

## American Government Get Out the Vote

Have you ever heard someone being called an “idiot”? If you have, what they are really being called is “someone who does not vote.” The word “idiot” comes from the Greek word *idiotes*. In ancient Greece this was the word for someone who kept to himself. *Idiotes* did not participate in Greece’s public life or politics. They did not vote or debate important issues.

Today, voting is the most important way American citizens participate in politics. Citizens can vote for **candidates**<sup>1</sup> in national and state **elections**.<sup>2</sup> On the national level, they can vote for the president and members of Congress. On the state and local level, they can vote for the governor, state representatives, state senators, and people like the mayor and city council. Different candidates have different beliefs. People usually vote for the candidate whose beliefs are closest to their own. Most people want a candidate who will represent them and their beliefs in office.

Only American citizens 18 years of age and older can vote in the United States. Even though voting is a right, you also must register to vote beforehand. Registered voters are each assigned a place to vote. This is called your **polling**<sup>3</sup> place. When Election Day comes, you go to the place and sign in. This is how the government makes sure that people only vote once in the same election.

The people working at your polling place will give you a **ballot**.<sup>4</sup> Some ballots look sort of like a multiple-choice test. There will be little bubbles that you fill in next to the person’s name that you want to win. Other ballots are electronic. You will choose who you want directly on a computer screen or by turning **levers**<sup>5</sup> on a voting machine. Whichever type of ballot your polling place uses, voting is very private. No one should be able to see whom you choose.

Even though you cannot vote yet, you can learn about important issues. You can read the newspaper, write a letter to your representative in Congress, and participate in community activities. The important thing is to get involved!

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<sup>1</sup> **candidates** – persons who are running for office in an election or have applied for a job

<sup>2</sup> **elections** – the act or process of choosing someone or deciding something by voting

<sup>3</sup> **polling** – having to do with the registering of votes

<sup>4</sup> **ballot**—a piece of paper or other object used in secret voting

<sup>5</sup> **levers** – a bar or handle that you use to work or control a machine

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. The sentence that best expresses the main idea of this passage is:
  - a. Even though you cannot vote yet, you can learn about important issues.
  - b. The word “idiot” comes from the Greek word *idiotes*.
  - c. Voting is the most important way American citizens participate in politics.
  - d. Only American citizens 18 years of age and older can vote in the United States.
  
2. The passage states that people usually choose which candidate to vote for based on the candidate’s
  - a. personality.
  - b. looks.
  - c. beliefs.
  - d. age.
  
3. Which of the following is not a fact, but an opinion?
  - a. Some ballots look sort of like a multiple-choice test.
  - b. Citizens can vote for candidates in national and state elections.
  - c. The important thing is to get involved!
  - d. The people working at your polling place will give you a ballot.
  
4. The author wrote this passage to
  - a. persuade you to vote for someone.
  - b. provide information about voting in the U.S.
  - c. tell a story about an idiot who didn’t vote.
  - d. explain voting in Greek government.
  
5. What is a polling place?
  - a. a place where you can read the latest political news
  - b. the place where you can vote
  - c. a sort of political assembly
  - d. the place where Congress meets to discuss laws

6. Why do you think it is important to vote?

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7. Why do you think Greeks used to call people who were not involved in public life “idiots”?

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Some people enjoy debating which branch of the government is the most powerful, \_\_\_\_\_ the truth is that all three are essential!

- a. because
- b. but
- c. after
- d. even

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

On voting day, people vote at their respective polling place in order to elect representatives to the government.

What? people

(do) What? \_\_\_\_\_

When? \_\_\_\_\_

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Vocabulary Word:** debate: to discuss an issue in an attempt to win an argument or make a point

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Teacher Guide and Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 850

**Featured Text Structure:** Descriptive - the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

**Passage Summary:** The author describes the origin of the word “idiot,” which in ancient Greece used to refer to an individual who was disinterested in politics or public life. Later, the text discusses how voting works and mentions that the ballot is always secret in the United States.

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5. What is a **polling place**?
  - a. a place where you can read the latest political news
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6. Why do you think it is important to vote?

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary but could include that it is important to vote because it is how people choose the leaders of the government. If you do not vote then you do not have a voice in the way that the government works and you cannot complain when they do something you don't like

7. Why do you think Greeks used to call people who were not involved in public life “idiots”?

**Suggested answer:** Because people who are not involved are not voicing their opinion and thus their needs are probably not being considered by the government or whoever is in charge of laws.

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Who? **people**

(do) What? **vote**

When? **on voting day**

Where? **at their respective polling place**

Why? **in order to elect representatives to the government**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** debate: to discuss an issue in an attempt to win an argument or make a point

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.