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## *Please Vote for Me*

A Lesson in Democracy *Guide for Teachers*



**JOURNEYS IN FILM™**  
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# A Lesson in Democracy

## Enduring Understandings:

- Certain fundamental values, such as justice and equality, are essential for a well-functioning democracy.
- Fair elections are a critically important component of effective democracy.

## Essential Questions:

- What are the key values necessary in a democracy?
- What happens when elections are not well run?

## Notes to the Teacher:

To prepare for this lesson, photocopy **Handout 1: Principles of Democracy** and cut it apart into sections. The sections are not exhaustive; they reflect only the following democratic values:

- Justice (All people should be equal before the law, which should be upheld with honor and integrity.)
- Diversity (The nation embraces the variety of its citizens regardless of race, religion, age, sex, culture, or economic status.)
- Truth (Government will be transparent and will not lie to the people.)
- Patriotism (Citizens love their country and the values it stands for.)
- Equality (People have the same legal and political rights, regardless of race, religion, age, sex, culture, or economic status.)
- Popular Sovereignty (The government is created by the people, draws its power from them, and is subject to their will.)
- Common Good (Government works to ensure the welfare of all the people, not just of particular groups.)
- Individual Rights (Each person has rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.)

The last section of the handout has no value listed; use this to insert one or more of your own that you feel is important. (Note that these values or principles are ref-

erenced again in Lesson 6 of this curriculum, an art project based on symbols for these values.)

Next, prepare a bulletin board area which is headed “Principles of Democracy.” Leave space for students to put up their answers to Handout 1. If you wish, you may also give each of the groups paper and drawing implements and ask them to illustrate one or more of the principles of democracy in action; these drawings can also go up on the bulletin board.

The lesson begins with a discussion of some of the basic principles of Western-style democracy. Then students watch the film, preferably all in one sitting. A response sheet encourages individual students to react to the film and then students share their responses. A classroom discussion covers more general questions about the purpose and effect of the documentary.

Finally, there is an optional activity if you have time, a classroom election, which gives students the opportunity to run an election of their own. Please modify and edit the procedural steps as you see fit for your classroom; they are only suggestions to get you started and could be expanded or edited to become as large and complex as you like or as small and simple as you need.

**Duration of Lesson:**

Two class periods, plus time for film viewing and “election campaign” (optional)

**Assessment:**

Class discussion

Likes/Dislikes evaluation

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## McREL Social Studies Standards

Indicators addressed by this lesson:

**Standard 1.** Understands ideas about civic life, politics, and government

### Level III (Grades 6–8)

2. Understands how politics enables people with differing ideas to reach binding agreements (e.g., presenting information and evidence, stating arguments, negotiating, compromising, voting)

**Standard 9.** Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs, and principles of American constitutional democracy

### Level III (Grades 6–8)

1. Identifies fundamental values and principles that are expressed in basic documents (e.g., Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution), significant political speeches and writings (e.g., The Federalist, King's "I Have a Dream" speech), and individual and group actions that embody fundamental values and principles (e.g., suffrage and civil rights movements)
2. Understands how certain values (e.g., individual rights, the common good, self government, justice, equality, diversity, openness and free inquiry, truth, patriotism) are fundamental to American public life
3. Understands popular sovereignty as opposed to state sovereignty (e.g., ultimate political authority rests with the people who create and can alter or abolish governments; citizens are not the same as subjects), and knows that popular sovereignty is a fundamental principle of American constitutional democracy

## Common Core Standards

Addressed by this lesson:

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.

RH.6–8.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

## Materials:

Film, *Please Vote for Me*, or excerpt

One copy of **Handout 1**, cut into sections

Copy of **Handout 2** for each student

Copy of **Handout 4**

Optional: **Handout 3**

## Procedure:

1. When students are seated, show the first minute and a half of the film *Please Vote for Me*, up to the scene of the class picture. Explain that this is the morning routine for a school in China. Ask students to compare this scene with a typical morning routine at your school (or an assembly program, if more appropriate). Ask students if they would prefer to start the morning as the Chinese students do. (Most students would dislike the regimentation, but some might appreciate the sense of commitment and community.) Explain to students that they are about to watch a film in which some of these students have an experiment in democracy, but that it's important first to clarify their own ideas about what democracy means.
2. Tell students that scholars have identified important principles or values that underlie an effective democracy. Organize students into groups and give each group several prepared sections of **Handout 1: Principles of Democracy** to consider. Ask them to talk about whether democracy really needs each of these principles and what would happen if the principle were ignored. Then have them explain their ideas

to the class. Have them place the cards for the principles they agree with on the bulletin board.

3. Tell the class that they are now going to watch the rest of the film to see what happens when the children in China experience their first taste of democracy. Restart the film and allow the class to watch it without interruption, if possible.

4. As soon as possible after showing the film, distribute **Handout 2: Please Vote for Me Response Sheet**.

Give students about 10 minutes to fill out the sheets; ask them to work thoughtfully and make their comments as full as possible. Then have a general class discussion centering on the four questions on the handout.

5. Guide a discussion in which your students consider these questions:

- How democratic was the class election? Which of the democratic principles previously discussed were evident in this election? Which were ignored?
- If you were the third-grade teacher, what would you have done differently?
- How involved were the parents of the candidates in the election? Should they have acted differently? How much should parents involve themselves in their student's life at school?
- What do you think the Chinese students learned from their experiment in democracy?
- What are the similarities and differences between this classroom election and our own electoral

process, particularly presidential campaigns?

- How does your school handle elections? What safeguards are in place? What would you do differently?
  - What do you think was the filmmaker's purpose in making this documentary? Was he objective in his approach and methods?
  - Do you think the Chinese school will continue its "experiment in democracy"? Was it successful? Why, or why not?
6. If you wish to do the optional class election (below), have students complete **Handout 3: What's in a Name?** for homework. (Acknowledge to the class that not all students may be able to answer all of the questions.)

#### **Optional Activity: Classroom election (for use after viewing the film)**

1. Divide the students into two or three groups. (More than three can make the vote too divided for a majority result.) Explain to students that they are going to have a classroom election of their own. Brainstorm and define ideas about elections, voting, representative leaders, and themes that you wish to concentrate on during the election process. Make sure to define with the class for what position the students will be campaigning and voting (e.g., class monitor, class president, cheerleader, etc.).
2. Explain to students that their group or party will be allowed to choose only one candidate for the class

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election. Each party must determine the process they will use to choose their individual candidate; the process must be approved by the teacher. Distribute

**Handout 4: Student Model Election—Party**

**Campaign Worksheet.** Tell students that the candidate will be chosen and presented for election based on who the party thinks has the “best” meaning of their name from **Handout 3**, i.e., the name and its meaning that will be likely to attract the most votes. Allow students time to choose their candidate.

3. Explain that each party will also need to create a platform to have their candidate follow, present to the voters, and promise to enact if elected. Platforms must include only two campaign promises: one positive treat or reward, such as a promise of candy after a class one day or doughnuts for dessert after lunch. The second promise must be a reform for the class, like an extra homework assignment, an extra quiz, the loss of a current privilege, or an extra duty one day. Platforms must also be approved by the teacher.
4. Once candidates and platforms are decided, explain to students the details of campaigning (the rules that will work for your school and class): where and how long a campaign runs, where candidates can ask for votes, where posters or ads can be placed, whether

you will allow campaign songs, etc.

5. Set an election day and time. Determine with the class how the winner will be chosen: a majority vote or a certain number of votes needed for a victory. Create ballots for the voting. (You may need extra run-off ballots to find a clear winner or narrow the field to just two candidates.)
6. On election day, remind students that their vote is a private and individual right that should not be abused. Collect ballots, tally, and announce results. You may wish only to announce the winner, not the actual tallies, to save hurt feelings.
7. Once a clear winner is determined, set dates for the campaign promises to be put in effect.
8. Follow up with discussion and response questions on student **Handout 4** once the project has ended or as you see fit during the process.

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## Handout 1 – p. 1 Principles of Democracy

Democratic Value: **Justice**

What does it mean in your own words?

What would our country be like without it?

Democratic Value: **Diversity**

What does it mean in your own words?

What would our country be like without it?

Democratic Value: **Truth**

What does it mean in your own words?

What would our country be like without it?



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## Handout 1 – p. 2 Principles of Democracy

Democratic Value: **Equality**

What does it mean in your own words?

What would our country be like without it?

Democratic Value: **Popular Sovereignty**

What does it mean in your own words?

What would our country be like without it?

Democratic Value: **Common Good**

What does it mean in your own words?

What would our country be like without it?



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## Handout 1 – p. 3 Principles of Democracy

Democratic Value: **Individual Rights**

What does it mean in your own words?

What would our country be like without it?

Democratic Value:

What does it mean in your own words?

What would our country be like without it?

Democratic Value:

What does it mean in your own words?

What would our country be like without it?

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## Handout 2 *Please Vote for Me* Response Sheet

<p><b>Likes</b> — What appealed to you in this film?</p>	<p><b>Dislikes</b> — What didn't you enjoy in this film?</p>
<p><b>Puzzles</b> — What questions do you have after seeing this film?</p>	<p><b>Patterns</b> — What elements (images or actions) keep reappearing in the film?</p>

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## Handout 3

## What's in a Name?

Throughout Chinese history people have had strongly held beliefs and practices, based on the ideas of a Chinese philosopher named Confucius (551–479 BCE). Confucius held that there are five relationships that demand respect and duty:

- between a ruler and subject
- between father and son
- between elder brother and younger brother
- between husband and wife
- between friends.

The ideas of ancestor worship, filial piety, and responsibilities are tied in with Confucius and with two other sets of beliefs held in China, Buddhism and Daoism. For the Chinese, it was important to know your family history and honor your family name with good deeds and proper behavior. It was important never to bring shame upon your name by being a bad person.

Directions: Find out as best you can why you are named what you are named. Why were certain names given to you? What do they mean? What country or region of the world are they from? Are you named after a particular person? What responsibilities or jobs were associated with your name? Be prepared to share your answers with the class.

My Name: (Print neatly)

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Meaning of first name: \_\_\_\_\_

Origin of first name: \_\_\_\_\_

Meaning of middle name \_\_\_\_\_

Origin of middle name \_\_\_\_\_

Meaning of last name \_\_\_\_\_

Origin of last name \_\_\_\_\_

Notes about my name:

How do I plan to honor and live up to my family name?

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## Handout 4 – p. 1 Student Model Election Party Campaign Worksheet

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of your group's political party: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher approval of the process for selection of candidate: \_\_\_\_\_

Real Name of your candidate: \_\_\_\_\_

Meaning of candidate's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Party Platform Promises:

Positive Promise: \_\_\_\_\_

Reform Promise: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher (initials here) Approved Platform promises: \_\_\_\_\_

Campaign Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

Election Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Winner: \_\_\_\_\_ Vote Totals: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the benefits of voting for your representative leaders?

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## Handout 4 — p. 2

2. Explain how the party system, campaign process, and elections can be a good thing.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Explain how the party system, campaign promises, and election results can have a negative effect.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Explain how and why you are satisfied or unsatisfied with the results of the class election.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How would you change this system to make it work better?

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