

Caucus 101: Caucus History & Iowa's "First in the Nation" Status

Length of class: 60 minutes
In short, skip 1-3 from 90 minute lesson.

Objectives: Students will be able to explain how Iowa became first in the nation for the caucuses/primaries. Students will debate/defend why/why not Iowa should maintain its "first in the nation" status.

Additional objectives:

Students will be able to define a caucus.

Students will utilize speaking and debate skills.

Students will analyze news articles as evidence.

Students will evaluate their own reasons why/why not Iowa should maintain its "first in the nation" status.

Standards:

Iowa Core: SS 9-12. PSCL.1 Understand the rights and responsibilities of each citizen and demonstrate the values of lifelong civic action.

Iowa Core: SS.9-12.PSCL.4 Understand the differences among the complex levels of local, state and national government and their inherent, expressed, and implied powers.

Iowa Core: SS 9-12. PSCL.5 Understand strategies for effective political action that impact local, state, and national governance.

Iowa Core: SS 9-12. PSCL.6 Understand how law and public policy are established at the local, state, and national levels of government.

Iowa Core: SS.6-8.H.2 Understand how and why people create, maintain or change systems of power, authority, and governance.

Iowa Core: SS.9-12.H.4 Understand the role of individuals and groups within a society as promoters of change or the status quo.

Iowa Core SS.9-12.H.8 Understand cause and effect relationships and other historical thinking skills in order to interpret events and issues.

Assessment: In-class debate. Written response to the following: Should Iowa maintain its "first in the nation" status for caucuses-why or why not? Support your opinion with evidence.

Materials Needed:

1. Presidential nomination process reading and flowchart-copies for each student.

2. One notecard for each student.

3. 4 news articles-divided between students (see procedures): *Iowans: It's Best for America if our Caucuses Go First*: <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/iowa-poll/2015/02/28/iowa-caucuses-first-nation-iowa-poll/24125077/>, *Let's Strengthen-Not Endanger-Iowa's First-in-the-Nation Caucuses in 2016*: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jean-hessburg/lets-strengthen-not-iowa-caucus_b_5585559.html, *Enough with Letting Iowa Go First. The First Primary State Should be California*: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2015/02/04/enough-with-letting-iowa-go-first-the-first-primary-state-should-be-california/>, and *Sorry, Iowa, You Should Have to Earn the Top Primary Spot from Now On*: <http://thefederalist.com/2015/03/18/sorry-iowa-you-should-have-to-earn-the-top-primary-spot-from-now-on/>

4. Written analysis form

5. Evidence form for debate.

LEARNING PLAN:

1. **Focus: Presidential Nomination Process:** Pass out "Presidential Nomination Process reading and flow chart." Give time for students to read, take notes/highlight significant ideas. After, invite a class discussion on definitions of primaries vs. caucuses and what occurs at the national conventions. Discuss the timeline to the national convention. Emphasize the importance of local precincts and local control on the path to the national convention.
2. **Focus: Prep for Debate.** Think-Pair-Share. Give each student a regular sized notecard. Ask students to respond on ONE side of the notecard to the following question: Do you believe Iowa should maintain its "first in the nation" status for caucuses? Why or why not? Give 5 minutes for students to write answers. Once finished, have students pair up with a partner and share their responses. If time allows, invite individual students to share answers and discuss as a whole class-try to find students who disagreed with each other and why to generate further discussion.
3. **Focus: Analysis of Evidence.** The next few steps were generated applying ideas from Choices by

Brown University and Structured Academic Controversy by Carleton College.

- a. There are four different articles for students to analyze; *randomly* pass out ONE article to each student. Students will *individually* read and analyze article given. Use either NARA’s written analysis form or the one provided with this lesson. Do NOT tell the student which article/side they are given ahead of time. Let them figure this out on own.
 - i. Pro/support Iowa’s first in the nation status: *Iowans: It’s Best for America if our Caucuses Go First*: <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/iowa-poll/2015/02/28/iowa-caucuses-first-nation-iowa-poll/24125077/>
 - ii. Pro/support Iowa’s first in the nation status: *Let’s Strengthen-Not Endanger-Iowa’s First-in-the-Nation Caucuses in 2016*: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jean-hessburg/lets-strengthen-not-iowa-caucus_b_5585559.html
 - iii. Con/doesn’t support Iowa’s first in the nation status: *Enough with Letting Iowa Go First. The First Primary State Should be California*: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2015/02/04/enough-with-letting-iowa-go-first-the-first-primary-state-should-be-california/>
 - iv. Con/doesn’t support Iowa’s first in the nation status: *Sorry, Iowa, You Should Have to Earn the Top Primary Spot from Now On*: <http://thefederalist.com/2015/03/18/sorry-iowa-you-should-have-to-earn-the-top-primary-spot-from-now-on/>
 - b. Once students have *individually* completed the document analysis form, have students find other students who had the same article and create groups; they should bring their analysis paper with them. You should have four groups. Students will discuss the evidence/reasons why the author supported or did not support Iowa’s first in the nation status. In each of the four groups, students will select a recorder. The recorder will record on a separate sheet of paper reasons why the author did or did not support Iowa’s first in the nation caucus status. Each group should have a list of 5-6 reasons. They can add other additional reasons they created too, but they must have evidence from the articles included.
4. **Focus: Gathering evidence for debate.** Once students have completed part b, they will now get into two larger groups. The groups who had the two different “pro” articles will gather, while the groups who had the “con” articles will gather. Another recorder will be selected and the new recorder will write down both groups’ evidence and reasons on one sheet of paper.
- a. These two larger groups will also select a different person to record an opening statement for the debate. You can now explain to students they will be debating the merits of Iowa’s first in the nation caucus status. The large groups will need to prioritize their evidence and reasons and assign each person a speaking part.
 - b. Once the groups have opening statements and have assigned speaking parts and prioritized their evidence, have the students sit across from one another. Pass to each student an “evidence form” to complete while the other side is speaking. This might also be a good time to discuss rules/expectations of debate such as being respectful of each other, disagreeing with the other position’s position/ideas and NOT being critical of the person, listening to everyone’s ideas etc.
5. **Debate.** Allow each group to present the opening statements. You can choose for one side to present all of its evidence at once or go back and forth between the two groups. It is up to you. I find it easier for students to follow along if one side gives all of its evidence first. Remember, the key for the students is to argue the side *they have been assigned*. The students might not agree with their assigned side, but it is essential they argue that side. Once the evidence has been presented, give 7-10 minutes for each side to gather and discuss the opposing side’s evidence so they can refute it.
- a. Gather back together in 2 groups and do a coin toss to see which side goes first. The teacher should play a minimal role in this debate-only as an observer. Allow the debate to continue as you see necessary. Students may also choose to give closing statements as well.
6. **Application.** Once the debate has run its course, have students go back to their individual seats and look at their note cards again. Ask students to flip over the notecard and on the back side, write a new, critical answer to the question from the beginning: Do you believe Iowa should maintain its “first in the nation” status for caucuses? Why or why not? Remind student it is OKAY for them to change their minds. Remind them to apply the NEW evidence and information they learned from the articles and they class debate to determine a more thorough, comprehensive answer. Now they should back their response with concrete evidence. This may take longer than the original 5 minutes given; it could be assigned as homework or as a fuller, one-page paper response. To show to other students across the state, take a photo of their new reasoning from the notecard an upload it to QR Reader: (You can also give a prize or extra points in awarding the best debate group or individual).

Homework: For next time...

Each student must:

- Find their own news article about Iowa's first in the nation status for caucuses. Print it off/send it via email/add the link to our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Caucus101/> . Have students briefly present their articles to the class the next day.
- **Visit the Caucus 101 website or Facebook Page and vote in the "Why Iowa?" Poll. Each student will vote yes or no to the question "Should Iowa be the First to Caucus?" and share their reasoning as to why.**

Additional Resources:

<http://www.iowagop.org/>

<http://iowademocrats.org/>

<http://www.catchdesmoines.com/iowacaucus/>

<http://iowapoliticalcaucus.blogspot.com/>

