

## **How We Elect a President in the United States**

### **Introduction**

The United States Presidential Elections can be an exciting time for the country. Students will learn about the process by which an individual is elected to the country's highest office. A final project and presentation about ideas for a political platform will be made by each student.

### **Electing a President of the United States of America**

The presidential election process in the United States has historical roots dating back to the first President of the United States, George Washington. Back in 1789, he was the uncontested winner of the election and made history. What is the process of electing a president? How does the country go about selecting a candidate and then voting to decide who the next Commander-in-Chief will be?

### **The Beginning of the Process**

Early on in the presidential election process there may be several individuals who want to begin a campaign to be President of the United States. Usually this process starts in January or February of the year in which the presidential election takes place. Every four years there is an election for president. Once elected, a president may serve no longer than two terms or eight years. Even though the president can serve for two terms, he or she must be re-elected after the first four years. Serving two terms is not an automatic process. The president must compete with the nominee of the other political party.

During the presidential primary race, many people can declare their intentions to compete. The primary races are held in each of the 50 states, but also include the District of Columbia, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Contenders from each political party compete in the primaries. The winner who receives more votes than his counterpart will win that state's primary. The first state with the primary election is New Hampshire. The remaining states will vote in their own primary elections up through the beginning of June or until a clear winner has been determined from each

## How We Elect a President in the United States (Cont'd)

political party. Sometimes the primary process need not continue through each state, because a clear winner has already been determined.

While the primary elections are an important part of the first steps in selecting a president, there are other kinds of meetings in states which serve to select a nominee. Some states hold caucuses which are meetings during which delegates are selected to represent the party at the national convention and select a presidential candidate as their party's nominee.

Later in the summer of the election year, both the Republicans and Democrats hold a national convention attended by the delegates from each state selected during the primary process. These delegates represent the will of the people (as indicated by the votes during the primary) and officially nominate the Republican and Democratic candidate as their party's choice for President of the United States. These candidates introduce their choices for running mates during the convention. In addition, each party crafts its platform. The platform indicates the important goals that each political party wants to achieve if their nominee becomes the president. After the convention, both the Democratic and Republican presidential and vice-presidential nominees enter the home stretch; the national presidential election.

### The National Race

Once the excitement of the conventions dies down a bit, the national race gets into full swing. Each of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates will engage in a series of debates; three for the presidential candidates and one for the vice-presidential candidates. The public has a chance to listen to their ideas and decide which pair would best represent their perspectives and goals for the country. There are many advertisements on television, billboards and print media which promote the candidates. The candidates also travel extensively throughout the country and meet the public.

## How We Elect a President in the United States (Cont'd)

They give speeches on why they would best represent the public in the Oval Office. Election Day then comes in early November.

### The Election

On Election Day, the entire nation votes for the next President of the United States. Some states allow people to vote early, but once they do, they cannot vote again on Election Day. People usually are excited and a little nervous on Election Day, especially if the campaign for President has been long and hard fought. After the polls around the country close and the votes have been counted, a winner is declared. Sometimes the race is so close that a clear winner cannot be determined right away. There may be a recount to verify the results of the election. On occasion, there have been lawsuits about the voting procedures which delayed the results even more.

A president is not simply chosen based on the number of votes he or she won. Instead, a system known as the Electoral College is used. A state's electoral votes are based on their population as determined by the latest census. The state may have some areas which are more or less populated. The number of electoral votes will vary from each region depending on the population. Once a candidate has reached one half of the total number of Electoral College votes in the nation, then he or she is the president. Two hundred and seventy votes represent one half of the Electoral College for the nation.

Sometime in December, the members of the Electoral College cast their votes based on the results of the presidential election that took place in early November. By the beginning of January, the President-Elect is officially chosen. On January 20th, the President of the United States is officially sworn in by the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court during the inauguration ceremonies. The President-Elect then is sworn in as the new President of the United States.

## How We Elect a President of the United States

### Worksheet 1 - Defining Terms

Using a dictionary and the reading from this lesson, in complete sentences, define the following terms:

1. election
2. Commander in Chief
3. primary elections
4. Electoral College
5. debate
6. Vice-President
7. electoral votes
8. inauguration ceremonies
9. convention
10. delegate
11. Caucus

## How We Elect a President of the United States

### Worksheet 2 - Creating a Platform

As discussed, the Democratic and Republican parties working with the nominees create a platform on which to run the presidential race. This kind of platform is a set of ideas important to each party and that will guide some of the most important decisions made in the White House.

In this exercise you will create a platform for your candidate.

Procedure:

- a) Choose to represent either the Democratic or Republican party.
- b) Think of five ideas that you believe are important and upon which you want to build the platform for either party. For example, an idea for a platform could be to end the war in Iraq.
- c) Once you have selected your five ideas, write them down on the reverse side of this worksheet.
- d) Explain the importance of each idea in a paragraph with five to seven sentences.
- e) Copy each paragraph onto an index card.
- f) You will create a poster with your index cards of ideas. Using the poster paper provided by your teacher, create a poster with these ideas. Use illustrations to support your ideas. You may use images cut out from old magazines or draw your own using colored pencils.

### Capstone Activity - Poster Presentation:

Each student will present his poster to the class, each in five minutes or less.

Presentations will be evaluated based on the following:

	Points possible	Your score
1) Content: quality of ideas and descriptions	80 points	_____
2) Mechanics—grammar, spelling, layout	10 points	_____
3) Style—speaker’s communication skills	10 points	_____
TOTAL:	100 points	_____

## How We Elect a President of the United States

### Worksheet 1 - Defining Terms Answers

Using a dictionary and the reading from this lesson, in complete sentences, define the following terms:

1. Election- the selection of a person or persons for a political or other office by vote
2. Commander in Chief- supreme commander of the armed forces of a nation
3. primary elections-a preliminary election in which voters nominate party candidates in office
4. Electoral College- a body of electors chosen by the voters in each state to elect the President and Vice-President of the United States
5. debate- a discussion of opposing viewpoints in a public forum
6. Vice-President- an officer next in rank to the President who stands in for the President in his absence
7. electoral votes- the number of electors chosen as a result of state elections for the President and Vice-President of the United States
8. inauguration ceremonies- ceremonies for the formal induction into political office
9. convention-an assembly of a political party to nominate their candidate for President of the United States
10. delegate- a person who represents another or others in a decision-making capacity
11. Caucus- a meeting of party leaders to nominate a candidate for political office