

SHOULD WE MAKE VOTING MANDATORY?

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA FOR HOMEWORK, IN-CLASS TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the [Thinkalong module](#). Students can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

SHOULD WE MAKE VOTING MANDATORY?

America from Scratch | August 10, 2018 | Video
8:55 minutes

A video from PBS Digital Studios exploring whether the U.S. should have compulsory voting.

- In 2016 voter turnout was 55.7 percent. People of color and the poor have even lower turnout. In non-presidential elections more than half of eligible voters don't vote.
- In ten of our largest cities, mayoral elections have had a turnout of less than 15 percent. The highest rate of voter turnout in the U.S. was in 1876 when almost 82 percent of eligible people voted.
- Some reasons people have for not voting are: they don't think their votes count, there are physical and logistical barriers to voting, or people are uninterested in politics.
- Toussaint Morrison asks why voter turnout is so low in the United States and whether making voting mandatory would make a difference.
- Mandatory voting would have to start at the local level because it would be difficult to enforce due to the varying election laws across the states.
- In some countries with mandatory voting laws, there still is 100 percent voter turnout. People are still choosing not to vote, even under the threat of fines.
- Secretary of State of Minnesota Steve Simon says he would stop short of making people vote, stating "the right to vote is also the right to not vote."
- Debra Ceaver, Founder and CEO of Vote.org suggests we could improve voter turnout by having online voting registration, polling centers, and holding voting on weekends not weekdays.

WHAT WOULD CHANGE IF MORE PEOPLE VOTED?

NPR | September 15, 2018 | Audio
4:15 minutes

A radio story about nonvoters, the 60 percent of the population that typically doesn't vote during midterm elections, even though they're eligible.

- Francisco Morales, a community activist in Nevada, has a mission to get young people of color and people who vote in presidential elections but not midterm elections to vote.

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help students to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.

- Morales believes that politicians focus on issues like Medicare and Social Security because older people are reliable voters. As a result, young people of color who want their issues to be heard need to vote more.
- Jan Leighly, a professor at American University, says that voters and nonvoters have different preferences on economic policies. The wealthy are more likely to vote, but Leighly says that if everyone voted, the electorate would be further to the left on economic issues.
- Georgetown University professor Jason Brennan disagrees with that theory. He says making everyone vote would have little effect on which party holds power. He points out that in countries that have compulsory voting there has been almost an even split between political parties.
- Eric Shickler, a professor at the University of California Berkeley has studied the hypothetical question of everyone voting in the U.S. He says that in 2003, it would have meant a one to two point increase on the Democratic side. This increase can tip a really close election but not give the Democrats a permanent majority in elections; however he says policies like immigration might change.
- Shickler states that if we redo the research from 2003, it'll show a more consistent benefit for Democrats because more nonvoters now are Democrats.

ON THE SIDELINES OF DEMOCRACY: EXPLORING WHY SO MANY AMERICAN DON'T VOTE

NPR | September 10, 2018 | Audio

7:02 minutes

A radio story from NPR exploring why people choose not to vote in different parts of the country.

- Only 6 in 10 eligible voters cast ballots in the 2016 presidential elections. The U.S. hasn't had a solid majority of people voting since the turn of the 20th century, but the voting pool was smaller – more male and whiter.
- More Americans are saying that they are excited to vote in midterm elections than they have in previous two decades, but on Election Day, low voter turnout is usually the norm.
- Megan Davis, a 31-year-old massage therapist in Providence, RI, is proud of the fact that she has never voted. She feels like her voice doesn't matter because the people in office are always unsatisfactory.
- Data shows the wealthy vote more often while nonvoters are more likely to be poor, young, Hispanic or Asian-American and are more likely to be Democrats.
- Whether elections results would be different if everyone voted is debatable but voting does determine whose interests get ignored or acknowledged.
- Hundreds of thousands of nonvoters want to vote but can't because of voter registration laws such as voter ID laws, criminal records keeping them from voting, being purged from the voting rolls, etc.
- But there are also millions of Americans who simply choose not to vote. Their reasons are varied: being apathetic, disliking the available choices, not thinking their vote matters, or thinking they don't know enough to vote.

KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your classroom and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Suffrage
- Election

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help students to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.

- Lobby
- Enfranchisement
- Candidate
- Conscription

CONTEMPLATE

Students will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

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?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help students answer these five questions about each piece of media.

DEBATE

Students will engage their peers in an evidence-based debate using the media they just analyzed. Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form an evidence-based response to the debate question.

In addition to rich in-class discussions, teachers can also connect with other classrooms through the Thinkalong website. [Sign up here](#) to be connected.

LET'S INVESTIGATE

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Use this worksheet to help you investigate the media sources in the Thinkalong module.



SUMMARIZE THE TOPIC

KEY VOCABULARY

MEDIA RESOURCE 1

TITLE _____

DATE PUBLISHED _____

MAIN IDEAS

MEDIA RESOURCE 2

TITLE

DATE PUBLISHED

MAIN IDEAS

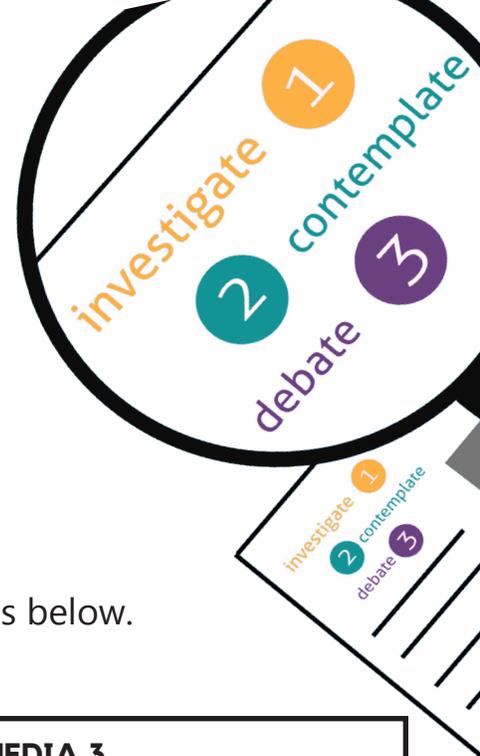
MEDIA RESOURCE 3

TITLE

DATE PUBLISHED

MAIN IDEAS

CONTEMPLATE YOUR SOURCES



NAME: _____

DATE: _____

After watching the media in the module, answer the questions below.

1. **AUTHORSHIP:** Who created this message?

MEDIA 1

MEDIA 2

MEDIA 3

2. **FORMAT:** What creative techniques are being used to grab my attention?

MEDIA 1

MEDIA 2

MEDIA 3

3. **AUDIENCE:** How might different people understand this message differently than me?

MEDIA 1

MEDIA 2

MEDIA 3

4. **CONTENT:** What values and points of view are represented? What's left out of this message?

MEDIA 1

MEDIA 2

MEDIA 3

5. **PURPOSE:** Why is this message being sent?

MEDIA 1

MEDIA 2

MEDIA 3

CREATE YOUR ARGUMENT

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Create strong arguments for both sides from the resources in the Thinkalong module.



DEBATE QUESTION	
PRO ARGUMENT	CON ARGUMENT
REASONING	REASONING
EVIDENCE	EVIDENCE