

Lesson Plan: The County Election

Themes: Voting, Democracy

- **Target Audience:** ESOL or BL class - Level 3+
- **Goal:** Students will increase speaking, writing, listening and reading skills.
- **Objectives:** Students will be able to look at a painting and describe, analyze, interpret and evaluate it. They will be able to relate the content of the painting to historical events of the time.
- **Class time:** 60-90 minutes
- **Resources/Materials:**
 - Student Handouts
 - Poster of artwork - *The County Election* (Note: You can obtain the poster from Rebecca)
- **Preparation:** Make copies of student handouts and hang poster in your classroom.

Lesson Flow:

Notes to Tutor:

- Asking students to review art may be completely new to them. In addition, for some students, the discussion about the racism that existed in history found in art such as the one featured in this lesson may be a sensitive topic.
- The lesson preview, i.e., “Do Now” Activity is designed for you to discuss what art is and what makes good art.
- For Parts 1 and 2, use open-ended questions for students to discover the work. Let them do the talking. Below are some sample questions. Feel free to substitute other open-ended questions that are more appropriate for your class.
Alternative approach: You can use the “Think-Pair-Share” method. Give students two minutes of think time, two minutes of discussion with a partner and then open up the class discussion.
- Part 3 is a short writing activity. Part 4 is a reading activity that summarizes the learnings from the lesson.

PREVIEW (“DO NOW” ACTIVITY)

1. **Ask:** What is art? What is “good” art?

PART 1: DESCRIBE AND ANALYZE (Speaking and Listening) – Student Handout 1

1. **Ask:** What do you see? What are the people doing? Encourage students to guess what is happening in the painting. Ask them to look for clues. Based on what you see, what would you name this painting?
It’s called Election Day, 1852. Most of the people are voters.
2. **Ask:** What does it mean to vote? How old do you have to be to vote?
Voting is a way that Americans can participate in their democracy. Define “democracy”: Form of government in which people choose leaders by voting. In 1971, the minimum voting age was changed from 21 to 18 for all federal, state and local elections.
3. **Ask:** Where do you think this scene is taking place?
It is located on the courthouse steps in a small Missouri town.
4. **Ask:** What colors do you see in the painting? Are they dark, light or bright?
Blue, Orange, White, etc. Some dark, some light.
5. **Ask** students to find these elements:
 - A white dog: *It is located in the center.*
 - A seated man in a “top hat” who might be sketching or writing: *He is located in the center—that’s the artist. Define “top hat”: a tall hat that is worn by men on very formal occasions.*
 - A man pouring drinks: *He is on the left.*
 - A man with a bandaged head and a horse and rider: *They are in the center distance.*

PART 2: INTERPRET (Speaking and Listening) – Student Handout 1

1. **Ask:** Why are there no women in this scene?

American women could not vote in 1852.

2. **Ask** students to describe the different shapes of hats in this painting. What do the hats suggest about the occupations or jobs of these individuals?

The tall stiff hats with the small brims (top hats) probably belong to the politicians. Farmers and laborers wear hats with softer crowns and wider brims.

3. **Ask:** What message does the painting give about the election process in American democracy?

A whole community of men, from rich to poor, comes together to vote. Notice how no one figure is emphasized or made larger than others in this crowd. That suggests that all the votes are equal.

4. **Ask:** How does this election scene compare with a current American voting scene?

Today Americans vote with secret ballots in private booths rather than declaring their votes in public. Women and African Americans are among the voters. Today campaigners are kept a legal distance from the actual polling place.

PART 3: EVALUATE (Writing) – Student Handout 1

1. **Ask** students to write a paragraph using the following prompt: Is this a good piece of Art? Why or why not?
2. **Ask** volunteers to read their paragraphs. Discuss.

PART 4: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER (Reading)- Student Handout 2

1. **Ask** for volunteers to read the student handout about George Caleb Bingham, the painting and the history of its time.
2. **Reinforce** new vocabulary and concepts.

Student Handout 1

Part 1

1. What do you see? What are the people doing? Based on what you see, what would you name this painting?
2. What does it mean to vote? How old do you have to be to vote?
3. Where do you think this scene is taking place?
4. What colors do you see in the painting? Are they dark, light or bright?
5. Find these elements:
 - A white dog
 - A seated man in a “top hat” who might be sketching or writing
 - A man pouring drinks
 - A man with a bandaged head and a horse and rider

Part 2

1. Why are there no women in this scene?
2. Describe the different shapes of hats in this painting. What do the hats suggest about the occupations or jobs of these individuals?
3. What message does the painting give about the election process in American democracy?
4. How does this election scene compare with a current American voting scene?

Part 3

Write a paragraph answering the following question:

Is this a good piece of art? Why or why not?

Student Handout 2

The County Election, 1852

George Caleb Bingham (1811–1879)

Saint Louis Art Museum,

St. Louis, Mo

About the Painting

This oil painting shows a large group of men in front of a **courthouse** in a small Missouri town on Election Day. Some men are talking, some are voting, others are gathered around a newspaper, and two boys are playing. The artist himself appears in the painting in a **stovepipe hat**, sitting on the courthouse steps. A friendly dog is with him and two men in white hats are looking over his shoulder. Both wealthy and working class men have come to the courthouse to vote.

About George Caleb Bingham, the Artist

George Caleb Bingham is known as “the Missouri artist” for the state where he lived and worked. Today he is famous for being one of the classic artists of the American West. He is best known for his scenes showing the daily life of the western **frontier**. His paintings show people of Missouri in and around St. Louis, Columbia, Jefferson City, Arrow Rock, Boonville, and Kansas City. He also painted scenes of the young nation’s government process, including campaigning and elections.

History

Voting rules were still being formed when Bingham painted this picture in 1852. At that time, only white men could vote; women and African Americans were not allowed to participate. The painting records the day that Bingham ran for a position in the state government. Bingham lost to a man named E.D. Sappington, seen here under a blue banner **tipping his hat** and handing his card to a voter.

Vocabulary:

- **Stovepipe hat:** a very tall silk hat (Reminder - top hat: a tall hat that is worn by men on very formal occasions)
- **Courthouse:** a building in which legal cases are heard
- **Frontier:** a distant area where few people live
- **To tip your hat:** to touch your hat or cap or to lift it off your head as a way of greeting or saying goodbye to someone

Source: “A Head Start on Picturing America”