

## DOES MY VOTE COUNT???????

By Janie Worst

Learning Objective(s): The student will

1. Understand how the Electoral College system works to elect the president and vice-president;
2. Compare the popular vote with the electoral vote;
3. Analyze the need for a change in the method of electing the president and vice-president.

TEKS/TAKS: US24.G, US26.B, US18.C, GOVT. 11A and 11B, TAKS 8.16D

Materials Needed:

Background information on the history and procedures of the Electoral College system, copy of a map of the United States with the 2004 electoral votes per state for each student.

Teaching Strategy:

1. Have students read background information on the history and workings of the Electoral College system. Discuss key elements of the system.
2. Hold a popular vote election for president. Post the results of this election. This would simulate the results if a pure popular vote system were used to elect the president and vice-president.
3. To simulate the Electoral College system, divide the class into five groups, with each group representing states with varying numbers of electoral votes. The number of students in each state will depend on the percentage of electoral votes the state will cast in the Electoral College. (The following numbers are based on a class of thirty. For different class sizes, use the percentage to determine the number in each state group.
  - A. California (55 actual electoral votes)      15 students or 49% of the class population
  - B. Texas (34 actual electoral votes)      9 students or 30% of the class population
  - C. Washington (11 electoral votes)      3 students or 10% of the class population
  - D. Alabama (9 electoral votes)      2 students or 8% of the class population

E. Wyoming (3 electoral votes)  
population

1 student or 3% of the class

4. Once the students are in the state groups, have them elect a spokesperson. This spokesperson will now conduct the election for president within the state, keeping a tally of the votes. After this popular vote election is conducted, the results will be announced while the teacher keeps tally on the board. With each state's results the teacher will announce which candidate gets ALL of the electoral votes of that state and also keeps that tally on the board. Students could also be used to keep the two tallies of votes.
5. After all states have announced their results, debrief the activity by comparing the two votes. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the system for both the large and small states.
6. After all students understand the system, any of the following activities could be used to further the students' understanding of the Electoral College system.
  - Have the students hold a debate on the necessity of a constitutional amendment to change the method of selecting the president and vice-president.
  - Write a constitutional amendment to change the system of election the president and vice-president.
  - Have the students redraw the map of the United States based on the number of electoral votes the state has, rather than its actual size.
  - Have the students plan a campaign route trying to assess the best way to achieve the 270 electoral votes necessary to win the election. To make this more authentic, have the students research the past results in each state or keep track of the current candidates campaign trail.
  - Expand the class election sample to a school-wide election by selecting one class during the day to conduct the election. Instead of the class being divided up for the Electoral College, each class could be assigned a state. At the end of the day, the popular vote and the electoral votes could be announced.
  - Give the students a copy of the electoral map of the United States and as they are watching the election returns, have them color code the winners, keeping track of the both the popular vote and electoral votes each candidate received. A special mark could be placed on the state that decides the election.
  - Research past elections where the popular vote and the electoral vote results have been different.

Extension for GT/AP: Have the students research the method of selecting the executive in other democratic systems. Compare the two processes for strengths and weaknesses.