

Lesson Plan: Are 16-year-olds mature enough to vote?

By Rachel Roberson

Featured resources

- The Lowdown: [Should the Voting Age Be Lowered to 16? \[VIDEO\]](#)
- San Francisco Public Press: [Proposition F](#)
- Forbes (opposing argument): [No, We Shouldn't Lower the Voting Age to 16](#)



Opening quick write prompt:

Do you think 16- and 17-year-olds should be allowed to vote in local elections? Why or why not? If you could, would you choose to vote at age 16? Explain your answer.

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will evaluate the arguments for and against 16- and 17-year-olds being allowed to vote in local elections, and reflect on their own views about the issue.
- Students will analyze Proposition F, a measure in San Francisco that would lower the voting age to 16 for local elections.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What are the best strategies for getting teens under 18 involved in political issues that affect their lives? What are the reasons for and against lowering the voting age?

Several countries, including Brazil and Great Britain, have lowered their voting age, as well as two small cities in Maryland. Arguments in favor of lowering the voting age point out that teens deserve a voice since they often work, pay taxes and rely heavily on local services, like public transportation and education. Research also shows that when teens vote earlier they are more likely to vote as adults, thus boosting voter turnout nationally. Counter arguments claim that 16 and 17 year olds are not mature enough to vote, as demonstrated by laws that categorize those under 18 as minors. If Proposition F passes, San Francisco will be the first major U.S. city to lower its local voting age to 16.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English language learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Canvass (v.)	To talk to a group of people in order to gauge their opinions or persuade them to support a certain candidate, project, idea, etc.
Disenfranchised (adj.)	Prevented from having the right to vote
Inclusive (adj.)	Including all services, participants or items
Municipality (n.)	A city or town that has a local government
Ordinance (n.)	A local law or piece of legislation

Activity

- As a class, in small groups or individually, students watch the video featured in [this Lowdown post](#) as well as [this Forbes article](#) or another text that includes arguments against lowering the voting age.
- After watching and reading, students make a list of arguments in favor and against the issue.
 - Model this part of the lesson** if needed by watching the video as a class and making a pro/con list based on the video. Then divide students into groups to read the suggested articles, which offer further arguments.
- After making the pro/con list, ask students to choose any argument they disagree with and, in writing, make a case for their opposing view in a format they can share with the class orally or online.
 - Model the written response.** A response could look like: *I disagree with _____ (name of person who made the argument) when s/he said, " _____ " (direct quote from article). Instead, I believe _____ (what the student believes) because _____ (student supports argument with evidence.)*

Discussion questions

- One of the arguments against lowering the voting age is that 16-year-olds aren't mature enough to vote. If you disagree, what could teens do to prove to their local election commission that they are responsible enough to vote?
- One of the arguments for lowering the voting age is that it may encourage people to continue to vote as adults. Do you think this would be true for you if you could vote at 16?
- Do you think lowering the voting age is the best way to get teens more involved in election issues? Why or why not?
- What are ways to get young people involved in local issues other than lowering the voting age?

Circle chats, small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension activities

Don't hate, annotate: Students comment on each other's written arguments and respond directly to the text articles online using an annotation platform like [Hypothes.is](#). Visit these sites for a [quick teacher tutorial](#) and [further resources](#).

Write/speak locally: Students turn their pro or con arguments into a letter, short speech or presentation, then research ways to make their voice heard in their community. (Example: Speaking during the public comment section of a city council meeting, posting on an online forum, etc.)

A national platform for your students' voices: Students make their voices heard on issues they care about by participating in [Letters to the Next President 2.0](#). This national initiative gives youth a platform to express their opinion about election issues that matter most to them. Teachers must sign up and get a group code that students can use to upload letters. For more resources and examples, see also [KQED's student video project](#), My Backyard Campaign.

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence