

Experiencing the Presidential Nomination Process: Caucuses and Iowa's Role

NCSS Thematic Strand: Civic Ideals and Practices

Grade Level: 9-12

Class Periods Required: 1-50 minute class period

Purpose/Background/Context:

Since the reform following the 1968 Democratic National Convention the road toward Election Day is no longer navigated by party elites but by American voters. In states like Iowa, these voters utilize the caucus system to determine how many delegates will go on to support each candidate.

Although many see caucuses as archaic and unrepresentative of the nation's population, caucus supporters point to the advantages of using this system over a primary. This process relies heavily on grassroots efforts, which allows for "small d" democracy to flourish; intensive candidate participation, bringing candidates face-to-face with voters; and attentive and highly active constituents who are committed to their citizenship roles.

Iowa's caucus is the first in the nomination process and therefore has extreme importance and gains national attention. Candidates spend much time and money on and in Iowa and national media outlets have extensive coverage of the event.

The Iowa caucus is different from caucuses in other states, and the Republican and Democratic caucus procedures operate differently in Iowa. Iowa has several stages before the National Party Conventions take place: the precinct, county, district, and state conventions. As for caucus procedures are concerned, the Republicans use a winner-take-all Straw-Poll process. Caucus goers vote privately at the Republican events. At a Democratic caucus, in contrast, caucus goers publically declare the candidate whom they support. Then, those in attendance can make speeches and in various ways try and persuade others to join them in support of a candidate – in other words, to switch sides. Unlike the Iowa Republicans, who have a winner-take-all contest, Democrats distribute delegates based on the proportion of caucus goers who support the candidate.

Given that Iowa is the first in the nation to hold a presidential caucus and primary the State can virtually ruin some candidates' chances to represent their Party in the presidential election while giving a substantial boost to the chances of others. The outcomes in Iowa therefore influence the presidential choices in states that follow them. Some have questioned whether the caucus system allows only a handful of party activists, who attend caucuses, too much power in presidential politics. Others wonder if Iowa, a relatively small state in population and mostly white, should continue to have such a great influence in the overall nominating process. As Iowans and United States citizen, students in this lesson plan assess the positives and negatives of the caucus system and offer opinions about our State's "first in the nation" status.

Objectives & Student Outcomes:

Students will:

- ❖ Learn about and experience key practices involving the rights and responsibilities of an American citizen through the caucus system.
- ❖ Identify and evaluate multiple points of view about caucuses and Iowa's role in the nomination process.
- ❖ Develop a position on caucuses and defend it.
- ❖ Identify assumptions, biases, and arguments used in political cartoons.
- ❖ Evaluate current criticisms of campaigns and proposals for their reform.

Materials:

- ❖ PowerPoint
“Presidential Nomination Process: Caucuses and Iowa’s Role”
- ❖ YouTube Video “Iowa Caucuses: Animated Edition!”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxZYwcoBPhA>
- ❖ Handouts:
“Candidates For 2012 Iowa Caucus”
“Republican and Democratic Processes in Iowa”
“Republican Straw-Poll Ballot”
- ❖ Signs with candidates names posted around room

Procedures:

Procedure 1

Political cartoon

- ❖ Ask student to point out what they see in the cartoon and what they interpret it to mean.
- ❖ Inform students that there are many people who believe the caucus system to be outdated and irrelevant. There are also a large number of political scientists, politicians, and voters who feel the same disdain for Iowa’s position in the Nomination Convention.

Procedure 2

Part I of PowerPoint presentation: Caucuses

- ❖ Briefly review with students what was discussed last class (the history of the nominating process and primaries).
- ❖ Go over the basics of a caucus and its advantages and disadvantages.
- ❖ Ask students if there are any questions so far about the caucus process.

Procedure 3

Part II of PowerPoint presentation: Iowa’s Role

- ❖ Introduce Iowa’s role in the nomination process.
- ❖ Hand out copies of “Republican and Democratic Processes in Iowa.” Tell students to take notes in the empty spaces during the video.
- ❖ Show YouTube video.
- ❖ Finish PowerPoint section on Iowa’s Role in the Caucus.

Procedure 4

Hand out “Candidates For 2012 Iowa Caucus” to the students.

- ❖ Inform students they will be voting in a Straw Poll for one of the three candidates.
- ❖ Have them read over the candidates’ information and encourage them to note things they like or dislike about each candidate.

Procedure 5

Hand out “Republican Straw-Poll Ballot” to the students.

- ❖ Explain that students will be voting for their preferred candidate secretly.
- ❖ Once they have voted they can bring their ballot to the front of the room to be tallied.

Procedure 6

Tally votes and write outcomes on the board. Inform students of the winner who will receive all of the delegates to go on to the county level.

Procedure 7

Explain Simulation

- ❖ Hand out pieces of paper bearing candidates names to pre-determined students. These slips will designate which candidate a student will support. While doing so explain that students will be next participating in a Democratic style caucus (despite having Republican candidates). They will need to find their fellow supporters and station themselves in the room. Assign a spokesperson in each group to argue their case to other attendees.

Procedure 8

Caucus Simulation

- ❖ Students will simulate a democratic caucus.
- ❖ The teacher will point out any groups that are not viable and have fewer than 15% support. These groups' representatives will make a statement to persuade more people to their candidate (inform student they have 3 minutes to do so).
- ❖ The teacher will then point out those who are undecided and have a pre-assigned representative from each group attempt to persuade them into group (once again, each will have 3 minutes to speak).
- ❖ After each of the groups' speeches, students are free to change groups if they have been persuaded.

Procedure 9

- ❖ Tally votes and write outcomes on the board. Inform students of the percentages of delegates allotted to each candidate based on the caucus outcomes.

Procedure 10

- ❖ Large-group Discussion
Have students return to their seats and discuss the simulations asking some or all of the following questions:
 1. What did you think of the caucus simulation?
 2. Did you prefer one party's process to another? Which one and why?
 - a. What were the pros/cons of each method?
 3. Thinking about the PowerPoint, the video, and the simulation do you think that caucuses are an effective means of selecting candidates to the national convention? In other words: should states use caucuses or are they, as the cartoon pointed out, outdated, junk, and worthless?

Assessment of Outcomes:

Students will be assessed on their participation in the caucus simulations with the teacher noting interactions and discussion.

Students will also be assessed on their participation in the discussion of the political cartoon and following the simulations. The teacher will call on students who have not participated to ensure that everyone is involved.

Extensions and Adaptations:

Have students write an essay arguing for or against the use of caucuses.

Have a democratic dialogue discussing whether or not caucuses should be used or whether caucuses or primaries are superior.

In groups, have students create posters comparing and contrasting primaries and caucuses.

If during an election year have students attend their local precinct's caucus (whether to observe or participate) and write a short response. This could be a source of extra-credit.

Resources:

"Compare 2012 Presidential Candidates." *www.findthedata.org*. Find the Data.
<<http://2012-presidential-candidates.findthedata.org/>>.

Iowa Caucus: Animated Edition! Perf. Jacob Soboroff. *YouTube*. Why Tuesday, 23 Oct. 2007. Web. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxZYwcoBPhA>>.

Redlawsk, David P., Caroline J. Tolbert, and Todd Donovan. *Why Iowa? How Caucuses and Sequential Elections Improve the Presidential Nominating Process*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011.

Candidates For 2012 Iowa Caucus

Ron Paul 	Mitt Romney 	Rick Santorum 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Religion: Baptist ❖ Health Care: Repeal Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care; Allow individuals to opt out of Medicare ❖ Same-Sex Marriage: Let States decide legality ❖ Abortion: Pro-Life ❖ Life's Origins: Creationist ❖ Death Penalty: Outlaw ❖ Religion in Schools: Abstinence only education ❖ Climate Change: Believes in climate change ❖ Marijuana: Legalize medical marijuana ❖ Stem Cell Research: Let state's decide whether to utilize stem cell research ❖ Oil: Remove subsidies and tax breaks for oil companies ❖ Nat'l. Defense: Bring troops home to cut back spending ❖ U.S. Role in World: Halt intervention; Eradicate promotion of preemptive war ❖ Afghanistan: Bring troops home ❖ Immigration: Alter 14th Amend. To eradicate alien's birthright citizenship; Oppose amnesty for illegal immigrants ❖ Environment: Repeal federal regulations on environmental issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Religion: Mormon ❖ Health Care: Repeal Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Medicare; Repeal Obama's healthcare plan; empower states and individuals and reduce health care costs ❖ Same-Sex Marriage: Ban Same-Sex Marriage ❖ Abortion: Pro-Life ❖ Life's Origins: Evolutionist ❖ Death Penalty: Allow ❖ Religion in Schools: Abstinence only education ❖ Climate Change: Doesn't believe in climate change ❖ Marijuana: Outlaw medical marijuana ❖ Stem Cell Research: Against ❖ Nat'l. Defense: Modernize forces and equipment; Grow troops and ensure their funding; halt efforts to cut military budget ❖ U.S. Role in World: Create foreign policy that broadcasts American exceptionalism; Act unilaterally to accomplish goals ❖ Afghanistan: Bring troops home according to orders of U.S. generals ❖ Immigration: Oppose resident college tuition and driver's licenses to illegal immigrants; Stop families immigrating to join their family who are citizens ❖ Environment: Oppose EPA regulation of greenhouse gases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Religion: Roman Catholic ❖ Health Care: Repeal Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care; Replace PPACA with privatized Medicare; Subsidies to Americans paying for private health insurance ❖ Same-Sex Marriage: Ban same-sex marriage ❖ Abortion: Pro-Life ❖ Life's Origins: Creationist ❖ Death Penalty: Allow ❖ Religion in Schools: Abstinence only education ❖ Climate Change: Doesn't believe in climate change ❖ Marijuana: Outlaw medical marijuana ❖ Stem Cell Research: Against ❖ Oil: Focus on oil and gas for energy; drill every possible oil resource ❖ Nat'l. Defense: Protect defense from cuts; Promote democracies around the world with monetary support ❖ U.S. Role in World: Advocate American exceptionalism by fighting against evil and for freedom ❖ Afghanistan: Refrain from setting strict deadlines for withdrawal ❖ Immigration: Build fence along Mexican border ❖ Environment: Promote coal as main form of energy; Oppose cap and trade restrictions to maximize production

Republican and Democratic Processes in Iowa

Republican “Straw-Poll”

Attendees must be eligible to vote, but do not need to be registered as Republicans.

1. Each attendee casts a presidential preference vote by a secret ballot.
2. Votes are tallied on a statewide basis.
3. Delegates to the county conventions are based on the winner-take-all system where the candidate with the most votes gets all the delegates.

Notes:

Democratic Caucus

Attendees must be registered Democrats and must be eligible to vote.

1. Attendees are asked to join preference groups for candidates.
2. Once in their preferred candidate group, the group must consist of at least 15% of those present to be viable.
3. Groups with less than 15% (who are nonviable) are eliminated and their group members must join other viable groups.
 - a. During this time other group members can try and persuade people over to their groups.
4. Delegates are then given to candidates based on each group’s proportion of the whole caucus population (proportional system).

Notes:

Republican Straw Poll Ballot

TO VOTE: Completely fill in the oval at the left of the candidate's name.
DO NOT vote for more than one candidate.

Republican Party Ballot	
RON PAUL	<input type="radio"/>
MITT ROMNEY	<input type="radio"/>
RICK SANTORUM	<input type="radio"/>

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