

| THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE |
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| SS.7.CG.3.14 Explain the purpose and function of the Electoral College in electing the President of the United States. |

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| 2023 BENCHMARK UPDATES |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New benchmark added to the 2023-2024 middle school civics and government standards |

Essential Teacher Content Background Information

[Teacher Content Notes Not Appropriate For Student Use]

This section addresses the following topics:

1. The Origin of the Electoral College
2. The Process of the Electoral College
3. The Purpose of the 12th Amendment

1. The Origin of the Electoral College

The Electoral College is intended to ensure a balance in our constitutional republic. The Framers established the Electoral College in the Constitution as a compromise between having the people vote for the President directly (popular vote) and Congress selecting the president for the country. The Founders were of two minds. On the one hand, letting Congress pick the president could be a sure path towards corruption between branches, and potentially make the president beholden to members of Congress that elected them. On the other hand, direct election of the president by popular vote could give too much power to what the Founders viewed as a potentially uninformed mob manipulated by someone who wanted power. So the Electoral College is a rough compromise between the two extremes. Keep in mind, however, that the term "Electoral College" does not appear in Article II of the Constitution or the 12th Amendment. Instead, they refer to "electors" but not to the "Electoral College."

2. The Process of the Electoral College

The Electoral College process consists of selecting the electors at the state level, a meeting of those electors, voting of those electors for president and vice president, and the counting of the electoral votes by Congress.

There are 538 electors in the Electoral College. To be elected President, the candidate needs the "magic" 270 electoral votes. Based on the 2020 census, Florida now has 30 electors for the 2024 presidential election. In 2020, the state had 29; the change reflects the addition of another congressional seat for Florida due to reapportionment. Each state has the same number of electors as it does members in Congress: two for Senators and one for each member in the House of Representatives.

The process of finding electors in Florida begins with the joint candidates for president and vice president from their respective political parties. Each party submits their slate of presidential electors. On the general election ballot are the candidate's names for president and vice president, not the names of presidential electors. However, when the voters cast votes for the president and vice president of their choice, they are actually voting to select the electors representing that party. Each state's winning electors meet, after the general election, to certify the vote. Florida's Electoral College will be held in December 2024 on a date set by Congress.

Whichever presidential ticket gets the most popular votes in Florida, gets all of the state's Electoral College votes (30 in 2024). Even if they win by a small margin, they still get all of the Electoral College votes. It should be noted, though, that not all states function the same way. For example, Nebraska and Maine split their electoral votes proportionally. At the same time, the national popular vote may not always reflect the final

electoral vote tally; a collection of smaller population states may offset winning the votes in larger population states.

On January 6th of the year following a presidential election, a state's electoral votes are publicly certified and counted in a joint session of Congress. This date reflects a change caused by the 20th Amendment, as a president's term now ends on January 20th instead of March 4th as originally conceived. The vice president presides over the count as President of the Senate and announces the results of the vote. If the required 270 electoral votes are met, then the vice president declares the new or re-elected president and vice president of the United States, and they are sworn in on January 20th.

If no candidate receives a majority of electoral votes, the presidential election moves to Congress. The House of Representatives elects the president, with each state receiving one vote. A candidate must receive at least 26 votes (a majority of the states) to be elected.

3. The Purpose of the 12th Amendment

The original method of electing the president and vice president caused some significant issues in the election of 1800. At the time under the Constitution, electors voted for two individuals, but there was no constitutional expectation that they would distinguish between president and vice president in the vote. Generally, the person who won the majority of votes would become president, while the second place winner became vice president. You can see how that could be potentially problematic, and it came to a head in the historic election of 1800.

In 1800, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams stood against one another for the second time, but each had running mates representing their parties this time. Aaron Burr was Jefferson's running mate, and Charles C. Pinckney ran with Adams. Remember, however, that there was no distinction between a presidential and vice presidential vote at the time. Burr and Jefferson tied at 73 electoral votes each, and it was sent to the House of Representatives, where each state delegation had one vote. It took 36 separate votes in the House to give Jefferson the victory, with Burr his rather angry vice-president as the second place winner. The electoral vote, it was decided, had to change.

Since the electoral college process was detailed in the Constitution, the only way to change it was through a constitutional amendment. The 12th Amendment was ratified in 1804 and, in addition to requiring that a candidate for vice president meet the same qualifications as one for president, changed how we elect the president and vice president. Now electors in the Electoral College must cast one of their votes for the president and the other for the vice president. In this new system, the president and the vice president would be of the same political party. They call this a presidential ticket.

Interestingly, the 12th Amendment did not solve all of the issues posed by the Electoral College. In the 1824 presidential election Andrew Jackson, running against John Quincy Adams and two others, won a plurality of both the popular vote and the Electoral College. But to win the presidency, you need more than a plurality (the most electoral votes), you need a majority (more than half the electoral votes). The election would once again be sent to the House of Representatives. The House, ultimately, would vote for Quincy Adams in what Jackson termed 'The Corrupt Bargain.' This was not an isolated case. While they all did not end up in the House of Representatives, the elections of 1876, 1888, 2000, and 2016, all saw the popular vote winner not win the Electoral College vote. However, this is the system as intended by the Founders, and generally speaking, it has done its job.

To learn more about some of the more unique scenarios related to the Electoral College, see the [Electoral College FAQs](#) from the National Archives.

Adapted from:

[Presidential Electors/Electoral College - Division of Elections - Florida Department of State \(myflorida.com\)](#)

[What is the Electoral College? | National Archives](#)

Lesson Summary

| ESSENTIAL QUESTION | | | |
|---|------------|------------------------|---------------|
| What is the origin, purpose and function of the Electoral College in electing the President of the United States? How did the 12th Amendment change the Electoral College? | | | |
| BENCHMARK | | | |
| SS.7.CG.3.14 Explain the purpose and function of the Electoral College in electing the President of the United States. | | | |
| CIVICS EOC REPORTING CATEGORY | | | |
| N/A | | | |
| OVERVIEW | | | |
| In this lesson, students will explain the origin, purpose, and function of the Electoral College in electing the President of the United States and explain the changes made to it by the 12th Amendment. | | | |
| BENCHMARK CLARIFICATIONS | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Students will explain the origin of the Electoral College and the changes made to it by the 12th Amendment. | | | |
| BENCHMARK CONTENT LIMITS | | | |
| N/A | | | |
| CIVICS CONTENT VOCABULARY | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">census, certify, Electoral College, electoral votes, electors, joint session, popular vote, presidential ticket, Twelfth Amendment | | | |
| INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES | | | |
| Simulation | Map skills | Collaborative learning | Video as text |
| MATERIALS | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Game Die (enough for students pairs)TimerElectoral Map image (external link)The Electoral College readingThe Electoral College QuestionsThe Electoral College Homework Help video (external link)Video Review activity sheetElectoral College Simulation | | | |

- Win the White House Game (external link; optional)

B.E.S.T. STANDARDS

- ELA.7.R.2.1- Explain how individual text sections and/or features convey a purpose in texts.
- ELA.7.R.3.2- Paraphrase content from grade-level texts.
- ELA.K12.EE.1.1- Cite evidence to explain and justify reasoning.
- ELA.7.V.1.1- Integrate academic vocabulary appropriate to grade level in speaking and writing.
- ELA.7.V.1.3- Apply knowledge of context clues, figurative language, word relationships, reference materials, and/or background knowledge to determine the connotative and denotative meaning of words and phrases, appropriate to grade level.

Suggested Student Activity Sequence & Pace

| DAY | ACTIVITY SEQUENCE |
|-------|--|
| DAY 1 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Project the “Electoral Map” image for the 2020 presidential election from the 270 to Win website. 2. Ask students the following questions: Raise your hand if you have ever seen a map that looks like this, maybe on the news? During/after what election do we typically see these? (presidential elections) Does anyone know what it is called? (electoral map) What is it used for? (the numbers and colors on each state represent which presidential candidate received that state’s electoral votes and therefore ‘won’ that state) 3. Toggle the timeline bar to show students some historical electoral maps so that they can see examples of more close/divided elections but also elections where one candidate won in a landslide. 4. Explain that when electing the president of the United States, all eligible citizens going to their polling place and casting their vote on a ballot is only one step in the election process for this national office. It will ultimately be the Electoral College (a process, not a place) that determines who the next president will be. 5. Hand out “The Electoral College” reading and provide students time to individually read and mark the text. 6. Have a few students share what they marked and answer any questions the students may have. 7. Provide students each a copy of the “The Electoral College Questions” and have them complete each question individually. Teacher Note: Be sure to emphasize that some of the questions do not have right or wrong answers. We want students to understand they can share their opinions if they have reasons to support them. 8. Once complete, have students share responses to the Questions #1 and #3 in a whole class discussion, amending responses if necessary. Teacher Note: Use sample answer key below to help guide discussion. 9. Have students stand up and make two lines that face each other, so that each student is across from one other student. Have them bring their Questions sheet with them. With the person they are across from, have the students decide who will be ‘Student A’ and who will be ‘Student B’. 10. On your command, have all ‘Student A’s’ talk and share their answer to Question #2 while ‘Student B’ listens. Set a timer for 30 seconds - 1 minute before interrupting them to instruct them to stop. Then allow the same amount of time for ‘Student B’ to share their response while ‘Student A’ listens. 11. Repeat step 10, this time starting with ‘Student B’ but with Question #4. 12. Bring students back to their individual seats and collect the Question sheet to formatively assess the benchmark. |

DAY 2

1. Review the Electoral College information students learned yesterday by watching “[The Electoral College | Homework Help](#)” video from Bill of Rights Institute.
Teacher Note: The information in this video is from June 2020 so some information is slightly outdated (i.e. Florida will have 30 electoral votes in 2024, not 29)
2. Have students fill in the “Video Review” activity sheet while watching the video.
3. Collect their Video Review sheets.
4. Explain to students that the Electoral College may sometimes be difficult to comprehend. So today you are going to solidify your knowledge gained on the subject by experiencing the process.
5. Place students into pairs.
6. Pass out a copy of the “Electoral College Simulation” to each pair as well as one game die.
7. Review the simulation instructions with students, clarifying any questions. Have students complete the simulation.
8. Once the simulation is over, have students answer the reflection questions individually on a separate piece of paper.
9. Debrief the activity by using the reflection questions.
Teacher Note: When you get to reflection question #3, share with students that while not often in our nation’s history, there have been 5 times (1824, 1876, 1888, 2000, and 2016) where the individual who won the popular vote did not win the presidency. You could also return to the “[Electoral Map](#)” image from the 270 to Win website and toggle to those years for a visual.
10. Finish the lesson by asking the class a few of the questions that the students wrote as part of their “Video Review” activity sheets.
11. Choose 3 to 5 questions that the students wrote in the last box on the “Video Review” activity sheet and ask them to the class using Think, Pair, Share for each question.
12. Students listen to the question chosen by the teacher from the activity.
13. Give students “think time” at least 30 seconds.
14. Have students pair up with someone and discuss their responses.
15. Have a few selected students share their responses with the whole group.

Extension Activity: Have students play the “[Win the White House Game](#)” from iCivics.

Civics Content Vocabulary

| Word/Term | Definition |
|----------------------------|---|
| census | the official count of a population done every 10 years |
| certify | to confirm formally; verify |
| electoral college | a group of people named by each state legislature to select the president and vice president |
| electoral votes | the choice expressed collectively by the electoral college, which determines the winner of elections for president and vice president in the U.S. |
| electors | a person who is certified to represent their state's vote in the Electoral College; cast their votes in the Electoral College |
| joint session | when the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate meet together |
| popular vote | the tally of each individual's vote within a given geographic area |
| presidential ticket | the joint listing of the presidential and vice presidential candidates on the same ballot as required by the Twelfth Amendment. |
| Twelfth Amendment | an amendment to the Constitution, adopted in 1804, specifies the separate election of the president and vice president by the electoral college |

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Civics 360 Resources](#)

Florida Department of Education's Civic Literacy Reading List

- N/A

ANSWER KEYS

Sample Answers: Electoral College Questions

Sample Answers: Video Review activity sheet

SOURCES

Historical Presidential Election Maps from 270 to win:

<https://www.270towin.com/historical-presidential-elections/timeline/>

Information on the Electoral process in Florida, Presidential Electors/ Electoral College/ Divisions of Elections:

<https://www.dos.myflorida.com/elections/candidates-committees/presidential-electorselectoral-college/>

Information about the Electoral College process, What is the Electoral College? Library of Congress:

<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/elections/presidential-election-process/what-is-the-electoral-college/>

Information about the process and history of the Electoral College, The Electoral College | Homework Help from the Bill of Rights Institute, video:

<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/videos/the-electoral-college-homework-help>

Quotes about the Electoral College from the Federalist Papers, Library of Congress:

<https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text>

Information on the process of the Electoral College, What is the Electoral College? National Archives,

<https://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/about>

Electoral College Simulation, Thompson Schools, PDF,

<https://www.thompsonschoools.org/cms/lib/CO01900772/Centricity/Domain/3627/Electoral%20College%20Simulation.pdf>

Win the White House game, iCivics:

<https://www.icivics.org/node/67038/resource?back-ref-search=electoral%20college&back-ref-filter=>