Using a TOWN’S MAYORAL ELECTION as a model, this lively, information-packed book covers all aspects of the voting process, from campaigning and debating to registering and volunteering, all the way to the voting booth. There’s even a recount! VOTE!, which was vetted by an expert in voter education, includes a timeline of the history of voting in the United States, a glossary of words associated with voting, a discussion of American political parties, and a list of Internet resources.

★ “It’s hard to imagine a more accessible introduction to voting.”
—ALA Booklist, starred review
teaching extensions and activities

WHO ARE WE VOTING FOR?
We tend to focus on voting when there is a presidential election. But we vote at least once a year, either for local, state or federal elections or issues. VOTE! focuses on a mayoral election. Does your town have a mayor? If not, who governs your town? Do you have a selectboard? A town council?
- Make a chart of your town government. What do these people do?
- Make a chart of the the state and federal offices. What do these people do?

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?
The Mayor or select people deal with problems confronting your community. Sometimes the town officers vote on how to solve the problem, sometimes the community does.

- In VOTE! one candidate wants to build new schools, the others want to build a stadium. Which would your students support? There is sure to be a difference of opinion. Discuss the pros and cons: What is the cost to the community? How does the community benefit?
- How are you going to decide? Draw straws? Flip a coin? Vote? Try each way. Is the end result different? Which is the most fair way to choose? Why?
- Ask students to think about local issues that affect them directly: a school bond issue, a bottle deposit bill, recycling, water pollution, potholes in the streets. Every community has something!

WHERE DO VOTERS GET INFORMATION?
Information where people can learn more about candidates or issues.
- Have students collect information about candidates or an issue.

WRITE A LETTER
- Ask students to write to one of their town officials or to the editor of the local newspaper about a local issue of importance to them. They should be sure to cite some of the information they’ve found. Mail the letters and keep track of the responses.

DESIGN A POSTER
Talk about symbols and pictures used in election campaigns: Uncle Sam, the stars & stripes for political campaigns, the color green for environmental issues.
- Have students conduct posters, bumper stickers, campaign literature. What symbols do they use?
- Have students design posters or buttons supporting a candidate or issue, using symbols and information they have learned. (For buttons, cut circles from poster board and affix velcro dots.)

CONDUCT A POLL
Discuss how polling is conducted.
- Have students conduct a poll. The poll can be conducted among fellow students and families. Questions can be as simple as how many hours people watch TV each week or they can be about a town issue the class has discussed.
- You can break down the poll so you know whether the respondents are kids, adults, male or female. Students can make a bar chart of the results. What do the results tell them?

POLITICAL PARTIES
There are more than two parties.
- Ask students to find information on political parties. How many parties can they find? What are the parties’ symbols and platforms?

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MORE THAN TWO PARTIES RUN CANDIDATES IN AN ELECTION?
There’s a chance that none of the candidates will win more than fifty percent of the vote. If that happens, there is another election (a runoff) between the top two vote getters. But many people think that a better solution would be for voters to rank the candidates in order of preference, indicating their first choice, second choice, and so on.

This is called an INSTANT RUNOFF election. Several cities have adopted Instant Runoff and more are considering it. Australia has used it for years. If this is a fairer way to vote when there are more than two candidates? Try voting both ways, then discuss the results.
- First, hold a regular election, using paper ballots, where students vote for their favorite of five animal ‘candidates’. Does any animal get more than 55% of the vote? If not, vote again between the top two vote getters. Why?
- Then vote again, this time using the Instant Runoff method, again using paper ballots. Ask students to vote for the animal ‘candidates’ in order of preference, indicating which is their first, second, third, fourth and fifth choice. With five candidates, it’s unlikely one candidate will receive more than 55% of the votes.
- Eliminate the lowest vote getter. The ballots cast for the eliminated candidate now have their second choice counted. This process continues until one candidate receives a majority.

Electoral college elections are different. For a sample Instant Runoff election between five Muppet characters, see: http://instantrunoff.fairvote.org/how/muppets/

ELECTRONIC VOTING
- In the short run, many states have bought new electronic touch-screen voting machines. The new technology helps election officials tally votes quickly. However with many of these machines, there is no paper ballot and therefore no way to verify that the machines are counting the votes correctly. It has been demonstrated that electronic touch-screen voting machines can be hacked and vote totals changed. Congress has been talking about requiring that all voting machines produce a paper record of each vote.
- Research different ways to vote.
- Download a ballot from the internet. Is it easy to understand?
- If you are having a school or class election, have students design a ballot. Ballots can be paper or they can be on a computer screen. Is there a way to recount them?
- Discuss how votes are private. No one needs to know who voted for whom. Why is this a good idea?

WHERE DO PEOPLE VOTE?
How many polling places are in your town? Where are they located? Many are in schools which would give students an opportunity to visit a polling location.
- Have students research where polling places are in your town. Locate them on a map.
- Encourage students to go with their parents to vote.

KIDS CAN’T VOTE
But they can encourage their family members to vote. Are they all registered?
- Have students research how and where people register to vote. They may be able to convince some family members to register and tell them how to do it.

It was 130 years before all women could vote!