



# CIVICS CLASSROOM CURRICULUM

CITIZENS CLEAN ELECTIONS COMMISSION ★ YOUTH VOTER EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

**4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup>**  
**GRADE LEVELS**

**LESSON 5**  
**WHAT IS A DEMOCRACY?**



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# Civics Classroom Curriculum

## What is a Democracy?

 AZCleanElections.gov



TOPICS 	GRADE LEVEL
Governing structures Voting rights	4 <sup>th</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

The Citizens Clean Elections Commission (CCEC), in partnership with expert curriculum writers, presents the Civics Classroom Curriculum lesson series, which covers a variety of relevant topics including democracy, elections, government, and the political party system. This is a part of CCEC’s youth voter education and outreach initiative.

These lessons in Civic Education aim to promote an understanding and appreciation of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy, encourage participation and civil dialogue, and develop civics skills such as critical thinking, researching, and determining fact versus fiction or opinion.

Research shows that lifelong voters cast their first votes early in life. The lesson plans adhere to Arizona’s classroom teaching standards and are applicable within more than one subject. The respective subjects are listed in the Integrated State Standards section of this module. The lesson plans were designed with teachers in mind and with utmost admiration for their important work.



# LESSON PLAN:

## WHAT IS A DEMOCRACY?



### OVERVIEW

The following activities are designed for students in grades 4 through 6. It will be necessary for you to tailor your actual lesson to your grade level and student readiness. For instance, you may want to reduce the number of questions students are required to answer (for lower grades); simplify the questions (based on ability levels) or expand on them (enrichment); do the activities in groups or individually; assign part of the lesson as homework; lead them through the entire lesson (direct instruction) rather than having them explore (inquiry); and determine how they will present their findings, e.g., discussions, a poster, a presentation using technology, a worksheet, etc.

We would also recommend that your students do this lesson in groups, including the research, the multimedia creation and the presentation. They could even “present” digitally by recording it using a screencast program or just narrating PPT slides. If they do this, then it opens the possibility that they could post their learning artifacts in a digital space (such as Edmodo, Google Classroom, Canvas, etc.) and give each other feedback (which is another set of technology skills).

This lesson can take place over multiple days.

### I. Materials needed

Access to the internet and a laptop or cellphone. Teacher will create a community service “ballot” to be used with this lesson plan.

### II. Lesson Aim/Objective(s)

Students will learn the definition of democracy and four important elements as well as the importance of their participation in the democratic process.



### III. Do Now/Warm Up

Have students write the word “democracy” using their computer, notebook, or a piece of paper. Ask them to do a “free association” of the word, typing or writing down all of the words and phrases that come to mind when they think of the word “democracy.” Discuss their answers.

**Discuss:** The word democracy describes a form of government. The word comes from two Greek words that mean “rule by the people.” In a democracy the people have a say in how the government is run. They do this by voting, though there are usually rules about who can vote. Early in our history, only white male property owners could vote. What do you think about that?

Democracies are different from dictatorships, in which a dictator or central authority has decision-making power over the society. (Definition from Kids Britannica). How would you feel about living in a dictatorship?

#### **Discuss the two types of democracy:**

**Direct** - A direct democracy is one in which every citizen votes on all important decisions. One of the first direct democracies was in Athens, Greece. All of the citizens would gather to vote in the main square on major issues. A direct democracy becomes difficult when the population grows. Imagine the more than 300 million people of the United States trying to get together in one place to decide an issue. It would be impossible.

**Representative** - The other type of democracy is a representative democracy. This is where the people elect representatives to run the government. Another name for this type of democracy is a democratic republic. The United States is a representative democracy. The citizens elect representatives such as the members of Congress (the House of Representatives and the Senate) to make laws.

**Ask:** Why is it important to participate as a voter in our democracy? Discuss this concept. Discuss what issues are important to their families.

### VI. Instruction

**A.** Ask students who can vote in our elections, reminding them that the right to vote was originally reserved for white male landowners only. Share the following information about expanded voter rights with your students:



### Constitutional Amendments Affecting Voting Rights ([usa.gov](http://usa.gov))

The [15th Amendment](#) gave African American men the right to vote in 1870. But many weren't able to exercise this right. Some states used literacy tests and other barriers to make it harder to vote.

The [19th Amendment](#), ratified in 1920, gave American women the right to vote.

The [24th Amendment](#), ratified in 1964, eliminated poll taxes. The tax had been used in some states to keep African Americans from voting in federal elections.

The [26th Amendment](#), ratified in 1971, lowered the voting age for all elections to 18.

### B. Discuss these four important elements of a democracy:

**Citizens rule** - We've already discussed this in the definition of democracy. Ask: What does this mean? The power of the government must rest in the hands of the citizens either directly or through elected representatives.

**Free elections** - Democracies conduct free and fair elections where all citizens are allowed to vote how they want. Why is it so important that elections are free? Fair? What might make an unfair election?

**Majority rule with individual rights** - In a democracy, the majority of the people will rule, but the rights of the individual are protected. While the majority may make the decisions, each individual has certain rights. Ask: What rights do you have? (Free speech, freedom of religion, freedom to assemble, equal protection under the law, etc).

**Citizen participation** - The citizens of a democracy must participate for it to work. They must understand the issues and vote. Also, in most democracies today, all citizens are allowed to vote. There are no restrictions on race, gender, or wealth as there were in the past. Potential voters are, however, required to register to vote.

Direct students to the Citizens Clean Elections Commission website ([azcleanelections.gov](http://azcleanelections.gov)) for information on registering to vote. Click on the Voter Registration tab.

### C. Complete an exercise in democracy:

The class will be asked to come up with up to four ideas for community service class projects, e.g., campus litter pickup. These four ideas will be listed on the blank ballot you have created. Each student will receive a 'ballot' with the four options listed and will be instructed to make their selection, filling in their vote. The ballots will be provided to the teacher in paper form or sent electronically. Once the votes are counted, the winning volunteer project will be announced. The class will participate in the project together as a continued lesson in civic engagement.



## VII. Enrichment or Homework

If time, talk about or assign to research some of the following historic moments in voter rights provided by the U.S. Department of Justice (usa.gov):

**Federal laws passed over the years help protect Americans' right to vote and make it easier for citizens to exercise that right:**

The Civil Rights Acts created some of the earliest federal protections against discrimination in voting. These protections were first outlined by the [Civil Rights Act of 1870](#) and were later amended by the Civil Rights Acts of

- [1957](#)
- [1960](#)
- [1964](#)

The [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#) prohibited voter discrimination based on race, color or membership in a language minority group. It also required certain places to provide election materials in languages besides English.

The [Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984](#) required polling places to be accessible to people with disabilities.

The [Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act \(UOCAVA\) of 1986](#) allowed members of the U.S. armed forces and overseas U.S. voters to register and vote by mail.

The [National Voter Registration Act \(NVRA\) of 1993](#) created new ways to register to vote. It also called for states to keep more accurate voter registration lists.

The [Help America Vote Act \(HAVA\) of 2002](#) authorized federal funds for elections. It also created the [U.S. Election Assistance Commission \(EAC\)](#). The EAC helps states comply with HAVA to adopt minimum standards on voter education, registration and ballots.

The [Military and Overseas Voting Empowerment \(MOVE\) Act of 2009](#) improved access to voting by military and overseas voters.



## VIII. Assessment

### Closure discussion:








Divide students into groups of 3 or 4. Have them discuss the following questions. Then discuss their answers as a whole class.

- What is a democracy?
- What are the two types of democracy?
- What did the 15th, 19th, 24th and 26th amendments do?
- What does “citizens rule” mean?
- What are “free elections”?
- What is “majority rule”?





## COMMUNITY SERVICE BALLOT

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Vote for one of the four community service options listed above by filling in the bubble.

Use *BLACK PEN* or *PENCIL* to fill in the oval.





- What is “citizen participation” and why is it important?

## INTEGRATED STATE STANDARDS

Choose from the following standards for your lesson

### GRADE 4

**4.C1.1** Analyze civic virtues and democratic principles or lack thereof within a variety of government structures, societies and/or communities.

**4.SP3.4** Use information about a source including the author, date, place of origin, intended audience and purpose to evaluate the extent to which the source is useful for studying a topic.

**4.SP3.6** Present summaries of arguments and explanations using print, oral and digital technologies.

**4.RI.1** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**4.RI.2** Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

**4.RI.3** Explain events, procedures, ideas or concepts in a historical, scientific or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

**4.RI.4** Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a grade 4 topic or subject area.

**4.RI.7** Interpret information presented visually, orally or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, timelines, animations or interactive elements on web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

**4.RI.10** By the end of the year, proficiently and independently read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science and technical texts, in a text complexity range determined by qualitative and quantitative measures appropriate to grade 4.

**4.W.1** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

- Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer’s purpose.
- Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.
- Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases (e.g., for instance, in order to, in addition).

- d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

**4.W.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

**4.W.6** With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to complete a writing task.

**4.W.7** Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

**4.W.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research. Apply grade 4 Reading standards to informational texts.

**4.W.10** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes and audiences.

## GRADE 5

**5.SP3.4** Infer the intended audience and purpose of a source from information within the source itself.

**5.SP3.5** Use information about a historical source including the author, date, place of origin, intended audience and purpose to judge the extent to which the source is useful for studying a topic and evaluate the credibility of the source.

**5.SP3.7** Construct and present explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples and details with relevant information and data

**5.C2.1** Explain how a democracy relies on people's responsible participation within the context of key historical events pre-American Revolution to Industrialization. Key concepts include but are not limited to volunteerism, joining associations and groups, joining political parties, using the First Amendment (free speech, religion, press, assembly, petition), censorship, voting in elections, running for office, working on campaigns, bringing cases to court, civil disobedience, protest movements and serving in the military.

**5.C4.2** Use a range of deliberative and democratic procedures to make decisions about and act on issues and civic problems in their classrooms and schools.

**5.RI.1** Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**5.RI.2** Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

**5.RI.4** Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific



words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.

**5.RI.10** By the end of the year, proficiently and independently read and comprehend informational text, including history/social studies, science and technological texts, in a text complexity range determined by qualitative and quantitative measures appropriate to grade 5.

**5.RF.4** Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.

**5.W.1** Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

- a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.
- b. Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.
- c. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically).
- d. Provide a concluding statement.

**5.W.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

**5.W.6** With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills in order to complete a writing task.

**5.W.7** Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic and to answer a specific question.

**5.W.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research. Apply grade 5 Reading Standards to informational texts.

**5.W.10** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes and audiences.

**5.SL.2** Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

**5.SL.4** Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

**5.SL.5** Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in



presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

## GRADE 6

**6.SP3.4** Use information about a historical source including the author, date, place of origin, intended audience and purpose to judge the extent to which the source is useful for studying a topic and evaluate the credibility of the source.

**6.SP3.7** Construct and present explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples and details with relevant information and data.

**6.C2.1** Analyze the beliefs, experiences, perspectives and values that underlie points of view regarding civic issues in the time period and regions studied.

**6.C4.1** Explain challenges and opportunities people and groups face when solving local, regional and/or global problems.

**6.C4.2** Describe and apply civic virtues including deliberative processes that contribute to the common good and democratic principles in school, community and government. Key concepts include but are not limited to civility, respect for the rights of others, individual responsibility, respect for law, open mindedness, critical examination of issues, negotiation and compromise, civic mindedness, compassion, patriotism, conciliation and consensus building.

**6.RI.2** Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

**6.RI.10** By the end of the year, proficiently and independently read and comprehend informational texts and nonfiction in a text complexity range determined by qualitative and quantitative measures appropriate to grade 6.

**6.W.1** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

**6.W.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts and information through the selection, organization and analysis of relevant content.

**6.W.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

**6.W.6** Use technology, including the internet, to type and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to complete a writing task in a single sitting.

**6.W.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

**6.W.8** Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.



**6.W.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research. Apply grade 6 Reading Standards to informational text and nonfiction.

**6.W.10** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes and audiences.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Grade 4

**PO 1.** Analyze information using digital creativity tools to create original works and express ideas.

**PO 1.** Communicate digitally with others by selecting and using a variety of appropriate communication tools.

**PO 1.** Contribute to a cooperative learning project and demonstrate effective group behaviors while using digital collaborative resources.

**PO 3.** Differentiate between fact and opinion, bias and inaccurate information.

### Grade 5

**PO 1.** Analyze information using digital creativity tools to create original works and express ideas.

**PO 1.** Communicate digitally with others by selecting and using a variety of appropriate communication tools.

**PO 1.** Contribute to a cooperative learning project and demonstrate effective group behaviors while using digital collaborative resources.

**PO 3.** Evaluate between fact and opinion, bias, inaccurate and misleading information by consulting more than one source.

### Grade 6

**PO 1.** Analyze information using digital creativity tools to create original works and express ideas.

**PO 1.** Communicate digitally with others by selecting and using a variety of appropriate communication tools.

**PO 1.** Communicate and collaborate for the purpose of producing original works or solving problems.

**PO 3.** Evaluate information and media through determining facts, opinion, bias and inaccuracies by consulting multiple sources.