



Easy Voter Guide

Teaching About Voting with the Easy Voter Guide

Tips for literacy tutors and instructors in California for the March 2, 2004 Special Election

- I. Background: why many people don't vote
- II. Overview for tutors and instructors
- III. Teaching about voting
 - 1) Sign up to vote
 - 2) Get ready to vote
 - a) Choosing whether to vote at home or at the polls
 - b) Understanding what is on the ballot
 - 3) Go vote!

I. Background: Why many people don't vote

The problem: Over half of Californians do not vote and an even higher proportion of adult students are non-voters. For some people, the reason is that they are not citizens yet, but far more who are eligible to vote do not because they do not feel comfortable with the voting process and complicated election information.

What you can do: Literacy tutors and instructors can help those who are eligible to exercise their right to participate in the democratic process that affects all of us. In just a few sessions you can help students:

1. Sign up to vote (if they haven't already).
2. Decide if they want to vote at home or at the polls, and apply for an absentee ballot.
3. Help them review the candidates and measures on the ballot so they can make their own voting decisions.

This material can be easily adjusted to fit the language level and needs of your students. By helping your students vote, you are providing them with an opportunity to achieve a tangible accomplishment in a relatively short period of time while still helping to develop their literacy skills.

Why many students don't vote: Research across adult literacy programs in California has shown that many students feel that voting is like taking a test. They aren't sure if they understand the material, they feel they have to answer every question, and think that no one can help them. Hence, many students would rather not vote than deal with the embarrassment they anticipate. Happily, it can be easier than they realize:

| Student Misconception: Voting is like taking a test | The truth: Voting can be customized to your issues and your style |
|--|---|
| I have to do it all by myself | You can have people help you review the ballot and come with you to the polls |
| I'll have to study complicated documents | You can use the Easy Voter Guide |
| I'll have to go to the polls | Anyone can choose to vote by mail |
| I'll have to answer every question | You can vote on just the things that are important to you |
| I can't make a mistake | You can get a new ballot if you make a mistake |

II. Overview for tutors and instructors

The following ideas and activities are designed to give you and your students a variety of ways to introduce voting in your lessons and use the Easy Voter Guide and related materials as resources to learn about the election process in California. They have been designed for either one-on-one tutoring, small group or classroom situations. Some activities may be more appropriate for your student(s) than others. Choose or modify those that fit your lesson format and the students' level of skill and experience.

We hope you have fun while also demystifying the voting process. Our experience with the process has taught us that because voting is a cornerstone of civic engagement, feeling confident about voting will be empowering for your students and encourage them to explore many other ways to become involved in their educational programs and communities.

Introducing Voting Into Your Lesson Plans

Whether teaching a classroom of adult students or one student, you address the following goals when you help students become voters.

Goals:

- Introduce the topic of why it is important to vote.
- Dispel myths about the voting process.
- Provide specific information about how to sign up to vote, how to prepare to vote, and how to cast a vote.
- Enable students to apply learning to a real life act of civic participation.

Lesson Formats

Teaching about the voting process and helping students prepare for the election can easily be integrated into the classroom or tutoring by following a common lesson plan format such as the Four-Part Lesson Plan. No matter what your students' reading level, consider this framework as a starting point.

1. Making a personal connection to the topic

Ask your students questions about their experience with voting or not voting.
Ask what they know about voting and about this election.
What are the resources that you can use to find out about the issues?
Write down their comments as a personal story or make a list of barriers to voting.
Add your own ideas.

2. Word Work Activities

Identify words the students want to know from their stories or lists.
Teach key vocabulary words needed to understand resource guides and voting forms.
Show word patterns in words related to voting.
Ask students to select one- and two-syllable words.
Create flash cards of important words that the students select.

3. Content and Comprehension Activities

Review the steps to becoming a voter and ask students to list them.
Read directions on voting forms and discuss.
Read descriptions about the political parties and discuss similarities and differences.
Read and discuss the issues of the specific election, i.e. the recall, the propositions.

4. Goal-Directed Learning

Make the learning activities specific to your students' own stated goals.

Important dates for the next California election:

Tuesday, February 17, 2004:
deadline to register for the
March 2, 2004 election

Tuesday, February 24, 2004:
deadline to apply for an absentee
ballot (note: now any voter can
choose to vote by mail)

Tuesday, March 2, 2004:
election day; polls are open from
7 am to 8 pm

III. Teaching about Voting

This section is organized to follow the Easy Voter Guide format that “voting is as easy as 1-2-3.” Lessons can be organized into these topical categories. Note: If your students are Internet users, go to www.easyvoter.org. There are clearly worded information and photographs for each step of the voting process, including what to expect at their polling place. If your students are not Internet users, you might want to print out some of the information and include it as part of your lesson on voting.

1) Sign up to vote

Materials to Use:

- Voter registration form — available at most libraries, post offices, election offices; you can also download the form from your county elections office website.
- Voting Is Easy as 1-2-3 four-page handout (download at <http://www.easyvoter.org/california/resources/outreach.html>)
- The Easy Voter Guide for this election — available at your library (or download at <http://www.easyvoter.org/california/nextelection/index2.html>)

Getting Started

Making a Personal Connection to the Topic

Discuss the following questions and write down your students’ responses or have them write.

- Ask your students if they are U.S. citizens.
- Have they voted in the past? Have they registered to vote in the upcoming election?
- Make a list of why it is important to vote and then list why they or others don’t vote.
- Assure them that you can help them with each step of the process but you do not want to tell them who or what to vote for.

Word Work

Before looking at the Guide with your students, take a few minutes to review important vocabulary words. If a student is reading at a lower level, choose only 2 or 3 words each time.

| | | |
|------------|-----------|--------------------|
| ballot | candidate | citizen |
| primary | general | “decline to state” |
| California | election | registration |

Content and Comprehension

1. Go over the following key information:
 - When is the election and the deadline to register? (see back cover, Easy Voter Guide)
 - Who can vote? (Voting is easy as 1-2-3)
 - What are the steps to follow? (Voting is easy as 1-2-3 or back cover of Easy Voter Guide)
 - Choosing a political party (pages 3-4 of the Easy Voter Guide)
2. If they are not registered, help your students fill out the registration form. (Note that the items requesting the California Driver’s License number and phone number are optional.) Be sure to have them sign the form and mail it in by February 17, 2004.
3. Make a plan to review the guide with your students.

Have your students get out the calendar and mark important dates such as the last day to send in a request to vote by mail (February 24, 2004) and Election Day (March 2, 2004). Your students can set a final goal to have their sample ballots marked with their choices a day or so before the election. Set dates to have the review of what is on the ballot. Emphasize that your students should make final choices on the sample ballot in private, although you can certainly answer any questions.

2) Getting ready to vote

- a) deciding to vote at home or at the polls**
- b) understanding what is on the ballot**

Materials to Use

- Sample Ballots received by the students (or a Sample Ballot you obtain from their county elections office if they signed up too late to receive one in the mail)
- Voting is easy as 1-2-3 handout
- The Easy Voter Guide

2a) Deciding to vote at home or at the polls

Making a Personal Connection with the Topic

Take a few minutes to discuss how they feel about voting.

- Where will they feel more comfortable — at home or at a polling place?
- What are their fears?
- What would make them feel more comfortable?

Word Work

| | | |
|------------|----------|-------------|
| polling | absentee | sign |
| precinct | private | application |
| pollworker | | |

Content and Comprehension

Explain that every voter can choose two ways to vote (back cover of Easy Voter Guide or Voting is easy as 1-2-3 handout)

At their specific polling place: Help your students find their polling places on the back cover of their Sample Ballot (if they registered too late to get a Sample Ballot, find their polling places by calling the county elections office or by looking it up on the www.easyvoter.org website).

By mail: A written request for an absentee ballot, with a signature, must be submitted to the county elections office by February 24, 2004. Use the form on the back of the Sample Ballot, or download the form and help your student fill it out. Or you can have your student write a short letter to the county elections office with the request, their name, address and signature.

2b) Understanding what is on the ballot

Making a Personal Connection with the Topic

What do you think will be on the ballot?

Why is it important?

How will the issues on the ballot affect you?

How will you decide which questions to vote on?

Word Work

| | | |
|----------------|-------------|--------------------|
| proposition | information | Secretary of State |
| advertisements | campaign | nonpartisan |
| county | statewide | opinion |

Content and Comprehension

Background notes for tutors:

1. What are we voting on?

Explain that we vote on two things: people (candidates) and new laws (propositions). Go over the Sample Ballot listing of the recall question, the candidates and the propositions and ask which of these are of interest. Let them know they do not need to vote on everything. They can just pick a few items to learn more about.

2. What sources should I use?

After your students have registered, in addition to the Sample Ballot, they should receive a Voter Information Guide from the Secretary of State's Office. (You can show them what it looks like on the *Voting is as easy as 1-2-3* handout.) They may also receive mail from campaigns. Discuss the difference between partisan and nonpartisan sources. Let them know that the Easy Voter Guide is nonpartisan.

3. Using the Easy Voter Guide

Lesson plan ideas for using the Easy Voter Guide to help your students understand what is on the ballot.

1. Pre-reading

- What do you hope will be included?
- What questions do you hope the Easy Voter Guide will answer?
- Look at the table of contents.
- Look at the heading at the top of each page. What is this page going to be about?
- Now read the dark headings on the page. What will each part be about? Predict.

2. Reading

- Read a section of the text silently.
- What did you learn?
- Listen to a portion of the text, read it silently, read it out loud, or read it together.
- If students read it out loud, the tutor supplies words if needed or use duet reading where tutor and students read together for fluency.

3. After reading

- Talk about what you read. What did you learn?
- What do you have questions about?
- Students summarize in their own words.
- Students write 2-3 word phrases in the margin next to each section so that they will remember it.
- What will you tell a friend about what you learned while reading this text?
- Which words are easy for you now? Which ones do you want to practice for the next class? (Pick no more than 5).

Note: If you are working with a group of students, these questions can be divided up so that each group gets one or two questions. Each group tries to find the answers and all have to agree. Then they share with the other groups. Or, each group answers all the questions and then debates the answers with the other groups.

4. Comprehension questions for reading

- What is the difference between a Primary Election and a General Election?
- How many political parties are there in California?
- What types of candidates will be on the ballot?
- How many statewide propositions are there?
- How will you find out where your polling place is?
- How many steps are there to vote? What are they?
- What will you tell your friends so that they will vote in this election or the next election?
- Why is it important to vote?

5. More research activities

- What do you want to know more about?
- What other resources can you use to find out more?
- How can you analyze this information?
- Read campaign literature
- Read newspapers, (including editorial page recommendations) magazines, billboards, buttons, yard signs, etc.
- Listen to TV debates, ads, radio ads
- Talk to friends and family
- Internet websites, sample ballot, political party information
- Go to speeches and public appearances, forums, and debates

Create a chart to help you evaluate each candidate's views on important issues:

| Candidate | Issue 1 | Issue 2 | Issue 3 |
|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
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6. More writing activities

- Write down your choices for President and for U.S. Senate, and how you will vote on the four propositions. Do not show anyone. This is private information for you only.
- Write flash cards with 5 new words that you want to learn.
- Write 2 sentences about why it is important to vote so you can share them with friends.
- Write 2 sentences about what you learned from studying this information about voting. What surprised you?

3) Go vote!

While your students have to cast their own ballots, you can help them finish their preparations with the following checklist:

If they have decided to vote at their polling place:

- Do they know the location of their polling for this election?
- Have they picked a time of day between 7am and 8pm to go vote? Do they need to plan for transportation?
- Have they marked their Sample Ballot with their choices to take with them?

If they decided to vote at home:

- Did they apply for the absentee ballot by February 24, 2004?
- Did their absentee ballot arrive?
- Do they plan to mail it back in to arrive by March 2, 2004 or do they plan to drop it off at any polling place in their county on election day?

One other option:

- Does your county offer early voting?
- If so, you and your students could go vote together if you live in the same county but in different neighborhoods.

After the election:

After you vote, ask your student(s) write two or more sentences about the experience. What were they thinking and feeling if they voted for the first time? How will the next time be different?

Good luck and get out and VOTE!

PS Have some fun with this puzzle!

A C V I I V L F B W B P H P C
N D H W N O F A U A A E E R F
G Y V B F I P U C R L V G P Q
I B C E O C C D T I S L R B N
A X Z Q R E E Y F I T O O O W
P P R F M T C U Y D P I I T E
M I I G A D I C O O V T L X I
A L K O T F L S S K C B E O F
C Z E S I H R I E E K D U H P
N C C X O H T C L M E M B F M
G D E F N I F E Y V E T L L S
N R C C O G V U U G Z N O X V
F B I N C I T I Z E N W T V K
S E T A D I D N A C T M Z S O
X K I M Y J N C T I Y N F X R

ADVERTISEMENTS
BALLOT
CAMPAIGN
CANDIDATES
CITIZEN
ELECTION
FREE
INFORMATION
PARTY
POLITICAL
PROPOSITION
VOICE
VOTE

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