THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for Social Justice: News, Issues, and Ideas

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

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This drawing was inspired by Alice Walker who wrote that we each must contribute our own small "stone" of activism in order to make a better world.

Illustration by Anna Lemsa who is from Russia. She studies ESL in Acton, MA.

The Change Agent is the biannual publication of The New England Literacy Resource Center. Each issue of the paper helps teachers incorporate social justice content into their curriculum. The paper is designed for intermediate-level ESOL, ABE, GED, and adult diploma classes. Each issue focuses on a different topic that is relevant to learners' lives.

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Submissions
Our next issue is about climate change. See the "Call for Articles" on the back cover.
We welcome submissions from teachers and students in our field as well as activists and thinkers from outside the field. For submission guidelines visit <www.nelrc.org/changeagent> or contact us at 617-482-9485 or changeagent@worlded.org.

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No information in this magazine is intended to reflect an endorsement for, or opposition to, any candidate or political party.

From the Editors

"Democracy is based upon the conviction that there are extraordinary possibilities in ordinary people." So said Harry Emerson Fosdick, the great grandfather of one of our editorial board members, Shana Berger. And this became a guiding principle of this special issue, which we think of not so much as an election-year guide, but as an embrace of the multitude of ways that ordinary people can have an impact in their communities—all year, every year, in large ways and small.

The "how-to" of participation is important, and so we include a wealth of information about how voting and advocacy systems work in this country as well as many inspiring first-person stories from learners about their experiences advocating and organizing around issues that matter to them. But the "why" and the "what" of participation matter just as much, and so we feature articles, stories, and lesson plans that explore diverse ways people have found to raise their voices, join with others, organize, and be heard.

Any discussion of "democracy in action" will include moments of hopefulness as well as pessimism. The electoral system, we found, is a pathway of participation for some and a source of alienation for others. Both are authentic perspectives that we provide here as starting places for classroom discussions and activities.

Speaking of starting places, the opening illustration and chart (on pages 3 and 4) are strategically located at the beginning of the magazine because we think they provide a frame for the material in this issue. Not everyone votes or rallies or writes letters, but almost everyone takes responsibility for themselves and their families and communities on some level. One element of education rooted in social justice is helping learners find pathways from their starting place—whatever that might be—to ever larger circles of people who share their interests and ever more sustained movements that are powerful enough to bring about real change.

—Cara Anaam and
Cynthia Peters

p.s. Be on the look-out for the audio and video symbols—  indicating students' stories available in multi-media format from our website.

What changes are these community members trying to bring about? Whom are their actions intended to affect? Who might support them? Who might be against them? Which are the biggest changes? Why do you think so? Which will be the hardest changes to bring about? Why? Which changes will affect the most people? Turn the page to explore further...

Three Types of Civic Participation

Type of Community Member	Type of Participation	List the ways you participate as a community member:
A personally responsible community member	works, pays taxes, obeys laws, helps those in need during snowstorms and floods	
A participatory community member	joins parent/teacher council at child's school, participates in church and neighborhood committees, votes	
A justice-oriented community member	organizes with others in the workplace or community to make change collectively, explores the root causes of problems, questions who benefits from government decisions	

Discussion Questions

1. What categories do your activities fall into? What about other students? Are you surprised?
2. When you think about the civics lessons in school or in your adult education program, what kind of citizenship have they mostly prepared you for?
3. What type of community members do you think would make the *strongest* democracy?
4. What could your program do to develop your skills for participation in the strongest democracy?
5. Go back and look at the picture on the previous page. How would you categorize the actions of the people in the drawing?

"What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, *American Educational Research Journa*l, Summer 2004. A PDF version of the article is available at <www.mills.edu/academics/faculty/educ/jkahne/what_kind_of_citizen.pdf>.

First, You Have to Believe in Yourself

Deeqo Jibril

When I was growing up, I thought leadership was just for people with money or fame, but I have learned that leadership is not the position you hold. It's the difference that you make in your family and in your community.

It's been a long journey for me to come to where I am now. I am from Somalia, but I had to leave because of the war there. I lived in a refugee camp in Kenya. I came to the United States in 1991 at the age of 13. I went through a lot, but it made me a better person. Many people helped me, and that makes me want to help others.

I'm the first one in my family to go to college. My mother never went to school. Many Somalis feel that educating girls is not necessary. Some of my own family members felt that I should raise my children first and then get my education.

I have three children ages 2, 6, and 7. They are my motivation. Every time I want to quit school, I think, "How am I going to tell my son or daughter that they need an education if I don't have one?" I went to English High School in Boston, but I didn't learn anything about going to college there. Later, I found the Bridge to College program. It helped me with my writing, math, and computer skills, and I learned how to apply for college. Now I'm a mentor for other Bridge program students.

I am somebody, and my voice is powerful.

As an immigrant, I never realized that I had a voice. In April 2007, I attended the Commonwealth Legislative Seminar for Minorities. I learned how laws are passed and how to advocate for issues. I did an internship for Senator Jarrett Barrios. Every time he had a committee hearing he invited me to come along. That experience led me to become even more interested in politics. It made me realize I am somebody, and my voice is powerful.

One year, I attended a hearing and advocated for the Dream Act, which would allow undocumented immigrant youth to pay in-state college tuition. I also volunteered for our Governor's campaign. I motivated other Somalis to vote. It takes persistence. At the beginning, they said, "Why should we vote? What's going to be different?" But I gave them examples of how elected officials affect our lives. For example, the government makes decisions about our rights at work and our children's education.

My plan is to enroll in the Women and Politics program at the University of Massachusetts and to become a leader in my community. Most of my people don't vote. I want to be a role model for Somali women and show them how politics affects them. Eventually, I want to run for office. Women are not just made to have babies. We can also become effective leaders.

To me, advocacy means speaking up for what you believe is right. Without advocacy, change won't happen. The most important lesson I have learned so far about speaking up is that first, you have to believe in yourself because if you don't believe in yourself you cannot be an effective advocate. Then, you need to act on your beliefs.

Deeqo Jibril attended Cambridge Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. She received a Citizens Bank/World Education college scholarship in September 2007. Deeqo's story is retold in pictures on the next page.

First, You Have to Believe in Yourself

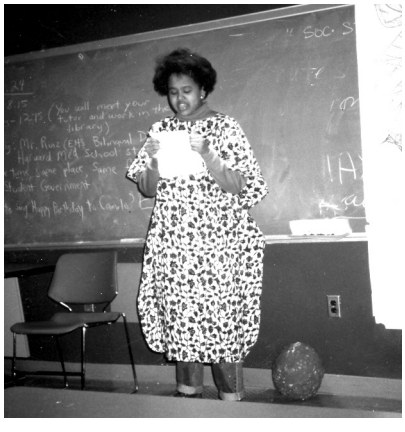
Deeqo Jibril

Deeqo in Somalia, age 10.

It has been a long journey for me to come to where I am now.

A Somali refugee camp in Kenya.

I am from Somalia, but I had to leave because of the war there. I lived in a refugee camp in Kenya.



Deeqo in her ESL class, age 15.

I came to the United States in 1991 at the age of 13. I went through a lot, but it made me a better person. Many people helped me, and that makes me want to help others.

Deeqo's children, Ayan (age 7), Munira (age 2), and Hamza (age 6),

My children are my motivation. Every time I want to quit school, I think, "How am I going to tell my son or daughter that they need to get an education if I don't have one?"

Deeqo with State Representative Sanchez and the director of the Commonwealth Legislative Seminar for Minorities, Joel Barrera.

In April 2007, I attended a class to learn how laws are passed and how to advocate for issues. I realized I am somebody and my voice is powerful.

Deeqo with Governor Deval Patrick of Massachusetts.

To me, advocacy means speaking up for what you believe is right. Without advocacy, change won't happen. The most important lesson I have learned so far about speaking up is that first, you have to believe in yourself.

Deeqo Jibril attended Cambridge Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. She received a Citizens Bank/World Education college scholarship in September 2007. *The full text of Deeqo's story is on the page 5.*

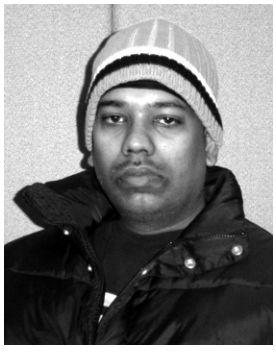
Do You Vote? What Are Your Responsibilities?

Yes, I vote because it is one of the most important rights I have.

Iris M. Santiago

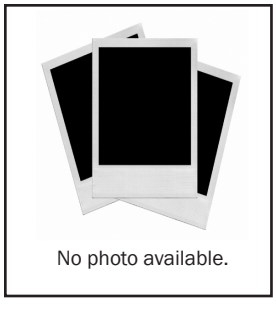
I don't vote because I don't like to vote. I don't know who the mayor of the city is. I don't know who my local representative is. I take responsibility in my community by paying my bills, taking care of my kids, and going to school.

Jose Ortiz



No, I don't vote because I don't like rules. But I respect my neighbor. I respect women at my work. I went to jury duty. And I pay taxes.

Ramesh



I believe poor people and middle class people, especially kids, have a right to health care. I believe it is important to pay taxes because that is the way the government raises funds to pay for services for the people. It is also important to know what's right and what's wrong and to take responsibility for your actions. Volunteering for your community and helping people is a good way to be responsible. Speak your mind about what's right and wrong. And vote. It is very important for us and our community.

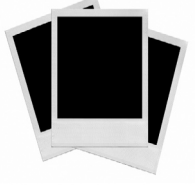
Yashira Velilla

Voting doesn't matter because it's just an inside job. My responsibilities are my children. I make sure they do their school work and keep going on the right path.

Dennis Rodriguez

Do I vote? Yes, I vote because my vote makes a difference. I take responsibility in my community by not throwing garbage on the street, by taking care of older people in my community by helping them cross the streets, and by helping young children if they are lost in the community and take them to the policeman.

Suhail Arce



No photo available.

Do I vote? No, I don't vote, and to be completely honest I don't have a reason why I don't vote. My responsibilities in my community are (1) being a cautious driver. I make sure I'm safe, and I'm not a danger for others. (2) Volunteering: I like to help so the community can get better. And (3) child care: I love kids and I try to help so they can be good, helpful and most importantly so they can be safe.

Iris Anavitate

These quotes are from ABE and GED students in the Holyoke Adult Learner Opportunity (HALO) Center in Holyoke, MA. They were collected by teachers Margaret Boyle and Kelly Martin as part of classroom writings and discussions about voting and elections. Glenn Yarnell photographed the students and recorded the audio clips. This was the first time that HALO students utilized digital recording technology as part of class, and it sparked many ideas for future projects. Audio versions, read by the students themselves, accompany writings where you see the headphones symbol. Listen to the audio at <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>.

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Do you vote? Why or why not?
2. What are your responsibilities to yourself, your family, and your community?
3. Do you think voting is a right or a responsibility or both or neither?
4. Look at the "Three Types of Community Member" chart on page 4. Make your own chart with a column for each type of community member. Pick several of the students above and list their actions in the appropriate columns. For example, Suhail Arce directs lost children to the police. What type of community member is she when she helps lost children? What about when she votes?
5. Make a list of the actions you think contribute to a strong democracy.

Defend Your Opinions

Donna Jones

My point of view is just as important as the next person's. I made this startling discovery by debating my husband about how much of our tax dollars should be spent on children's education versus adult education.

Our beliefs on this subject were as far apart as the North and South poles. Being an Adult Learner, I passionately believe that education money should be divided fairly with slightly more going to Adult Education. I based my opinion on the fact that parents are their children's role models and their first teachers. Also, the adults who become literate increase their earning power, which means they pay more taxes (the pay back theory) *and* provide a better lifestyle for their children. People's self esteem generally increases as their literacy skills improve, thus enabling them to take a more active role in their community and in their children's schooling.

Our discussion went on for several hours over a two-day period. (A personal tidbit: you have never met two more bull-headed and determined people.) Whenever I could, I loaded my brain with more information to back up my position.

I don't know what I said that persuaded him to come over to my way of thinking but he did. I was surprised when he came home after a political meeting and mentioned that he advocated for the importance of funding adult education and to support any candidate who would do just that. I was impressed with myself for standing up for what I believed in.

Now, I firmly believe that if you have a chance to speak up for what you believe, do it! The more experience you have defending your point of view with family and friends, the more comfortable you will become speaking to elected officials and the media. Your self confidence and self assurance will help you get your point across to others.

Since the debate with my husband, I have gone to Washington, D.C., with other adult students and met with my representatives' aides to preach the importance of adult education and to ask them to support increased funding for it. Currently, I am studying advocacy so I will be better prepared to meet with political leaders in the future. Also, I am more confident about encouraging other adult students to speak out for what they believe in. It will take many loud and determined voices to make changes so we can leave the world a better place for the future generations.

DO NOT JUST sit back and wait for change to happen. Be a driving force that makes it happen, and experience the thrill of having people listen to your opinions.

Donna Jones has been an Adult Learner for many years with Project Read in South San Francisco, CA. Her tutor, George Santore, helped her discover her love of writing.

For Discussion

Talk or write about a time that you felt passionate about a political opinion.

Did you ever talk with someone about the way the government uses tax money? What did you talk about? Did you agree or disagree?

Read more about taxes on page 54 and download additional student-friendly lessons on taxes at <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>.

From Workplace Justice to Political Mobilization

Anestine Bentick

By being an organizer in my workplace, I help bring people together. We talk everyday about what is happening on the job. We go to meetings together, and we make strategies for improving our work life. We have a voice, and we use it.

In a workplace that's not unionized, you don't have a voice. Your boss is your boss, and that's it. You do what your boss says or you find a new job. In a unionized job, the union steward sits at the table with the boss.

Recently, at my workplace, the South Boston Community Health Center, our boss called the bargaining unit together because the health center has no money. Because of changes in health care in Massachusetts, the health center is not getting reimbursements. The boss called us in and he said, "I could freeze the pension for one year or I could lay people off." The union members talked about it. We voted to accept the pension freeze. We didn't want anyone to get laid off.

Anestine Bentick at a ceremony honoring Rep. Harkins and Sen. Tolman for their support of the Quality Home Care bill, giving personal care attendants the right to form a union.

By being in this process, we have the experience of using our power as a group. The boss is powerful because he has a lot of control, but we are powerful because we have large numbers. Some bosses don't like the idea of sitting at the same table with workers. Employers are afraid of employees having power. Bosses like to control people, and they like their power. They don't want to share it. But we don't *ask* to be heard. We don't need permission to use our voices.

When you organize at the workplace, there is a ripple effect. Politicians start to sit up and take notice because they see that we are organized and mobilized and ready to move.

Recently, at another SEIU workplace, the workers were negotiating a contract. They asked the state legislator from that area to write letters to the CEO of the hospital on their behalf. The union members appealed to him as a group, and that's how we got his attention. He listened because he saw us as an organized and powerful group. The members at that hospital won the training fund as a result of our work. At the victory celebration, I said to this state legislator, "Thank you for your help. In 2008, we know you're up for re-election. If there's anything we can do, please let us know."

Politicians start to sit up and take notice because they see that we are organized and mobilized and ready to move.

By organizing in the workplace, we not only make bosses listen, we make politicians listen too.

Anestine Bentick works as a medical assistant at the South Boston Community Health Center and is a member of 1199SEIU. She has taken ABE classes with the Worker Education Program in Boston, MA.

Taking Action on an Issue that Matters

Donna K. Dear

I am very active in my community—Roxbury, Massachusetts. I volunteer at Rosie's Place where I help serve lunch to the homeless, and I am active with the T Riders' Union, which organizes for transportation justice. Being involved with a community of people who care about the issues has helped me to fight for things that matter to me. Also, I have an 18-year-old nephew. He is a good kid, but there are so many dangers out there. I want him to have a supportive environment as he becomes an adult.

Donna Dear at a rally at the State House in Boston.

One issue that matters to me and my community is CORI reform. Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) files are damaging people's lives. CORI files provide lists of convictions and arrests (even if the arrest did not result in a conviction). Even misdemeanors stay on your record indefinitely. CORI laws keep thousands of people from obtaining employment, housing, loans, insurance, and college education. More than two and a half million people living in Massachusetts have a CORI.

As a CORI reform activist, I have distributed literature about CORI reform, encouraged my neighbors to get involved, and attended public hearings. We had a march that started in Roxbury and went all the way to the State House, where people with CORIs spoke and we delivered letters and petitions.

There is a dire need for our state representatives to support CORI reform, which would outlaw no-CORI hiring policies and reduce the number of years one must wait to seal a record from the public's view. It is unjust for people to go to jail, serve their time, and come back into society with no possibility of getting a job. As one Baptist minister testified at the September 18th, 2007 public hearing: "Our commonwealth should treat people like human beings." If that's not enough of a reason to support CORI reform, consider that it costs over $40,000 to lock someone up for a year. It is better for communities and the budget, to have people employed.

I will continue to fight for CORI reform by organizing in my community, attending rallies and public hearings, and petitioning my state representatives. Find out what the CORI laws are in your state. Take action now and help prevent CORI from ruining promising lives.

Think about it!

Donna Dear says she hopes her nephew will have "a more supportive environment as he becomes an adult." What is she doing to support him?

Sources: Yawu Miller, 9-27-07, *The Boston Banner*; <www.unionofminorityneighborhoods.org>; and "Fighting for jobs and CORI Reform," 6-2-07, *Boston Workers Alliance newsletter.*

Donna K. Dear, originally from Barbados, is not eligible to vote due to her citizenship status, but she has found many ways to make her voice heard. She is enrolled in a College Pathways class conducted by ABCD in Boston, MA.

Reading as a Path to Voting

Pat Evina

One of my learning goals when I came into the Literacy Program was to exercise my right to vote under the 19th Amendment. This was one of my dreams. But to realize it, I needed help!

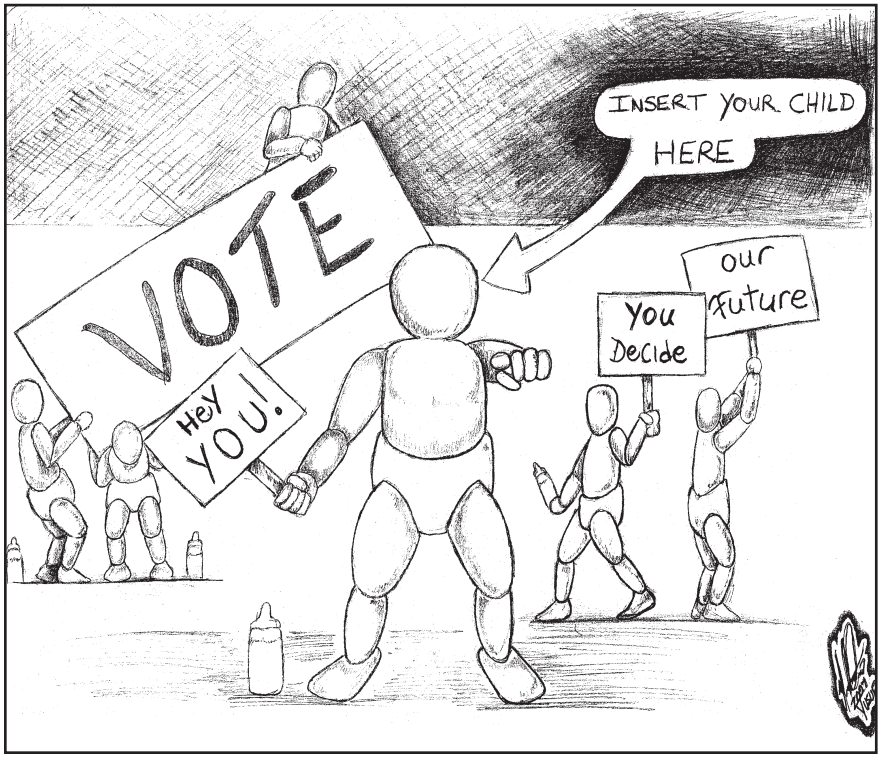
God sends angels. You can't see the wings, but you can see the work they do. A new friend who saw my despair sent missionaries from her church to talk to me. It was a low point in my life and it was time to tell someone about my disability. They put me in touch with the Adult Literacy Program. I thought my learning would be a *sprint*, but it has been a *marathon*—a lifetime of learning.

I can now vote. I can also talk to others about the importance a vote can make in a lifetime. I am a second generation immigrant from a Communist country. My grandparents, who had seven children, came to this country to worship freely and take part in our democratic way of life. The price they paid was to leave all their earthly possessions in the Ukraine.

Vocabulary

Sprint: to run or go at top speed for a short distance.

Marathon: a long distance race, an endurance contest.



Yusuf Stroud, who is currently working on his GED in St. Louis, MO, was born in Newark, NJ, in 1978. He likes to draw, cut hair, and play music. He loves his son, Shamel, age 6. His parents, Joseph Lee Stroud and Renee Janet Williamson Stroud are deceased. Someday, he hopes to be able to make a living by drawing portraits.

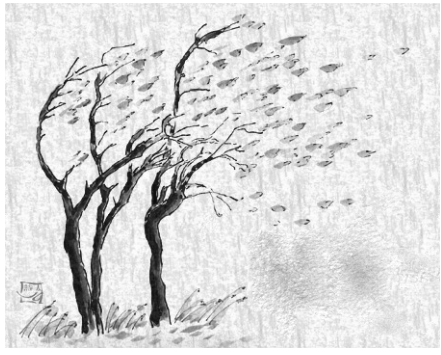
I tell people never to be afraid to dream. Look what happened to me and my family. My four children are registered to vote. I'm not only a student, but I'm also a tutor, and I have been a guest speaker at major functions of the Literacy Program. I have also taken students from the Literacy Program to the Court House where they too have registered to vote. Some of these people have never been in the Court House. What an experience!

Remember, Rosa Parks was one person and she made a real difference. With your vote you can also make a DIFFERENCE!

Pat Evina of Berwick, PA, was at the end of her rope and nearly her life when she discovered help through the Adult Literacy Program. She now is a reading and voting citizen.

Fall Election Wind

by Ruigan Zhu



As many voters did, I voted in the November 2006 elections. I voted for my governor, senator, and congressperson. I hoped for a better quality of life in the future.

I liked to watch TV and read some newspapers about the campaign before making my choices. I was talking about the candidates' opinions with my friends, classmates, co-workers, and family members. We cared about who made better points and who was the best candidate. We argued some questions about the various stands of the candidates through the election season. I also heard similar arguing from a corner on the street, a hallway in the building, a yard next to the sidewalk, and many other places. Folks seemed to be very interested in how the vote would go on Election Day. In the moment, people seemed to me like different colored trees; the campaigns were like the seasonal winds. Some times, "Trees want a little quiet, but the wind doesn't stop." That was all that TV news was talking about. It didn't stop. It blew into each big street, small driveway, great building, little house, and any place people gathered. Everywhere, if you were a voter, you would feel this wind. It was blowing, and it blew into the hearts of the people.

That was an important election wind. I was willing to be involved because it could bring some new faces with some new ways of doing things. It could let people discuss the election questions, to consider the candidates, and to choose their new government. I did not care about the new governor's skin color or origin. That was not important. I cared about the better quality of life my new governor could give me . (Deval Patrick was elected our new governor. He's the first black man to be elected governor in Massachusetts. He leads the new government and serves his people with new ideas. I have some of the same ideas.)

On Election Day, I worried about any problem that might block my bus on the way from Boston to Newton. I was afraid that I might not be able to vote. So, I decided to go back to my home town an hour early from class and work in the afternoon. That would give me more time and guarantee my being able to vote. At my polling place, the volunteers helped the voters with smiles on their faces. The process was clear and the atmosphere was quiet. Finally, I was waiting in the line to put my vote into the ballot box. That was a power line. People gave their power for the new Government through this power line. I was very excited when I finished my voting. I had to do more work the next day because I hadn't finished everything when I had left early to vote. It made me busy and tired, but I was still happy to do it.

Today, I believe Deval Patrick is writing a new history in Massachusetts government. If he works effectively in this term, I will call him to continue next term, and I will vote for him again. Let's go together to the beautiful future!

Ruigang Zhu is a student at the Asian American Civic Association in Boston. He has lived in Massachusetts for more than ten years.

Choosing to Participate

Facing History and Ourselves

"Democracy is a work in progress. It is shaped by the choices ordinary people make about themselves and others. Although those choices may not seem important at the time, little by little, they define an individual, create a community, and ultimately forge a nation."

-- from *Choosing to Participate, A Study Guide by Facing History and Ourselves*

Visit <www.choosingtoparticipate.org>. Click on "Explore the Exhibit," and read/hear/watch the "four compelling true stories that demonstrate the complexities that any moment could present and encourage us to think about how we might act and the consequences of our choices."

Consider a choice that you have made or would like to make. How did it (or would it) affect you, your community, and your nation? Use the grid below to examine the ripple effect of your choice. After you fill in the grid, discuss it with your classmates. What do you think? Do individual choices make a difference?

A choice I made: _____

How does this choice define me as an individual?

How does this choice affect my community?

How does this choice affect my country?

No One will Solve our Problems for Us

Julissa Villa

No one will solve our problems for us. We have to do it for ourselves. We may have come here for a dream, but we have to keep fighting for ourselves, and for the people who come after us.

My start as a community organizer came with adult education. When my youngest son was born, I decided to leave my work and dedicate myself to studying English. Just when I started taking classes, though, I found out that there was a threat to cut state funds. So I joined my teacher in attending a meeting of our local association, Friends and Students of Adult Education. I participated in a rally supporting adult education, and later I joined the Student Council to work with other adult learners to improve opportunities to study.

From there, I saw many chances to learn more about leadership and community issues through trainings and meetings. I participated in campaigns for our governor's re-election, for our congressman, for issues like domestic violence. I saw that it all connects with my community. I live in a neighborhood just south of the city, and there I see so many immigrants, afraid, living in limbo, unaware of their rights and of all the opportunities around them. I'm an immigrant too, and it frustrates me to see the lack of health care, education and housing in my community. I'm the kind of person who takes all the opportunities given to me and tries to bring them back to my people.

My pillars of strength are my family. I've been so fortunate to have their support. Every time I've come home talking about a new project, they say – *echale ganas*! – go for it! They know that it's part of who I am to participate in the community. I get them involved, too; my son was two years old when he participated in that first demonstration supporting adult education.

"We are part of the solution," says a sign at this Border Action Network demonstration.

I volunteered for two years with our local broad-based organizing group, Pima County Interfaith Council. Then I got a job as a full-time organizer in the immigrant rights organization, Border Action Network. When I make presentations about immigrant rights, I point out that my own English isn't great, so that participants know that they don't have to speak perfect English to get involved. Now I've been able to bring together immigrant rights and adult education; we've prepared volunteer teachers and organized Human Rights English Classes at our center.

Julissa Villa speaking at the Southside Poverty Summit, 2004.

Julissa Villa with other activists at the Southside Poverty Summit, 2004.

The best training I've received was when, on a work trip to Washington, D.C., I was detained at the airport so that immigration officials could verify my documents. I decided not to tell them that I am part of Border Action Network, and just see what others experience. The conditions were terrible in the detention centers where I was held for the weekend: it was very cold, dirty, and they weren't giving us food. The women in the room had crossed through the desert to come to the U.S. and desperately needed first aid for their feet.

When I got out, I went home and cried for hours, but this experience made me more determined. Soon after, our organization had a community forum with the Border Patrol and I talked about my experiences. We're demanding that the Border Patrol provide first aid and food, and allow pastors in to visit people in the detention centers.

I want people to step out of the shadows—don't give up! Take the opportunity to study and participate. Don't get caught up in material things—knowledge and education are what's important. Even if we won immigration reform right now, there are still many things we need to make better—housing, health, and education. We are each important in the fight to make things better.

Julissa Villa has always loved public service, and after taking classes at Pima Community College Adult Education in Tucson, Arizona, she learned how much she could offer. She studied English and became certified as a Community Health Advisor/Neighborhood Coordinator. She currently works as a community organizer with Border Action Network in Tucson, Arizona. She says that achieving the American Dream is "not about obtaining papers but about helping others less fortunate than us. With papers alone we can have work but not satisfaction, a house but not a home, allies but not friends. It's best to forget about papers and live happily as we have always done."

For Discussion

Have you ever felt strongly about something in your community? Did you get involved? Why or why not?

How does Julissa's experience affect your perspective?

Describe a community group that you are part of.

Using Strength in Numbers

Adult learners in the MA State House during Adult Learner Awareness Day, 3-07.

How Do Politicians Make Decisions?

Many factors affect the decisions of politicians, not just whether an idea is good or just or correct or affordable. In order to get elected, politicians have to get votes in elections and money for campaigns. When making decisions, they may have their own opinions, but they also want to look good to people who support them.

In making a decision, politicians and the people they appoint to important government positions must weigh the following:

- Their own ideas and desires
- Number of letters and phone calls that they have received about an issue
- News coverage (including Letters to the Editor)
- The opinions of people who gave money to their campaign
- The opinions of the business community and people hired to promote their viewpoints (lobbyists)
- The opinions of voters, by polls and perception
- The opinions of organizations that represent big segments of voters
- The opinions of political party leaders
- People or groups who can make a policy-maker look bad

What is Grassroots Advocacy?

Grassroots advocacy is when we use our strength in numbers to advocate for a cause. Grassroots leaders mobilize other people to advocate and put pressure on decision-makers. These volunteer leaders often develop ongoing relationships with officials and their staff. They discuss, explain, and negotiate issues with officials and follow up.

We Can Do Something

As students and as citizens, we can do something. If we just sit here and wait for someone else to do the work, it's not going to happen. We have to start, one by one, talking to people.

Maria Eugenia Carrasco is a former ESOL/GED student activist in the Coalition of Human Rights, Tucson, AZ. To learn more about adult learners advocating for change, go to <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras> and watch "We Are Adult Education," a 14-minute video about students fighting for Adult Education in the Arizona state government.

Should We Call or Write to Officials?

- Personalized letters always matter much more than form letters. However, numbers still matter: thousands of post cards are better than five personalized letters.
- Calls and letters together are more powerful than letters alone. Almost anything draws more attention than a single email.
- It does not matter if you know every policy detail or statistic. Stories and experiences are also very valuable.
- Some adult education programs dedicate specific days to calling officials.
- More people will make calls when they can do so at the program with support from staff.
- You rarely get to talk to the politician. They hire aides who keep track of public opinion and tally the number of people motivated to make a call or send a letter or fax.

Why Should We Visit Officials?

- Legislators hear from lobbyists all the time but they rarely hear from ordinary people who live in their districts. Visiting is very important!

Adult learners in the Massachusetts State House during Adult Learner Awareness Day, March 2007.

- Politicians and their staff will usually be friendly even if they don't agree with you. They want to hear from people in their district and will often prioritize comments from people who are directly affected by the issue.

It's Too Late To Start Digging A Well When The House Is On Fire

Advice for Adult Education Advocacy

1. Timing is everything. Know the legislative calendar from January to June.
2. The campaign starts the day after the elections in November. Send letters of congratulations to the elected officials.
3. Identify your champions in the legislature and allies in the community to help you carry the message to legislators.
4. Focus on key decision-makers who make budget decisions on education: members of Education and Appropriations and Ways and Means committees.
5. Focus on the governor: in most states the appropriations process starts with the governor's budget submission to legislature.
6. Remember: student involvement is crucial.
7. Specify a number of letters rather than "lots of letters" to be sent to legislators. In small communities, ten letters can be a tidal wave.
8. List your Board of Directors on advocacy letters. Legislators may know some of them and take note.
9. Rule of four: There should be at least four contacts between the adult education program and state legislators during the year (congratulations letters, meetings, request for funding, end-of-the-year reports).

Art Ellison is the director of the NH Dept. of Education.

"Grassroots Advocacy" continued on next four pages

How Should We Prepare for a Visit?

- Do your homework: Know which position the officials hold and how they have voted in the past. Find out which committees the official serves on and the purpose of those committees. Find out what experiences or interests the official has that you can relate to and bring up in the conversation.
- Bring packets of information that explain the issue you are advocating for, how many people you represent, and what you recommend. Also include background information on your organization or school.

What Should We Say in a Visit?

- Decide in advance who will say what. Practice what you will say.
- Anticipate the officials' questions and be prepared to answer them. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say so.

Who is My Representative? How do I Find Out?

- ⇨ To find out who represents you in the U.S. House of Representatives, call (202) 224-3121 or visit <www.house.gov>. Input your zip code—it helps to have your 9-digit zip code, which you can find at <www.usps.gov>.
- ⇨ To find out who represents you in the U.S. Senate, call (202) 225-3121 or visit <www.senate.gov>.
- ⇨ To find out about your state representatives, visit <www.vote-smart.org>. You can also learn more about how to register in your state, recent key votes, and ballot measures.

- Be prepared to ask questions of the official and try to get specific answers.
- If the official disagrees with you, decide in advance what will be your response. Will you express disappointment or does it make more sense to leave a friendly impression?

Adult learner with her state representative.

An Agenda for Meeting with an Official:

- Establish clearly who you are and the group you represent.
- Review the information in the packets you brought and highlight some key points.
- Ask and answer questions.
- If possible, include a brief story that illustrates the need for the change you advocate.
- Discuss how you and the official will follow up.
- Thank the legislator for his/her time.
- Leave packets.
- Send a letter of thanks and any additional information the legislator requested.

How Can We Set Up the Visit?

- Call and make an appointment. Sometimes they will ask you to request a meeting in writing.
- Even if you don't get to meet with the legislator, their aides are important to meet with as well. They are responsible for advising the legislator.

Why Should we Invite Officials to Visit our Program?

- It is an opportunity for the legislator to meet people who benefit from your program. Special events, such as graduations and award ceremonies, are a great time for officials to see your program.
- A visit can be a great class project, where students write an invitation, prepare the agenda, and plan what to say and do. After the visit, they can evaluate what they thought of the official's responses, what they learned from the experience, and what next steps they might like to take.

What are Press Releases? How are They Used?

- A press release is written like a newspaper article: the most important facts go first.
- Quotes are crucial because they are the part that is the most likely to be used in a newspaper article. You may also include a "backgrounder" fact sheet that provides further information.
- Good press releases are sometimes printed as articles in newspapers.
- However, a press release alone will almost never bring out many or any reporters. It is merely an excuse to call reporters, assignment desks, columnists and editors.
- Over time, pay attention to which reporters have the most affinity with your issue and build relationships with them.

How Can We Talk Effectively with the Media?

- The same rules apply to talking with the media as visiting officials: educate yourself about the issue; speak from your direct experience to the point; plan who will say what; and rehearse your main "message of the day."
- If a reporter asks you an off-topic question, just state your "message of the day" again.

"Who am I to Talk to the Legislature...?"

As a new immigrant, I knew the importance of learning English, and Adult Education was the first place where I felt comfortable. Meeting people in a similar situations and having excellent teachers made my transition easier.

About a year later, I became a student council member. At this time we faced a new and unexpected challenge: A proposal in the state legislature to cut funding for Adult Education.

We were all concerned and asked, "What is going to happen to our school?" But we didn't stay with our arms crossed. We mobilized: Writing letters, organizing rallies, talking to legislators, and hosting the governor at one of our learning centers.

When I met with the state legislators, I thought, "Who am I to talk to people with high positions in the capitol?!" But I was very surprised and satisfied. This relationship between the legislature and the people is important. People vote, so legislators represent people. They work for the people.

In 2004 we faced a new concern: the President's proposal to eliminate adult education funding in the country. I traveled with other students to the Leadership Conference held by Voice of Adult Literacy United for Education (VALUE) in Washington, D.C. We told the congresspeople and their staff our stories. We talked about the value of Adult Education.

Saving adult education means helping people get the knowledge and skills that they are going to use for the rest of their lives.

Ismet Osami was a student at the Refugee Ed. Project, Pima Community College Adult Ed., Tucson, AZ. Watch his digital story at <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>.

"Grassroots Advocacy" continued on next two pages

Public Action That Pressures Politicians

Politicians and people in power respond to pressure. If a grassroots movement is disrupting life-as-usual, they will pay attention. Explore actions that will get the media to pay attention to you and your issue, which will in turn get the attention of politicians.

- A rally, media event, or direct action should have a clear message.
- Legislators, union leaders, famous people as well as other well-spoken supporters of the issue should be asked to speak to draw press

What Else Can I Do?

I got involved in the "Student Presenter Project" because I was part of the student council at my school, and I felt bad that adult education was in danger of losing funding.

At the beginning of the fight for adult education funding, a lot of students at our school didn't want to get involved. They didn't have information. They didn't know what to fight for. There was a lot of confusion.

As student leaders, we wanted to make other students aware that it was not just about our school, but adult education in the whole state. We gathered information and we got trained on public speaking and on how the government works. Then we went to the classes to give presentations.

We explained that the government doesn't make decisions in one day—they have a process.

We explained that the government doesn't make decisions in one day—they have a process.

I told them: "The government is thinking with their minds. We need to send letters from our hearts, so we can reach their hearts and change their minds. Tell them your experience, so they can understand."

After the presentations, people got the idea of the problem. They asked: To whom should I send the letter? Is there a meeting I can attend? What else can I do?

Sandra Lopez was an ESOL student and volunteer at Pima Community College Adult Education, Tucson, AZ. Her digital story is available at <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>.

Sandra Lopez (middle) at a rally for adult education.

attention. Also, students and staff could share brief, well-crafted stories about how the issue affects their lives and community.

- The size of a rally is crucial. It should be held in an area that is large enough for a crowd but not so large that it makes the rally or event look small. If the turnout is small, support for the issue will be perceived to be weak.
- Something visual that dramatically makes your point can make a strong impression and draw media attention. In one adult education rally in Massachusetts, people rolled out a giant scroll down the state house steps that listed the names of thousands of adults on waiting lists for classes.
- Other ways to make the event newsworthy are a new study or report; anything that saves the public money; and controversy or conflict with people in power.
- Direct action is political engagement that demands immediate changes. This contrasts with indirect action, such as electing representatives who promise to make a change at a later date. Direct action can include activities such as demonstrations, boycotts, street theater, civil disobedience where a group might risk arrest. Some groups might use direct action if they feel they can't get an official's attention in any other way. For example, a group might stage a "sit in" at a legislator's office and refuse to leave until he/she agrees to meet with them. Grassroots groups carefully consider the possible consequences of direct action.

Adapted by Ami Magisos and Silja Kallenbach with permission from the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education (PAACE), 2004; see <www.paacesite.org>.

Effective Advocacy Alerts on Listservs

The Massachusetts state appropriation for adult education has increased from $4.2 M to $29.5 M since 2000. Roberta Soolman attributes this to the highly organized and active advocacy efforts of the MA Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE). Each adult education program has a "point person," who reports advocacy efforts to a regional advocacy coordinator in each part of the state. One effective strategy to inform and activate this network is MCAE's use of its listserv. Some lessons learned about how to effectively use an advocacy listserv:

- Make advocacy alerts brief and concise. Before sending out an alert, examine it for any possible problems in interpretation of the message.
- Each alert must be understandable on its own, even if it is part of a larger campaign. Make it clear whether it calls for state or federal level advocacy.
- Rewrite alerts in simple language for students.
- Alerts should be numbered sequentially with the fiscal year.
- Eliminate jargon if you want more people to participate.
- Provide a script for calls and sample letters.

Roberta Soolman is co-chair of the Public Policy Committee of the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education.

What is Digital Storytelling?

Thousands of people are telling their stories in mini-movies that they create. These "Digital Stories" can be shared on the web or on CDs or DVDs. All you need is a digital camera, a microphone, and a computer with easy editing software, like imovie or Windows Moviemaker. Articles in this issue with the video camera symbol have accompanying digital stories available on our website <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>. For more information about digital storytelling, go to <www.storiesforchange.net>.

Custody Battle

Delanae Sykes

Earlier this year, my boys' father tried to get sole custody of my kids. I believe that if a mother is a good mother then there is no reason for the kids to be taken away. I love my kids and would never put them in harm's way. I needed to get my two boys back right away. I had to speak up!

I have had my two boys since birth, and I don't know what I would do without them. Their father went behind my back and got temporary custody. I was infuriated because he had just been released from jail for non-payment of child support. My next step was to go to court and prove that I am a good mother and care for my kids properly.

When the boy's father and I arrived at the Court House, we had to sit with a mediator and tell him our history from the time we met until the time the father got temporary custody. I explained my situation to the mediator: I had the boys enrolled in school; I brought the boys to the doctor on a regular basis; I had made a safe living situation for us. I then gave him phone numbers to call so he could confirm what I told him.

In addition to these facts, it was important for the mediator to know the reasons why I felt the boys' father was unfit and unable to care for our children. I explained that I had given their father many chances to have the boys. Every time he had them for an extended visit, he would call me and tell me he couldn't care for them anymore. I would then have to go pick them up and move them back with me.

We then went in front of the judge. After reviewing what the mediator wrote, he granted me sole physical custody of my boys. It was the most stressful day of my life, but I also felt tremendous relief. It felt good to know I had stood up in front of the judge and told him what I thought. I realized that, if necessary, I could tell people how I felt and stand up for what I believed was right.

Delanae Sykes is a GED student at the Portsmouth Basic Adult Education Program in Portsmouth, NH. She is a 25-year-old single mother of three beautiful children. Her main goal in life is to be able to provide her children with all the things they need.

Take it Further

After reading "Custody Battle" and "Justice of My Own" (on the next page), refer back to the "Three Types of Civic Participation" chart on page 4. What kind of participation do Delanae Sykes and Felicia Taylor describe in these two articles? Are there ways that their problems could be addressed using *all three* types of participation? Divide into groups. Pick one of the articles and generate ideas about how a person could respond to the situation using all three types of participation. Get back together and share your ideas. Think about how they relate to your own "battles."

Justice of My Own

Felicia Taylor

Felicia Taylor and her mother

It was February of 2002. I was 14 years old, and I was sitting in a crowded court room surrounded by my family and staring at the monster who took my soul. Next to him sat the judge, the only man who could give me some kind of justice. Because the monster, albeit with a disgusting grin on his face, pled guilty, the judge sentenced him to eight years probation. "Eight years probation for rape of a child—he had to be kidding!" I thought. My heart felt ripped from my chest by the injustice of it. But there was nothing I could do—or so I thought. I walked out of the Superior Court in New Bedford feeling as though I had been victimized for a second time and this time by a judge.

Somehow I found the determination not to let my fears take over my life. I was sick of waking up in the middle of the night sweating from the nightmares and I was sick of always looking over my shoulder, afraid my perpetrator was there. I needed to find my own justice. I would expose both these monsters, the perpetrator and the judge. I wasn't going to stay quiet anymore. I was going to tell the whole world my story.

By 7:00 pm that night, I had Channel 10 News at my house with all their equipment laid on the floor. Thank God for my mother who handled the meeting, for I was only a child and a scared one at that. I wanted everyone to know that this judge was wrong but I couldn't do it by myself. As we sat at the living room table, my mother let everything out starting from the night of my attack and ending with the judge's decision. Then they videotaped my room where this whole nightmare began, thanked us, wished us luck, and said to watch the 10 o'clock news. That night, my story was first on the news. That one report paved the road to my self-recovery.

For months thereafter, my mother was in the public eye, from radio stations to TV talk shows, to every local news station and newspaper. My story had spread everywhere and even the mayor had come forward to speak in my defense. The community had demanded the judge be removed from the bench and the reporters had found out about things from his past that shed light on why he had been so lenient with my attacker. My story brought forth other victims who also believed the judge had treated their cases too leniently. I was no longer in the fight by myself. Now I had other people to stand with me.

But the system had still done nothing about this judge, so I decided I would speak for myself. I held a press conference in my back yard. As I walked to the podium that had been set up, my legs were like jelly and my heart was pounding in my ears. Reading my prepared speech, I tried to keep myself from choking up with all my emotions. I stayed strong, kept reading, and answered all the reporters' questions.

The press conference was my ticket to justice. That same week, the judge was forced off the bench, and although my attacker was still free, I felt that I had won. I had changed from a scared little girl to a strong woman. I had my soul back and I knew that no other child would ever suffer the pain of that judge's unjust decision again because of my telling my story and because of the enormous efforts of my loving mother.

Thinking back to my past makes me feel proud. I had achieved something at age 14 that many people don't in their entire life. I had stood up for my beliefs, taken back my life, and forced the removal of a corrupt superior court judge. And that was very good!

Felicia is single mom to her 1-year-old son, Jacob. They live in Attleboro, MA, where she attends Bristol Community College. She is a rape survivor and wants to say to other survivors, "Be strong and never stop fighting for what you know is right."

Educating for Change in St. Louis

Acting for a Better Community (ABC) Organizing Team

Literacy and Social Change: A Short History

Throughout history, people around the world have organized and struggled for educational rights. Literacy campaigns have taken place in nations such as Cuba, Nicaragua, South Africa, and, most recently, Venezuela. The premise behind these literacy campaigns was to change society through literacy education. A popular education center in the United States called The Highlander Center has played important roles in many major political movements. Highlander's work is rooted in the belief that in a just and democratic society, the policies shaping political and economic life must be informed by equal concern for and participation by the people.

St. Louisans have also fought for education for centuries. One such person is John Berry Meachum. Meachum established Candle Tallow School, which taught black St. Louisans, free and enslaved, to read and write. In 1847, the State of Missouri passed a law that prohibited teaching blacks to read and write. When Candle Tallow was raided by police and its teacher arrested, Meachum looked for a new location for his school. He settled upon the Mississippi river. Hundreds of black students became literate on this steamship in the middle of the Mississippi. This school became known as the Freedom School.

Literacy and Social Change in St. Louis Today

Following in this rich tradition, adult learners and educators in St. Louis have been meeting and holding conferences and forums to identify how literacy could be improved in our community and used to address various social issues such as employment, healthcare, and housing. In 2004, the Acting for a Better Community (ABC) conference was organized by members of the Literacy Roundtable and LIFT-Missouri, the state's literacy resource center. In 2005, a core group of 20 adult learners and 10 educators participated in a student leadership program led by VALUE, a national organization whose mission is to strengthen adult literacy efforts in the United States through learner involvement and leadership. After attending the program, the students went back to their sites and started to work on student leadership projects.

Students and teachers dialogue about their site-based projects at a forum.

Noticing a Problem, Making a Plan

At one literacy site, adult learners realized that, after budget cuts, there was not enough money in the school budget to take their children on a field trip. They organized to raise money so they could take their children to the City Museum.

The students decided that they wanted to do a car wash and this resulted in several learning experiences. Students had to devise a budget, supplies list, marketing plan, and volunteer schedule for the carwash to be a success. The classroom teacher, center director, and the students all had to have a level of trust in the process to ensure that the carwash would occur. The planning process and the mutual trust that was generated promoted a sense of group identity. Because the fundraiser resulted in a field trip with their children, there was a built-in celebration of their work and accomplishments.

This group shared their experiences with other adult education teachers and learners at one of the

ABC forums. After listening to the steps in their process, each learning site developed a project that was specific to the needs and concerns of their site.

They started by posing a problem and then developing a collective solution. Through this process, people started to ask critical questions about *why* funding was cut and *why* students are allowed to drop out of school and other issues about social, political, economic, and educational equity. They asked, "Why is there homelessness? Why can't we find decent jobs? Why is there money for war and not for education? Why is the fight for freedom so fierce? Why is there so much injustice when we live in one of the richest countries in the world."

Literacy Education and Democracy

With this article, we hope to provide just a brief snapshot of the organizing around social change that has been occurring through adult literacy education in St. Louis. ABC participants have gone on to organize transition-to-college events and a workshop of Freedom Writers. They have participated in the forum planning meetings, spoken to student classes about leadership, and have a strong presence in the COABE '08 conference planning sessions. And they are finding out that what seemed like private problems are in fact shared by many and have roots not in their own personal flaws but in the way society is organized.

In the adult learners' stories we hear their critical analysis of the social, economic, and political conditions of their lives. Literacy education that is aimed at building democracy and changing society demands an educational process that is learner-centered, connected to the real concerns and needs of learners, includes problem posing and problem solving, and provides the opportunity to see connections between private and systemic problems.

The ABC organizing team includes Mary Ann Kramer, Sarah Beaman-Jones, Maggie Dyer, Carlotta Algee-Stancil, Marcia Hayes, Caroline Mitchell, Rebecca Rogers, Ora Lewis-Clark, and Dwight Johnson. For more information, see <www.abcsofliteracy.blogspot.com>.

STUDENT WORK SHEET

In order to create positive change, it is helpful to follow a process.

1. CHOOSE

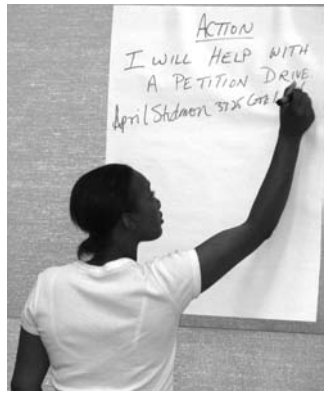
a. List some things you'd like to see change. Start with things you as a group have some control over.
b. Pick an issue, situation or problem you want to change. Aim for consensus within your group that this is what you want to work on.
c. What is the result you want?

2. PLAN

a. What are the steps you must take to realize this result? Create a list of steps.
b. List people who agree to participate in each step and what they will be responsible for.
c. When do you want to start and complete each step? Create a timeline.
d. Who else will need to be involved?

3. ACT

a. Check off action steps as they are completed.
b. Say "thank you" to those who have assisted you in your action.



A student participates in an action plan at a forum.

4. EVALUATE

a. Did you get the result you hoped for? How do you know?
b. Who became your allies in the process? Can you count on them to help you again?
c. What did not go smoothly? Why? What could you have done?
d. How did you feel during the process?
e. What did you learn in the process that would help you in the future?

Let's Get Out the Adult Education Vote!

Kristen McKenna and Silja Kallenbach

The elections provide many teachable moments and raise critically important conversations in the classroom about democracy and civic engagement. There are plenty of authentic materials to choose from that build academic skills, such as reading comprehension, critical thinking, math, civics or social studies. As is evident from many of the student writings in this issue, voting can build students' sense of belonging to the community and can serve as a springboard for more sustained civic participation. Also, students registering to vote is a countable outcome under the National Reporting System.

For all these reasons, here in New England we are, once again, recruiting adult education programs to join the Voter Education, Registration and Action (VERA) campaign. VERA is a non-partisan effort aimed at adult learners and program staff in the New England states. Its goal is to educate adult learners about voting and the topical electoral issues, and mobilize them to vote. VERA is sponsored by the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) at World Education. But you do not have to be in New England to get out the adult education vote. Below are some activities that have helped adult learners become informed voters and active community members.

Voting Matters

- ⇨ **Voting is a civil right that people have fought and died for.**
- ⇨ **Elected officials' decisions affect our daily lives and well-being.**
- ⇨ **While there are no gurantees that voting will result in the outcome you desire, abstaining from voting gurantees that you have no effect on who is elected to represent you.**
- ⇨ **If no one voted, power would be even more concentrated than it already is.**

Study the Issues

"We used the editorial page of the Boston Globe *to read other people's opinions on the election. Students responded to the letters in three ways: First they underlined a statement that they agreed with. Then they circled a statement that they disagreed with. Finally, they chose one of the letters to respond to in writing."*

~ Harborside Community Center, Boston, MA

- Watch a video about an issue that is important to students. Discuss it. Find out which level of government has primary responsibility for it.
- Have students write letters to candidates about three issues that are important to them and describe what they'd like to see happen.
- Have students watch the presidential debates as homework and discuss them in class.
- Study political cartoons in class.
- Create a bulletin board with newspaper clippings and comments about election issues.
- Use the past issues of *The Change Agent* from <www.nelrc.org/changeagent>.
- Use activities from the *Civic Participation and Community Action Sourcebook* online at <www.nelrc.org/expertise/civic.html>.

Learn About the Voting Process

"Our program director made up voter reminder slips for every student that included students' voting location. She also served as voter mentor to students who told their teachers they wouldn't vote. She engaged those folks one-on-one, got them to talk about issues they cared about, and got them to read the candidates' views on their issues."

~ Exeter Adult Education, Exeter, NH

- Arrange a trip to the Board of Elections/Town Clerk. View voting machines and try them out.
- Hold a mock election (using real ballots from your local election committee).

- Invite writing and open discussion about students' reluctance to vote, alienation, and sense of powerlessness.

Learn About U.S. Politics

"We conducted class discussions about people's families' voting histories and about prisoners' voting rights; wrote expository essays about community problems and proposed solutions; conducted a voting treasure hunt to gather information from peers about voting knowledge and experience."

~ Hampshire Sheriff's Office Adult Learning Center, Northampton, MA

- Discuss different political parties in the U.S. and review their official web sites. (See p. 56.)
- Invite different speakers to class from groups like the League of Women Voters, the Secretary of State, the Elections Commission. (If you invite different political parties or candidates be sure to invite all who are running so as not to jeopardize your tax-exempt status. See p. 62 for more information.)
- Collect and analyze literature and ads from different political campaigns.
- Compare the U.S. political system to those of other countries. Start with your students' home countries.
- Make graphs of past voter turnout in your state or region. See the website of the Federal Election Commission <www.fec.gov>.

Register Voters

"A class made a wall of voter information from the Internet, candidate posters, current publications, voter registration, and location information. This wall became a resource for all adult education students to find out candidates' opinions on specific issues. We also held a candidates' forum with local state candidates that students prepared questions for. Social studies classes connected voting to lessons about branches of government and the Constitution. In English classes students wrote essays on who you'd vote for and why."

~ Exeter Adult Education, Exeter, NH

- Organize a program-wide Voter Awareness Night. Include information about how to register to vote in your state, give out registration forms and provide assistance in filling them out. Set up an election booth so people can practice voting, invite guest speakers, and provide information on all the candidates and questions to ask in choosing one.
- Encourage students to register themselves and others from their families and communities.
- Hold a workshop for teachers and volunteers on how to register to vote.
- Attend a local voter registration drive.

Get out the Vote on Election Day

"We assigned the learners to watch the debates, and then we discussed them in small groups. We also did an electoral vote watch and count during election night and post- election mapping."

~ Read/Write/Now, Springfield, MA

- Have your class present information on voting and elections to other classes.
- Encourage your students to get to the polls on Election Day. Consider offering your Election Day class time as a time when your students can go out and vote.

Talk About Election Results

- Make graphs of election results in your local area.
- Stay in contact with the elected officials and hold them accountable for their campaign promises.

If you are in New England, join VERA at <www.nelrc.org/vera>.

History of Voting

Most of us take our right to vote for granted. But our state and federal governments sometimes did not let certain groups of people vote—including women, African-Americans, Native Americans, young people, people who didn't own land and who couldn't pay poll taxes, and people who couldn't read and write. In history, these groups of people organized to fight for their right to vote.

Activities

Brainstorm about what you already know about the history of voting. Write it on newsprint or the white board.

Do the History of Voting activity at <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>.

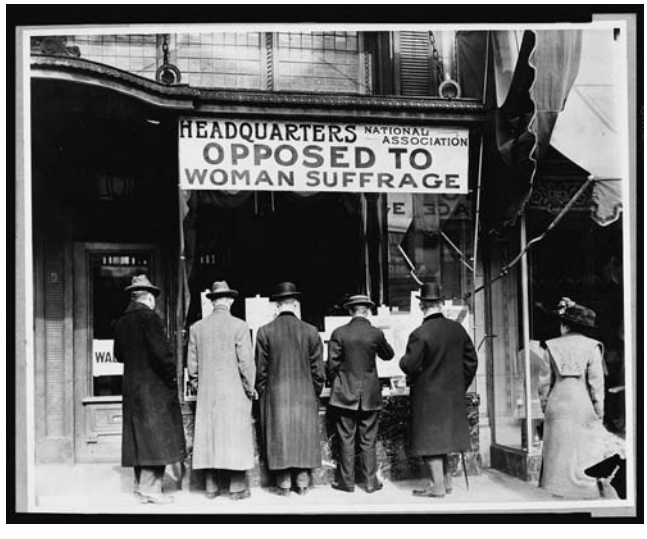
Read "What if the Government Said You Couldn't Vote?" (on the next page), and consider these questions about each group:

- **Who do you think** did not allow this group the right to vote? Why did they want to do that?
- **Who do you think** helped this group fight for the vote? Who maybe fought against it?
- **Do you think** anyone will stop this group from voting again? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

Suffrage means the right to vote. A **suffragist** was someone who fought for the right to vote. Write a sentence using suffrage or suffragist.

Write a caption for this photo.



Write a caption for this photo.

What If the Government Said You Couldn't Vote?

In modern America, almost everyone can vote who wants to. But it wasn't always that way! Here are some of the groups that have been blocked from voting over the past 200 years.

1. WOMEN. For many years only men were allowed to vote. People believed women were too emotional and cannot make intelligent choices. Women had to protest for 75 years to win the right to vote. In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution allowed women to vote.

2. POOR PEOPLE. When this country was new, only White men with property could vote. In the early 1800s, this changed and people did not need to have property to vote. Then people had to pay a poll tax to vote. In 1964, the 24th Amendment to the Constitution made poll taxes illegal.

3. YOUNG PEOPLE. For many years, only adults 21 years and older were allowed to vote in some states. During the time of the Vietnam War, many people had a different opinion. Because younger people went to fight and die for the country, they should be able to vote. In 1971 the 26th Amendment allowed everyone 18 or older to vote.

4. PEOPLE WHO COULD NOT READ AND WRITE. Early in America's history, only people who could read and write were allowed to vote in some states. The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s ensured passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which made literacy tests illegal.

5. AFRICAN-AMERICANS. The Constitution did not say only White people could vote. But it said that only free people (people who were not slaves) could vote. This made it illegal for most African-Americans to vote until after the Civil War. In 1870, the 15th Amendment allowed Black men to vote. After that, many states passed new laws to limit Black voting. Some ways people tried to limit Black voting were literacy tests, poll taxes, and making Black people scared to vote. Southern states had a "grandfather" law. This law said that if your grandfathers voted, you didn't have to take a literacy test. This was good for White men who could not read because their grandfathers could have voted. This did not help Black men because their grandfathers were slaves. They were not able to vote. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 took away all these limits on voting. It also created a system to make sure that people would follow the new law.

6. NATIVE AMERICANS. In 1887, some Native Americans could vote if they gave up their tribal affiliations. In 1924, after wiping out nearly all of the Native American people, the U.S. declared that Native Americans were citizens. However, the right to vote was decided by states, and some states did not give Native Americans the right to vote until 1957.

Can Everyone Vote Now?

No. Convicted felons in most states can't vote. Some states let people vote when they get out of jail. Some states do not. When felons in Mississippi get out of jail, they need to get a pardon by the governor before they can vote. Also, people living in the U.S. who are not citizens of this country cannot vote. Maybe they work and pay taxes here, but they still cannot vote.

"History of Voting" and "What if the Government Said You Couldn't Vote" reprinted and adapted with permission from the Civic Participation and Community Action Sourcebook, *Andy Nash, ed. Originally adapted from* Beyond Basic Skills, *1998 by Tom Valentine and Jenny Sandlin.*

What Were They Thinking?

List some arguments people might give against women's suffrage.

List some arguments people might give in favor of women's suffrage.

List some arguments people might give for why voting really won't give us equality.*

For supplementary materials related to this activity, visit <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras> and click on "History of Voting Rights: Drawing, Role-Playing, Debating" by Diana Satin.

* This quote is taken from a speech by Emma Goldman. See <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras> for complete text of her speech in which she argues that the voting system doesn't work and would not allow for fundamental change.

Why We Should Lower the Voting Age

Seth Anthony

Today, we look back on those who tried to deny voting rights to women and minorities as bigoted, biased, and closed-minded. We like to think that we now see things more clearly.

But maybe our vision is still clouded by prejudice. Invoking the same tired arguments that were used to push down the rights of women and minorities for centuries, we still deny the right to vote to millions of American youth.

In 1971, during the Vietnam War, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18. The nation realized that it was unconscionable to send youth off to fight in war, but not give them the right to vote. But 18 is just an arbitrary cutoff. So why not lower the voting age?

Opponents of lowering the voting age argue that youth will be overly swayed by their families, by authority figures, by slick commercials or by sound-bite promises.

Yet, all of us are influenced in our political views by our families, churches, mentors, friends, and the media. And if youth start voting earlier—while they're living in their home communities—they're actually more likely to start voting with an eye toward real issues.

A National Youth Rights Association member rallies to lower the voting age in Berkeley, CA.

Opponents of lowering the voting age argue that youth aren't responsible enough to vote.

And yet, in this country, people as young as 14 are permitted to drive automobiles, and people as young as 12 are tried as adults in court. Youth are held to similar standards of responsibility as older Americans, but not given equal rights.

Opponents of lowering the voting age argue that youth aren't interested in voting, or that they don't understand how government works.

And yet, 80 percent of youth have held jobs before graduating from high school. Youth pay billions of dollars in sales, income, and payroll taxes, and they interact with the direct effects of government every day though the schools they attend, the roads they travel on, and the air they breathe. All these things are regulated by a government that youth have no say in choosing.

Opponents of lowering the voting age argue that young people's brains are not fully developed or not trained enough to reason about complex issues.

And yet, Congress, in the 1965 Voting Rights Act, declared that "any person [...] who has completed the sixth grade [...] possesses sufficient literacy, comprehension and intelligence to vote in any election."

It's patently hypocritical to refuse youth the right to vote on grounds of "immaturity," when our own laws prohibit imposing tests of maturity, intelligence, or responsibility for voting.

All the arguments used to deny voting rights to youth have been used before, against women and minorities. They were wrong then, and they're wrong now.

It's time for the United States to step forward in the advance of equal rights. It's time to lower the voting age.

Seth Anthony is a student at Rocky Mountain College in Fort Collins, CO. This piece was adapted and reprinted with permission from the Rocky Mountain Collegian, *where it originally appeared on February 14, 2008.*

Want to read another opinion? Chris Demers, a student at Bristol Community College in MA, is opposed to lowering the voting age. Visit <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>.

Is Voting a Right for Every Citizen?

What if you commit a crime?

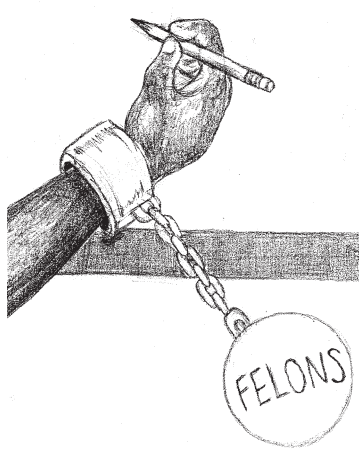
Andy Nash

"Our democracy is weakened when one sector of the population is blocked out of the voting process."
—U.S. Representative John Conyers, Jr.

In the above quote, who do you think Rep. Conyers is talking about? Who is "blocked out of the voting process" in the United States?

Since the founding of this country, most states in the U.S. have passed laws that take away the right to vote from felons and ex-felons (a felon is a person who has been convicted of a serious crime). These are called felony disenfranchisement laws.

Laws are different from state to state. However, in all states except Maine and Vermont, felons cannot vote while they are in prison. In many states, people who are on parole or have already served their sentence are still barred from voting, sometimes permanently. The United States is the only democracy in which convicted felons who have served their sentences may be disenfranchised for life.



People who support felony disenfranchisement claim that convicted felons are bad people who should not vote and that disenfranchisement should be part of their punishment. People who disagree with these laws say that voting is every citizen's right and has nothing to do with the sentence for a crime. In fact, voting helps ex-offenders become part of a stable community again—it can be part of the rehabilitation process.

In 2000, Florida's felony disenfranchisement laws received a lot of attention because over 600,000 ex-felons were not allowed to vote in the presidential election. President Bush won in Florida by only 537 votes. At that time, Florida stripped citizens who were convicted felons of their voting rights for life—even after they'd completed their punishment—unless they went through a very complicated application process that many ex-felons didn't know about. After strong public outcry, Florida changed the law so that non-violent offenders automatically have their voting rights returned after they complete their sentences.

Definitions

Bigamy: being married to two people at the same time.
Disenfranchisement: to deprive someone of a right of citizenship, especially the right to vote.
Literacy Tests: very difficult reading tests given to people registering to vote.
Parole: a conditional release of a prisoner before his or her sentence is finished.
Poll Taxes: a fee African-Americans had to pay to vote.
Vagrancy: wandering from place to place; having no permanent home or income.

The History of Disenfranchisement

In 1890, Mississippi was the first state to use felony disenfranchisement laws against African-Americans. Until then, the Mississippi law disenfran-

chised those guilty of any crime. In 1890, the law was changed to focus on crimes such as bigamy and vagrancy. These crimes were more common among African-Americans because slavery had separated them from their families and/or left them homeless. Felony disenfranchisement laws, combined with other laws like poll taxes and literacy tests, disempowered African-American communities and excluded them from the political process.

A Shifting Terrain

Since each state makes and changes its own laws, it can be difficult to see a national trend on this issue. However, most of the changes in the last few years have been toward loosening the restrictions on voting rights. Some states, such as Nebraska, Alabama, Maryland, and New Mexico, have repealed their lifelong bans on voting by ex-felons. Many others, such as Rhode Island, Tennessee, Nevada, and Iowa, have changed their laws so that voting rights are restored to ex-felons more quickly or through simplified procedures. To find out about the laws in your own state, go to <www.sentencingproject.org>.

The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws

Today, felony disenfranchisement laws continue to punish people who have served their sentences and discriminate against people of color.

- 35 states prohibit felons from voting while they are on parole.
- Two states deny the right to vote to all ex-felons who have completed their sentences.
- 13% of Black men (1.4 million citizens) are disenfranchised, a rate seven times the national average. Poor people and Latinos are also overrepresented among the disenfranchised.
- About 5.3 million Americans have lost their voting rights due to felony convictions.
- Given current rates of incarceration, three in ten of the next generation of Black men can expect to be disenfranchised at some point in their lifetime.
- Nationally, about 7.5% of Black adults (men and women) are disenfranchised, compared to 1.5% of Whites.

Another way the criminal justice system disempowers people of color is through redistricting. Every ten years, states redraw their electoral maps based on population changes. During this process, states count prisoners where they "reside" (where the prisons are, in mostly rural areas) rather than where they come from (poor areas of cities). This increases the "official" population in rural areas, so they get a bigger share of government funds for roads, schools, and social services. They also get to elect more representatives, even though many of their phantom "residents" in prison cannot vote.

Post-reading:

1. What about this article do you think is worth discussing?
2. What is something you learned that you didn't know before?
3. Go to the suggested website to find out about the laws in your state. What do you hope they are?
4. Return to the quote of Representative John Conyers, Jr., you read before the article. Do you think these laws weaken or strengthen our democracy?
5. Here's another quote from Representative John Conyers, Jr. What do you think about what he is saying?

"*If we want former felons to become good citizens, we must give them rights as well as responsibilities, and there is no greater responsibility than voting.*"

Andy Nash is a Professional Development Specialist who believes that the purpose of adult education is to build and protect democracy. She works at NELRC/World Education. Most of the information in this article comes from articles that can be found at <www.demos-usa.org> and <www.sentencingproject.org>.

Felons' Rights to Vote

Claudia Arredondo

In Illinois felons are allowed to vote as long as they're not incarcerated. After their release from prison, while on parole or probation, felons have the right to vote. In other states felons aren't allowed to vote, or they have to wait until they are off parole or probation. Our 15th Amendment says that states can't "prevent a citizen from voting because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Some felons in this country are having their right to vote taken away. I don't think this is fair.

Many felons are tax payers. The majority of felons who are not incarcerated work and pay taxes. They should be allowed to vote. If felons have paid their debt to society, society should not take their right to vote away.

People may think that felons are not capable of making "educated decisions" such as voting, yet they are released from prison to live among other human beings. What's going to happen next? Are states are going to start saying that poor people aren't allowed to vote, because they'd be considered "incapable of making such an educated decision?"

We, the people, make up this country. Some states are sending the message that felons aren't important enough to vote, that their opinions don't matter, and that we don't value them. If states prohibit felons from voting, they are degrading them as people. To me, it is discriminatory.

Claudia Arredondo is 21 years old and working towards a GED. As soon as she passes the exam (hopefully this year), she plans to go to college.

Yusuf Stroud is currently working on his GED in St. Louis, MO.

Voting: My Obligation to Past, Present, and Future

Sheila Mailman

It wasn't until 1954 that Native Americans in the state of Maine were allowed to vote in federal elections. As a full-blooded Native American (Cheyenne, Maliseet, and Penobscot) woman, I see voting as an obligation both to my ancestors and to generations to come. I want to make a difference by exercising my right to vote and helping others do the same. In my neighborhood, I volunteer to help those that can't read that well so that they to have the opportunity to vote. I help shut-ins get their absentee ballots and campaign for my choices for Congress and governor. I also met our State House representative at the soup kitchen last fall.

My first voting experience resulted from a group effort of our ABE class to become active participants in the voting process. In class, we talked with some of the candidates. All of the students in the class voted except for one who is not a U.S. citizen yet. For some students, their votes were the first in the history of their families who may have lived for two or three generations here in Aroostook County. These students have broken the non-voting trend for themselves and their families.

I love to vote. I like the excitement, the rush of people entering and exiting booths, and friends coming and going. It is times like these that I look back and see how far our nation has come. Gender, nation of origin, and financial status no longer can be used to determine who can vote. For me, "to vote or not to vote" is not even in question. It is my obligation to the past, present, and future generations—and I do it proudly.

From Your Point of View

List the ways that voting could be an obligation to the

PAST:

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PRESENT:

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FUTURE:

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Sheila was born in Bangor, ME. Her Native name is Sleeping Bear. She learned about her Native American heritage from her maternal grandparents, who taught her how to gather and prepare native herbs, spices and tree bark for treating a variety of ailments and how to predict weather patterns. Sheila currently resides in Caribou, ME, has two adult children and two grandchildren, is an active volunteer at the community soup kitchen, and serves as secretary of the social club.

Should Non-Citizens Vote?

Andy Nash

Immigrant workers pay taxes, work hard, serve in the military, send children to schools, and make contributions to their communities. Their families buy groceries at the corner store, play in the local park, and take the bus. Non-citizens are affected by the same community concerns as their citizen neighbors. They worry about the quality of public schools, struggle to find affordable housing, and want clean, safe streets. So why shouldn't they be able to vote and have a say in local government?

Many believe that non-citizens should be allowed to vote in local elections because voting gives residents a stake in the society by including them in the decisions that affect them. Like other citizens, immigrants tend to become more involved and invested in their communities and the nation when they have a voice in social and political processes.

Others believe that non-citizens should not be allowed to vote because then they would have less reason to become citizens. They worry that non-citizens may not have enough knowledge about or loyalty to this country.

What is the Connection between Citizenship and Voting?

Historically, the right to vote has never been tied to citizenship, which is why women and African Americans—who were both citizens—were widely denied the vote until 1920 (women) and in some places until 1965 (African-Americans). This idea that voting is tied to citizenship is rather recent. For most of our history (1776 until 1926), non-citizen voting was widespread in the United States. Non-citizens voted in forty states and federal territories in local, state and even federal elections. Non-citizens also held public office. The Constitution does not preclude it and the courts have upheld voting by non-citizens.

In fact, this country was founded on the idea of "no taxation without representation," the belief that you cannot tax people who do not have their voice represented in government. And non-citizens certainly pay taxes.

Voting is about choosing the representatives that will make decisions about our lives. Because non-citizens lack voting rights, politicians can ignore their interests. Non-citizens are at risk of discrimination in employment, housing, education, healthcare, and criminal justice. This is not healthy for a democracy. Extending the right to vote to non-citizens would help keep government representative, responsive, and accountable to all.

Arguments FOR non-citizen voting rights

1. Non-citizens work hard, pay taxes, and contribute to society. Many non-citizens even fight and die in the country's military. People say that non-citizens have earned the right to vote because of these sacrifices to our nation.
2. Voting is an important part of participating in our democracy. By allowing people to vote and be part of the democratic process, you encourage them to be active members in our society.
3. Politicians often do things to please voters. Because non-citizens cannot vote, politicians do not feel responsible for helping them. As a result, the needs of non-citizens are ignored. Voting rights would make politicians more accountable to the needs of non-citizens.

Q & A on Citizenship and Voting

Andy Nash

Why don't all immigrants become citizens?

Most immigrants that come to America intend to become citizens. What has changed in recent years is that the naturalization process has become increasingly cumbersome, the application backlog has increased to about five years, and the cost of naturalization has skyrocketed. The average time it takes to obtain citizenship is nearly ten years.

Can non-citizens vote on anything?

Non-citizens currently vote in local school board elections in Chicago (and several other cities) if they have a child in the public schools. Over the past decade, non-citizen voting campaigns have been launched in at least a dozen states, including California, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, North Carolina, Colorado, Texas, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

Arguments AGAINST non-citizen voting rights

1. People should become citizens first if they want to vote. Otherwise, they might not have an incentive to become citizens. Why would people become citizens if they could already vote?
2. Non-citizens are more loyal to their native country than they are to the United States.
3. Non-citizens have not lived here long enough and do not know enough about American society to make good decisions.

What happens in other countries?

Non-citizens vote in at least some level of elections in more than 35 countries around the world, including Israel, Ireland, Japan, Chile, Colombia, Spain, Switzerland, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. Europe began granting non-citizen voting rights in the 1960s because the growing number of immigrant workers prompted nations to think about ways to help mobile populations become part of their new communities.

Why did citizen voting rights change through history?

During the period when this country was growing through westward expansion, non-citizen voting spread with the growing need for new labor. Many new states and territories used voting as an incentive to attract immigrant settlers. The general practice was to require residency from six months to one year before voting rights were granted. Non-citizens began losing their right to vote after the Civil War, when it was feared that they would vote to abolish slavery.

Western territories were often forced to disenfranchise their non-citizen populations in order to gain statehood, as southern states felt that non-citizens were too likely to oppose slavery.

In addition, the powerful in both political parties worried that new immigrants would support social movements (the labor movement, for example) and new political parties. They came up with many ways of excluding people from the vote: poll taxes, literacy tests, felony disenfranchisement, and the elimination of non-citizen voting.

Andy Nash is a Professional Development Specialist who believes that the purpose of adult education is to build and protect democracy. She works at NELRC/World Education.

This is "The Land of the Free."

Ladda Lanouette

I believe that voting is a very important obligation of everyone who is eligible. I always push my friends and family to register to vote and make sure they get out to the polls on Election Day. It doesn't matter to me if they vote Democrat, Republican, or Independent, as long as they vote from their hearts and vote to make our community and our country a better place for all of us.

Voting is a privilege and a cornerstone of our democracy. As Benjamin Franklin left the Constitutional Convention on September 18, 1787, someone from the crowd shouted out to him: "Well, doctor, what have we got?" and Franklin responded: "A Republic, if you can keep it." If we as citizens don't exercise this right to vote, we are in danger of losing it.

The electoral process and the debates really fascinate me and I always watch the polls with great interest. I am hooked on the political TV shows. With the assistance of my teachers and counselors at the Methuen Adult Learning Center, I learned to read and write English and now am extremely proud to be a U.S. citizen and able to participate in the electoral process. To show my gratitude, I volunteer to hold up a sign outside the polling place for my favorite candidate, whether there is rain, sleet, or snow.

If I was back in my home country of Thailand, I could vote, but the corrupt people in power would always be bribing the citizens in the countryside to make sure they voted for their candidate. Early in 2007, there was a military coup in Thailand. I was scared at first and I worried about what might happen to my family and friends back home. Thank the Lord I live here in the land of the free where I believe that a military coup could never happen.

Strategies to Increase Voting

I've noticed that a lot of the young people don't care about politics or voting in elections. I think this is a real shame. If the younger voters don't get involved in our democratic process, we could lose our Republic as Benjamin Franklin feared, or our United States could turn into a country run by the military like happened in Thailand. I think that if young people are encouraged to get involved in their communities by assisting at neighborhood polling places, and maybe driving elderly and disabled voters to the polls, there is a good chance they will grow up to be enthusiastic and informed voters. Younger people might also help get their parents involved. Many of these parents do not know English, but that should not keep them from participating in our democracy.

If we make Election Day a national holiday, I think many more people would be able to vote. Election Day is already a holiday in some states, and just recently, Rep. John Conyers of Michigan and a member of the Congressional Black Caucus introduced a bill in Congress to make election day a national holiday called "Democracy Day."

It is important that everybody votes because there are so many close races, and every vote counts. Many people will stay at home and say that their one vote doesn't count. But our democracy can only work if EVERYBODY participates. I believe that although our voting and electoral process may not be perfect, it's the best in the world! I know that along with the power of my vote comes a great responsibility. I'm ready!

Ladda Lanouette is originally from Thailand. She is currently working on her GED at the Methuen Adult Learning Center in Methuen, MA.

"I Find it Difficult to Believe Politicians."

Damaris Rodriguez

I come from Guatemala. I find it hard to have faith in the political process. Politicians sometimes do nothing to make positive changes for the country or the community. My view is influenced by something that happened in my native country. A president was elected there who promised to make a lot of changes for the good of the people. But once he became president, he did not do anything for them. Instead, he stole money, bought himself a mansion in another country, and moved away. I find it difficult to believe politicians after witnessing that.

I would like to believe that things are different here in the United States, but I'm afraid that now the situation may be the same. The president promised to help immigrants, but so far he has not kept his promise. It is a bad decision to separate families, as happens when parents are deported to their native countries. Children suffer whether they accompany their parents to what is to them a foreign country or stay behind without their parents.

America needs immigrants. I think it is important for immigrants to have a voice. I hope the next administration will do the right thing and make a difference in our lives and in America.

Damaris Rodriguez is 21 and has been living in the United States since 1994. She has two school-aged children and is currently studying with the goal of passing the GED.

What do you think?

The essays on pages 40 and 41 are by immigrants who had bad experiences with politicians in their country of origin. What is your experience with the political system—either in the U.S. or in your country of origin? Are you more optimistic about the U.S. political system (like Ladda Lanouette) or are you more pessimistic (like Damaris Rodriguez)? Write about it here.

Election Reform

Andy Nash

Here are some strategies for making voting more inclusive and easier for people. Some of these strategies are already implemented by some states. For example, the State of Maine allows people to register on Election Day, but most states don't. Check the ones that would help you get out and vote.

Strategies for Election Reform

- ☐ Allow people to register to vote on Election Day.
- ☐ Make Election Day a holiday.
- ☐ Allow people to vote by mail without pre-conditions (for example, incapacitated or absent from the state).
- ☐ Get time off from work to vote.
- ☐ Restore voting rights to ex-offenders who have completed their parole.
- ☐ Use voting machines that allow voters with disabilities to vote privately.
- ☐ Notify voters of their polling place before Election Day.
- ☐ Hold community workshops about how to use the voting machines before the elections.
- ☐ Only require identification to register to vote. Accept a wide range of identification documents to prevent discrimination against those without a driver's license or official ID.

Activity

List election reforms that would help you get out to vote.

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Pros and Cons

At least 20 states require all voters to show ID in order to vote. Two states require a government issued photo ID.

Pro: prevents voter fraud

Con: many people don't have a drivers license or photo ID. The percent of African-Americans and Hispanics who don't have a license or photo ID is much higher than for White adults. Those with IDs with outdated addresses, name changes, etc. are not able to vote.

Read more about this topic and the recent related Supreme Court decision at <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>. Click on "The Debate over Voter Identification."

Andy Nash is a Professional Development Specialist who believes that the purpose of adult education is to build and protect democracy. She works at NELRC/World Education.

National Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections: 1960-2004

Pat Nelson

A	B	C	D	E	F
Year	Voting Age Population	Registered Voters	% of Voting Age Population that is Registered	Turnout	% of Voting Age Population that Turned Out to Vote
2004	221,256,931	174,256,931		122,294,978	55.3%
2000	205,815,000	156,421, 311	76%	105,586, 274	51.3%
1996	196,511,000	146,211,960		96,456,345	49.1%
1992	189,529,000	133,821,178		104,405,155	55.1%
1988	182,778,000	126,379,628	69.1%	91,594,693	50.1%
1984	174,466,000	124,150,614		92,652,680	53.1%
1980	164,597,000	113,043,734		86,515,221	52.6%
1976	152,309,000	105,037,986		81,555,221	53.6%
1972	140,776,000	97,328,541		77,718,554	55.2%
1968	120,328,000	81,658,180	67.8%	73,211,875	60.8%
1964	114,090,000	73,715,818		70,644,592	61.9%
1960	109,159,000	64,833,096		68,838,204	63.1%

Source: Federal Election Commission

Math Questions

1. What happened to the voting rate between 1960 and 2004?
2. Do you think the percent of voting age population that is registered was higher in 2004 than it was in 2000? Why? How would you find out?
3. Calculate the missing percentages in Column D.
4. Compare the percentages in Column D with the percentages in Column F. What do you notice?
5. In how many years between 1960 and 2004 did the voting rate increase from the year before? In how many years did it decrease?
7. Choose two years and compare the number of people that voted. Write your answer as a complete statement.
8. What does the chart tell you about the general voting trend in the United States? Why do you think that is? What could be done about it?
9. Write a math question that you'd ask about this chart. Show how you would answer it.
10. Was voter participation in your community higher or lower than the national average?

Pat Nelson is coordinator of the NH Literacy Resource Center and a consultant to the Right Question Project in Cambridge, MA.

Americans Distrust the Government

Cynthia Peters

	1987	2007
Americans who said that they believe that elected officials "care about what people like me think."	47%	34%

	early 1960s	2007
Americans who think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right "just about always" or "most of the time."	75%	24%

	1969	2004
Americans who said "the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves" rather than "for the benefit of all."	29%	64%

Sources: "A Citizen Congress," by Archon Fung, October 16, 2007, *Boston Globe*, <www.pollingreport.com>, The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press <www.people-press.org>.

Questions and Ideas

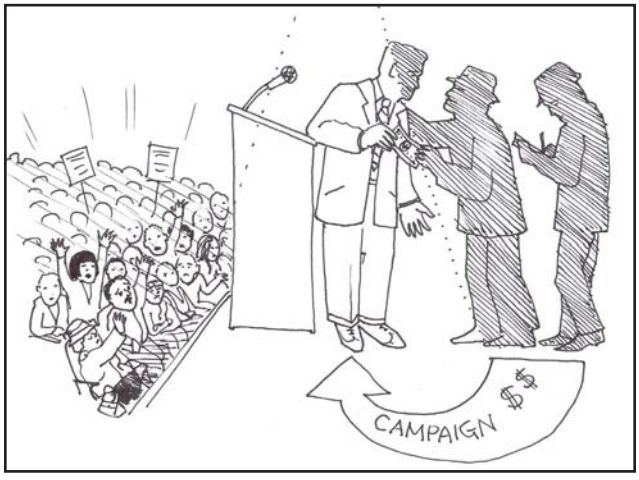
1. What are the trends in voter confidence over the last 40 years?
2. How does this trend affect our democracy?
3. What do you think regular people can do to make government more trustworthy?
4. Create your own poll and collect data from your class, your workplace, and your community. Compare the data. Discuss what you learn.

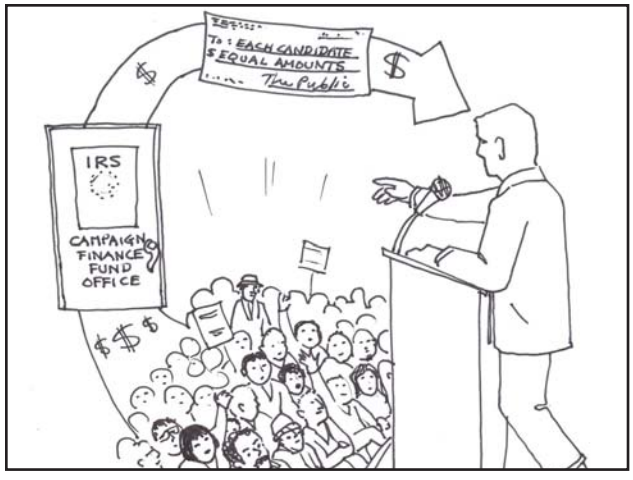
Cynthia Peters is editor of The Change Agent.

Activity

What changes would increase the level of trust Americans have for their government? List them here.

Look at these two illustrations and write about what is happening in each of them.





Joann Wheeler

Which System Do You Want?

Wendy Quinones

"This is an impressive crowd – the haves and the have-mores. Some people call you the elites; I call you my base." –George W. Bush, speaking at $800-per-plate charity dinner (CBS News, Oct. 20, 2000)

"The truth is, it's about access. When you've got 20 phone messages at the end a long day, you're going to pull out the ones who gave you $1,000 or $5,000… I think that kind of access to individuals based on money is hard to erode. It's hard to get out of our system, but Clean Elections clearly takes a good step in that direction. I think it sends a message that the people you want to owe at the end of the day are the people of the state of Maine." –Glenn Cummings, Speaker of Maine's House of Representatives

In most elections, it takes money—a lot of money—to be a candidate, whether you win or lose. In the 2006 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives, for example, the average winner spent $1,253,031. Even the losers spent an average of $622,348.

Where does that money come from? Candidates for office raise and spend as much money as they can, much of it coming from individual contributions. As the quotes above demonstrate, people who give more to candidates get more of their attention. To limit abuse, campaign contributions have been regulated by state and federal law for many years.

But what would happen if campaigns were funded from public money, with each candidate getting an equal amount? Several states and cities have tried this approach. Maine is one state that passed a Clean Elections system. What happened there? (See next page to find out.)

Sources: <www.cbsnews.com>, "Getting a Grip on Money & Politics," Part 1, <www.quantumshift.tv>; and <www.opensecrets.org>.

Wendy Quinones is an ABE teacher at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA.

Clean Elections

Wendy Quinones

Campaign finance regulations	U.S.	Maine
Maximum individual contribution to any one candidate	$2,300	$5
Maximum individual contribution to all candidates, parties, and PACs	$108,200 per two-year election cycle	Unlimited (proposal for $1000 per PAC, total of $10,000 per 2-year election cycle)
Public funding	Matches qualifying contributions raised by candidate	Equal amounts distributed to each candidate, with additional funds if candidate's opponent has not agreed to Clean Elections restrictions
Maximum expenditure permitted (under federal matching funds limitation if the election were in 2007)	$81.8 million	Determined by spending in past elections
Without public financing	Unlimited—as much as the candidate can raise	Unlimited—as much as the candidate can raise

Public vs. Private Financing

If candidates wants to run a "clean election," they have to agree to spending limits and reject special interest cash. In return, they receive public funding for their campaigns. In both state and federal elections, participation in public funding is voluntary. Few candidates (and no presidential candidates) choose to do so at the federal level. If candidates do not accept the terms of public financing, they are free to raise as much as they can from private donors.

Democratic, Republican, and independent voters all support Fair Elections. Nearly 75 percent of respondents—including 80 percent of Democrats and 65 percent of Republicans—said in a mid-2006 poll that they supported a voluntary public funding system.

What Happened in Maine?

In Maine's 2006 elections, 81% of candidates ran under the Clean Elections (CE) law. The vast majority of CE candidates won their elections (83% of the Senate, 84% of the House). Maine's legislature is now composed of 84% legislators who ran under the CE law. Watch "Getting a Grip on Money and Politics," at <www.quantumshift.tv/v/1191271814>. This video examines campaign finance reform through the eyes of Deborah Simpson, a former waitress and single mother who ran for office under Maine's Clean Election law, and won!

For Discussion

1. What are some of the effects of allowing individuals to make large campaign contributions?
2. How has the Maine Clean Elections law changed elections in that state?
3. Under which system would you rather be a candidate? Why?
4. Arizona and Connecticut have also passed statewide public campaign funding laws. What effect have those laws had on who is in office?

Wendy Quinones is an ABE teacher at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. A major source for this article: <www.uspirg.org>.

Pocketbook Politics: Whose Voice Speaks Loudest?

Wendy Quinones

"No right is more precious in a free country than having a voice in the election of those who make the laws under which, as good citizens, we must live."
– U.S. Supreme Court, Wesberry v. Sanders, 1964

Campaigns for election to office in the U.S. are expensive – very expensive! In 2004, for example, it cost $28 million to win a Senate seat in Illinois; by 2006 the price had risen to $46.5 million in New York. In 2004, House Speaker Dennis Hastert spent over $5 million for his Illinois House seat; by 2006 the highest-priced House seat, in Florida, had risen to over $11 million. Even the least costly Senate seat took $1.5 million to win in 2006, while the least expensive House seat cost more than $182,000.

With these kinds of costs, candidates need money, and lots of it. Where does it come from? Who helps winners get elected? Who do the winners owe? Very, very few people, as it turns out.

Furthermore, studies show that those few are 95% White, and 81% of them have incomes of $100,000 or more. The chart below shows the number of campaign donors who gave money to political candidates in the 2004 election. Use these figures to answer the questions below.

The total U.S. voting age population was 220,126,266 in 2004. U.S. Census figures for 2006 show the population is 66% White, 14.8% Hispanic or Latino, 13.4% Black, and 5.8% other.

Contributions to Political Candidates in 2004

	Number of donors	Amount donated (in millions of $)
All Donors giving $200+	1,140,535	1,913.3
Donors giving $200-$999	673,602	264.6
Donors giving $1000-$1,999	834,321	513.2
Donors giving $2,000 - $9,999	230,798	755.6
Donors giving $10,000+	25,833	644.8
Donors giving $95,000+	372	41.2

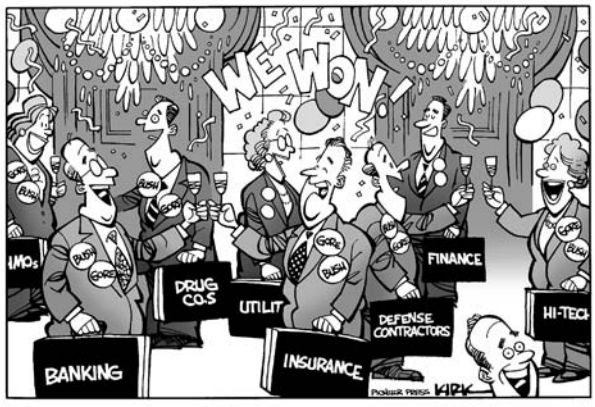
Source: figures from the Center for Responsive Politics, <www.opensecrets.org>.

Math Questions

1. What do you think is interesting about this information?
2. Use the information to calculate averages. For example, what is the average contribution of donors who gave $95,000 or more? Round to the nearest $10,000.
3. Use the information in the chart and the text to create a pie chart or a bar graph.
4. What statements could you make about race and political giving?
5. Based on the data presented, what statements can you make about the political system? For example, more than three-quarters of the donors to political campaigns have incomes of $100,000 or more.
6. What effect do you think these numbers have on political campaigns?

Wendy Quinones is an ABE teacher at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA.

"Wealth Primary"



Before you read:

1. Discuss the role of a primary. What is its function? (If you're not sure what a primary is, see the box on this page.)
2. What do you think "Wealth Primary" means?
3. Can you think of people, groups, or companies that give money to political campaigns?
4. Write captions for the cartoons.

"Getting money out of politics is the unfinished business of the Voting Rights Movement."
– Dr. Gwen Patton, Civil Rights Leader

U.S. elections are now subject to a *de facto* "wealth primary" that effectively excludes nonwealthy voters and candidates from meaningful participation in the political process. The wealth primary is the process by which the person who raises the most money almost always goes on to get his or her party's nomination. He or she is the "winner of the wealth primary." It also means that those campaign contributors with the most money choose the candidate who almost invariably goes on to win. While all U.S. citizens have the right to run for elective office, huge increases in the cost of running for office now ensure that low-income citizens cannot afford the cost of the campaigns. Those who cannot compete in the wealth primary cannot find representation in government.

Fully three quarters (76%) of the 2006 congressional primary races featured only one candidate seeking his or her party's nomination, providing voters with no real choice on primary election day. One reason for this is that incumbents usually have a large financial advantage. In 2006, the average incumbent Senator started his or her reelection campaign with $1.43 million already on hand.

What is a primary?

The purpose of the primary is to "narrow the field." Let's say you have six Democrats and six Republicans who want to run for president. Each party has to choose *one* candidate to run in the final election. The primaries are the process that each Party uses to pick a candidate to represent their party in the final election. **Note:** Some states use a caucus instead of a primary. See page 65.

The Facts: Our Money-Driven Elections

- According to the Federal Election Commission, major party congressional candidates who raised the most money won 92% of their primary races in 2006. Candidates who spent the most won 91% of the time.
- Only one-ninth of 1% of the voting-age population—nearly 232,000 people—gave $1000 or more to federal candidates in 1999-2000.

- Only 0.27 % of voting age Americans gave over $200 contributions to candidates.
- A 1997 survey of major congressional campaign contributors (those who give $200 or more) revealed that 95% of such donors are white, and that 81% have annual incomes of $100,000 or more.

Our Campaign Finance System Discriminates

At one point in our history, only White male property owners had the right to vote. But disenfranchised people have organized and struggled for an America that lives up to its legal and moral promise of political equality. Over time, grassroots movements eliminated numerous barriers to voting rights, including property, race, gender, and age qualifications.

Today, we must face up to the newest voting-rights barrier: the "wealth primary." Those who do not raise enough money rarely appear on the ballot, much less win office. The rest of us, the vast majority of American people, are shut out of a critical part of our election process.

This piece was excerpted and adapted from the National Voting Rights Institute <www.nvri.org>. Updated figures are from <www.uspirg.org>. Reprinted here with permission.

Politicians and the Wealthy

Ryan-Scott Hilsman

I choose not to vote because of the way I believe things are run in this country. Most politicians these days are corrupt people. When it comes time for elections, they parade around making promises that they do not intend to keep. Once in office, they do the opposite of what they said they would do so that they can help the rich people who gave them money to run. Look at the way the wealthy live—they can do pretty much as they like but if I did some of the same things, I'd be in trouble.

Unfortunately, the time of politicians who help the rest of us has left, hopefully not forever. We need people to run for office who know what it is like to work for a living. Then maybe the hard-working people of this country can actually get a break, and not be used just to provide money that goes into the pockets of the corrupt politicians.

Why should I vote for people that do not really care for the well-being of our country and its people? Why should I vote for people who make promises that they do not intend to keep? These types of people do not deserve my vote. I would consider voting only if someone kept their promises to the middle and lower classes.

Ryan-Scott Hilsman is a student at Bristol Community College in Attleboro, MA.

One Number Can Count

Angie Perron

Sometimes when I look in the mirror, I see not just my face staring back at me but a number. I wasn't always that way. I had a job I loved, a nice apartment, a boyfriend, and two beautiful kids. I was one of those everyday people. My world suddenly began to change: the father of my kids, gone; my job, gone. The only thing left was me and my kids.

After 6 months of looking for a job, the hole I was digging just kept getting bigger. I made a decision for my family; I went to apply at the State for help. Just getting out of my car in the parking lot was difficult, never mind walking into the building. I sat in a drab room with ugly chairs, and no one looked at me. They just sat there blank, waiting for their number. A woman walked out from behind the big, locked gray door and called my name. I got up and walked over to her. As she stood there looking at me holding a folder with my name on it, I realized that she was not looking at me; she was looking through me. The only me she saw was the one in her hand, the brown folder with my number on it.

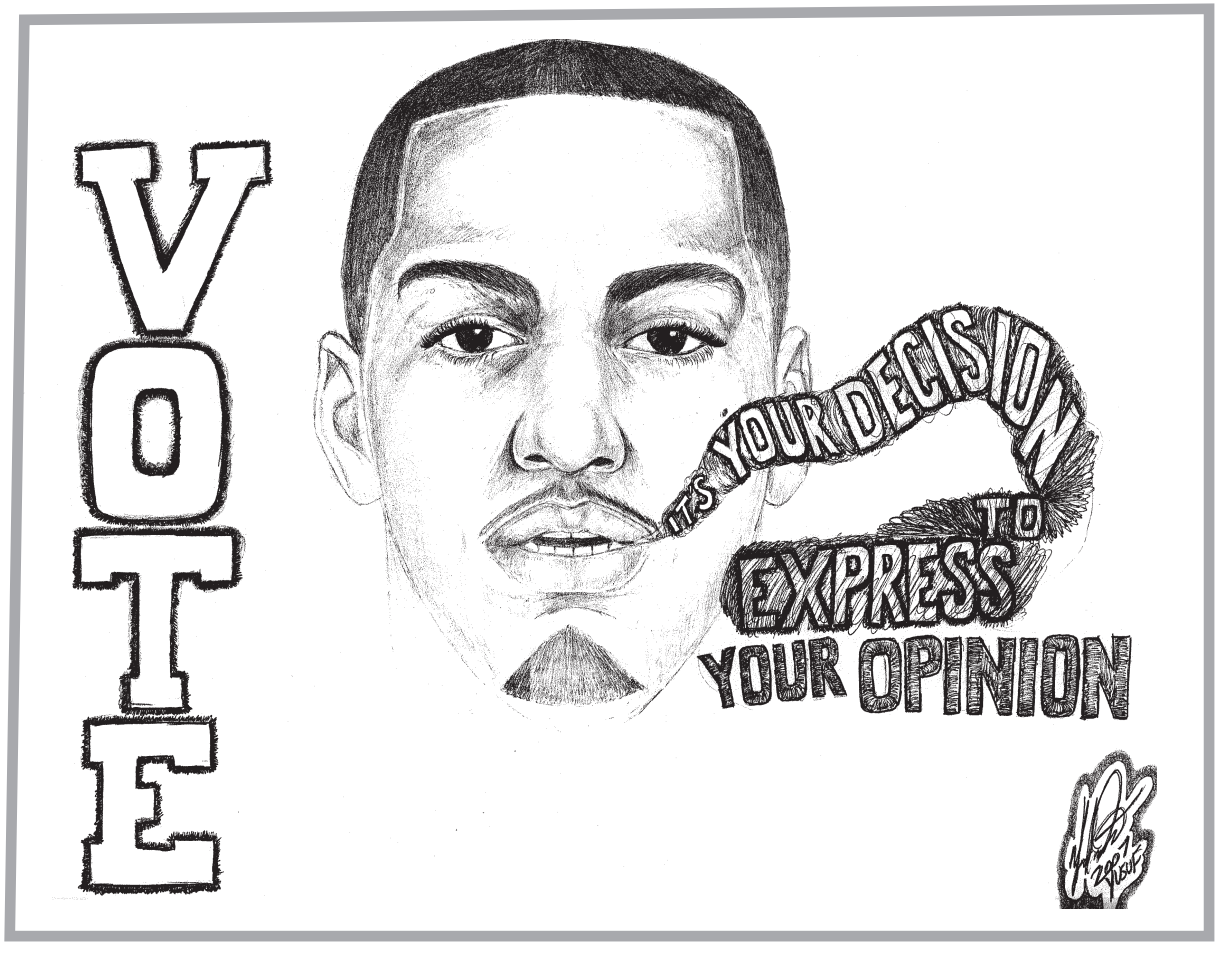
People I don't know see this number along with the others. They just see what's put on paper and make decisions based on it. I don't usually have control over these decisions, but they always affect me one way or another. Like the time they took away the yearly allotment we could use for car repairs, registration, and inspection. I had to do without my car for four months because I couldn't afford the repairs to pass inspection. But I still had to complete all my required responsibilities even though I was twelve miles away from school.

In the past two years, there have been all kinds of ups and downs in my life. I've gone back to school, gotten my GED, and learned new skills to better my life. I'm straightening out my life even though sometimes I still feel like a number on that file. Being just a number, you don't always count. But I know one place where I can count. That is within my own life. I'm not a number; I'm a person, and it is me and my family that needs to count.

We need to depend on each other. We need to work together. But there are some decisions in life that are made without our families being considered. They're made in Washington, D.C., or in state or local government. And that's why I vote, so I have a say in who is making those decisions for me. I want to know that they see my face and the many faces of the others like me. Remember that feeling of being a number that doesn't count? Do you want to be somebody who doesn't matter by not voting? Or do you want to make your own decisions by voting and being that one number that does count? What are you going to do?

Angie Perron lives in New Hampshire. This article is from the CD, "Their Decisions, Our Stories," A project of the Better Questions, Better Decisions Voter Education Initiative, 2004. For more voter stories, go to <www.rightquestion.org>, click on Voter Education Materials, and follow the links to the video.

What Difference Does It Make?



Yusuf Stroud is currently working on his GED in St. Louis, MO.

The people we elect make the laws we have to live by. Our lives are directly affected by the decisions they make. They decide things like:

War
- Will I be drafted into the military?
- If I'm in the military, will I be sent to war?

Education
- Can I go to a free GED program?
- Can I get money to help me pay for college?

Work
- What is the minimum wage?
- What rights do I have at work?

The Courts
- Are there mandatory sentences for drug crimes?
- If I have a public defender, will he or she have enough time to talk with me and know my case?

Voting is one way you can have a say in the decisions that change your life.

Politicalese: Spotting Election Campaign Tactics

Pat Nelson

Political ***campaigns*** flood the public with lots of ads, flyers, mailings, rallies, and debates. Sorting through all the information to choose a ***candidate*** can be difficult. It can be even more difficult to recognize the ***tactics*** that candidates use to make their opponents look bad. In an ideal world, candidates would focus on the ***issues*** and clearly explain what they would do if elected. However, in our world, voters have to work hard to see the tactics that candidates use to get elected. Here are some examples of common tricks and ***strategies***:

Name Calling: Candidates choose negative terms to describe their ***opponents***. A candidate can be called a "flip-flopper" for changing an opinion on an issue. If a candidate wants to reduce funding for the military, he or she is deemed "unpatriotic." Attacks on a candidate's family, gender, race, or personal traits that have no bearing on the ability to lead are also used to distract the voter.

Starting Rumors: Candidates will often make statements that can't be proven: Quotes like, "I've heard that Mr. Jones is soft on terrorism" or "My opponent will raise your taxes." Statements like these can affect the results of an election if voters do not know if such statements are true or not.

Buzz Words: Empty phrases like "law and order" or "the American Way" or "family values" are designed to cause an emotional reaction but do not mean much. What does the candidate really mean by these terms?

Passing the Blame: One candidate may accuse another of being the cause of major problems like inflation, a rise in terrorism, or job losses. When this happens, check it out. The ***incumbent*** or a ***political party*** is often accused of causing some problems. Was the candidate in a position to solve the problem? What other factors were at work? Has there been time to tackle the problem?

Promising the Sky: There are some promises that no one can fulfill. "I will solve the problem of world hunger." "All children will be able to read." "Everyone will have health care." When you hear such promises, consider how realistic they are. Does the candidate have a plan?

Guilt by Association: If a candidate is criticized based on his/her supporters, pay attention. For example, "Mr. Baines receives money from anti-Christian groups." Does this necessarily mean that Mr. Baines is anti-Christian?

Loaded Statements: "I oppose wasteful spending." "I won't raise taxes." A candidate who gets away with such statements should be forced to fully explain his/her positions. ***Loaded questions*** can have the same effect. "Where was my opponent during the debate on immigration reform?" Without the facts, this implies that the opponent did not do his/her job.

Evading Real Issues: Many candidates are good at not answering questions directly. For a candidate to say, "I am deeply concerned about the lack of affordable health care" and leave it at that is not acceptable. Watch out for the candidate who never outlines a clear plan for achieving stated goals.

Pat Nelson is coordinator of the NH Literacy Resource Center and a consultant to the Right Question Project in Cambridge, MA.

Try matching the campaign tactic with its example:

A. Starting Rumors 

_____ My opponent is a flip-flopper.

B. Buzz Words 

_____ My administration will guarantee universal health care.

C. Passing the Blame 

_____There is evidence that my opponent is connected to organized crime.

D. Promising the Sky 

_____ Taxes have risen 10 times during my opponent's term.

E. Name Calling 

_____ Where does Ms. Jones stand on family values?

Now Try This

Practice watching TV, newspaper, and internet ads to see if you can spot some of these tactics that politicians use. For examples of negative campaigning, search for "attack ads" on youtube. See <www.youtube.com/youchoose> for candidates' election ads. Also, check out <www.c-span.org/classroom/govt/rwh050204.asp> for a lesson on negative campaigning.

Sick and Tired of Campaign Promises

Steven Burns

It is the time of the year when many cities have their Mayoral Elections. In Attleboro, RI, *The Sun Chronicle's* front page headline is: "Elections Set, Voters Wanted."

The idea behind this headline is that they do not expect the voter turnout to be good. Why? Maybe the voters are sick and tired of hearing all the campaign promises that end up being lies. We have all heard them before. "If elected, I will not raise taxes." Ha-ha!!

I know that we need to pay taxes. The streets, bridges, and schools all need repairs. My problem is that politicians keep saying they won't raise the taxes, but then they do raise the taxes.

For this reason I have not and will not vote for any politician for any office. I know that some people will think that this is the wrong attitude, but I feel that politicians are crooks and liars and are only in it for their own gains. I hope that some day I will be able to see an election that matters. It is not that I do not care, but I only want to vote if I think it will help the country or my state or my town. Some day, I hope I will be able to participate in an election that will make a real difference. But in the meantime, if the question is to vote or not to vote, my answer, for now, is not to.

Steven Burns quit high school at 17 and got married at 18. He and his wife had four children together. Since she passed away last year, he went back to get his GED, and he is hoping to continue his education.

"Read My Lips: No New Taxes"
Learning more about a hot button issue

Taxes are a major issue in almost every campaign. Remember when George Bush promised not to raise taxes in his speech at the 1988 Republican National Convention? His famous line: "Read my lips. No new taxes" helped him win the presidency. But it was also a promise he could not keep.

Taxes are a hot button campaign issue. But who really understands them? Many acknowledge that we need public money for "streets, bridges, and schools," as Steven Burns does above, but many are also unhappy about the amount of taxes they pay. What are the principles that guide taxation? What is progressive taxation, regressive taxation, and flat taxation? Who gets tax breaks? Occasionally politicians will talk about changing the form of taxation or implementing tax breaks, and many of us are not familiar with what they are and what the ramifications are for people with different levels of income.

Visit <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras> for a student-friendly lesson on taxes, including pictures, charts, and manipulatives. (Adapted from "Your Government, Your Taxes, Your Choices." The full curriculum can be found at: <www.mcae.net/curriculum/index.html>.)

Using the Media to Analyze Political News

Kristen McKenna and Wendy Quinones

Most people receive most of their news from the mainstream media. Can you trust what you see on TV and read in the newspaper? Use the guidelines here to improve your "media literacy." Watch news coverage on different stations and compare how they report the news. Pick one political news story and compare the report between each network. Use the Five Key Questions and the Five Core Concepts as a guide to help you evaluate what you see.

Media Literacy means thinking critically about what you see and hear in the media.

Five Key Questions of Media Literacy

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

Five Core Concepts

1. All media messages are constructed.
2. All media messages use a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Five Key Questions for Editorial Cartoon Analysis

1. What is the event or issue that inspired the cartoon?
2. Are there any real people in the cartoon? Who is portrayed in the cartoon?
3. Are there symbols in the cartoon? What are they and what do they represent?
4. What is the cartoonist's opinion about the topic portrayed in the cartoon?
5. Do you agree or disagree with the cartoonist's opinion? Why?

Adapted from The Center for Media Literacy website and The Media Literacy Kit. More lessons on Media Literacy at <www.medialit.org>.

Kristen McKenna is the Project Director for the ABE Advantage program at Bristol Community College in Attleboro, MA. Wendy Quinones is an ABE teacher at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA.

A Sample of U.S. Political Parties: Where do they Stand on Key Issues?

Cynthia Peters

Greens	Democrats	Republicans	Libertarians
Abortion			
Support full access to abortion, with funding, for all women.	Most support abortion rights.	Most oppose abortion. Bush ordered a ban on U.S. funds for overseas agencies that offer abortion. Supported South Dakota statewide ban.	Believe the question of abortion should be left to each person's "conscientious consideration," and government should be kept out of the matter.
Death Penalty			
Oppose the death penalty citing racial bias, failure to deter crime, widespread errors, and humanitarian objections.	No official position. Focus on community policing, crime prevention, and gun control.	Overwhelmingly support the death penalty.	No official position.
Free Trade			
Oppose Free Trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which reduce government regulation of trade. Greens oppose the power of these agreements to overturn labor, environmental, and human rights protections.	Although most supported Free Trade agreements in the past, opposition among Democrats is growing.	Mostly support Free Trade agreements.	Oppose all intervention by government into the area of economics.
Global Warming			
Support converting to renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power. Believe the Kyoto Protocol falls short but is an important first step.	Some support the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which would limit the emission of greenhouse gases.	Believe industry will develop new technologies to replace fossil fuels. The Bush administration has refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and generally opposes mandatory caps on greenhouse gas emissions.	Do not support any international treaties and do not want the government involved in regulating private enterprise or the use of resources on private property.

Greens	Democrats	Republicans	Libertarians
Health Care			
Demand universal health care: Single-payer national health insurance, with guaranteed treatment and medicine regardless of age, ability to pay, employment, prior medical condition, including choice of doctors and hospitals.	Support health care policy based on individuals purchasing private health insurance (with some government assistance for those who can't afford it) and tax deductions to help offset the cost of health insurance.	Support health care policy based on individuals purchasing private health insurance (with some government assistance for those who can't afford it) and tax deductions to help offset the cost of health insurance.	Oppose any government role in the provision of health care.
Iraq War			
Call for an end to the Iraq war. Call for a sharp reduction in military spending with funds redirected into social and environmental needs.	Do not have a united position.	Believe the Iraq War is making the world safe from terrorists.	Believe that the principle of non-intervention should guide relationships between governments.
Minimum Wage			
Demand a living wage (pay that people can live on)—usually defined as a wage high enough for full time workers to provide food, housing, health care, child care, and basic transportation for themselves and their families. Recently, a living wage of $10.64 per hour was set in Los Angeles, California.	Support incremental minimum wage increases. In July 2008, the federal minimum wage will be $6.55 per hour. Working full-time with no vacation, a minimum wage worker would earn $13,624. Poverty level is considered to be about $21,000.	Generally oppose raising minimum wage.	Oppose government regulation over wages.
Taxes			
Support progressive taxes (lower taxes for low-income and working people, higher taxes for wealthier people).	Want to repeal Bush's tax cuts, which mostly benefit the wealthy, but at the same time many Democrats support ongoing tax breaks for corporations.	Support tax cuts, which overwhelmingly benefit the top 1% of the income earners.	Seek to lower all taxes by eliminating government services and programs that can be handled by the private sector. Oppose redistribution of wealth through income-based taxation.

Cynthia Peters is editor of The Change Agent. *Sources: <www.greens.org>; <www.gp.org/platform/2004>; <www.ctj.org>; <healthcare.gop.com>; <www.dnc.org>; <www.lp.org>; <www.wikipedia.org>; <www.massdems.org>; <www.ctj.org>; and <www.ontheissues.org/>. All the Parties listed were contacted to confirm that their views are accurately represented.*

How Do We Elect the President?
Understanding the Electoral College

Cara Anaam

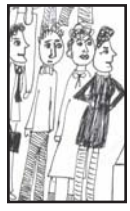
In the presidential election of 2000, Al Gore got over half a million more votes nationwide than did George Bush. But George Bush became president because he got five more votes in the Electoral College, a system of voting that is used only in elections for the president and vice president.

What is the Electoral College?

The 12th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlines the process for electing the president. We call this process the Electoral College system. It is a method of *indirect* popular election.

When voters cast their ballots in the presidential election, their votes actually select a group of electors who pledge to vote for a specific candidate when the Electoral College meets in December.

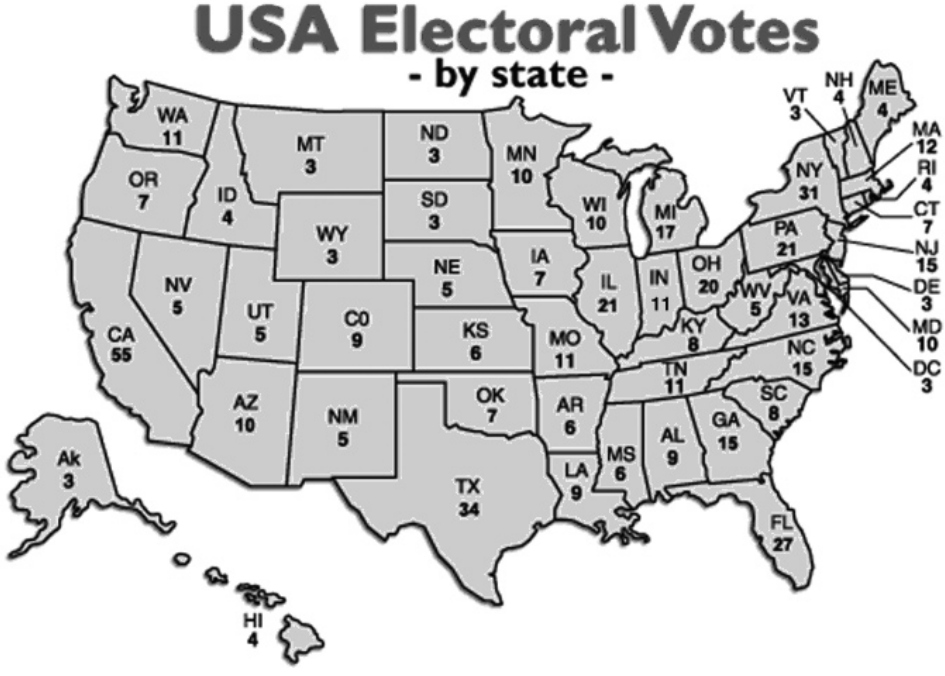
How does it Work?



The candidate who wins the popular vote in any given state (except for Maine and Nebraska) receives *all* of the state's Electoral College votes. In Maine and Nebraska, the electoral votes are assigned *in proportion* to the popular vote.

In the end, the winner of the race is the candidate who receives a majority (270) of the 538 Electoral College votes. The results of any presidential election aren't official until the president of the Senate counts the votes out loud at a special joint session of Congress held after the election.

Find your state on the map showing how many electoral votes each state will have in the 2008 election. How many electoral votes does your state have? What state has the most? Which states have the least?



Why do We Do it this Way?

As they drafted a Constitution, the founders of our country had a difficult problem to solve in deciding how a president should be elected. In 1776, there was no Internet, no television or radio networks, and no newspapers. Communication between states and among people in a state took a long time. Also our nation in the beginning was composed

of 13 large and small states. The founders needed to find a way of giving each state some power in the election of a president, not just the larger ones. They rejected the idea that the president should be elected by popular vote because they feared that people would know only about candidates from their own states. This would give all the power to the larger states.

Is it the Best System for Today? What Do You Think?

Those in favor of it argue:

- It contributes to the cohesiveness of the country by requiring that popular support for a presidential candidate be found throughout the entire country.
- It gives power to smaller states.
- It contributes to political stability by encouraging a two-party system.

Opponents argue that:

- It makes it possible to elect a president who doesn't get the majority of people's votes.
- It creates a risk that an elector may not vote according to the will of the voters who elected him.
- It makes it very difficult for support for a third-party candidate to get recognized thus keeping out new ideas.

Cara Anaam is co-editor of The Change Agent.

What is a Swing State?

Wendy Quinones

Candidates use polls and voting history to try to predict which way a state will vote. In some states, it is very easy to predict which candidate will get the majority of the votes. In Massachusetts, for example, the majority consistently votes for the Democratic presidential candidate. Texas voters have consistently picked a Republican candidate. In some states, however, it is not clear which way the voters will "swing." In these so-called "swing states," it is hard to predict who will win. If the state has a lot of electoral votes, the candidates will spend a lot of time campaigning there. If they win—even if they win by only a slim margin—they will get all the electoral votes.

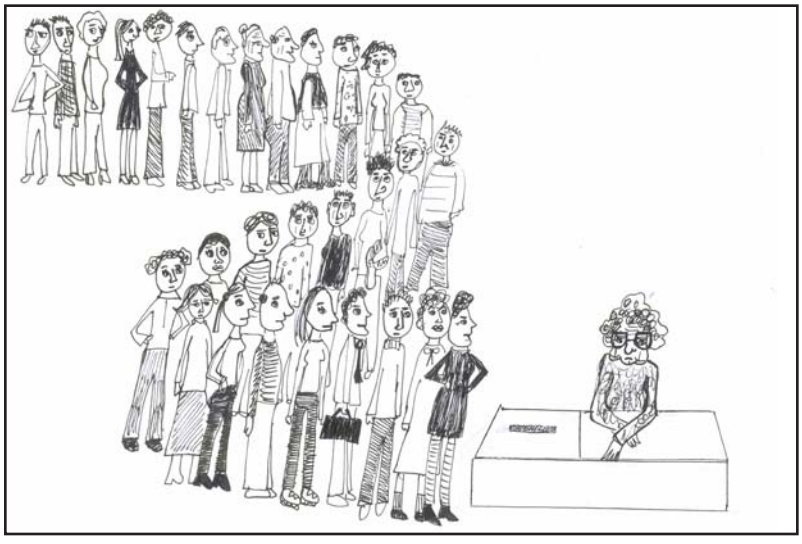
A Thought Puzzle: How is it possible to win the majority of the popular vote but lose the election?

	A	B	C	D	E	
VOTERS	XOO XXO XXX	XOO XXO XXX	XOO XXO XXX	OOO OOO XOO	OOO OOO XOO	X=20 O=25
ELECTORAL COLLEGE	X	X	X	O	O	

This graphic shows how the winner of the popular vote can lose the Electoral College. States A, B, and C each have a majority of "x" voters, so "x" wins 3 electoral votes even though there are fewer "x" voters.

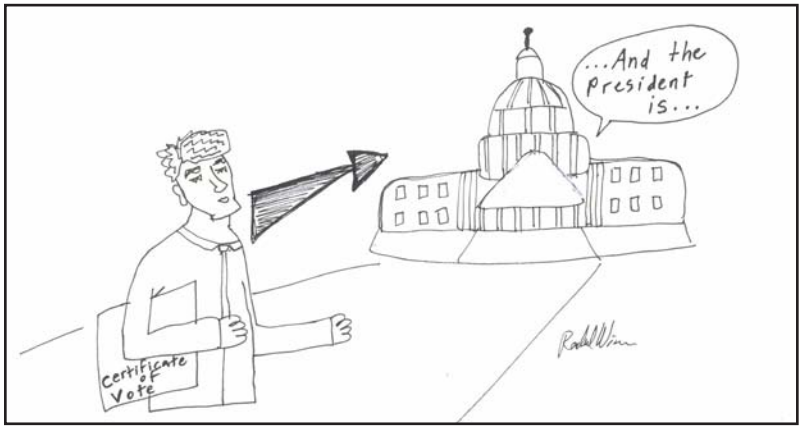
The Process of Electing a President

Illustrations by Rachel Wimmer



1. Everybody lines up to vote. This is the popular vote. It feels like you are voting for president, but you are really voting for a block of "electors."

2. The winner of the popular vote gets all the electors. In this picture, a majority of the people voted for the Democratic candidate, so the Democrats get all the electoral votes for Montana, which is three. The Republicans don't get any electoral votes.



3. The electors sign the "Certificate of Vote," which is delivered to the Office of the President of the United States Senate. At a special meeting in January after the election, the President of the Senate reads the Certificates of Votes and declares the official winner.

What If You Can't Vote?

Even if you can't vote, you can still be involved in the political process. Here are some suggestions:

Find out about the issues and candidates, and pick your candidate or issue:

- Investigate: Check out the campaign websites. Watch TV debates. Read newspaper. Share information and opinions with your friends, family, neighbors, classmates, etc.
- Don't be afraid to ask tough questions at candidate meetings, at rallies, and when a campaign worker rings your doorbell.
- Support your candidate or issue. If you convince even two voters to support your candidate or issue, you've had twice the impact of someone who just votes once.
- Talk to your friends and family about your candidate or issue. Think together of ways to support candidates or issues you believe in.
- Be a letter writer. Tell candidates, newspapers, and party leaders how you feel about the issues or the campaigns.
- Call TV and radio stations to praise or criticize campaign issues.
- Volunteer to work on a campaign.

Support the elections:

- Encourage and assist others in registering to vote and getting to the polls on Election Day.
- Volunteer to promote fair elections. Some non-partisan organizations include Election Protection 365 and the National Campaign for Fair Elections. Volunteers are trained to assist voters and record problems on Election Day.
- When you turn 18 or become eligible, register to vote. And then on Election Day, VOTE!

Turn up the heat in between elections:

- Organize direct action, such as rallies, pickets, boycotts, and sit-ins. Anything that disrupts business-as-usual can put pressure on politicians to pay attention.
- Find creative ways to make your voice heard.

Adapted from the March 2004 issue of *The Change Agent* by Ami Magisos.

Pick Your Candidate

There are two major things to consider when trying to pick a candidate to vote for:

- What does the candidate say about the issues that are important to you?
- What qualities and experience do you want a candidate to have?

There is an excellent, non-partisan, user-friendly resource that you can download and use to help you ***Pick Your Candidate***. Go to <www.nelrc.org>. **Click** on *Publications and Online Collections.* **Scroll** to *Civic Participation and Citizenship Collection.* **Select** *Civics for ABE and ESOL* on the left. **Scroll** to *Voting, Government, and the Constitution.* **Open and scroll** to *Pick Your Candidate*; click on the link.

Picking a candidate is just one step. See <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras> for links to more resources about registering to vote, finding your polling place, etc.

Pick Your Candidate, by Debbie Tasker of the NH Bureau of Adult Education, is appropriate for multiple levels.

Finding a Way to Register New Voters

Alexander Dow

When I first heard about our agency's involvement with a voter registration project, I confess my first thoughts were not all positive. I asked myself, "Is this something we should be doing? We're an educational organization, not a political organization." My negativity gradually faded as I began to fully understand the why and what of the process.

In our agency's first meeting to get the initiative started, we heard from a representative from Everybody VOTE, a non-partisan project organized to increase voter registration. This local organization was part of a larger national effort, the Nonprofit Voter Engagement Networks, to increase voter registration through non-profits in United States. The group estimates that there are 600,000 non-profits in the United States.

While we saw the potential impact, we were concerned about the legality of the project. Could our program get in trouble for organizing a voter registration drive? Luckily, the organizing group eased our fears by letting us know that not only *can* non-profit organizations register new voters, in most cases they *should* be encouraging involvement in the democratic process. The only caution is that non-profits cannot endorse or support a particular candidate or party; they must work in a non-partisan way.

We began to incorporate voter registration into our orientation and student intake process. In a six month period, we were able to register nearly 30 new voters. While 30 votes doesn't seem like much, if every non-profit registered 30 new voters, we would be looking at 18 million new voters—a margin that's larger than the differential of every presidential election in U.S. history!

A Non-Profit (501c3) can: YES

- Register people to vote
- Distribute non-partisan materials on candidates or ballot measures
- Sponsor non-partisan candidate forums or debates (you need to invite everyone who is running)
- Help new voters understand elections and the voting process
- Provide briefings to all candidates on the organization's issues
- Encourage and help people get to the polls on election day

A Non-Profit (501c3) cannot: NO

- Endorse candidates for office
- Contribute money to candidates
- Let candidates use office space, equipment, mailing lists, or other 501(c)(3) resources
- Rate candidates
- Publicize which candidates share the organization's view on contested issues

Source: <www.nonprofitvote.org>

Alexander Dow is currently the Downtown Center Manager of the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council. He also serves as western regional representative for the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education (PAACE).

Referendums: A Form of Direct Democracy

Kristen McKenna

What is a referendum?

A referendum is a direct vote in which an entire electorate (all voters) are asked to either accept or reject a particular proposal. The referendum is a form of direct democracy. Direct democracy occurs when voters have decision-making power over laws and initiatives. Other terms for a referendum are: ballot measures, initiatives, or propositions.

Where will I see them?

Referendums are placed on the general election ballot. Sometimes, cities or towns can issue special referendum questions outside of the normal election time for unique cirmstances that require quick action. For example, if an election official has broken the law or done something wrong, voters may be asked to vote on whether or not he or she can stay in office.

Types of referendum are:

Bond question: asks voters to approve spending money on something specific like a road.

Non-binding referendum: when the government asks advice on an issue the legislature may explore. This will not be a law.

Binding referendum: if approved, it will become law.

Constitutional amendments change the state's constitution.

Note: Since referendums are not in a universal format and the rules that govern them are decided by individual states, this guide is meant to help instructors begin a dialogue with students. For specific rules governing referendums, please consult your state's Board of Elections, Secretary of State's office or the state's Civics Education Department.

Word Play

Referendum comes from Latin, meaning things to be referred. Think of other words with the same root, such as: **refer** (v) to send or direct for treatment, aid, information, or decision; **referee** (n) judge, one to whom a thing is referred, a sports official who administers a game; **reference** (n) the act of consulting, a book (such as a dictionary or an encyclopedia) that contains useful information. In the case of a **referendum**, the government is referring a question to the voting population. What do you think of this idea?

When will I see them?

You will see them on the ballot for the general election, which is held on the first Tuesday in November.

Why do we use referendums?

The ancient Romans were the first to develop direct voter questions or referendums. Throughout history, many different governments have used them to hear the opinions of the public on certain issues. The United States has no federal rules for the use of referendums but each state's constitution has specific rules for its state.

Who can put a referendum on the ballot?

In some states, citizens can put referendums on the ballot if they have enough supporting signatures and if they file on time.

How do I understand and vote on them?

Anything on the ballot is considered an official legal document and it must be written by a team of lawyers and other officials. Sometimes, this makes it difficult for a voter to understand if they are voting for the referendum or against it. If you are going to vote on a referendum, remember:

1. Review the referendum beforehand. Usually all registered voters will get a booklet in the mail which explains the referendum. These booklets are printed in the newspaper and can be found in libraries and government offices.
2. Talk about it in class or with friends and family. Students can bring the booklet into the classroom to review the questions before they see them on the ballot.
3. Ask for help. Voters have the right to ask for help when they go to vote.

Proposition 13: Tax Revolt in California

The most famous citizen ballot measure occurred in California, *Proposition 13*, when two citizens, Paul Gann and Howard Jarvis filed a "People's Initiative to Limit Property Taxation." The initiative, which would limit the amount of taxes Californians had to pay, was enacted by the voters of California on June 6, 1978. What do you think the impact of this law has been? Which citizens do you think have benefited from this law and which citizens have not benefited? Is there a question you would like to see put on the ballot in your city or state?

Kristen McKenna is the Project Director for the ABE Advantage program at Bristol Community College in Attleboro, MA.

Box 4: Look at These Real-Life Examples

A Referendum (often a citizen initiative)

In Maine: Do you want to allow patients with specific illnesses to grow and use small amounts of marijuana for treatment, as long as such use is approved by a doctor?

A Constitutional Amendment (proposed by the legislature):

In Texas: The measure would define marriage as between only one man and one woman and prohibits the recognition or creation of any legal status similar to marriage.

A Bond Question (often proposed by state and municipal governments):

In Rhode Island: Shall an act passed at the 1996 session of the general assembly entitled "An Act Authorizing the City of Cranston to Issue $400,000 Bonds and Notes for the Purchase of Public Works and Highway Equipment in the City" be approved?

Think about it: What would you need to know before you could answer these questions? Is it the responsibility of the voter to research these questions and be prepared to vote on them? What would you do if you felt the question was too complex for a simple yes or no answer?

Pros and Cons of Referendums

Advantages are:

- direct public opinion; you vote on the laws you want,
- you have a chance to understand how the government spends money,
- the government asks you, the voter, for advice

Disadvantages:

- language is often difficult or confusing
- wrong decision can be made by people who don't understand the issue
- a person, legislature, or city can have ulterior motives for putting a question on the ballot.

What is a Caucus?

Kristen McKenna

Party Members Have to Choose

In U.S. politics, Party members have to decide which candidate they want to represent their Party in the national election. Some states hold a Primary, and Party members go to the polls and vote. Other states hold a Caucus.

It Starts with a Local Meeting

A caucus is a neighborhood gathering of Party members who discuss which candidate they want to represent their Party in the national election. The caucus can be held in the town hall, library, or someone's home, and it takes about 1-2 hours.

Different Parties, Different Styles

The Republicans caucus by first listening to speeches about the candidates and then filling out a secret ballot. The results are counted and reported to the media.

The Democrats have a more complicated process. They break into groups, separating themselves from other folks with a different candidate preference. If a candidate doesn't have 15-25% of the total, his or her supporters must go join another group. People argue and debate and attempt to woo smaller groups to join them. Once everyone is in a group, delegates to a county convention are apportioned. If you get 50% of the people in your corner, you get 50% of the delegates.

From Neighborhood to County to State to National

At the county convention, delegates are chosen for the state convention. And at the state convention, delegates are chosen for the national convention. Finally, at the national convention, delegates from all over the country choose a candidate to represent their Party in the general election.

Where does that word come from?

Caucus can be a noun, meaning a *closed meeting of a group of people belonging to the same political party*, or it can be a verb meaning *to meet*. No one is sure where the word caucus comes from. Some say it comes from *caulkers*, who helped build ships; some trace it to the Latin word *caucus*, which comes from the Greek *kaukos*, a drinking vessel; others say it comes from the Algonkian Indian word *caucausu*, which means elder or counselor.

Do All the States Do it This Way?

A few states hold caucuses, but most hold primaries. At a primary, voters do not "caucus" with each other. They simply vote for the candidate that they want to represent their party.

For Discussion:

1. Which would you prefer—the open debate style of the Democrats or the secret ballot of the Republicans? Why?
2. Talk about a time you "caucused" with someone—at home, at work, or in your community. Was it a valuable process?

Kristen McKenna is the Project Director for the ABE Advantage program at Bristol Community College in Attleboro, MA and the New England Regional VERA (Voter Education and Registration Action) campaign Coordinator.

Democracy Requires Action, Organization, and Risk

Howard Zinn

One of the things that I got out of studying history was to question the notion of democracy. The more history I read, the more it seemed clear to me that progress was not made through the calm deliberations of Congress or the wisdom of the Supreme Court. Whatever progress has been made in this country has come because of the actions of ordinary people, of citizens, of social movement.

Consider economic justice. Obviously, we have not made *enough* progress toward economic justice, but we've made *some* progress. People used to work 12 and 14 and even 16 hours a day and six days a week. But now, it's common to work an eight-hour day. How did that happen? It wasn't done through the Supreme Court. It wasn't done through Congress or through the President.

An interesting thing about the Constitution is that it doesn't say anything about economic rights for people. Whatever economic rights working people have gained in this country, they gained through a long history of labor struggle. The history books mostly ignore this struggle.

Consider the rights of Black people in this country. Slavery ended not because Abraham Lincoln decided it should end. Slavery ended because there was a powerful movement of people that pressured the President and the Congress to end slavery. How did people achieve this? They were willing to break laws and commit acts of civil disobedience. One hundred years later, during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, Blacks and their allies rose up again in mass movements in one of the hardest, toughest, most dangerous places for anybody to rise up anywhere. They created an embarrassment to the national government that finally began to bring some changes. They made the 14th Amendment (which guaranteed African Americans the right to vote) have some meaning for the first time.

Consider foreign policy. The Supreme Court did not do its job during the Vietnam War. It did nothing about the fact that the war in Vietnam was never declared by Congress and was therefore illegal. A movement had to be created in this country to stop the war. So that's what happened. The movement bypassed the formal institutions of government, and created an enormous commotion and tumult in the country that scared the President and Congress.

That's what democracy is. It's what people do on behalf of human needs outside of, sometimes against, the law. Democracy doesn't come to you only through the existence of formal institutions. It requires all sorts of energy, action, organization, risk, and sacrifice by ordinary people.

Howard Zinn is the author of A People's History of the United States*. This was excerpted and adapted by Cynthia Peters from "Second Thoughts on the First Amendment,"* Failure to Quit, Reflections of an Optimistic Historian, *Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1993. Reprinted with permission.*

Beyond How-To Civics Education for Adult Learners

Shana Berger

The Traditional Civics Class

Did your experience of learning civics in the classroom go something like this: a drawing on the board with the three branches of government and discussions about what happens among professional politicians, how a bill becomes a law, or perhaps, how to lobby your elected official? Mine too! The problem with this model is that it assumes we have a democracy, and we just need to fill learners up with the knowledge they need to vote, follow rules, and navigate government.

It wasn't until I became involved in a high school pro-choice club where we marched in Washington, D.C., while chucking tennis balls marked with pro-choice messages at the White House that political participation felt meaningful to me. The more I became involved in such activities, the more I began to feel skeptical that democracy was a done deal. I realized that to effectively influence decision-making processes, I needed to do more than merely understand how my government works and then dutifully vote every couple of years. I needed a civics class that opened up space to debate, deconstruct, and analyze taken-for-granted assumptions about the meanings of democracy. I needed a civics class that honored the democratic principle of encouraging each person to bring his or her full intelligence, creativity, and skepticism to analyze the system we've got and imagine how it might work better.

The First Challenge: Unpacking the Concept of Democracy

Different notions of democracy carry different beliefs regarding the knowledge, skills, and values needed by citizens for democracy to flourish and, therefore, significantly different implications for civics curricula. For example, for some, democracy is related to liberal ideas about protections of individual rights such as the right to private property; for others, democracy is about equality of opportunity. For many, democracy can be found in free markets while for others, civil society is the site of democratic activity. Likewise, the definition of a good citizen changes according to your definition of democracy. For some, good citizens volunteer; for some they participate in campaigns. Yet for others, they question the existing system. (See "Three Types of Citizens" chart on p. 4.)

Two Stories from the Classroom

A critical approach to civics education would move away from treating learners as empty receptacles to be filled with information and procedures and instead draw upon learners' vast experiences and knowledge to help them examine how their personal experiences and problems are often structurally produced and connected to broader forces.

For example, after an 18-year-old student of mine was shot and killed, I asked the young people in my class what they thought needed to be done to address the upsurge in violence in their communities. One young person answered, "Kill Bush." It was an angry response that some teachers might want to deflect, but I felt it revealed a great deal about how little faith this student had in his democratically elected government. Prior to the shooting, the class had been discussing the lack of jobs and community resources available to young people, how that came to be, and who might be responsible. This comment was evidence to me that my student connected the violence in his community to larger systemic problems, including the very functioning of the government that President Bush represents. A traditional civics

class emphasizes the idea that democracy is out there somewhere quietly protecting our rights. But this student did not feel so protected.

In another one of my classes, in which many of the students were in and out of lockup or had friends who were, learners expressed frustration at their own and their friends' inability to vote due to past arrests. In response to student interest in this issue, I presented a chart displaying voter felony disenfranchisement laws in the fifty states. The conversation moved from individual stories and experiences of disempowerment to looking at the issue as a systemic problem that results from a government that students said doesn't recognize the notion of rehabilitation and second chances.

Had half the class not gotten locked up or encountered severe personal crises the next week, we would have looked in more depth at the organizing forces and structures that shape the students' individual experiences. Such an activity would have allowed learners to move between their experiences and the lens through which they view their experiences (assumptions about the political system and democracy), in order to assess and possibly adapt their interpretations and their frameworks for understanding the world around them. There's no irony in the fact that the people whose stories most fly in the face of the idea that we live in a functional democracy are most often (literally) locked up, locked out of public debate, or in some other way (through poor education, impoverished living conditions, or demeaning work) kept from making their voices heard.

From Civics as Procedure to Civics as Critical Reflection and Questioning

As ABE teachers, we have the opportunity to entertain conceptions of democracy that go beyond mastering procedure or increasing levels of participation. We have an opportunity to provide a space for debate, conflict, reflection, questioning and visioning, and a chance to grow and change in our thinking as we hear from one another and learn about various conceptions of democracy. If we avoid this opportunity because it feels too controversial, and we decide that a more neutral approach would be to stay with the tried and true curricular approaches to civics, we're not actually being apolitical. Rather, we're choosing to leave things as they are—indeed a political choice!

So do we have a democracy? And what is democracy? Is it maximizing numbers of participants? Voting? Running for office? Civil disobedience? Discussion? Creating better systems when the current ones fail us? Does it require certain conditions such as the redistribution of wealth? Is it a given thing? Is it a process? Who participates? Let's discuss it!

Shana Berger works with the Worker Education Program, a joint labor-management eduction program, that offers classes primarily to 1199 SEIU members in Boston, MA. Formerly, she taught primarily court-involved youth at ESAC.

Understanding Our Values: A Lesson Plan

Shana Berger

Helping learners realize that alternatives exist to their current ways of living in the world is a central activity to critical thinking. The realization that an unsatisfactory situation is not as fixed as had previously been thought gives one the openness to imagine systems that are more meaningful. For example, if we find ourselves in social, political, or economic arrangements that are oppressive, we can envision just alternatives. Civics education should stimulate people's imaginations to create change, rather than ask them to fit in an unjust system.

Since traditional civics education curricula focus on *how* learners ought to engage with government while saying nothing about *why* they should engage in such action, this lesson will provide learners the opportunity to explore their political and moral values.

Moreover, because it is hard for learners to imagine alternatives when they are constantly taught to think within a particular paradigm, this lesson will promote a language of possibility.

In this lesson, learners will articulate through pictures, skits, and writing how they would envision democracy in their communities by reflecting on the values important to them.

Activities

1. Brainstorm the question, "What are values?" and record the answers on flipchart paper.
2. Have learners get into small groups or pairs to share the values important to them.
3. Give learners index cards and ask them to write their top ten values on each card. As a way to spark discussion among partners, ask learners to prioritize these values.
4. Visioning: Ask learners to work individually or in groups to create a picture or skit that responds to the following question:

If you could imagine democracy in your community, what would it look like? Remind learners to incorporate their values into their creation in some way.

5. When learners are finished, ask them to hang their visions around the room. Suggest that learners do a "gallery walk" so that they can interact with one another and ask questions.
6. After the gallery walk, ask each learner to discuss their creation. When all learners have presented their visions, have them comment on similarities and differences.
7. Compare these creations hung on the wall with students' assumptions about the meanings of democracy. Are there any changes in opinions, values, or assumptions? Will these changes affect the way learners see themselves as citizens in the world?
8. Now that learners have had an opportunity to share ideas, ask them to write a five-paragraph essay incorporating their own ideas from their skit or drawing and the ideas from their classmates answering the same question that served as the basis for their drawing or skit:

If you could imagine democracy in your community, what would it look like?

Shana Berger teaches at the Worker Education Program, which offers classes primarily to 1199 SEIU members in Boston, MA.

What's the Difference between Capitalism and Democracy?

Diana Satin

Why is this shopper smiling? Is he talking about choices related to a political system? An economic system? Both? What do you think makes a country "great"?

Which is Which?

Work in pairs or small groups. Read the following statements and check the appropriate box next to it. "D" is for democracy and "C" is for capitalism.

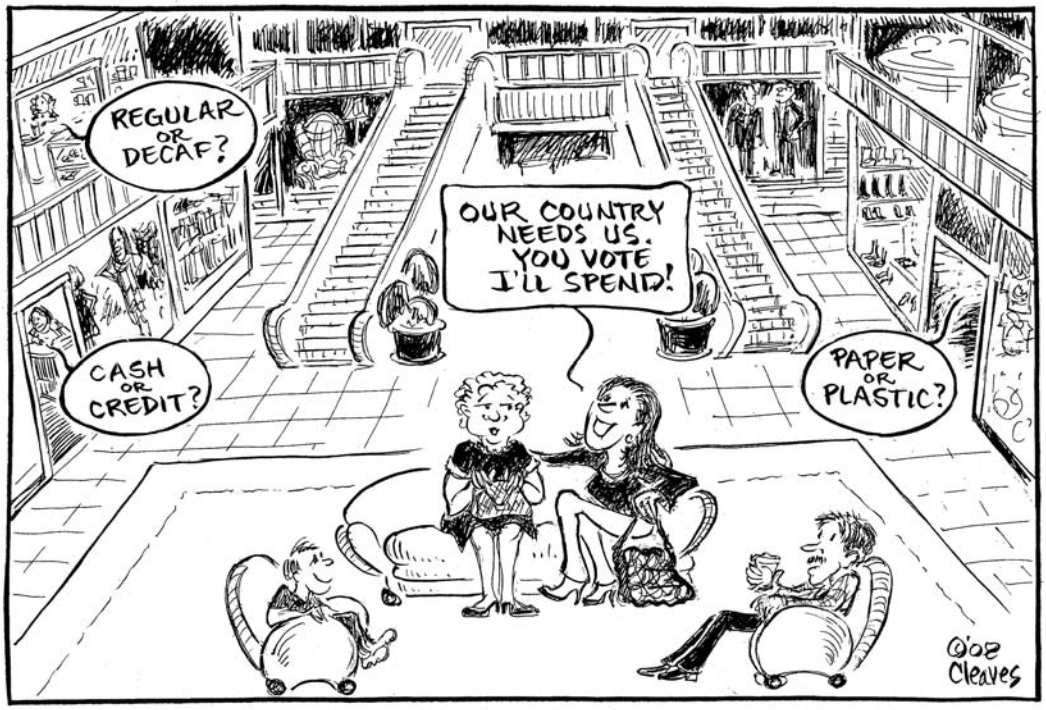
Report back to the class. Notice similarities and differences in your choices. Work together to come up with examples of capitalism and democracy from your lives. An example of capitalism: "My parents started their own restaurant business and they make the food and sell it and keep the money they make." An example of democracy: "When the government was going to cut our school's funding, we called and wrote letters to our representatives, and they didn't cut the funding."

After your discussion, see if the class can come up with definitions of Capitalism and Democracy as we live them in the United States. What connections do you see between the two systems? What are some ways that our form of democracy supports capitalism (for example, legislators vote to give corporations tax breaks if they move to their state)? What are some ways that our form of democracy puts limits on capitalism (for example, legislators pass laws that require employers to provide safe and healthy working conditions)?

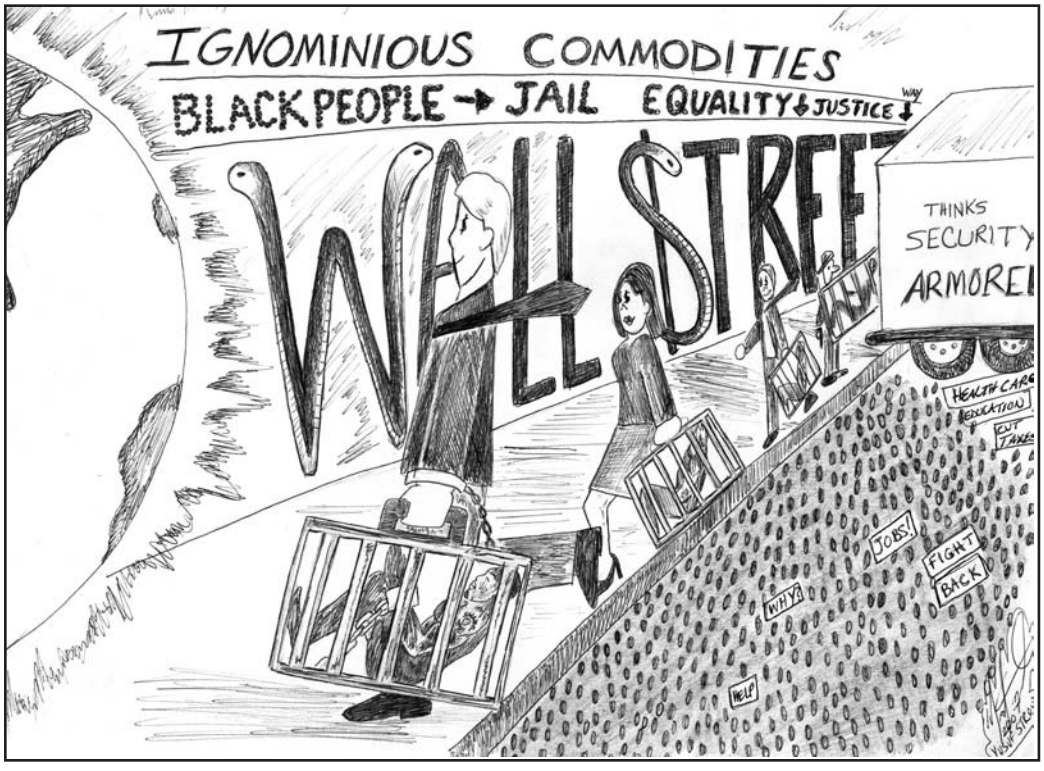
	D	C
People are free to buy whatever they can.		
Individuals can vote for people to run the country.		
The system is based on individuals taking care of their own needs by making money.		
Individuals can own businesses; the government doesn't own all the businesses.		
(Almost) anyone can run for political office.		
Everyone is equal under the law.		
Everyone can express their ideas. This right is protected by the law.		
People are free to work for money.		
The system is based on individuals taking care of society by making decisions together?		
The majority rules in making decisions for the city, state, or country.		
There are many political parties people can belong to.		
Corporations are free to maximize profits.		

Diana Satin has worked with adult immigrants since 1994 as a teacher, staff development coordinator, curriculum developer, and author. She is currently a distance-learning instructor for several ESOL programs and an educational consultant.

Talk about what you see in these two cartoons.



What is this artist, Ann Cleaves, saying about making choices? What are the important decisions you make in your life? Which choices contribute to democracy?



Louis D. Brandeis, a Supreme Court Judge, said "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." Think about his words in the context of this cartoon by Yusuf Stroud. What is this cartoonist saying?

A Simulated Town Meeting: An Experience in Democracy*

Pat Nelson

Saxonville, a small pretty town in north central New Hampshire, has a population of 986. Most of the wage earners in the town work in the tourist and lumber industries or in shops that line Main Street. Elementary students attend the Saxonville Village School through Grade 6 and are then bused to the Cooperative School District in Glendale, 25 miles away.

Along with the rest of the state, Saxonville holds its town meeting every year in March. During the meeting, residents of the town meet in the town hall and, acting as a law-making body, vote on budgets, laws, and other matters related to the operation of the community for the following 12 months. This year's meeting will be controversial. The town will be asked to vote on a motion to close the Saxonville Village School and send the 65 elementary school children to Glendale.

The population of the school has decreased over the last several years because fewer young families are moving to the town. The selectmen feel that the school will become a serious financial drain on the town. There are strong feelings on both sides of the issue. The discussion promises to be heated and long.

Those opposed argue:

- "Our children thrive in the small school setting and the individual attention that they receive."
- "Spending several hours a day riding on a school bus will be unhealthy for the children."
- "The lack of a good elementary school will continue to keep young families from settling here. We should be trying to encourage new families to move here."

Those in favor argue:

- "We have to be fiscally responsible; a school with declining enrollment is not a wise use of tax dollars."
- "The children will have access to more choices in academics, art, and sports in a larger school."
- "The old school can be turned into a much needed community services center."

*** Teacher Notes for this lesson, including two days worth of activities, are available at The Change Agent website <www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras>.**

Meet the citizens of Saxonville who have been most vocal about the school closing:

A SENIOR CITIZEN COUPLE: They have lived in Saxonville their entire life. They are now both retired and living on a fixed income. They believe that if the school closes, the money saved will lower their tax burden. They favor the closing.

HEAD OF THE PTA: She has been a strong supporter of the school and its staff for years. She is angry that such an important resource for children will be taken away from them. She opposes the closing.

THE TOWN BANKER: He sees an opportunity for attracting new business to the town by developing the school building into a town center with shops, restaurants, and office space. He favors the closing.

THE GENERAL STORE MANAGER: She is a single-parent who moved her family to Saxonville because she wanted her children to live in a small town. Her children attend the school. She believes that closing the school will cause unfair disruption in the quality of life that families have in the town. She opposes the closing.

THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR: He has been at the school for 10 years. In his work he sees the issues that families have to deal with. To access some services, families have to travel up to 50 miles. He would love to see the school remain open, but he feels that the town would be better served by a community services center. He favors the closing.

A LUMBER WORKER: He works for the Lumber Mill in town but spends most of his time out in the field cutting lumber. His wife does not drive. He has children in the 1st and 2nd grades. If one of them got sick, it would be extremely difficult for him to get to another town to pick up his child in a timely fashion. He opposes the closing.

THE TOWN MEETING MODERATOR: She has been chosen to run the meeting and organize the discussions on any issue. She can vote on any issue, but as the moderator, she must remain neutral and ensure that discussions proceed in a fair and civil manner. At the end of a debate, she will call for "yes" votes and "no" votes by a show of hands.

Images by Leah Peterson

Pat Nelson is coordinator of the NH Literacy Resource Center and a consultant to the Right Question Project in Cambridge, MA.

Community: A Path toward Participation

Margaret Anderson

When I set out to design a voter education workshop for The Literacy Project's student leadership program, I thought the project would be fairly simple. We had developed a model that worked well to teach a range of leadership skills, including communication, conflict resolution, public speaking, and board involvement. I thought I could switch the topic and have just as much success. But I was wrong! Understanding *why* I was wrong gave me a new appreciation for what it means to do effective voter education. Here's what I learned.

Voting Skills Are Not Enough

Before I started the project, I thought that our primary challenge was to explain the logistics of voting, critical thinking skills, and media education. These skills are certainly important. But as the project unfolded I understood that they are irrelevant if voters don't *want* to vote. And most of our students wanted nothing to do with voting.

We saw hostility towards the political process early in our project. We started by inviting participants to spend six weeks learning about leadership skills and voting. At the end of six weeks, the participants would become the trainers, and they'd run voter education workshops in our ABE and GED classes. We thought it was a great program design, but the response was lukewarm, at best. Instead of turning people away, as we had in the past, we were calling up past participants, trying to convince them to come.

We forged ahead with only five participants and dove into the world of voting. Our six weeks were great. And then it was time to go out to the classes. Some of the workshops were very successful: we registered over two dozen new voters, supported our core participants in their development as leaders, and inspired some students to use their vote to create positive change.

Need for a Sense of Community

But one workshop was truly a disaster. Things took a bad turn before we even *started* talking about voting. "Tell us your name and where you are from," we asked them, as usual. The answers we got were loaded with meaning. One person couldn't decide how to answer the question. "I don't really know where I'm from," she said. "I'm not really *from* anywhere." Another declared, "I'm *from* the city, but I'm living here." The answers grew more heated as we went around the circle, till one participant really laid it out for us: "I'm really *from* Worcester, but I'm stuck in this damn boring town till I get my GED." And it went downhill from there.

In retrospect, I understand why this common workshop opener—and the workshop itself—was such a disaster. This particular group of students was largely comprised of DSS- and DYS-involved youth who had been relocated from urban environments to our more rural towns. They didn't feel connected to a place. In fact, they were "placed" there by others, mostly against their own will. They certainly didn't pay attention to the local issues and campaigns, nor did they feel that the government was looking out for them. Instead, they saw "community" and "government" as forces that were lined up against them. Voting—*and any type of community involvement*—seemed to them to be meaningless gestures against such an array of powers.

I might have thought that this lack of connection to place was an isolated issue, one that arose out of the specific circumstances of these young people. But I heard about the importance of "connection to place" again, this time in a workshop we ran for our own staff. We learned that the staff almost always voted in national elections, but they voted only sporadically in local and state elections. What made the difference? They needed to have a

"Community" contd. on p. 78

We Need a Massive Movement for Adult Education

David Greene

Adult education could revitalize and energize the country. At present, widespread low-literacy and low-numeracy levels deprive us of many potential contributions. Students in adult education classes and millions more potential students have knowledge, skills, experience, understanding, and perspective to offer the United States. Because adult education students are immigrants, women, minorities, and members of the working-class, they have important perspectives that need to be voiced and organized. Their participation and activism already enrich our democracy and could do so even more if there were a stronger grassroots movement for increased educational opportunities and for justice in the many other areas of life in which adult learners are struggling.

What are the Obstacles in Our Way?

There are many obstacles in the way of a massive popular education program in the U.S., including lack of funding for classes as well as a lack of living wage jobs and a social safety net that make attending class possible. In addition, myths, stereotypes, and prejudices about adult students are common in society and among teachers and students. One myth that persists in the literacy field is that education for adults is the same as education for children. This fails to take into account the experience and learning that adults have gained. Antoine Brunvil, a student in one of my classes, recently helped to teach a class about the history and politics of Haiti, his homeland. He was full of inspiration and information. His teaching engaged and challenged his fellow students. When we underestimate the knowledge, experience, and understanding of adult students, we lose out on the contributions of people like Brunvil.

Unfortunately, it is not just their input in the classroom that we lose when we succumb to this stereotype, but also their leadership in building a movement for social change. In the same way that teachers sometimes treat learners as empty vessels needing to be filled (as Paulo Freire put it), we also treat them as passive recipients of services. While administrators and teachers work hard to raise the money for programming and provide engaging curriculum, it is rare for them to see students as agents in the life of the program. That's a big loss.

Adult Students Are Key to Social Change

Ryan Springer, an adult student organizer in New York City, states that "when adult education students are informed and given the opportunity to actively participate, they can change their lives, their communities, and our society." Massive literacy programs can be a doorway to seriously address issues of poverty, health and safety, housing, inequality, and employment.

Such a movement, however, would seriously threaten the status quo. People who are invested in this system and the profits that it has provided may not want change. Even adult education practitioners, who otherwise mean well, can act as "gatekeepers"—allowing stereotypes and prejudices to keep adult learners' voices from being heard. Calvin Miles, the president of VALUE (Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education), believes that the adult education system itself can be a serious obstacle to movement building, sometimes serving to keep students "in their place."

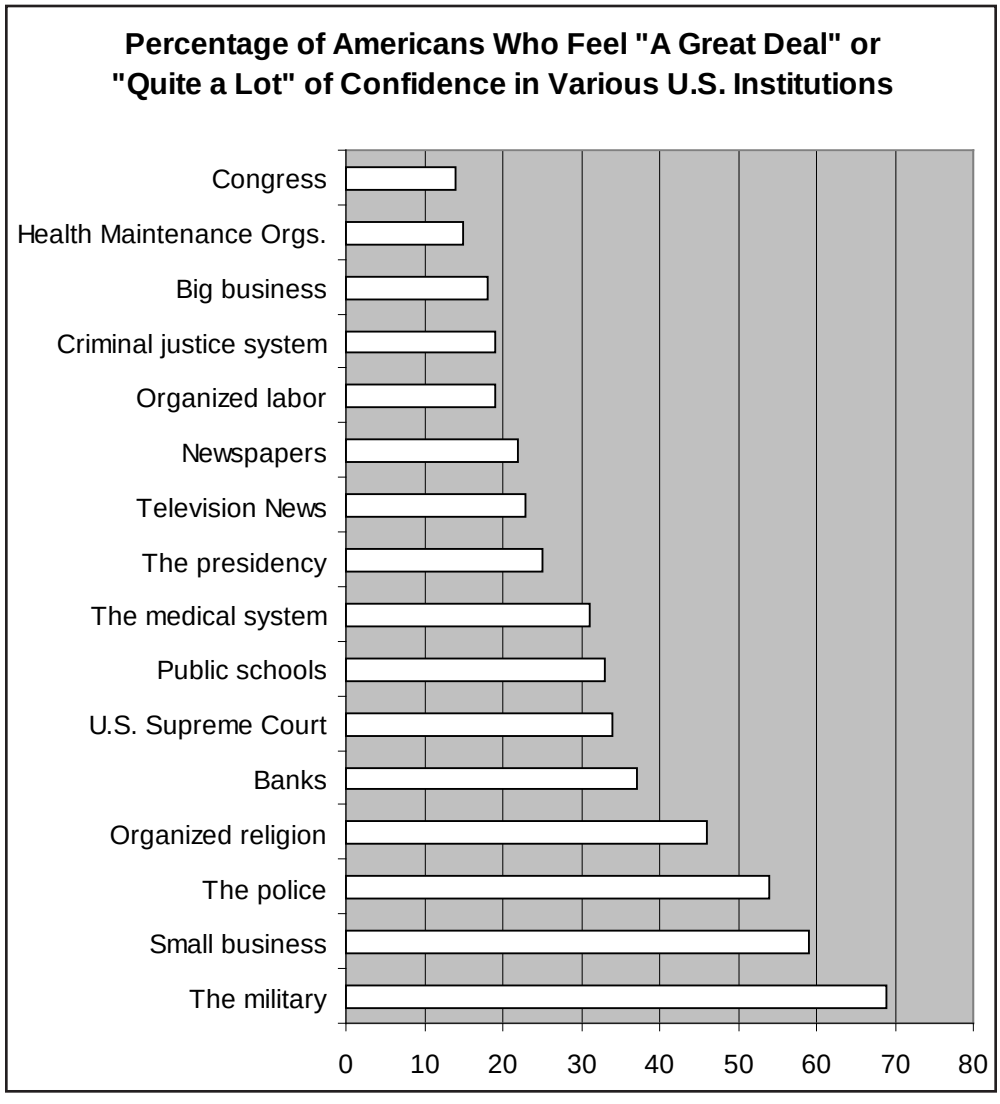
"The problem with the literacy community is that it doesn't make enough noise," said Maria Quiroga, a leader in the fight for literacy in New York City. It's time for all of us to make some noise. Let's step forward to build a movement for a more just society, including liberatory and empowering education for all.

David Greene is president of the Paulo Freire Institute for Popular Education and Social Change and a founder of the Center for Adult Learning and Leadership in New York City.

How Do Americans Feel About U.S. Institutions? What Does That Have To Do with Democracy?

Cynthia Peters

1. What do you notice about the graph? Are you surprised by what you see?
2. Which of these institutions are democratic, i.e., elected by the people?
3. Which institutions have a lot of influence over who gets elected?
4. Is there a connection between the level of trust people have in its institutions and how well a democracy functions?
5. Try collecting your own data about how others feel about U.S. institutions. The Gallup Poll question is: "I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Please tell me how much confidence you, yourself, have in each one: a great deal, quite a lot, some, very little, none, or unsure."



Source: Gallup Poll, June 11-14, 2007, taken from www.pollingreport.com.

Cynthia Peters is editor of The Change Agent.

On Getting Along

Howard Zinn

How do I stay involved and happy in this awful world where the efforts of caring people seem so small compared to those in power? It's easy.

FIRST: Don't let "those who have power" intimidate you. No matter how much power they have they cannot prevent you from living your life, speaking your mind, thinking independently, and having relationships with people as you like.

SECOND: Find people to be with who share your values and your commitments, but who also have a sense of humor. That combination is a necessity!

THIRD: Understand that the major media will not tell you of all the acts of resistance taking place every day in the society—the strikes, the protests, the individual acts of courage in the face of authority. Look around for the evidence of these unreported acts, and then assume that there are many thousands more of them.

FOURTH: Note that throughout history people have felt powerless before authority, but that at certain times these powerless people, by organizing, acting, risking, persisting, have created enough power to change the world around them, even if only a little.

FIFTH: Remember: power is fragile. People in power seem invulnerable, but their power depends on the obedience of others. Generals become powerless when soldiers refuse to fight; industrialists become powerless when workers go on strike.

SIXTH: Notice when power crumbles in the face of rebellion. We have seen many such times both in the United States and in other countries.

SEVENTH: Don't look for a moment of total triumph. It is an ongoing struggle, with victories and defeats. Be patient. Even when you don't "win," there is fun and fulfillment in being involved with other good people, in something worthwhile.

Howard Zinn is the author of A People's History of the U.S. *Reprinted w/ permission from ZNet <www.zcommunications.org>.*

We Need a Revolution

Dead Prez

I can stop these cops from killin',
I can feed these hungry children,
I can stop racism, a product of cap-it-a-lism.
I can unpack the prisons,
and turn religion back to we livin'
I can stop the bloods from pillin' caps
and the crips from pillin' back
and get yo' cousin off crack,
I can stop the war,
that's in the black hood,
Send the money right back to the po' fo' sho an'
if you with me n--, let me know
let's go, if ya really wanna know
(I wanna know.)
(We need a revolution)
…
The system ain't gonna change,
unless we make it change.

Finding Inspiration

What is hopeful in these two pieces?

What helps you "get along"?

"Community" contd. from p. 74

sense of belonging before they would take the time to educate themselves about the issues and participate in local elections. If the place they lived didn't feel like "home," they didn't vote.

As this theme of "place" emerged, I realized that it was an important lesson, one that goes well beyond voter education. So many of our students—and so many of us *all*—have had negative experiences with groups, whether it's in our families, in our schools, or in the community at large. Many students are survivors of physical or emotional abuse. Others speak of feeling left out, harassed, or embarrassed in school settings. Some have lived with the violence of war. Many live in poverty. Add to those experiences an understandable anger at injustice and the inequalities of power within our communities—and it's no wonder that "getting involved in the community" is not a compelling option.

This line of thought reminded me of why so many of our leadership programs have been successful. We start each session with a community building activity, using the range of participatory games well known to workshop leaders. As we introduce new concepts and skills, we continue to integrate them with structured, community-building activities. Our success depends on building a positive connection to a group so that participants can interact with one another in non-threatening and meaningful ways.

It seems to me that this is the most important work of leadership building—creating a safe place so that the desire to belong can emerge. Somehow, just feeling a sense of belonging seems to re-kindle the hope that it's possible to build a more just world. Once we have those intangibles—a sense of belonging and faith that change is possible—teaching the actual skills of leadership comes fairly easily. But without those core "issues of the heart," all of our skill-building—whether it's about voting or any other aspect of civic participation—is irrelevant.

Margaret Anderson works with the Literacy Project in western Massachusetts. Reprinted with permission from Field Notes.

Interested in the connection between literacy and liberation?

The Change Agent **is sponsoring a Social Justice Strand of Workshops at the COABE National Adult Education Conference on April 28 – May 1, 2008, St. Louis, MO**

Please join us!

Pre-Conference Session April 28: Freedom Schools

Learn about the historical role of Freedom Schools in adult literacy and liberation, and discuss the implications of using education as a tool for freedom today.

Social Justice Workshops April 29 – May 1, include:

1. Andy Nash, World Ed.: Teaching Basic Skills Through Socially Relevant Content
2. Martha Merson, TERC: Statistics for Action: Quantitative Literacy and Social Justice
3. Tricia Donovan, World Ed.: Math—Gateway to Change
4. Klaudia Rivera, Long Island Univ. and Ana Macias Univ of Texas, El Paso: Language and Access to Education: A Social Justice Issue
5. Ami Magisos, Pima Adult Ed.: AZ Digital Storytelling for Civic Engagement and Action
6. Silja Kallenbach, World Ed. and Shannon Cox, Univ. of Maine: Let's Get Out the Adult Education Vote in 2008!
7. Mev Miller, WELEARN: LGBTI and the Language of Sexual Diversities: From Awareness to Action
8. Sidney Storey, SCALE: Connecting ESOL Learners with the Community: Building Civic Action Skills
9. Ora J. Lewis, Acting for a Better Community, St. Louis, MO: Teaching Writing in a Social Justice Context

For more information, go to <www.coabeconference.org>

What is a "Literacy President"?

A Literacy President will support policies that promote adult learning.

Will there be a Literacy President in 2008?

We can help decide that by pressing the candidates to answer our questions regarding their plans for adult education.

Literacy President 2008 is a non-partisan initiative that seeks to raise awareness of adult literacy, regardless of who is elected. During the campaign, adult educators and learners will be asking presidential candidates questions about their position on adult literacy. By questioning the candidates now, we have the opportunity to engage them in dialogue about adult education, and show them that adult literacy and language learning is on Americans' minds.

Go to <www.litpresident.org> for a lesson plan that asks adult students to:

- Evaluate, prioritize, and refine the Literacy President questions
- Reflect on their knowledge and experience of advocacy
- Prepare to ask presidential candidates the questions that matter most to them

Join the effort to use the election to raise public awareness about adult education and to ensure that the next president is in fact a Literacy President.

Change Agent CALL FOR ARTICLES

Theme: **Climate Change**

Most scientists agree that the planet is heating up due to carbon emissions and that we will be facing significant changes in how we live as a result. The next issue of *The Change Agent* will focus on the social, political, and ecological significance of climate change. We are interested in hearing from teachers, learners, and allies about their experiences and thinking related to climate change.

Sample questions to consider:

- Who is responsible for carbon emissions? What changes need to be made in order to reduce carbon emissions?
- Have you organized with others to address global warming? If so, tell us about what you have done with others, and why.
- Have you changed your life in order to reduce carbon emissions? What did you do? Why?
- Have you experienced extreme weather conditions where you live? What happened? How did your community respond? Were you prepared?
- What should communities do to prepare for the changes in weather patterns? Who is responsible? Who should have input? Who should bear the costs?

Deadline for submissions: 5-5-08. Please consider submitting illustrations, cartoons, and graphics on this theme too! *The complete "call for articles" is on our website.*

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