

Observing Elections Around the World

High School – Contemporary World History; American Civics/Government
Middle School – Contemporary World History; American Civics/Government

Elaborated Lesson Focus

In this lesson, students will explore the practice of international election observation. They will study Carter Center election monitoring around the world and learn the common principles of genuine democratic elections. Students will apply their knowledge to U.S. elections and have the chance to be an unofficial observer.

Enduring Understanding / Essential Questions

Genuine democratic elections are an expression of sovereignty (power), which belongs to the people of a country. Voters choose their leaders and in doing so give authority and legitimacy to government. The rights of citizens to vote and participate in periodic, democratic elections are internationally recognized human rights. They are also essential to a country's peace and stability.

Achieving fair and free elections around the world has become a matter of concern for international organizations that promote peace and human rights. These groups often send out election observation missions at a country's invitation in order to assess the legitimacy and effectiveness of its electoral process.

Election observers must adhere to high standards for fairness and follow international principles of election observation. In doing their work, observers enhance the integrity of the electoral process often by deterring and exposing irregularities and fraud; by offering recommendations for improvement; by promoting public confidence; and by promoting electoral participation.

Key Terms:

Democracy
Sovereignty
Election
Polling Station
Ballot

Procedure:

1. Students will begin by viewing the Election Observation video (2006) on the Carter Center website: <http://cartercenter.com/news/multimedia/PeacePrograms/ElectionObservationAVoteforDemocracy.html>
2. Following the film, students will discuss the meaning of 'election observation' and the role of an election observer.
3. Next, students will use a computer to identify places around the world where The Carter Center has observed elections: <http://cartercenter.org/peace/democracy/observed.html>

4. Using the Center’s website, students will examine post-election reports produced by The Carter Center: http://cartercenter.org/news/publications/election_reports.html
Students should pay particular attention to the Executive Summaries and Observation Checklists found in the appendices. The following reports are recommended: Kenya 2002, Mozambique 2004, Nicaragua 2006. (NOTE: The instructor may need to assist students in interpretation of the reports depending on grade level.)
5. After exploring online, students will write a one-page free response to the following questions: *What is an election observer? What happens on an election observation trip? Where in the world have Carter Center observers worked? Why are they important? What impact do they have?*
6. **Extension:** Students will go to a polling place on election day. Using a modified checklist (below), students will observe balloting. Following the visit, the instructor will lead a debriefing discussion. Students will discuss their observations.

Rubric for One-Page Free Response

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Content	Provides clear and concise definition of election observer; fully lists and explains observer functions; gives specific locations of Carter Center observations.	Provides a definition of election observer; lists and explains some observer functions; provides general locations of Carter Center observations.	Provides an unclear definition of election observer; lists but does not explain observer functions; mentions but does not identify Carter Center observations.	Does not provide a definition of election observer; minimal explanation of observer functions; does not refer to Carter Center specifically.
Analysis	Demonstrates clear understanding of importance of international observations; gives specific examples of impact.	Demonstrates some understanding of importance of international observations; gives general examples of impact.	Demonstrates limited understanding of importance of international observations; gives few examples of impact.	Demonstrates little or no understanding of importance of international observations; does not provide examples of impact.
Grammar & Spelling	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.

**Carter Center Student Election Observer
POLL OBSERVATION FORM**

Observer Name: _____ **Date:** _____

A. INFORMATION ABOUT THE POLLING STATION

State:	County:	Precinct:
Polling station number:		
Arrival Time:	Departure Time:	
Number of voters in line, if any:		

B. OUTSIDE THE POLLING STATION

	YES	NO
Is the area free of party posters/campaign activity?		
Are security personnel within 300 ft of entrance (intimidation)?		

C. POLLING STATION ATTENDANCE

	YES	NO
Are three or more state election officials present?		
Are there any women officials?		
Are other observers present? If yes, specify:		
Are party agents and/or observers able to observe process adequately?		
Are all required materials available? If no, specify:		
Voter register		
Ballots		
Ballot boxes or other collection device		
Writing utensil or other voting tool		
Other		

D. POLLING OPERATION

	YES	NO
Does a polling station official explain the ballot procedure to each voter before handing him or her a ballot?		
Are all ballot boxes sealed and numbered?		
Are voters verified before voting to ensure they have not already cast a ballot?		
Are voter IDs checked against the voter register?		
Are voters able to keep their vote secret during the entire voting process?		
Do officials appear to be adequately trained and knowledgeable about their roles?		
Was the polling station free of disruption/restriction of the voting process?		