

## LESSON PLAN

### Voting 101: Reading a Ballot



"Your First Vote" 1960 campaign brochure put out by the Democratic National Committee.  
The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza Collection

[Click to view full, printable artifact online](#)

#### Grade

6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>

#### Time

1-2 Class Periods

#### Brief Synopsis

Students will learn how to read and understand a ballot for the general election. Utilizing a ballot from the 1960 general election and a local sample ballot from the 2024 general election, students will learn about the procedures for casting a vote. Through an analysis of the two ballots, students will identify how ballots and voting procedures have changed over time while realizing the importance of civic participation.

## Historical Context

On November 8, 1960, voters in the United States participated in a general election where they cast ballots for federal, state and local candidates and issues including selecting the 35th President of the United States. The U.S. Constitution gives responsibility for establishing voting procedures to the states, allowing them to determine election procedures and selecting members of the Electoral College for their state.

In 1960 the candidates for president included Sen. John F. Kennedy for the Democrats and Vice President Richard Nixon for the Republicans as well as candidates representing lesser-known parties including the Prohibition Party and Constitution Party. Kennedy won the popular vote by less than 120,000 votes. In the Electoral College, Kennedy received 303 votes to Nixon's 219. Democratic Virginia Governor Harry F. Byrd was not on the ballot however he received 15 electoral votes from Alabama, Mississippi and Oklahoma. During the 1960 election, voters also selected candidates for county and state offices and decided on proposed measures and propositions impacting local government.

In preparation for each election, states issue sample ballots for voters to access in advance of election day to help them review the races and issues included on the ballot. Sample ballots include each office and candidate within a voter's or county's jurisdiction and local and state measures for the upcoming election.

## Essential Questions

- What are the key components of a general election ballot, and how do they contribute to the voting process?
- How can understanding the different offices and candidates on a ballot impact your decisions as a voter?
- How does the voting process empower citizens to influence their community and government?
- Why is it important for young voters to engage with the electoral process, and how can they encourage others to participate?

## Learning Objectives

- Understand the structure and components of a general election ballot
- Learn how to identify sections on a ballot
- Develop critical thinking skills to interpret candidates and measures on the ballot
- Foster informed citizenship and encourage participation in elections

## Vocabulary

All definitions are derivative of Ballotpedia.org

**General Election:** An election in which candidates are elected to offices. This is in contrast to a primary election, which is used either to narrow the field of candidates for a given elective office or to determine the nominees for political parties in advance of a general election.

**Ballot:** A tool that voters use to make their choices during an election. It lists candidates and measures that you can vote for.

**Candidate:** A person who is nominated for election.

**Write-In Candidate:** Someone whose name does not appear on the ballot, but whose name must be written on the ballot by voters.

**Ballot Measures/propositions:** A law, issue, or question that appears on a statewide or local ballot for voters of that jurisdiction to decide.

## Curriculum Standards

### Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

Social Studies: 5.17; 6.11.B, 6.12.A; 7.15.B; 8.19.C

U.S. History Since 1877: 22.C, 28.A, 31.A

U.S. Government: 9, 10, 13.B, 21.A

### C3 Standards

Middle School: D2.Civ.2.6-8; D4.7.6-8

High School: D2.Civ.2.9-12; D2.Geo.2.9-12; D4.7.9-12

### Common Core

History/Social Studies

Middle School

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions

High School

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2

- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

- Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2:

- Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

## Materials

### [Tarrant County ballot for the 1960 general election](#)

Official ballot for Tarrant County (Fort Worth, TX) for the general election held on November 8, 1960.

### [State and local election offices | USAGov](#)

Look up the sample 2024 general election ballot for your area

Reading a Ballot Worksheet (p. 6-7)

Access to resources (e.g. candidate websites, ballot measure summaries)

## Instructions

### 1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Begin with a discussion about the importance of voting in a democracy.
- Ask students if they have voted or plan to vote in future elections.
- Discuss how voting impacts their community and the significance of being an informed voter.

### 2. Explain Ballot Components (15 minutes)

- Using the [1960 Tarrant County general election ballot](#), highlight each section and demonstrate how to read and interpret it.
- **Header:** Discuss what information is included (e.g., election date, type of election).
- **Sections:** Break down the main parts of a ballot:
  - **Instructions:** Review the instructions on how to properly mark the ballot.
    - How do you vote for individual candidates
    - How do you vote for all the candidates in one party?
    - How do you vote for a measure/proposition?
  - **Candidates:** Explain the different offices (e.g., federal, state, local) and how to identify them.
  - **Measures/Propositions:** Discuss local and state issues that may appear on the ballot, including how they affect voters.
  - **Signature:** Where does a voter sign their ballot?

### 3. Group Activity (15 minutes)

- Divide students into small groups and provide each group with a sample ballot from your area.
- Have students examine both ballots and determine differences between the two.
  - o Are the ballots organized in the same way?
  - o Are the instructions the same?
- Have them identify the sections and discuss what candidates or measures are present.
- Encourage them to consider the implications of each measure and the qualifications of candidates.

### 4. Individual Work (15 minutes)

- Distribute the “Reading a Ballot” worksheet.
- Ask students to fill it out based on the sample ballot, noting key information about candidates and measures.
- Instruct students to research one race and one measure, summarizing their findings.

### 5. Review and Reflect (5 minutes)

- Bring the class together to share insights from their research and discuss how they feel about voting.
- Emphasize the importance of evaluating information critically and making informed choices at the polls.

## Additional Resources

[www.vote411.org](http://www.vote411.org)

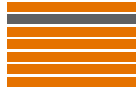
- League of Women Voters Education Fund website generating voting information by address including general information on the races included on the ballot, candidates, and individual ballot items.

[Voting and elections | USA.gov](#)

- United States government website providing information on voting and election laws including voter registration and procedures, voter ID requirements by state and federal laws and constitutional amendments impacting voter rights.

[Module 13: Voting Rights in America | Constitution Center](#)

- National Constitution Center resource on voting rights in the United States.



**Reading a Ballot Worksheet**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 1: Key Components of a Ballot**

1. What is a ballot?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. List the main sections you will find on a ballot:

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

d. \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2: Candidates Section**

3. What types of offices can you vote for? List at least three.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Why is it important to learn about the candidates running for office?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 3: Measures/Propositions**

5. What are measures or propositions?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Why should you carefully read the descriptions of measures?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 4: Instructions**

7. How do you vote for a candidate listed on the ballot?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 5:** Research

8. Choose one office and one measure you would like to learn more about.

Use the space below to note down what you find out:

Office Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Candidate(s): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Key Information: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What are the qualifications for this office?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Measure: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Description: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Why is this measure important?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 6:** Reflection

9. Why do you think voting is important?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. What is one thing you learned today about reading a ballot that surprised you?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_