New England Voter Education, Registration and Action (VERA) Campaign

2024 VERA Orientation
NELRC/World Education
Agenda

- Introduction to VERA; visit website and report back
- Teach history of voting
- Train Voting Ambassadors
What is VERA?

- Non-partisan campaign in which all members of the NELRC community participate.
- The goal is to educate adult learners about voting and the topical electoral issues, and mobilize them to vote through classroom and program activities -- and to do this in a way that teaches basic skills, adds knowledge, and supports digital literacy and leadership.
- Sponsored by the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) at World Education every four years during presidential elections since 1996.
What do students have to say?

“I never thought about voting before. I had bigger problems in life, but I look around here and I see so many people having so many problems. In my class, we studied the pros and cons of different issues to help us form our opinions. My top issues are housing and homelessness, and a woman’s right to choose.”

- Karen Lynch, Julie’s Family Learning Program, Boston, MA
Let me show you the website; then you explore
What Got Your Attention?

- VERA home page -- with timeline
- State-specific information
- Classroom and program resources
- How to hold a mock election
- Ideas for holding a voter registration drive
Election still a year away. What can you do now?

Teach about the history of voting rights. We have a 9-page packet on this. Will share link later...

Let’s dive in by watching this short video.
The History of Voting Rights Activity

- Gets everybody up and out of their chairs.
- Invites everyone’s knowledge as well as teaches history.
- Gives people an immediate feeling of inclusion and exclusion – which is interesting to reflect on later.
- Communicates the fluid nature of institutions and that they are shaped by our actions and by social movements.
- Is memorable in a way that a lecture is not!
Assign “identities” to people in the class – e.g., “Wealthy White Male,” “African American Female,” “Immigrant,” etc.

Put a “Can’t Vote” sign on one side of the room...

...and a “Can Vote” sign on the other side of the room.
At the beginning of U.S. history, who could vote?

Read the script out loud. The script narrates the history of voting rights in the United States. Pause as new developments occur in history which affect people’s voting rights. Ask people to move to the “Can” or “Can’t Vote” side of the room depending on what their identity is.
People often get very enthusiastic when their demographic wins the right to vote. You can see a perkiness to their step when they cross over to the “Can Vote” side of the room.
And they lose voting rights as well...

The story of voting rights in America turns out to be very fluid – with the right being won and lost – often several times over throughout the course of history. There are also numerous opportunities for debate among the participants. For example, did the poll tax and literacy tests exclude all African Americans from voting or just some?
History of Voting Rights: Post-activities:

- How did it feel to not be able to vote? To vote? To lose the right to vote? How does it make you feel about voting in real life?

- How are voting rights in flux in your community today? Note the photos below of current struggles to gain voting rights for immigrants and ex-felons.
What else is in the packet?

- Article by Andy Nash about Race and Voting Rights.
- Two pages of stories about people who lost voting rights
- A worksheet to assess understanding and take it further

Here’s the complete packet. Let’s go have a look.
What skills/knowledge will you be teaching?

[Notes here]

- Critical reading and thinking skills
- Academic vocabulary: based on the evidence, according to the author
- Vocabulary words
- History of voting rights
- Empathy skills: personal stories and participating in the activity
- Speaking and listening
- Social studies credits
- Using CCR standards
Consider the Voting Ambassador Training!

What is it? It is a set of Google slides that includes:

- articles about voting and civic engagement
- practical steps about how to register and vote
- ideas about how to get started supporting others to register, etc. -- and then how to reflect and learn from the experience

Google slides are here.
More Program Strategies

● Mock elections
● Candidates’ wall & forum
● Make a student infomercial about voting. Here’s a sample: [https://www.aacs15.com/node/692](https://www.aacs15.com/node/692)
● Guest speakers and visits with legislators
● Program-wide election day activities and rides to the polls
● What else?
Next Steps?

1. Share what you have learned today with colleagues.
2. Have a conversation with colleagues about moving forward with program-wide events (e.g., mock election, voter registration drive, or invite a speaker).
3. Try out these materials in the classroom.
4. Build in capacity for a Voting Ambassador training at your program.
Thank you!

Mock elections at the International Institute of Boston, 2008