

Election issues ARE youth issues!

Citizenship Key Stage 5

Suitable for: Tutor groups or discreet Citizenship lessons in schools, colleges or work based learning centres.

Learning objectives:

- To explore the factors that influence people to vote in General Elections.
- To know how and where to register to vote.
- To consider how young people can ensure their voices are heard in the 2010 General Election.

Resources (contained within):

- 'Who's making your decision' voter trait cards
- 'Taking Action' strategies & action plan template

Plus:

Selection of newspapers, both local and national

More information available on the 'Votes at 16' campaign see; <http://www.co-operative.coop/ethicsinaction/Young-people/Votes-at-16>

ACTIVITIES

Starter: What's important to you?

Ask students to form small groups and provide each group with newspapers. Explain that they are looking for stories about issues of concern to them in the community. Students are to cut out the headings of these stories and then group the headings under the following columns: crime, health, education, foreign policy, environment, social security, economy. Students should try to come to an agreement as to what they consider the top 3 issues of concern are to them.

Discuss the following:

- What were each group's top 3 issues? Why?
- How many of the issues identified were also issues that affect young people?
- Do political parties consider the views of young people when making decisions about these issues? Why / why not?
- If given the vote, who would vote in the next General election? Why / why not?

Main: Who's making your decision?!

1. Explain that in the last General Election only 61.3% of people registered to vote in the UK actually voted. Begin to explore reasons why some people may not have voted. Ask students to estimate how many young people, aged 18 - 24, they believe voted in the last General Election.

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2. Share with students that only 37% of young people aged 18-24 actually voted in the 2005 election. Explore with students the reasons why this number is so much lower than the general population. Explore the factors that influence our decision whether or not to vote. This could include: social class, employment, where you live, if you own a house, your age, gender, religion / ethnicity, level of education, what the media reports and what you think of the candidates or political parties on offer.

4. Students to form smaller groups and then should evenly distribute the 'voter trait cards'. Students share their trait with the group. As a group they must now decide:

- Is this person likely to vote in the next election? Why / why not? (arrange these in two columns)
- What issues are likely to be important to them?
- What might they want the government to do about these issues?

5. In a larger group, share the traits of people that are more likely to vote in the next election. Consider:

- Would these voters consider issues important to young people when deciding who they will vote for?
- What are the implications of this for young people?
- If you were entitled to, would you vote in the next election? What might be the implications of this?
- Do you need the vote to get your voice heard in an election? Why?
- What other ways can young people use to get their voices heard in the election?

Plenary: Take real action!

Explain that there has never been a better time than in the lead up to the 2010 General Election to make sure that young people's voices are heard. Young people can register to vote at 16, although there are a few restrictions if you are citizen from another country resident in the UK.

Discuss with students how to register to vote and the voting procedures. Introduce them to the site <http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk>, which makes the registration process very simple and answers any questions they might have.

However, not having the vote does not mean that young people should not make sure their voices are heard by others in the lead up to the election.

Hand out the 'taking action' ideas resource sheet. Ask students to rate each of the actions on how effective they think each would be. There are two empty spaces for them to add their own ideas. Take a class vote as to which action they would like to take. Decide the next steps with the group using the action plan template to put these ideas into action.

Teachers be aware!

It is against the law for election candidates to campaign in schools or colleges. The law also states that teachers must ensure they are bi-partisan. However don't be put off! Invite election candidates to come and explain the election process and what steps they are taking to make sure that they have taken young people's views onboard. More advice on these issues can be accessed from The Hansard Society. For guidance on dealing with extreme political views in the classroom go to: <http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/news.php?n783>

Who's making your decisions?

You have lots of money	You struggle to pay the bills
You left school at 16	You have been to university
Your parents always voted	No-one in your family votes
You own a house	You live in a rented house
You have a family	You are single
You are 40 years old	You are 18
You keep up to date with the news through papers, the internet or tv	You don't read the news in papers or on the internet or watch the news on tv
You are a doctor	You are a call centre worker
You are religious	You are not religious

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You are from a white British background	You are from a Asian British background
You don't like any of your local candidates	You are impressed by one of the local candidates

Taking Action!

Rank each of the nine actions below on how effective you think they would be in getting young people's views listened to in the 2010 General Election.

1 = most effective, 9 = least effective

Use the two empty spaces to add your own ideas.

Strategy	
	Write directly to your local candidates sharing your concerns. Also send this letter to the local newspaper, inviting responses from other people in the community
	Start a Facebook group asking your friends what they think are the top priorities / concerns. Invite the candidates to join the group and respond to your views.
	Start a blog on what issues are important to you in your community. Invite local candidates to comment.
	Use youth campaigning sites that are already out there like Battlefront, to share your views. www.battlefront.co.uk
	Find out what your candidates policies are on issues important to you. Most political parties have a youth site which you can find information on. Get yourself informed and then let as many adults as you can know what you think. This may even help them to make up their mind as well.
	Get involved in the Votes at 16 campaign, www.votesat16.org.uk
	Organise a debate at college, with students representing each of the political parties running in your constituency.
	Invite candidates into college to explain how the elections run and how they take the views of young people on board.
	Run a mock election in your college, with student candidates from each political party represented. Compare your results to those of the General Election. The Hansard Society has all the resources you need; www.mockelections.co.uk

Action plan - Election issues are Youth Issues!

Strategy	Steps we will need to take	Who will be responsible?	Who can we go to for help?	By when?