

Caucus 101: Democrat & Republican Caucuses vs. Primaries

Option 1: Length of class: 60 minutes

Skip step 2 from 90 minute lesson and/or shorten debate time.

Objectives: Students will be able to describe the similarities and differences between Democrat and Republican caucuses in order to prepare for mock caucus and understand the strengths and weaknesses of caucuses and primaries.

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 which system works the best to nominate a candidate for president: primaries or caucuses?

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: Class debate and participation in Democrat and Republican mock caucuses.

Materials Needed:

1. Computer to project/student internet access for the following videos:
 - a. Recipe for Democrat caucus:
http://www.iptv.org/lowaPathways/artifact_detail.cfm?aid=a_000929&oid=ob_000176
 - b. Recipe for Republican caucus:
http://www.iptv.org/lowaPathways/artifact_detail.cfm?aid=a_000931&oid=ob_000176
2. One copy of one of the three articles below (this will create groups):
 - a. *Why Primaries Are Better Than Caucuses* <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2015/04/20/why-primaries-are-better-than-caucuses/>
 - b. *Why the Caucus System is Better* <http://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/why-the-caucus-system-is-better/>
 - c. *Primaries vs. Caucuses: A Handy Primer*
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/mar/02/primaries-caucuses-handy-primer>
3. [Written analysis form](#)
4. [Evidence form for debate.](#)

LEARNING PLAN:

1. Begin with a brief discussion of the history of the Iowa caucuses (see day 1-history of caucuses). State the Democrat and Republican parties have different methods of caucusing. Show video for Democrat and Republican caucuses-found in "materials." Discuss similarities and differences and strengths and weaknesses of each. Creating a T-chart on the board might be helpful for students.
2. **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 three 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/point of view they are given ahead of time. Let them figure this out on own.
 - i. *Why Primaries Are Better Than Caucuses* <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2015/04/20/why-primaries-are-better-than-caucuses/>
 - ii. *Why the Caucus System is Better* <http://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/why-the-caucus-system-is-better/>
 - iii. *Primaries vs. Caucuses: A Handy Primer*
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/mar/02/primaries-caucuses-handy->

[primer](#)

3. **Focus: Gathering evidence for debate.** Once students have *individually* completed the document analysis form, have students find other students gather into groups according to which article they read (two groups). If students were assigned the article, *Primaries vs. Caucuses*, divide and assign each student to the pro-caucus or the pro-primary side. Students should bring their analysis paper with them. Students will discuss the evidence/reasons why the author supported caucuses or primaries. A recorder will be selected to record on a separate sheet of paper the author's reasons. 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.
 - 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 caucuses. 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.
4. **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.
 - iv. Gather back together in 2 groups and do a coin toss to see which side goes first. The first side will debate a point from the opposing side. The opposing side will have time to answer. Continue to conduct as a formal debate. The teacher should play a minimal role in this debate-only as an observer. Allow the debate to continue as necessary. Students may also choose to give closing statements as well.
5. **Application.** Once the debate has run its course, have students go back to their individual seats and write a 2-3 paragraph response to this question: which do you prefer-primaries or caucuses? Why/why not? Students must apply information from the articles and the debate. Now they should back their responses with concrete evidence. This may take 10-15 minutes; 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 and upload it to QR Reader: (You can also give a prize or extra points in awarding the best debate group or individual).

Homework: Who do you support? form

Additional Resources:

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

<http://iowademocrats.org/>

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

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

<http://www.iptv.org/iowapathways>

