



OUR NATIONAL SYMBOL

(45-50 minutes)

OBJECTIVE

Students participate in a primary election simulation and in a caucus simulation to explore and compare the processes.

MATERIALS

Paper for ballots

PART ONE: HOLD PRIMARY

ELECTIONS GET READY

- ✓ Tell students that the bald eagle, our national symbol, has decided to retire after years of public service. Our country's animals are gathering to decide who should run for the office of the new national symbol.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Divide your students into two groups. Tell them that half of them will be the bird party and half of them will be the mammal party. Explain that a party is a group of people who have some of the same political beliefs. Tell them the birds believe that since the symbol has always been a bird there is no reason to change it, and the mammals believe it is time for a change.
- ✓ Instruct them to gather into the two groups and hold a primary election to produce candidates. Explain that a candidate is someone who would like to be elected to a government office. If students need help,

possibilities for the bird candidate are: Great Horned Owl – wise, Mourning Dove – peaceful, Wild Turkey – independent; possible candidates for the mammals are: Raccoon – clever, Coyote – independent, Grizzly Bear – strong .

- ✓ Help each party vote to choose a candidate.
- ✓ Write the candidates on the board and discuss the pros and cons for each. Inform the students that they can now vote outside their party and must choose the national symbol they feel is best.
- ✓ Hold a general election with a secret ballot and choose a new national symbol. Celebrate!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *Was your favorite mammal or bird chosen?*
- ★ *Was this a fair way to vote? Why or why not?*
- ★ *Was this democratic, meaning did every one get to participate in the decision?*
- ★ *Can you think of a better way to choose a national symbol?*
- ★ *Is this the way we choose candidates in our state?*


OUR NATIONAL SYMBOL (continued)
PART TWO: HOLD CAUCUSES**GET READY**

- ✓ Tell your students that there is another way to choose a national symbol for our country — the caucus system.
- ✓ Share with your students the definition of a *caucus*: a meeting of local members of a political party that select delegates to a convention or register preferences for candidates running for office.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Divide your students into two groups, half will be the bird party and half will be the mammal party.
- ✓ Organize each party into four groups (caucuses) of three or four students. Ask each student to choose and announce in their caucus which bird or mammal he or she thinks is best and why. Help each caucus choose one delegate to go to the party convention. Explain that the delegate will cast a vote for their caucus.
- ✓ Hold the party conventions one at a time in front of the class. There should be four delegates to the bird convention and four to the mammal convention. Have the class watch and listen quietly as the delegates choose a candidate.

- ✓ When each party has a candidate, hold a secret general election. Either have the students close their eyes and raise their hands to vote or provide a paper ballot.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *Was your favorite mammal or bird chosen?*
- ★ *Was this as fair as the primary election? Why or why not?*
- ★ *Was this democratic, meaning did every one get to participate in the decision?*
- ★ *Can you think of a different way to choose a national symbol?*

MORE!

Repeat the process with other questions or actual decisions the class could make such as what to play at recess or which subject could be skipped today.