

**REGISTER YOUR OPINION**

(60-90 minutes)

**OBJECTIVE**

Students explore voter registration and voting and write letters to the government expressing their own opinions.

**MATERIALS**

*Register Your Opinion* handout; access to the Internet (optional)

**GET READY**

- ✓ Make each of your students a copy of the *Register Your Opinion* handout.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

- ✓ Ask students to read the information on the *Register Your Opinion* handout.
- ✓ Read the following to the students: *As current or future voters, what suggestions would you have for your representatives to improve the system of voter registration and voting to make it more appealing or accessible to you?* Ask students to write their responses in class or as homework.
- ✓ In class, discuss your students' ideas. Brainstorm a variety of possibilities and encourage students to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each. This information could be written up in a chart on the board. Interested students could research voting practices in other democratic countries in the world. Which countries have high voter turnout? Can we learn something from them to increase the voter turnout in the U.S.?
- ✓ Have students individually or in small groups write letters to their representatives explaining their suggestions while utilizing facts from the

handout or from the following Web site:

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/hava/hava.html>

- ✓ If your students receive responses to their letters, encourage them to share the responses with the class or to post them in a special location in the classroom.
- ✓ Further discussion in class could focus on how school elections are held. Do the current procedures ensure a valid outcome? How could the process be improved?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- ★ *Do current voting procedures ensure a valid outcome or do you think they are outdated and hinder the voting turnout?*
- ★ *How could the voting process be improved?*
- ★ *What can you, personally, do to help the voter turnout?*

**MORE!**

Have your students follow the link on the Rock the Vote Web site ([www.rockthevote.org](http://www.rockthevote.org)) to find information on voter registration for each state. Have each student choose a state in which he/she has a friend or relative of voting age who is not registered to vote. Ask each student to write a letter to his or her friend or relative in another state explaining how to register in that state. Students should include at least three reasons why everyone should register to vote. Encourage your students to mail their letters and let the class know if they receive a response.



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On October 29, 2002, President Bush signed the “Help America Vote Act of 2002” into law. The “Help America Vote Act of 2002” (HAVA) is the most comprehensive voting reform effort of the last few decades. Created in the response to issues that arose during the 2000 election, HAVA impacts every part of the voting process, from provisional ballots to voting machines and from poll worker training to voter registration.

The legislation aims to improve the administration of elections in the United States, primarily through three means:

1. Creating a new federal agency to serve as a clearinghouse for election administration information
2. Providing funds to states to improve election administration and replace outdated voting systems
3. Creating minimum standards for states to follow in several key areas of election administration

Election officials, legislators, and advocates in each state are responsible for implementing HAVA. Under HAVA, states must meet the new federal requirements, which include the following criteria:

1. A system that allows voters to review the accuracy of their selections indicated on the voting machine before the ballot is finally cast
2. A means to allow the voter to correct any votes
3. The provision of an audit of the votes cast, or a “permanent paper trail” of the votes cast, which would facilitate a more efficient and reliable recount
4. A means to ensure that voters with disabilities, including voters with visual impairments, will be able to vote independently without third party assistance by providing each polling place with at least one direct recording electronic voting system or other voting system equipped for individuals with disabilities
5. The furnishing of multi-lingual ballots in required election districts
6. A system which produces an error rate that does not exceed the error rate standards established under section 3.2.1 of the voting systems standards issued by the Federal Election Commission
7. Establishment of uniform and non-discriminatory standards as to what constitutes a “vote”

Which aspects of HAVA do you think would significantly improve the U.S. system of voter registration and voting? Which ideas, if any, could potentially limit voting rights? What other ideas do you have that might prove useful?

Adapted from <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/hava/hava.html> and <http://www.demos.org/page54.cfm>.