



A BALLOT BOX

Post & Lesson Plan

A BALLOT BOX

When was the last time you voted? Today? Yesterday? Maybe last week? Voting can be simple and a good way to let people know what you want. You may have voted, for example, on where to get dinner. You and one family member may have wanted to eat Chinese, but the rest of your family wanted pizza. You may have even had to defend why Chinese food was a better choice. Whatever the outcome may have been (hopefully Chinese food), voting usually ends with the majority getting what they want.

In the United States, voting has always been used to make choices, more important than what to eat. It forms the basis of our system of **government**. We vote for where to build roads, schools and who should be president. There are many ways to vote, but it works best when every eligible voter is allowed to vote. Voting is central to an American way of life, and for that reason, there are a number of requirements to vote like being a U.S. **citizen** and being eighteen years of age. We vote by raising our hands and voices. Sometimes, though, we need a different way to vote.

In the 1800s, ballot boxes, like the one above, were a popular way to collect votes. This wooden ballot box has very few parts: a hole for a marble and a hinged panel for opening the box. When the voting finished, the hinged panel was lifted to open the box. This made it easy to count the marbles when voting was over.



A ballot box housed within the pub room of the Wade House. Image courtesy of the Wade House.

This ballot box was useful because it let the voter's choice remain unknown. This is known as a "secret ballot." They were popular in smaller groups like social clubs. In these small clubs, remaining anonymous was important. Sometimes, people voted on awkward topics like who should enter a club. Remaining unnamed helped to avoid hurting feelings.

Small groups usually voted in a public house. A public house is a place where people could come meet, talk, and play games. Sometimes friends would meet for fun and other times clubs would host official meetings. Public houses played an important role in their communities. During the 1800s, and even now, public houses are places where ideas are traded and developed. For example, Federalists and Republicans, during the early 1800s, discussed and argued over states' rights. The public house then was important in the diffusion of ideas.

One example of a public house was the Wade House in Greenbush, WI. The Wade House actually served many purposes. It was a hotel, a dance hall, and a social club. Can you think of any social clubs that might meet at a place like the Wade House? When something

important came up, people could go to the Wade House for a meeting and make their voice known in a vote.



Source: Harper's Weekly, November 13, 1858—American Social History Project.

A public house from the 1850s. Although not the Wade House, this picture sheds some light on what a public house looked like. While looking at the picture, it may be helpful to look at who is missing from the picture. Harper's Weekly, November 13, 1858. Image courtesy of the American Social History Project.

In the 1850s, only adult men were allowed to belong to and vote in the social club at the **Wade House**. To vote in a ballot box like you see here, members would be given one white ball and one black ball. The white ball was a yes vote. The black ball was a no vote. Depending on what someone wanted, they would put the ball in the slot. In the end, someone would open the box and count the balls.

In some ways, voting has come a long way: men *and* women can now vote and participate in social clubs; electronic machines have replaced ballot boxes, and people can even vote online. In other ways, voting has not changed. People still need places, like the Wade House, to meet and discuss the ideas they are voting on. This has resulted in more and more places built for people to meet, discuss and vote on their ideas. For more serious voting, there are schools and town halls for voting. But I hope you now realize; voting can take place in anywhere. It can be as simple as your local gym or the coffee shop down the street. All it requires is a group, some time to talk over your ideas, and a show of hands.

Written by Michael DeLeers

Word Bank:

Government: A group of people that are organized within a community to decide on laws.

Wade House: An 1850s stagecoach inn.

Citizen: a legal member of a town, city, or country.

A Ballot Box

Enduring Questions:

- How do objects help us understand Wisconsin history?

Essential Questions:

- Why do we save things?
- What makes the things we save important?
- What questions can objects help us answer?
- How do we unlock the meaning of an object?

Wisconsin Standard for Social Studies

Behavioral Sciences:

- Classify technologies based on intended use, access, and design, and how they might change people's lives (for better or worse). **(SS.BH4)**

Social Studies Inquiry Practices and Processes:

- Evaluate the strength of claim, evidence, and communication using criteria established by both teacher and student. **(SS.Inq4)**
- Explore opportunities for personal or collaborative civic engagement with community, school, state, tribal, national, and/or global implications **(SS.Inq5)**

Economics:

- Predict unintended costs and benefits (i.e., externalities) for a given current situation or event. **(SS.Econ4)**

Geography:

- Identify and describe how people may view places in the community differently (e.g., students and senior citizens responding to a new playground). **(SS.Geog4)**

History:

- Use evidence to draw conclusions about probable causes of historical events, issues, and problems. **(SS.Hist1)**
- Describe patterns of change over time in the community, state, and the United States. **(SS.Hist2)**

- Explain how historical events have possible implications on the present. **(SS.Hist3)**

Political Science:

- Identify and describe basic human liberties **(SS.PS2)**
- Critique instances where groups have been denied access to power and rights, and any law or customs that have altered these instances. **(SS.PS2)**
- Investigate reasons why citizens participate in elections. **(SS.PS3)**

Content Questions:

- Why do we vote? What are the benefits to voting? Are there any disadvantages?
- What things do we vote on?
- Who is allowed to vote?

Educational Goals:

- Summarize the importance of voting
- Discuss the role of stereotypes in voting practices
- Discuss the role of voting in a democracy
- Evaluate the importance of fact checking

Activity #1: Voting, Stereotypes, and Fairness

- (1)** To start, you will need a box (cardboard works) and paper slips which say yes or no (located below) Cut a hole in the box.
 - (2)** This activity hopes to shed light on past voting practices and some of the arbitrary measures that restricted some people from voting. To highlight this, select a topic for voting: recess inside or outside? Or maybe if pizza or burgers are the best food?
 - (3)** On the first round of voting, only let those with glasses vote. The reason why those with glasses are allowed to vote is that they are “smarter.” Obviously, this is not true, but it will highlight the ways that uncontrollable factors affected voting.
 - (4)** Next, let all students vote
 - (a)** Place the slips into the bucket. Select a topic for students to vote on. Some examples could be whether to have recess inside or outside, or if pizza is the best food. Also, allowing students to come up and pull out a slip and place it into the bucket. This should remain anonymous. At the end, count the slips.
 - (5)** At the end, poll the students and ask them
 - (a)** Did the students feel the activity was fair?
- **Extension:** If students want to defend a particular topic, allow students to convince their classmates about a certain choice. This would a great chance to let students practice

debating. Also, allowing students to debate could be a great opportunity to discuss the need for respectful discussion when voting.

Activity #2: Where do you get your information?

- A sheet below will present the different ways that ideas and issues can be presented: TV, computers, word of mouth, newspapers, books and radio.
- Have students label what they think is the most effective way of discussing information. Discuss the disadvantages as well.
- **Extension:** This is a great opportunity for students to discuss misinformation and the ways one can move past it. If this seems valuable, you may want to discuss E.S.C.A.P.E.
 - Evidence, Source, Context, Audience, Purpose and Execution
 - This is a useful acronym which can be used when presented with information that seems false. To find out more, consider checking out:
<https://newseumed.org/tools/lesson-plan/escape-junk-news>

Bibliography

Thank you to the Wade House for all their help!

Lepore, Jill. *These truths: A history of the United States*. WW Norton & Company, 2018.

Activity #2: Where do you get your information?

Where do you get your information? Can you think of some pros and cons of each of these forms? Which is your favorite?



<p>Yes</p> <hr/>	<p>No</p> <hr/>
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<p>Yes</p> <hr/>	<p>No</p> <hr/>
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<p>Yes</p> <hr/>	<p>No</p> <hr/>
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Yes

No

Yes

No

Yes

No
