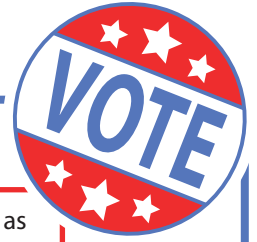


Why Do Citizens Vote?



Directions: Read the text, and then answer the questions.

"The right to vote is the basic right, without which all others are meaningless. It gives people—people as individuals—control over their own destinies."

- President Lyndon B. Johnson

Eligible voters are:

- American citizens
- 18 years or older
- Registered to vote
- Residents of a state

Why do citizens in the United States vote? Many people, like former president Lyndon B. Johnson, believe that the right to vote is a way for Americans to decide their destinies. Election season is filled with the hustle and bustle of voters trying to promote ideas and policies that are important to them. When citizens cast their vote for someone, they vote for the ideas and policies that the candidate supports. People vote for elected officials at every level of government. That means every vote cast could change local, state, or federal government.

It's no surprise that voting rights have changed over time. Specific voting rights were not in the original Constitution. Citizens fought for the right for women and African Americans to vote by passing amendments to the Constitution and voting rights laws. Why would Americans work so hard for the right to vote? One reason is to have a say in who represents them in government. People want their elected officials to pass laws and policies that are important to them. Now, most United States citizens that are 18 years or older have the right to vote in elections.

Every four years, the presidential election decides who will be the president and vice president for the next four years. The president can make changes to government agencies, like the Department of Education or the Armed Forces. Presidents can also suggest laws or veto laws that Congress has passed. Voting for president is one step towards making sure the president signs laws voters want.

People vote for local leaders, too! Your local government is probably in charge of police and fire departments, public transportation, and other public services. Elected officials in local government make decisions about how to run these services.

The best way to affect any policy in your local community is for citizens in that community to vote. A vote for a local official can decide how many public buses are available. A vote can determine which programs exist in a local public school.

Even though you may not be allowed to vote yet, you can still spread the word to others! Encourage them to vote. When you're eligible to vote, will you?

Key Terms:

candidate: someone running for public office in an election

election: a way to pick someone for public office

elected: someone chosen for office by votes

local election: election where mayors and local officials are elected

veto: to stop legislation from being passed into law

Why Do Citizens Vote?



Directions: Answer the questions below based on the text.

1. What reason does the author give for voting in elections?

The author says that citizens vote because they want to have a say in who represents them in the government.

2. How often do presidential elections happen?

Presidential elections happen every four years.

3. Why would the author include this statement in the text?

Citizens fought for the right for women and African Americans to vote.

The author included this statement to show that at one time not everyone in the United States had the option to vote. Since people did not have the option, they "fought for the right...to vote." Citizens thought the right to vote was important.

4. Do you agree or disagree with former president Lyndon B. Johnson when he said, "The right to vote is the basic right, without which all others are meaningless?"

Student answers will vary.

Research: Answer one or more of the questions by doing research. Write your answers on the back of this paper or on another sheet of paper.

1. Did you know that not all American citizens can vote in the presidential election? Do research to find out who cannot vote for president.
2. What is the role of Congress, and how are representatives voted into office?
3. Does one vote really count? After reading two or more opinions about the topic, write about your opinion.

1. Restrictions vary state-to-state, but one student answer could explain that U.S. citizens living in U.S. territories, like Puerto Rico and Guam, are not eligible to vote for president.

2. The role of Congress is to pass legislation to create laws and to approve presidential appointments to government positions. Congress is made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Senators represent their whole state and each resident of that state can vote for a senator. In the House of Representatives, only people that reside in the congressional district that the candidate will represent are eligible to vote.

3. Student answers will vary.