



CULMINATING ACTIVITY: USE IT OR LOSE IT!

(45-60 minutes)

OBJECTIVE

Students recognize the fragile nature of the right to vote and acknowledge the need to protect that right.

MATERIALS

Voting Hassles handout; *Use It Or Lose It!* handout

GET READY

- ✓ Make a copy of the *Voting Hassles* handout for each of your students.
- ✓ Make a copy of the *Use It Or Lose It!* handout for each of your students.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Working individually or in small groups, have students complete the *Voting Hassles* worksheet.
- ✓ Ask the students what countries they guessed the different events occurred in. Do they think that the event is current or historical?
- ✓ Next, read the following to the class: *Do you still think your right to vote is secure? In your opinion, how effective are U.S. laws related to voting? Here are the corresponding dates and places where the voting conditions described on the worksheet have existed—each of them, right here in our own nation, some as recent as five years ago! Maybe we still need to think hard about protecting our right to vote.*
 1. Louisiana, 1890s
 2. Alabama, 1965
 3. Mississippi, 1960s
 4. New York, 1872
 5. Texas, 1996
 6. Texas, 1990s
 7. South Carolina, 2000
 8. Florida, 2000

- ✓ Have students read the *Use It Or Lose It!* handout.
- ✓ Have students circle the actions they would be willing to participate in at the bottom of the handout. Tell them they should be ready to defend their choices and describe the possible consequences of their actions or reluctance to act.
- ✓ Engage your class in a discussion of the choices they made on the *Use It Or Lose It!* handout.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *What U.S. populations have earned the right to vote over the last two centuries?*
- ★ *How did these groups earn the right to vote?*
- ★ *Do you still think your right to vote is secure? How effective are the different voting laws in the United States?*
- ★ *What are you willing to do to protect your right to vote?*
- ★ *What problems remain with voting that need to be solved? How would you go about solving them?*

REFERENCES

Hampton, Henry and Steve Fayer. *Voices of Freedom*. Bantam Books: New York, 1991.
 Rapoport, Miles S. "The American Prospect." <http://www.org/print/V12/5/rapoport-m.html>



VOTING HASSLES

Directions: Consider for a moment what it would mean to be denied the ability to elect our government officials. Imagine that the following incidents happened to you. Write down where and when you think each incident might have happened. Be prepared to discuss your ideas with the class.

1. While you are waiting to register to vote, some men ride by in a pickup truck with shotguns. It is very hot and you are waiting in line very long. The water has been turned off at a nearby faucet and there is nothing to drink. Suddenly the doors ahead close and you are told for the third day in a row to go home and come back tomorrow.
2. A poll tax is charged for you to vote. You have very little money to pay, and they tell you that since you did not pay last year, you now owe twice as much if you want to vote.
3. Before they will allow you to register to vote, you are required to interpret several sections of the country's constitution that explains the rules of government. Your explanation must meet the approval of the registrar.
4. When you attempt to vote, you are arrested and put in jail.
5. Voting districts are gerrymandered (boundaries are drawn in uneven, illogical shapes) so that certain groups of people are submerged in a larger group. This larger group of people will effectively cancel your voting interests.
6. Radio ads are run to purposely confuse you about the method of absentee voting.
7. Polling places are closed early in certain areas of the city. Your precinct is closed when you get off work and you do not get to vote.
8. Ballots are difficult or confusing to interpret. They are also difficult to mark so that your vote cannot be easily read.



USE IT OR LOSE IT!

The founders of this country strongly believed that democracy requires its citizens to participate. If we fail to take part, we are no longer truly a democratic nation, no matter how content or unhappy we are with it. Taking the right to vote for granted is dangerous and deadly to the process of democracy.

It has not been easy for many members of this nation to gain the right to vote. After many years of fighting and seemingly gaining the right of suffrage (vote), some groups of people have had to keep fighting to continue protecting that right. Many of those groups were finally protected with the passage of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 that was written to enforce the constitutional right to vote. Their right to vote was then strengthened with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 that prohibits the use of voting laws, practices, or procedures that discriminate in either purpose or effect on the basis of race, color, or membership in a minority language group.

Today, around the world people continue to fight and die for the right to vote. How far would you go to keep this basic human right to choose your own government leaders? Indicate below which of the following you would be willing to take part in.

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Protest | Run for office |
| Non-violent actions | Attend meetings |
| Fight in a war | Make campaign donations |
| Letter writing campaign | Go to jail |
| Petition | Nothing |

What other actions might you take to defend your right to vote?