



# Future Voters of America

## Curriculum Outline for Future Voters of America **LIVING CIVICS**

### **Lesson #1**

#### **INTRODUCTION TO YOUTH POLITICS AND CIVIC ACTION**

What place does youth have in Government? (before the Vote)

How are the Voices of Youth currently heard?

How do candidates know what is on the Minds of Youth?

In what ways are Youth represented?

What organizations exist to Represent Youth Issues?

Introduce students to Civic Action by describing how the class will focus on how to become active members in their community and get their voices heard on political issues. Discuss some reasons why people are not politically active or civically engaged. (e.g. lack of knowledge, lack of time, not knowing how, mistrust of politicians, feeling that they can't make a difference).

#### **Mini Lesson:**

The History of Future Voters of America: Why do they exist? The Annual New York City Youth Congress... What is a resolution? What is a mandate? What resolutions/mandates are currently being worked on?

#### **Student Activities:**

Handout: Student Issue Lists and Future Voters Projects

#### **Writing Assignment:**

Create a Journal and answer the questions:

Is it important to learn about your government in High School?

Is it important to be an active citizen during the High School years and why?

(These questions can be repeated at the end of the course).

### **Lesson # 2**

Students were told to have a marble journal. They will keep all instructions, homework assignments essays etc. in the journal. In doing this it will give them the ability to focus on this project without integrating it with other lessons in the course i.e. Federal Government.

This lesson begins with the introduction of the current New York City Elections and the Candidates running. This will include a discussion on: What is a Platform? How long are the terms for each office...what are some of the laws around campaign financing.... Does the Candidate have a youth platform? Has the Candidate discussed issues that pertain

directly to you or to other young people? This class segment will run for fifteen minutes each week until Election Day. Each week the students will be responsible for reporting on different Candidates and their platforms. After Election Day this segment will be on general current events.

If not a NYC election year, this segment will focus on State or Federal candidates/issues. Students will always learn about City Government, City Council and how it works.

**Writing Assignment:**

1- Each student has to look through any newspaper and find an article that deals with a New York City issue. They are to summarize the article on the issue and to give their opinion on the issue. In addition each student is to pick an issue that upsets them either in New York City, State, at school, in their communities, etc. They are to write in their journal why this issue disturbs them.

2-Search on line to answer the following questions:

- a- When and by whom was the first City Council formed?
- b- What are the powers of the City Council?
- c- Print a photo and bio of your City Council official in your neighborhood.

Use the City Council and NYPIRG web sites.

**Lesson #3:**

Each student checks their journal and report to the class on general city issues. This is a wonderful way of getting students familiar with the City. Then students report on the issue that is bothering them as a young person. Two students will be assigned to write on the board recording these issues. One column will be headed School Issues and the other City/State. Students in class will take notes notes.

**Writing Assignment:**

Start to collect 10 or more articles on the Candidates that have interested you and answer the question WHY

Look up the State Government on the State Government web site.

Answer the following questions: How does the State Government function/ what are the powers of each division? What is the role of the Governor, State controller and other officials?

Each week students would look up one City or State official, read article-bio, highlight it and take to class. They are to enter this in their journals.

#### **Lesson #4 (Handout Civic Action Worksheets)**

Lesson opens with reports on students' City Council members. (Students become very interested in learning whom their council member is)...Many students have admitted that they had no idea what the City Council did or that they even had a City Council person representing them). This lasts for 15 minutes.

Divide students into 4-6 Civic Action groups. (Environment, School, Youth Politics, Teen Issues). Each group selects a facilitator and a scribe. The scribe will write down the group's brainstorming ideas on issues that affect youth. (e.g. class size; backpack searches; dirty parks; guns; education money stalled in Albany). Individuals in the group report on an issue they think should be addressed by the class. Each group chooses two issues. A facilitator is then chosen within each group. The facilitator will remain for the rest of the semester and the scribe will change weekly. The facilitator reports to the class the two issues from the group. Two students at the board record each group's choices.

#### **Writing assignment:**

a.- Students report on the Mayoral Campaign (or Governor's Campaign or Presidential Campaign)...gather campaign info. (e.g. as terms of office )

b.- Each member of the group chooses an issue from the campaign and journals why you chose that issue. Why it is important for youth?

What is the effect of this issue on you, your friends or your family?

Who in the Government can address this problem? (Mayor, City Council member, police department, community board, Department of Education, etc.)

#### **Lesson #5**

Class breaks down into their 4 Civic Action Groups. Groups discuss the items that have been written in their Journals the week before.

Using the issues that groups chose in Lesson 4, the whole class now votes to pick 2 issues to work on during the semester. (if possible, try to have one SCHOOL related issue and one issue that affects students/youth throughout the CITY/STATE.)

Divide the class into 4 "civic action" groups. Class members should be equally divided between the 2 issues. Each group will begin to create a "civic action plan"

#### **Writing Assignment:**

Using the group discussion on civic action, outline the issue you are working on and the ideas that can bring this issue into the forefront to be resolved. Discuss how you are feeling about this new curriculum in your Government class.

#### **Lesson #6**

Break down into your civic action issue groups and continue your discussions on the ideas for the issue you have chosen.

**Writing Assignment:**

Start to collect 10 or more articles on the Candidates that have interested you and answer the question WHY?

**Lesson #7**

Discuss articles from your journal that pertain to candidates and their platform issues. Are there relevant differences in positions? Similarities?

Educate the class about voting rights i.e. before 1971 people under 21 were not allowed to vote. The 26<sup>th</sup> amendment lowered the voting age to 18. Discuss how class feels about voting at 18.

Do you think it would make a difference if 16 and 17 yr. old students were voting in this election?

What are some pros and cons for the current City Council Bill #163 'The Future Voters Bill To Lower The Voting Age To 16 yrs. in Local, Municipal Elections'? (this includes voting for Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, City Council seats, Borough Presidents, District Attorneys).

**Handout:**

List of Reasons for Lowering the Voting Age to 16 yrs. (from National Youth Rights) and Bill #163.

**Writing Assignment:**

From the class discussion on pros and cons for lowering the voting age, pick one argument either for or against and write your own viewpoint on that point.

If you had the ability to vote in this election, begin writing in your journal which candidates you would be voting for and your reasons for your decisions. (this will prepare you for Lesson #9 when you hold a mock election in class the week before Election Day).

**Lesson #8**

Class discusses inviting an elected official to speak to the class. What possible questions might you ask? Choose members for a special committee to phone the official's office to extend an invitation to your class. Choose an additional committee of students who will be responsible for meeting/greeting your guest at the main entrance to your school and escort to your classroom.

Break down into your civic action groups. What beginning steps might be taken to start taking an action(s) toward implementing or getting support for your idea? List these as step 1, 2, etc. Who in your group can be responsible for each step?

**Writing assignment:**

Write out your own questions that you want to ask your official guest.

## **Lesson #9**

Today you will hold a mock election. Have someone list all New York City candidates/positions on the chalkboard. By a show of hands, list number of votes for each. Do you notice any trends? Is there a clear majority for any candidate? Are there any almost “too close to call” results? Why do you think this is? Have someone write down the results to compare with actual voting counts that happen next Tuesday.

Break down into your civic action groups and continue your process. You may now have additional steps to discuss taking, may think of a different approach to the issue, and have learned some new information in your reading, etc. to share with your group.

### **Writing assignment:**

Write down any last minute surprises from any candidates that you might hear about these next few days leading up to the election. New ‘gossip’? Mudslinging? Do you think that amounts of money candidates had to spend will impact the results? Why or why not? How does this impact on your understanding of term limits and campaign finance laws?

## **Lesson #10**

Actual Election Day results will be compared to students’ Mock Election numbers. How close were these comparisons? Would you have voted differently from the electorate? What can this tell you about young people and the right to vote?

This is past the halfway mark of the Future Voters Civics classes. You now need to be taking actions that will further the progress of your civic issue action plans. Identify any people that you will need to approach for help with your project. Teachers? Community leaders? Elected officials?

Prepare to present the progress of your project to the whole class next week to include any steps taken, people spoken to, and/or research that you have done. Try to elicit class discussion and ideas that other students may have. This will be a brainstorming experience, i.e. free exchange of thoughts and ideas that can come out of class interactions.

### **Writing Assignment:**

What part of this project are you working on? Write the steps you have taken and any follow-up that needs to be done on those steps.

## **Lesson # 11**

Break down into your Civic action groups. Your group needs to report again on progress and what has worked and what is not working i.e. Do you need to make more calls, make petitions, write letters, etc. Groups need to continue to strategize and to create a timeline for the completion of the project. At this point any guests that need to be invited must have their invitations and be included on your calendar. Groups then prepare for class presentations.

**Writing Assignment:**

Write about how you have personally prepared yourself to do the tasks required for your project. What are some of the obstacles that you have encountered, and how if possible you have found ways to solve them?

**Lesson #12**

Break down into your civic action groups. Prepare to present your project to Future Voters who will be attending your class next week. Your presentation should include a list of questions and problems that your group might be having as you are trying to move your project forward.

**Writing Assignment:**

Write out your arguments for the issue you are working on (either reasons for or against the proposal).

Fill in your 'HEAD' handout including what you have learned from this class. BE CREATIVE!! The "Head" is a drawing of the brain that students filled out i.e. whatever political thoughts they are having....

**Lesson #13**

Break down into your civic action groups. An FVA facilitator will visit each group. Each group will present the issue(s) being worked on. Brainstorming of possible actions to take will be discussed to include petitions, surveys, meetings, lobbying, phoning, letter writing, letters to the editor, and various strategies to be determined according to the issue.

An example of possible actions to take for an issue follows:

**ISSUE: BANNING STUDENTS FROM BRINGING CELL PHONES INTO THE SCHOOL BUILDING.**

Since this is an issue with agreement from students, teachers, and parents a SYSTEMS CHANGE APPROACH can be implemented.

**STUDENTS** can:

- do a survey of student body eliciting why cell phones should not be banned. Petitions listing these reasons can be distributed for signatures.
- The Chairperson of the Education Committee on City Council can be contacted by letter (with cc's to all Education Committee members) signed by student reps.
- A phone call to the Education Chair on the Council can be made requesting 10 minutes of their time to present the issue in person to the Councilperson or their representative.

**TEACHERS**

-Students can elicit the support of a number of their teachers who are in agreement with this issue and ask them to sign petitions, write letters and/or ask them to approach the

UFT for help and support with this in letters/phones/e-mails to The Department of education requesting a change in this policy.

### **PARENTS**

-Approach the parent Coordinator in your school and also ask for a meeting with the head of the PTA. Ask that a letter be sent to all parents requesting that they sign petitions, write letters, e-mail the department of Education, the Education Chair on City Council and each parents home district councilperson about this issue. Ask the PTA to list reasons that this is a policy infringing on parents' needs to have contact with their children.

### **SCHOOL**

-Ask parents, PTA to approach the school principal asking for a change in policy mandating that parents come to school themselves to pick-up confiscated phones. Show the hardship this can place on many parents. (long travel distances, time off from work, etc.)

### **Writing Assignment:**

Write down the various actions that you would choose to work on in order to move forward on your issue. Do you have any other ideas that you might bring back to the group. Write them up in your journal for discussion in your group.

### **Lesson #14**

Teacher opens class by discussing letter writing as a tool for activism. To whom do you write? Do letters change public policy? Are emails effective?

Break down into your civic action groups. With what you learned last week along with your homework assignment begin to decide how your group wants to proceed. Assign the tasks to group members and discuss your decisions with your teacher.

### **Writing Assignment:**

At this point write down how you think your issue is progressing and how you are doing with your particular assignment. Write about whether you feel optimistic about having a success with your problem

### **Lesson #15**

The class should stay in one group and talk about their issues and the different actions that you are planning. This is a time to cement your ideas as you will be moving forward from now on. There are only 2 more classes after this! This is just a sharing time not a time to make any shift in your strategies.

### **Writing Assignment:**

This is a time to work on your strategy i.e. Write a letter, do a petition. In your journal describe in detail what you have done or plan to do. If you have written something put it in your journal.

## **Lesson #16**

Break down in civic action groups. Today you should be sharing what tasks you have been able to accomplish and what will still take more time. Each of you needs to listen to each other and lend your support. If something seems to be impossible to do this is the time to change course, drop it and consolidate what you have done. Use class time if needed to work on unfinished tasks.

### **Writing Assignment:**

Write in your journal about your experiences so far. Has it been fun, frustrating, boring, exciting, challenging? Is it similar to other experiences that you have had? Explain.

## **Lesson #17**

Break down again into your civic action groups. Now is the time to really assess where your project is and what are your realistic goals given the time constraints. Each group now presents to the entire class the issues chose and steps taken to realize the goals. For students wanting to continue working on unfinished projects the following options are available:

- a.- Form a temporary club/group in school to continue the project.
- b.- Attend Future Voters of America Annual NYC Youth Congress in April in order to present this project for consideration as a resolution or mandate.
- c.- Attend a Future Voters leadership meeting and present project for student leadership to work on.

### **Writing Assignment:**

Write a poem or short story to build awareness and empathy for your civic action issue. Distribute around school by posting it on a bulletin board reading in assembly, printing it in your school newspaper.

This curriculum can be implemented “as is” over a 17 week semester. It can also be tailored to individual schools’ needs with summaries of the processes with a few classes.

Those issues that students have not yet been able to resolve may be brought to the Annual NYC Youth Congress for further development and possible passage into a Resolution or Mandate. Students may also continue with Future voters of America in weekly after-school Leadership meetings.

For additional information, please contact **The Future Voters of America at 212-535-8326.**

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