.org, fill in the search bar with your full address (street address, city, state, and zipcode) and click on one of your own representatives. After you click his or her name, click on the "Speeches" folder below the search bar. This will bring you to list of speeches that your representative has made. Next, click on the "Ratings" folder, and you will see different ratings/endorsements your candidate has received from interest groups. Finally, click on the "Positions" folder, and you will see your representative's stances on important issues. Speeches, ratings and issue positions will all tell you about your representative's positions on important issues. Now, pick one issue that you care about or are interested in, and answer the questions below about your candidate and that issue. (Hint: National politicians will have the most speeches and ratings, state politicians have the second most, and local politicians may not have any. If you run into trouble finding information about your representative, switch representatives to someone more well known.)

Name of your representative: _____

Position of your representative: _____

Issue that you are researching: _____

Find a speech that your representative has made about your issue:

Title of speech: _____

In two sentences, summarize your representative's stance on the issue:

Go to the "Ratings" folder, and select a rating your representative has received on your issue:

Name of the rating group: _____

What rating did your representative receive? _____

Has your representative responded to Vote Smart's Political Courage Test?

What is your representative's position on the issue you have chosen?
