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AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY, INC.

## **“I’m Not Old Enough to Vote, but If I Was...”**

### **LESSON PLAN: Creating Video Public Service Announcements**

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

Students will:

- Identify ways increased voter participation could impact the issues of concern to their communities.
- Use visual storytelling techniques to encourage voting age peers to vote.
- Research the rate of voter participation among various ethnic, racial, and age groups.
- Write, shoot, and edit a 10-30 second public service announcement on the importance of voting.
- Consider methods of political activity in addition to voting that may have an impact on issues of concern to their communities.
- Use critical viewing skills to analyze the structure and effectiveness of public service announcements.

#### **SUBJECTS:**

Civics, U.S. History, Language Arts, Visual Arts, and Media

#### **GRADE LEVELS:**

9-12

#### **MATERIALS:**

- TV and VCR or DVD player
- Computer lab equipped with iMovie or other video editing software
- LCD projector (optional) to view PSAs from the internet
- MiniDV cameras and microphones
- Blank miniDV tapes
- Copy of one of the **P.O.V.** Election Special documentaries and viewer guide
- Copies of sample PSAs that can be shown to the class on video, DVD, or from the internet

#### **ESTIMATED TIME:**

8-10 50-minute class periods. Days 1-2: It is recommended that the class view and discuss one of the P.O.V. Election Special Documentaries to create a context for discussing key political issues and the impact voting in the upcoming elections will have on those issues. Days 3-10: Creation and evaluation of PSAs.

Visit the following websites for more information on purchasing copies of the films:

"Farmingville"  
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/farmingville/>

"Bill's Run"  
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/billsrun/>

"War Feels Like War"  
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/warfeelslikewar/>

"Last Man Standing"  
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/lastmanstanding/>

"Chisholm '72"  
<http://www.pbs.org/pov/chisholm/>

Note: P.O.V. documentaries can be taped off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast.

## **BACKGROUND:**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau the largest group of non-voters consists of 18-24 year olds.

In the interest of expanding a community dialogue about voter participation, key political issues, and the need for an active citizenry, P.O.V. is sponsoring a "Why Vote" video PSA contest. We are inviting students to submit 10-30 second long public service announcements that encourage youth and other groups under-represented in the political process to vote, and to become active citizens on the issues that are important to them.

This lesson plan is designed for teachers who want to assign their students to create PSAs to enter in the contest. We are assuming that teachers have access to a digital video-editing lab and are familiar with basic video editing software.

(If teachers do not have access to cameras and editing systems they may want to follow the lesson plan up through the storyboard stage. Although the students won't be able to submit their work to the PSA contest, the finished storyboards could be displayed in a public place in the school as a to generate discussions and awareness about voting.)

## **ACTIVITY:**

**Day One – Two** (optional, but recommended): Select one of the documentaries from the P.O.V. Election Special Series to view and discuss with the class: **Farmingville**, **Bill's Run**, **War Feels Like War**, **Last Man Standing**, or **Chisholm '72**.

**Day Three:** What issues are important to our communities and what impact will the presidential elections have on those issues?

To get students to articulate their issues of concern and their opinions about voting, ask them to respond in writing to the following questions.

1. What are the most important issues facing you, your family, and your community (defined as broadly as you want)?
2. If you were old enough, would you vote in the upcoming Presidential elections? Why, or why not?

As students share their responses to question 1, write their issues of concern on the board to refer back to later. Briefly discuss student responses to questions 2.

Hand out, and read, “**FACT SHEET ON VOTER PARTICIPATION**”. (This is provided as at the end of this document.) Discuss the following questions:

1. What might the impact on elections be if all ethnic and age groups voted at the same rates? What would the impact be on your issues of concern?
2. What are the reasons more people do not vote?
3. What could political candidates do to motivate more people to vote?
4. What other forms of political activity do you are as important as voting to bring about change on your issues of concern (for example: demonstrating, boycotts, civil disobedience, petitions, strikes, media campaigns)?

**Conclusion: Your assignment over the next several days is to create a Public Service Announcement that will encourage people to vote, tell political candidates what they could do to earn more voter participation, or encourage people to become active on a particular issue.**

**Day Four:** What are the qualities of an effective public service announcement?

I. Have the class view 2 or 3 sample PSAs to learn about the elements and structure of effective PSAs. You may show PSAs taped from TV, or project PSAs from any of the following websites:

- [www.votolatino.org/psa](http://www.votolatino.org/psa)
- [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)
- [www.girlpower.gov/press/psa](http://www.girlpower.gov/press/psa)
- [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org)
- [www.aclu.org/Multimedia](http://www.aclu.org/Multimedia)
- [www.civilrights.org/](http://www.civilrights.org/)

II. Have students answer the following questions about each PSA viewed:

- What audience is the producer of the PSA trying to reach?
- What is the main point the producer of the PSA is making?
- What specific action does the producer of the PSA want the viewers to take?
- What techniques does the producer use to grab the viewers’ attention?
- What visual and audio elements does the producer combine in the PSA?

III. Summarize, and list on the board, the qualities and elements of effective PSAs and clarify the PSA assignment.

An effective PSA is:

- 30 seconds long or less
- grabs the viewers’ attention
- makes one point concisely
- proposes a specific action to the audience

- gives contact information
- gives accurate facts

A video PSA contains a combination of visual and audio elements (not necessarily all):

- an on-camera narration or voice over
- live action, animation, or still images
- text
- music

IV. **Homework:** Write a short “treatment,” or proposal, for the PSA you will create. Your proposal should include your target audience, the one main point you want to communicate, and the action you want your viewers take. You may want to use the phrase “I’m not old enough to vote, but if I was, I would vote about...” Your proposal should also describe the visual and audio elements you plan to use and what techniques you will use to grab the viewers’ attention. Also, research the facts and contact information you will include in your PSA.

#### **Day Five:** Preproduction

Have students “storyboard” their PSAs. The storyboard should include sketches of the shots, shot descriptions, and the dialogue or narration that goes with each shot. A storyboard for a 30 second PSA should have about 4 or 5 frames. A ten second PSA averages 25 words. A 30 second PSA averages 75 words.

You can provide students with blank storyboard forms or you can have students draw a series of frames with lines for shot directions and audio descriptions underneath each frame.

**Homework:** Practice reading your dialogue out loud slowly and clearly. Bring your visual materials to class.

#### **Days Six and Seven:** Production

Have students work in pairs to help each other shoot their PSAs (narrations, visuals, etc.).

**Homework:** Bring in a CD of the music you want to include in your PSA. *Make sure students are aware of the rights issues related to using copyrighted music from CDs. Refer to the Contest Rules for guidance.*

#### **Days Eight and Nine:** Postproduction

Have students edit their PSAs in iMovie or another editing software program. They should add text and music. Remind them to include contact information at the end.

**When students finish their PSAs they should save them in MPEG or Quicktime .MOV formats (no larger than 4 MB) and submit them on-line to the POV website.**

#### **Day Ten:** Screening and Evaluation

Screen all of the PSAs. Have students evaluate the process and results of the PSA project by responding to the following questions in writing:

- In what ways have your opinions about the importance of voting changed after creating your PSA?
- After creating your PSA, are you more or less likely to vote when you turn 18? Why?
- After creating your PSA, are you more or less likely to become actively involved in bringing about change on a particular issue? If so, what was it about the process that motivated you?
- What audiences do you think would be most influenced by the PSAs made by you and your classmates? Why?
- What have you learned about the electoral process through creating your PSA or viewing one made by a classmate?

### **ASSESSMENT:**

- Use student responses to the evaluation questions to assess the effectiveness of the PSA class project.
- Create a rubric to assess each student's PSA. Consider how well the PSA addressed a specific audience, whether or not one central idea was articulated in the PSA, and if a clear action was proposed.
- Show the PSAs in another class and assess how effectively they stimulated a discussion on voter participation.
- Have the students develop a rubric that they can use to critique their own PSA.

### **EXTENSIONS:**

- View other P.O.V. documentaries that deal with issues identified as important by the class. Assign students to create PSAs on those issues. Students could work with and create a PSA on behalf of a local community organization that is trying to educate people about a particular issue, thereby building a community partnership and providing a community service.
- Research the platforms of each of the candidates running for president. Make a chart showing how each candidate stands on the issues you have identified as most important to you and your community.
- Research the difference between the Electoral College and the popular vote. Write a persuasive essay in which you advocate the use of one or the other in presidential elections.
- According to a joint report issued by **The Sentencing Project** and **Human Rights Watch**, *3.9 million Americans, are currently or permanently disenfranchised as a result of a felony conviction. In Alabama and Florida, 31 percent of all black men are disenfranchised.* Research the issue of voter disenfranchisement in your state. What percentage of voting age citizens have been disenfranchised? What are the reasons a

person can be disenfranchised? What is the racial impact of state disenfranchisement laws? What organizations are campaigning to return the right to vote to people who have been convicted of felony crimes? Write a “letter to the editor” of a newspaper in your area in which you agree or disagree with the campaign to return the right to vote to people who have been convicted of crimes. For more information go to:

<http://www.hrw.org/reports98/vote/> and  
<http://www.aclu.org/VotingRights/VotingRightsMain.cfm>

- Have the class organize an “election special film festival” featuring their PSAs. The film festival could be held as a town hall event, or it could be a “traveling festival” that goes from class to class. The PSAs can be used to stimulate discussions about the importance of voting and the key issues of the moment.
- Have students design poster style PSAs based on their video PSAs. These could be exhibited in a public place in the school.
- Research the history of the struggle to obtain equal voting rights and the current issue of protecting voting rights. Go to:  
<http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/general/default.aspx?oId=16368> for a joint report by the **NAACP** and **People for the American Way** entitled “The Long Shadow of Jim Crow: Voter Intimidation and Suppression in America Today.”

## **RELATED LEARNING STANDARDS:**

These standards are drawn from “Content Knowledge,” a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

### **Civics**

Standard 11: Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

1. Knows how the racial, religious, socioeconomic, regional, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of American society has influenced American politics through time
5. Knows beliefs that are common to American political culture (e.g., belief in equality of opportunity; mistrust of power, as well as high expectations of what elected officials and government should do; the need to admit to faults or shortcomings in the society; the belief that social, economic, or political problems can be alleviated through collective effort)

Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

1. Understands the importance of established ideals in political life and why Americans should insist that current practices constantly be compared with these ideals

2. Knows discrepancies between American ideals and the realities of American social and political life (e.g., the ideal of equal opportunity and the reality of unfair discrimination)
3. Knows historical and contemporary efforts to reduce discrepancies between ideals and reality in American public life (e.g., union movements, government programs such as Head Start, civil rights legislation and enforcement)

Standard 19: Understands what is meant by "the public agenda," how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media

Level III (Grade 6-8)

5. Understands how citizens can evaluate information and arguments received from various sources so that they can make reasonable choices on public issues and among candidates for political office
6. Understands the opportunities that the media provides for individuals to monitor the actions of their government (e.g., televised broadcasts of proceedings of governmental agencies such as Congress and the courts, public officials' press conferences) and communicate their concerns and positions on current issues (e.g., letters to the editor, talk shows, "op-ed pages," public opinion polls)

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

1. Understands how political institutions and political parties shape the public agenda
2. Understands why issues important to some groups and the nation do not become part of the public agenda
3. Understands the concept of public opinion, and knows alternative views of the proper role of public opinion in a democracy
4. Understands how public opinion is measured, used in public debate, and how it can be influenced by the government and the media
5. Understands the influence that public opinion has on public policy and the behavior of public officials
6. Understands the ways in which television, radio, the press, newsletters, and emerging means of communication influence American politics; and understands the extent to which various traditional forms of political persuasion have been replaced by electronic media

Standard 28: Understands how participation in civic and political life can help citizens attain individual and public goals

Level III (Grade 6-8)

2. Understands the importance of both political and social participation and what distinguishes one from the other (e.g., participating in a campaign to change laws regulating the care of children as opposed to volunteering to care for children), and knows opportunities for both political and social participation in the local community
3. Understands how Americans can use the following means to monitor and influence politics and government at local, state, and national levels: joining political parties, interest groups, and other organizations that attempt to influence public policy and elections; voting; taking part in peaceful demonstrations; circulating and signing petitions
4. Knows historical and contemporary examples of citizen movements seeking to promote individual rights and the common good (e.g., abolition, suffrage, labor and civil rights movements)

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

1. Understands how individual participation in the political process relates to the realization of the fundamental values of American constitutional
3. Knows the many ways citizens can participate in the political process at local, state, and national levels, and understands the usefulness of other forms of political participation in influencing public policy (e.g., attending political and governmental meetings, demonstrating, contacting public officials, writing letters, boycotting, community organizing, petitioning, picketing)
4. Knows historical and contemporary examples of citizen movements seeking to expand liberty, to insure the equal rights of all citizens, and/or to realize other values fundamental to American constitutional democracy (e.g., the suffrage and civil rights movements)
6. Understands the importance of voting as a form of political participation

**United States History Standard and Benchmarks** (3rd Ed.)

Era 10 - Contemporary United States (1968 to the present)

Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States

1. Understands how recent immigration and migration patterns impacted social and political issues (e.g., major issues that affect immigrants and resulting conflicts; changes in the size and composition of the traditional American family; demographic and residential mobility since 1970)
2. Understands major contemporary social issues and the groups involved (e.g., the current debate over affirmative action and to what degree affirmative action policies have reached their goals; the evolution of government support for the rights of the disabled; the emergence of the Gay Liberation Movement and civil rights of gay Americans; continuing debates over multiculturalism, bilingual education, and group identity and rights vs. individual rights and identity; successes and failures of the modern feminist movement)

**Art Connections Standard and Benchmarks** (3rd Ed.)

Standard 1: Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

1. Knows ways in which various arts media can be integrated

**Visual Arts Standard and Benchmarks** (3rd Ed.)

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

1. Applies media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that one's intentions are carried out in artworks
2. Understands how the communication of ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes one uses



## **Language Arts Standard and Benchmarks (3rd Ed.)**

### **Writing**

Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

1. Uses precise and descriptive language that clarifies and enhances ideas and supports different purposes (e.g., to stimulate the imagination of the reader, to translate concepts into simpler or more easily understood terms, to achieve a specific tone, to explain concepts in literature)

### **Listening and Speaking**

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Level III (Grade 6-8)

8. Uses appropriate verbal and nonverbal techniques for oral presentations (e.g., modulation of voice, inflection, tempo, word choice, grammar, feeling, expression, tone, volume, enunciation, physical gestures, body movement, eye contact, posture)
9. Evaluates strategies used by speakers in oral presentations (e.g., persuasive techniques, verbal messages supported by nonverbal techniques, effect of word choice, use of slanted or biased material)
10. Understands the ways in which language differs across a variety of social situations (e.g., formal and informal speech in different social situations, use of jargon by sports commentators to make listeners feel like insiders)
11. Understands implicit statements of attitude and opinion (e.g., implicit point of view conveyed by tone of voice and expression in a television interview)
12. Understands elements of persuasion and appeal in spoken texts (e.g., purpose and impact of pace, volume, tone, stress, music in radio announcements; images conveyed by vocabulary and ideas)

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

4. Adjusts message wording and delivery to particular audiences and for particular purposes (e.g., to defend a position, to entertain, to inform, to persuade)
5. Makes formal presentations to the class (e.g., includes definitions for clarity; supports main ideas using anecdotes, examples, statistics, analogies, and other evidence; uses visual aids or technology, such as transparencies, slides, electronic media; cites information sources)
  3. Makes multimedia presentations using text, images, and sound (e.g., selects the appropriate medium, such as television broadcast, videos, web pages, films, newspapers, magazines, CD-ROMS, Internet, computer-media-generated images; edits and monitors for quality; organizes, writes, and designs media messages for specific purposes)
  4. Uses a variety of verbal and nonverbal techniques for presentations (e.g., modulation of voice; varied inflection; tempo; enunciation; physical gestures; rhetorical questions; word choice, including figurative language, standard English, informal usage, technical language) and demonstrates poise and self-control while presenting

5. Responds to questions and feedback about own presentations (e.g., clarifies and defends ideas, expands on a topic, uses logical arguments, modifies organization, evaluates effectiveness, sets goals for future presentations)
6. Understands influences on language use (e.g., political beliefs, positions of social power, culture)
7. Understands how style and content of spoken language varies in different contexts (e.g., style of different radio news programs, everyday language compared to language in television soap operas, tones of news bulletins on Aserious@ and youth-oriented stations) and how this influences interpretation of these texts

## **Media**

Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media

Level III (Grade 6-8)

2. Understands the different purposes of various media (e.g., to provide entertainment or information, to persuade, to transmit culture, to focus attention on an issue)
5. Understands aspects of media production and distribution (e.g., different steps and choices involved in planning and producing various media; various professionals who produce media, such as news writers, photographers, camera operators, film directors, graphic artists, political cartoonists)
6. Understands the ways in which image-makers carefully construct meaning (e.g., idea and word choice by authors, images created by photographers, television programs created by groups of people, photos or cut lines chosen in newspapers)
7. Understands influences on the construction of media messages and images (e.g., the historical period or place in which they were made; laws that govern mass media, such as truth in advertising; the socio-cultural background of the target audience; financial factors such as sponsorship; cause-and-effect relationships between mass media coverage and public opinion trends)

Level IV (Grade 9-12)

1. Understands that media messages have economic, political, social, and aesthetic purposes (e.g., to make money, to gain power or authority over others, to present ideas about how people should think or behave, to experiment with different kinds of symbolic forms or ideas)
3. Understands aspects of the construction of media messages and products (e.g., the significance of all parts of a visual text, such as how a title might tie in with main characters or themes)
4. Understands production elements that contribute to the effectiveness of a specific medium (e.g., the way black-and-white footage implies documented truth; the way set design suggests aspects of a character's socio-cultural context; effectiveness of packaging for similar products and their appeal to purchasers)
8. Understands the extent to which audience influences media production (e.g., selection of audiences on the basis of their importance to advertisers or media institutions; production of programs with high audience ratings and low production costs, such as game shows; how media producers determine or predict the nature of audiences)
8. Understands the influence of media on society as a whole (e.g., influence in shaping various governmental, social, and cultural norms; influence on the democratic process; influence on beliefs, lifestyles, and understanding of relationships and culture; how it

shapes viewer's perceptions of reality; the various consequences in society of ideas and images in media)

11. Understands legal and ethical responsibilities involved in media use (e.g., censorship; copyright laws; FCC regulations; protection of the rights of authors and media owners; standards for quality programming; regulations for broadcast repeats; forms of media self-control; governmental, social, and cultural agencies that regulate media content and products)
12. Understands the role of the media in addressing social and cultural issues (e.g., creating or promoting causes: U.N. military action, election of political parties; use of media to achieve governmental, societal, and cultural goals)

## **FACT SHEET ON VOTER PARTICIPATION**

60% of U.S. citizens who were eligible voted in the 2000 elections.

36% of 18 – 24 year old eligible voters voted in the 2000 elections.

43% of Asian and Pacific Islander voting age citizens voted in the 2000 elections.

45% of Latino voting age citizens voted in the 2000 elections.

56% of voting age black citizens voted in the 2000 elections.

More than 60% of voting age white citizens voted in the 2000 elections.

### **Source: The U.S. Census Bureau**

Only 6 million of 21 million voting age Latinos voted in the 2000. Many of them are youth disaffected with the political process. There are almost 4 million 18-30 year old eligible Latino voters.

### **Sources: The U.S. Census Bureau and Voto Latino.**

“The unprecedented potential impact of the Indian vote in 2004 can be reckoned from the single fact that in some states, the Indian voters can ‘swing’ the vote for both the Presidency and the majority party in the Senate.”

### **Source: Indian Country Today, September 3, 2004.**