

## CITIZENSHIP: DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

This Citizenship activity exposes students to an example of a real ballot issue that was narrowly approved by Missouri voters in 2014 (50.1% to 49.8%). Students will put themselves in the role of a voter who has limited knowledge of a controversial constitutional amendment and make a decision on whether to vote for or against, or to abstain. This exercise should reveal the need for doing one's homework ahead of Election Day and the need for critical thinking and research-based materials.

### SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK STANDARDS

Social Studies provides an introduction to civics/government, economics, geography, and history. The course strands, content standards, and the student learning expectations (SLEs) are meant to be taught in an integrated manner, not in isolation. Basic skills and foundational knowledge are developed through practical classroom experiences that access and develop personal connections to the content. Students learn through social studies lenses that begin by focusing on the narrower and more manageable viewpoint of self and personal experience, expanding to community, state, nation, and ultimately to a broader world view. Find out more about the Arkansas Social Studies Curriculum Framework here: <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/learning-services/curriculum-and-instruction/curriculum-framework-documents/social-studies-new-courses-valid-july-1-2015>

### STANDARDS FOR THIS ACTIVITY LESSON

Strand	Content Standard Code	Content Standard Description
Citizenship	C.2.5/6.3	Analyze rights, responsibilities, and privileges of citizens and non-citizens in the United States and various societies to 1500.
Citizenship	C.2.5/6.4	Examine actions/civic virtues that guide government, society, and communities over time. Civic virtues at the local, state, and national level.
Processes, rules, and laws	C.3.5/6.1	Compare the process for creating rules and laws at the local, state, and federal levels

\*To see the full standard visit:

[http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning\\_Services/Curriculum%20and%20Instruction/Frameworks/Social\\_Studies/Grades\\_K-4\\_Social\\_Studies.pdf](http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/Learning_Services/Curriculum%20and%20Instruction/Frameworks/Social_Studies/Grades_K-4_Social_Studies.pdf)

# BIG IDEAS

## WHAT IS BALLOT ISSUE LITERACY?

Every election cycle, 1.6 million Arkansans head to the polls to vote. But not everyone votes on statewide ballot issues. Many voters discover the proposed laws or constitutional amendments as they receive their ballot on Election Day. Others may have heard about an issue on TV or on social media, but aren't familiar with all the details or potential consequences of the law passing or failing. The state constitution guides how the state operates. The Arkansas Constitution includes laws that have established our free school system, freedom of speech, who can vote, how city and county governments operate, and much more. Ballot issues can change the current constitution or add new laws, and Arkansans have a say in this process on Election Day.

## OBJECTIVES

- Participants will:
  - Learn what a ballot issue is
  - Understand the limitations of information provided to voters on the ballot
  - Discover how opposing sides of an issue can make the same issue appear different depending on their priorities
  - Understand the need to search for neutral information about a proposed ballot issue
- Main Teaching Points:
  - The election ballot provides limited information about the potential consequences of a ballot issue passing or failing
  - Research helps voters make an informed decision on ballot issues

## SUPPLIES & PREPARATION

### SUPPLIES

- Missouri ballot example
- Vote Yes for Amendment 1 Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn-nuJBRN1c>
- Vote No for Amendment 1 Video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_0YhKv\\_Tv88](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0YhKv_Tv88)
- Pens for voting
- Device and internet connection to play videos
- Examples of past Arkansas ballot issue fact sheets

### PREPARATION

- Make appropriate copies of Missouri ballot example so each participant can have his or her own copy
- Ensure you have a working Internet connection and can play the YouTube videos ahead of time to reduce technical difficulties and lost activity time
- Have YouTube videos cued up and ready to play before starting activity
- After the exercise is completed, distribute examples of past Arkansas ballot issue fact sheets

# ENGAGE THE STUDENTS

## 1. Introduce the Ballot Issues

- Start by asking the students to raise their hand if they know what a constitutional amendment is. Ask a student who raised a hand to define his/her understanding of a ballot issue.
- Explain how a constitutional amendment is a change to the Arkansas constitution, or fundamental rules that the state operates under, initiated by state legislators or voters.
- Discuss how legislators have the authority to refer three constitutional amendments each election cycle to voters to approve or disapprove.
- Discuss how voters have the right to propose constitutional amendments or new state laws to voters on the statewide ballot. These issues only appear on the ballot if supporters are successful in gathering a certain number of signatures from registered voters.

## 2. The Role of the Public Policy Center

- Explain how the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service researches each ballot issue and publishes a fact sheet or report on the statewide issues to help voters make an informed decision on Election Day. Reinforce that these are neutral reviews that don't take a side and don't tell people how they should vote.
- Explain how campaigns can define the issue differently depending on their views, and how someone who has not done their own research or critical review of the issue can be misinformed about the potential consequences of a ballot issue passing or failing.

## ACTIVITY: MISSOURI RIGHT TO FARM

1. Distribute Missouri Right to Farm example ballot and pens to each student; read the example ballot aloud to students
2. Ask one or two students to explain what they think the ballot issue means
3. Explain that the ballot title is all a voter sees on Election Day
4. Ask students to raise their hand if they know how they want to vote on the issue
5. Explain how if the voter hasn't done his/her research, they may be confused about the issue if they relied only on what they saw on television
6. Play the two videos back-to-back (*Say Yes to Amendment 1* and *Say No to Amendment 1*) that aired ahead of the 2014 Missouri election
7. Ask one or two students to explain what they think the ballot issue means if it passes/fails and if their understanding had changed based on the commercials
8. Have students vote
9. Ask one or two students how they voted and why – only if they feel comfortable sharing
10. Distribute copies of past Extension ballot fact sheets
11. Tell students they are available online and at county offices ahead of each election – encourage them to read the fact sheets at a later date

## CONNECT & EXTEND

- After discussing the two opposing Missouri Right to Farm videos and having the students vote, extend their knowledge with the following questions:
  - If you did not know that both videos were for Amendment 1 in Missouri, would you have thought they were talking about the same issue?
  - Why do you think the videos were so different?
  - If you had only seen one of the videos, would it have swayed your vote?
  - After this activity and watching the opposing videos, how important do you think it is to do your homework before voting?

### EXTRA ACTIVITY

- Have the students break in to small groups (2-4 kids)
- Each group should choose a different Arkansas ballot issue and whether they are for or against the issue.
  - Examples of ballot issues can be found at [www.uaex.edu/ballot](http://www.uaex.edu/ballot)
- The group should make an ad or commercial for the ballot issue
  - Provide them with a recording device (iPad, phone, camera, etc.) for a commercial that is 1 minute or less
  - Provide paper, markers, crayons, etc. for a print ad that can go in a newspaper or be posted on social media
- Have the groups present their commercial or print ad for the rest of the group and explain how they think voters would react to their materials

### REFERENCES

Prepared by Kristin Higgins, Public Policy Center Program Associate. September 2015.



*The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs and services without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.*