



## How Primaries Work vs Caucuses: Lesson Plan

Topic	
<p>Both primaries and caucuses are held to determine how delegates are split up among party candidates, ultimately deciding which candidates are chosen for their party's presidential nomination. A primary election is fairly indistinguishable from standard elections: voters show up and secretly cast their ballots. Meanwhile, a caucus is more like a debate that can last several hours long. Both primaries and caucuses have their merits and flaws and can tell us different information about how candidates are perceived by different groups.</p>	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• History</li><li>• Government</li><li>• Social studies</li></ul>	30-45 minutes
Video link:	
<a href="https://academy4sc.org/topic/how-primaries-work-vs-caucuses-two-meetings-of-the-minds/">https://academy4sc.org/topic/how-primaries-work-vs-caucuses-two-meetings-of-the-minds/</a>	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
<p>Students will be able to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define primaries and caucuses.</li><li>• Explain the shared purpose both primaries and caucuses have.</li><li>• List the flaws and merits of both primaries and caucuses.</li></ul>	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Political parties, candidates	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet	
Before you watch	



**Imagine That:** Ask your class to imagine the following scenario. Your family is trying to decide where to go for dinner. The problem is that there are a bunch of options people have already come up with. How do you come to a decision? Should everyone write down their vote anonymously on a piece of paper and then have those votes be tallied up? Or should you discuss your options, letting people state their thoughts and change their minds before a public vote is cast?

### While you watch

Answer questions 1-5 on the Worksheet

### After you watch/discussion questions

1. Do you think your state should hold primaries or caucuses or maybe both? Why?
2. Do you think states will one day switch to holding all primaries? Why or why not?
3. Which type of primaries - open, closed, or semi-closed - do you prefer? Why?

### Activity Ideas

- Have students finish the remaining questions on the Worksheet.
- Hold a primary and a caucus to make a decision related to your class (should you have an exam, essay, or project as a final? How much should class participation (or homework) count as part of your grade: 5%, 10%, or 20%? Or any other decision that you are willing to implement the results of where there are more than 2 options to choose from). Hold a primary first, meaning that students cast a silent vote. Then, hold a caucus, where students move to different areas of the room based on their opinion. Then one person from each group has to make a plea for why others should join their group, then allow students to re-align themselves before taking a final vote. Compare the results of each process.

### Sources/places to learn more

1. Hersh, Eitan. "Primary Voters Versus Caucus Goers and the Peripheral Motivations of Political Participation." *Political Behavior*, vol 34, 2012, pp 689-718. DOI: 10.1007/s11109-011-9175-8.
2. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Primary election." Encyclopædia Britannica, 5 January 2015. [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com).



3. Montanaro, Domenico. "How Exactly Do The Iowa Caucuses Work?" NPR, 30 January 2016. [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org).
4. Norwood, Candice. "Presidential caucuses are complicated. Why do some states use them?" PBS News Hour, 9 January, 2020. [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org).