

Civic Knowledge & Action: Voter Registration

TEACHER RESOURCE

Overview

In a Pew Research Center study from 2018, 74% of Americans said voting in elections was very important. While voting is considered a civic duty, American voter turnout is routinely low when compared to the number of registered voters. For people ages 18-29, voter turnout often lags behind all other age groups. When discussing how to improve youth voter turnout, political commentators often cite the need for streamlined voter registration opportunities, civics education in high school, and ease of voting options. In this lesson, students will examine a variety of different texts that present opinions and information about key issues involved in youth voter turnout. It is important for students to examine a diversity of perspectives so that they can identify the primary issues within the topic of youth voter turnout.

SUGGESTED TIMING

This lesson can be completed in one 90-minute class or two 45-minute classes.

Connections to the AP English Language and Composition Course Framework

Part 1: Understanding youth voting and source analysis

- Students review voting data from census.gov to examine age demographics and voter turnout over the last four decades.
- Students are given two sources and summarize/evaluate each text according to a list of source analysis criteria.

AP English Language Skills			
EU	Skill	Essential Knowledge	Unit
CLE	3.A	CLE 1.A., 1.B, 1.C, 1.D, 1.E	1

Part 2: Identification of primary issues

- Students review their findings from the source analysis exercise and paraphrase the primary argument that exists in each source.
- Students identify common/overlapping themes and rank the arguments in order of importance.

AP English Language Skills			
EU	Skill	Essential Knowledge	Unit
CLE	3.A	CLE 1.A., 1.B, 1.C, 1.D, 1.E	1

Part 3: Responding in writing

- Students construct a paragraph, including a claim and evidence, that argues the most important issue as it relates to youth voter turnout.

AP English Language Skills			
EU	Skill	Essential Knowledge	Unit
CLE	4.A	CLE 1.A., 1.B, 1.C, 1.D, 1.E	1

Before You Start

This lesson provides students the opportunity to practice skills first identified in Unit 1 of AP English Language. Students should have familiarity with different types of sources and a foundational understanding of how to read texts closely for meaning. Since this lesson asks students to practice synthesizing their reading and discussion by writing a paragraph response, students will need some familiarity with drafting a claim and incorporating supporting evidence in their writing.

ACTIVITY

Part 1 Understanding Youth Voting and Source Analysis

TIME:

45 minutes

- Distribute **Student Handout 1: Examining Voter Turnout by Age**.
- Have students examine the Census visualization and respond to the accompanying questions about the 18-29-year-old group of voters.
- Discuss with students their observations about the data and assumptions about obstacles for youth voter turnout.
- Distribute **Student Handout 2: Source Summary and Evaluation** and **Student Sources: Textual Pairings**.
- Divide students into small groups. Assign each group an article pairing.
- Ask students to read assigned sources and complete Student Handout 2 for each source.
- Have students discuss their findings within the topic of voter turnout in small groups.

Before Moving On

In Part 1, students should be able to identify the claims and evidence within a text. Students should be able to paraphrase the information in a text.

Part 2 Identification of Primary Issues

TIME:

20 minutes

- Distribute **Student Handout 3: Identifying Key Issues**.
- Lead students in a full class discussion about the primary issues in each source. Have students identify common themes within the topic of youth voter turnout including:
 - Civics Education
 - Candidate Responsiveness
 - Voter Resources
- Have students list the key issues that influence youth voter turnout, provide explanation of each issue's importance relative to the larger topic of youth voter turnout, and rank each factor in terms of importance.

Before Moving On

In Part 2, students should be able to summarize key issues within the topic of youth voter turnout and determine which perspectives are worth exploring in their own writing. Students should be able to determine how evidence helps to effectively support argumentation.

Part 3 Responding in Writing

TIME:

20 minutes

- Distribute **Student Handout 4: Responding in Writing**.
- Provide students with appropriate support to organize and draft a paragraph response.
- Have students use Student Handout 3 as a resource to construct a brief written response.
- Have students complete the prewriting component of Student Handout 4. Discuss with students how their notes can be directly developed into the key components of a paragraph.

Some of the textual pairings have images or video, so it is important that prior to assigning the texts your students have had some practice at analyzing images, for example, using the OPTIC visual analysis strategy.

Before Moving On

In Part 3, students should have used their previous close analysis of the sources to create a response that constructs an argument about the most significant issue, in their opinion, that impedes youth voter turnout.

Debrief and Check for Understanding

TIME:

5 minutes

Conduct a debrief in which students discuss the following:

- What are some solutions suggested by your sources?
- What solutions might be useful for immediate action? What solutions represent the need for longer term implementation?
- How might www.dosomething.org help to support increasing youth voter turnout?

Before Moving On

In this lesson, students should have improved their source analysis skills and their ability to identify and compare perspectives within the topic of youth voter turnout. Students should be able to construct a written response based on synthesizing their reading into a cohesive response.

Lesson Extension

After debriefing with students, you may extend this lesson into a series of activities that allows students to identify areas of interest within the topic of youth voter turnout. Through their work, students will research and consolidate information in order to create a tangible service project that supports their local community.

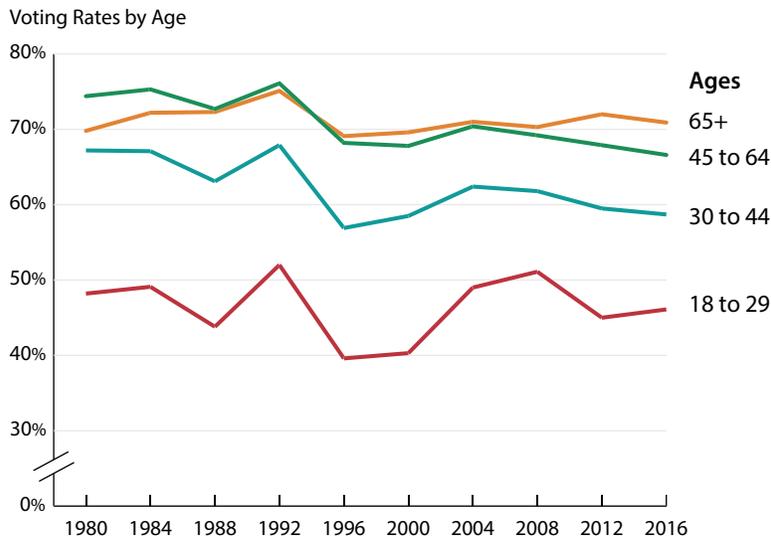
This lesson extension allows students to see how the critical reading and writing skills fostered in the classroom can catalyze action within communities. Some potential project ideas are listed below.

- Build Community Knowledge about Local Voter Registration Process
 - Research local/state process about voter registration.
 - Develop a method or mode (i.e. flyer, infographic, digital tool, etc.) to concisely convey information about how to register in a local district.
 - Partner with local organizations to create a messaging campaign that increases voter registration for the school, city, or district.
- Create a Digital Hub of Information about Candidates' Political Platforms
 - Research political platforms for local candidates and officials.
 - Consolidate unbiased information on candidates.
 - Create a format and delivery system that concisely disseminates candidate information to local voters.
 - Develop youth voter education programs on political candidates, digitally or face-to-face, that help to increase youth voter turnout.

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Student Handout 1: Examining Voter Turnout by Age

Examine the visualization below from the United States Census Bureau. Then, complete the accompanying questions.



U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
[census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

Source: Current Population Survey,
1980-2016 Voting and Registration Supplements
<https://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting.html>

1. How does voting for 18-29-year-olds compare to other age groups?

2. List two reasons that might impact voting turnout for 18-29-year-olds.

Student Handout 2: Source Summary and Evaluation

Key Issues

List the issues the source raises.

Evidence

List the type of evidence the source relies upon to discuss voting.

Summary

Provide a two-three sentence summary of the source. Describes the primary focus and the type of evidence.

Source Organization and Structure

Describe how the author or artist organizes the information/evidence in the source.

Student Sources: Textual Pairings

Sources are paired to present a variety of perspectives and formats. After being assigned a pairing, students should examine both sources and complete Student Handout 2 for each source.

Pairing One

1. **"Here's one more question parents should think about during back-to-school season,"** Danielle Allen (The Washington Post)
2. **"Mandatory Voting Guarantees Ignorant Votes,"** Trevor Burrus (CATO Institute)

Pairing Two

3. **"How Might Republicans Win Young Voters?"** Nate Hochman (National Review)
4. **Youth Voter Turnout: Why is it So Low?** Myles Bess (KQED and PBS Digital Studios)

Pairing Three

5. **"Teens and Elections,"** Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (Tufts)
6. **"Want to Improve Voter Turnout? Abolish Voter Registration. No, Really!"** Danielle C. Belton (The Root)

Pairing Four

7. **"With Covid -19, We Need to Rethink the Youth Vote,"** Jazmin Kay (The Nation)
8. **"Why Do We Vote?"** Christopher Munsey (APA)

Pairing Five

9. **"For Latino voters, vote by mail is not enough"** Irene Oria, Katherine Culliton-Gonzalez and Jorge Luis Vasquez Jr. (The Hill)
10. **"Young People Want to Vote. So How do We Get them to the Polls?"** John B. Holbein and D. Sunshine Hillygus (Forbes)

Pairing Six

11. **"Young Voters Know What They Want. But They Don't See It."** Maggie Astor (NYT)
12. **"Two Thirds of Eligible Voters Don't Vote,"** Nick Anderson (Houston Chronicle)

Student Handout 3: Identifying Key Issues that Impact Youth Voting

During classroom discussion, list the different issues that impact youth voter turnout. Briefly describe how the issue impacts youth voter turnout. Rank each issue in order of importance.

Issue Identify the issue that impacts youth voting.	Importance Explain the significance of this issue.	Rank Rank this issue in terms of importance to the topic.

Student Handout 4: Responding in Writing

Before drafting a response, complete the prewriting questions below.

Considering the Issue: Prewriting

1. What is the primary issue that keeps people between the ages of 18-29 from voting?

2. Why is the issue you identified of such importance to the topic of youth voter turnout?

3. Create a list of evidence, from your reading and discussion, that establishes the importance of the issue you identified.

4. What is a possible solution to the issue that you have identified?

Developing a Paragraph

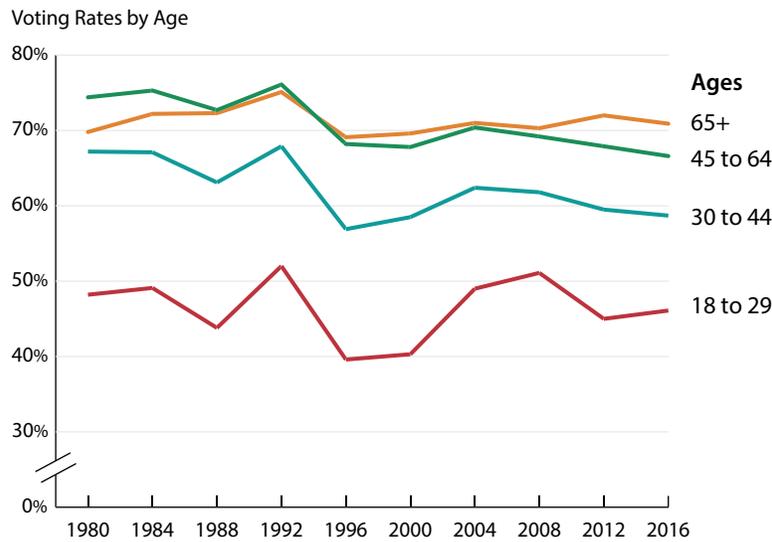
Use the information that you have assembled above to develop a paragraph that includes a claim and supporting evidence. Respond in writing to the prompt below.

Task: In a paragraph response, develop your position on what is the largest issue that keeps young people from voting.

Claim	
Evidence & Commentary	

Teacher Key: Student Handout 1

Examine the visualization below from the United States Census Bureau. Then, complete the accompanying questions.



United States
Census
Bureau

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
[census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

Source: Current Population Survey,
1980-2016 Voting and Registration Supplements
<https://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting.html>

1. How does voting for 18-29-year-olds compare to other age groups?

Voting for 18-29-year-olds is significantly lower than all other age demographics in the U.S.

2. List two reasons that might impact voting turnout for 18-29-year-olds.

Answers will vary. Some potential examples are listed below.

* *18-29-year-olds may not know how to register to vote or where to vote.*

* *18-29-year-olds may move frequently because of their jobs or college and not have the opportunity to register to vote.*

* *18-29-year-olds may not understand political issues or believe that political issues impact them.*

Teacher Key Textual Pairing One: Student Handout 2

Student Handout 2: Source Summary and Evaluation	
Key Issues	Evidence
List the issues the source raises about voting.	List the type of evidence the source relies upon to discuss voting.
<p>Answers will vary.</p> <p>Source #1 (WaPo)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civics education has declined in U.S. high schools. - Without civics education, there is less opportunity for students to understand their role or purpose within U.S. democratic processes. <p>Source #2 (Cato)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Even though a percentage of U.S. citizens do not vote, it is their choice. - Compulsory voting does not solve the problem of voter engagement and knowledge. 	<p>Answers will vary.</p> <p>Source #1 (WaPo)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - References to arguments from Tufts scholars. - State legislation about civics education. <p>Source #2 (Cato)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - References to U.S. law, the constitution, and U.S. Congress. - Survey from <i>The Washington Post</i> about voter knowledge. - Reference to compulsory voting in Australia.
Summary	
Provide a two-three sentence summary of the source. Describes the primary focus and the type of evidence.	
<p>Source #1</p> <p>Danielle Allen argues that civics education in the U.S. has declined over the last 30 years. She references arguments by Tufts scholars and a push from states to pass legislation that would support more civics education in schools. She believes that parents and students need to demand civics education so that our democracy can have more informed citizens.</p> <p>Source #2</p> <p>Trevor Burrus argues that mandatory voting is not in the best interest of U.S. citizens. He cites the protections of U.S. law for those who choose not to vote and a lack of voter knowledge to suggest that voting is a choice. Burrus argues that mandatory voting does not solve the problem of low voter turnout.</p>	
Source Organization and Structure	
Describe how the author or artist organizes the information/evidence in the source.	
<p>Source #1-</p> <p>Daneille Allen organizes her argument by establishing a claim about the decline in civics education and providing evidence from a variety of sources to support that claim. She then goes on to make the argument that this has negative impacts for democracy and concludes that civics education should be rebuilt.</p> <p>Source #2-</p> <p>Trevor Burrus organizes his argument by establishing a claim that mandatory voting is unconstitutional and unwise, providing evidence from a variety of sources to support that argument.</p>	

Teacher Key Textual Pairing Two: Student Handout 2

Student Handout 2: Source Summary and Evaluation	
Key Issues	Evidence
List the issues the source raises about voting.	List the type of evidence the source relies upon to discuss voting.
<p>Answers will vary.</p> <p>Source #3 (National Review)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Republicans need to discuss issues that are important to people under thirty. -Republicans can be “aspirational and idealistic” and still uphold conservative principles. <p>Source #4 (KQED and PBS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -People under 30 don’t vote as much as older generations because they don’t own property or have children. -There are fewer civics courses for students and that has caused a gap in information for voting. -Dissatisfaction with U.S. political parties. 	<p>Answers will vary.</p> <p>Source #3 (National Review)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -References to past presidents’ (Bush, Nixon, Reagan) ability to garner the youth vote. -References to Republican initiatives, specifically the Roosevelt Conservation Caucus, that align with youth voter priorities. <p>Source #4 (KQED and PBS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Evidence from the U.S. Census. -Expert testimony from USC California Civic Engagement Project. -Surveys and research about 18-29-year old voter behavior.
Summary	
Provide a two-three sentence summary of the source. Describes the primary focus and the type of evidence.	
<p>Source #3</p> <p>Nate Hochman argues that Republicans need to engage with youth voters on issues that are important and bring back the idealism of previous Republican candidates. He cites examples from past presidential elections and references examples of current Republican initiatives to suggest that there is an opportunity to connect with young voters. Hochman believes that Republicans can better present preexisting initiatives to win over youth voters.</p> <p>Source #4</p> <p>Myles Bess discusses different reasons that the youth vote is low in the U.S. and globally. He references the U.S. Census and a variety of different studies about 18-29-year-old behavior to suggest that youth voters aren’t disinterested in political issues. Instead, there are a number of obstacles that keep them from voting.</p>	
Source Organization and Structure	
Describe how the author or artist organizes the information/evidence in the source.	
<p>Source #3-</p> <p>Nate Hochman organizes his argument by establishing a claim about youth voters and Republican ideals and providing evidence from history as well as current Republican initiatives.</p> <p>Source #4-</p> <p>Myles Bess discusses why youth voter turnout has been low by looking at a range of information including studies, data, and the testimony from an expert.</p>	

Teacher Key Textual Pairing Three: Student Handout 2

Student Handout 2: Source Summary and Evaluation	
Key Issues	Evidence
List the issues the source raises about voting.	List the type of evidence the source relies upon to discuss voting.
<p>Answers will vary.</p> <p>Source #5 (Tufts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Voting needs to be modeled and taught for young people. -18-19-year-olds face the most voting challenges. <p>Source #6 (The Root)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -A variety of issues, including voter registration, voting during the week, and voting on one single day, keep people from voting. 	<p>Answers will vary.</p> <p>Source #5 (Tufts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Census data about 18-29-year-olds. -Analysis from education researcher about civics education. <p>Source #6 (The Root)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cites other countries that do not require voter registration. -Discusses obstacles for voting.
Summary	
Provide a two-three sentence summary of the source. Describes the primary focus and the type of evidence.	
<p>Source #5-</p> <p>The Tufts resource discusses major challenges for youth voters. The website relies on U.S. Census data and studies about youth voter turnout to examine reasons why younger voters may not vote. Tufts Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement argues that preregistration efforts, civic education, and media literacy are all important to turnout the youth vote.</p> <p>Source #6-</p> <p>Danielle Belton discusses why voter turnout is so low in the U.S. She cites voter registration and voting during the week as obstacles for all voters. She argues that the U.S. could change the current model of voting/elections to encourage great voter turnout.</p>	
Source Organization and Structure	
Describe how the author or artist organizes the information/evidence in the source.	
<p>Source #5-</p> <p>Tufts relies on data and research about 18-29-year-olds to support an argument about the need for civics education.</p> <p>Source #6-</p> <p>Danielle Belton focuses on obstacles that keep voters from the polls, specifically the need for voters to register. She cites voter turnout statistics as well as voting practices in other countries as evidence to support the claim that citizens should be automatically registered at 18.</p>	

Teacher Key Textual Pairing Four: Student Handout 2

Student Handout 2: Source Summary and Evaluation	
Key Issues	Evidence
List the issues the source raises about voting.	List the type of evidence the source relies upon to discuss voting.
<p>Answers will vary.</p> <p>Source #7 (The Nation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Covid-19 can impact student voter registration since students may be attending college online. -Voting by mail can be an obstacle for youth voters. <p>Source #8 (APA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Social factors, specifically altruism, can impact whether or not people vote. -Voting is a habit. It is impacted by a "stable context" for voting. 	<p>Answers will vary.</p> <p>Source #7 (The Nation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Research from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement. -2018 midterm voting statistics for youth voters. <p>Source #8 (APA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Research published in Political Psychology. -Research by Duke psychologist and political scientists.
Summary	
Provide a two-three sentence summary of the source. Describes the primary focus and the type of evidence.	
<p>Source #7-</p> <p>Jazmin Kay discusses the obstacles that face youth voters during the pandemic. She cites evidence from CIRCLE and the 2018 midterm voting statistics to support her argument that young voters need more support this year to cast their votes.</p> <p>Source #8-</p> <p>The APA article focuses on the factors that contribute to driving people to consistently vote in elections. The article references a variety of published research articles in political and psychology journals. The article suggests that voting is a habit that is often motivated by altruism and a stable location of residence over the course of several election cycles.</p>	
Source Organization and Structure	
Describe how the author or artist organizes the information/evidence in the source.	
<p>Source #7-</p> <p>Jazmin Kay establishes an argument about the obstacles facing youth voters during the pandemic and how youth voters will need additional support. She relies on research and statistics as evidence.</p> <p>Source #8-</p> <p>The APA examines the characteristics of voters and focuses on how those characteristics motivate election turnout.</p>	

Teacher Key Textual Pairing Five: Student Handout 2

Student Handout 2: Source Summary and Evaluation	
Key Issues	Evidence
List the issues the source raises about voting.	List the type of evidence the source relies upon to discuss voting.
<p>Answers will vary. Source #9 (The Hill) -Latinx voters face obstacles to cast their votes, and the pandemic exacerbates these issues. -Congress has the power to make changes to the 2020 election process to make it fair for all voters.</p> <p>Source #10 (Forbes) -The U.S. has one of the lowest voter turnouts in the world. -Young people do not vote because they don't see themselves and their issues represented in politics. -Civics education is key to improving youth voter turnout.</p>	<p>Answers will vary. Source #9 (The Hill) -Specific examples of individual voter experience. -Primary voting, specifically in Wisconsin, from spring of 2020. -Mail-in ballots.</p> <p>Source #10 (Forbes) -Data/studies from different election projects. -Research from the writers' book.</p>
Summary	
Provide a two-three sentence summary of the source. Describes the primary focus and the type of evidence.	
<p>Source #9- Irene Oria, Katherine Culliton-Gonzalez, and Jorge Luis Vasquez, Jr. discuss the obstacles that face Latinx voters during the pandemic. They cite the experience of specific voters and the way primary voting has taken place during 2020 to support an argument that Congress must act to provide safe voting options.</p> <p>Source #10- Holbein and Hillygus discuss some of the factors that keep young people from voting. They look at voter turnout globally and by age demographic. They argue that the obstacles that face young voters (i.e. difficult registration processes) don't outweigh their political activism and desire to vote.</p>	
Source Organization and Structure	
Describe how the author or artist organizes the information/evidence in the source.	
<p>Source #9- The authors rely on the experience of specific voters and primary voter turnout to shape an argument about the obstacles that face Latinx voters.</p> <p>Source #10- The authors rely on the voter turnout statistics and information about Gen Z to shape an argument about how to improve youth voting in the U.S.</p>	

Teacher Key Textual Pairing Six: Student Handout 2

Student Handout 2: Source Summary and Evaluation	
Key Issues	Evidence
List the issues the source raises about voting.	List the type of evidence the source relies upon to discuss voting.
<p>Answers will vary. Source #11 (NYT) -Young voters don't see themselves represented in political candidates. -Young voters have experienced a series of crises and don't believe that either political party is in touch with current issues.</p> <p>Source #12 (Houston Chronicle) -A large number of voters don't vote because they believe their votes are insignificant.</p>	<p>Answers will vary. Source #11 (NYT) -Testimony from individual youth voters. -Data from polls/surveys. -References to current events and political candidates.</p> <p>Source #12 (Houston Chronicle) -Individual votes don't seem to have the power to make larger change happen.</p>
Summary	
Provide a two-three sentence summary of the source. Describes the primary focus and the type of evidence.	
<p>Source #11- Astor discusses some of the struggles that face younger voters as they try to determine who best represents their interests. She examines the perspectives of individual voters within the 18-29-year-old age group and cites current events to argue that youth voters are dissatisfied with political candidates.</p> <p>Source #12- Anderson's cartoon suggests that the U.S. does not have high voter turnout. He characterizes those who don't vote as coming from a variety of different backgrounds. The cartoon argues that people do not believe that their individual vote makes a difference.</p>	
Source Organization and Structure	
Describe how the author or artist organizes the information/evidence in the source.	
<p>Source #11- Astor organizes her argument about youth voter dissatisfaction around the voices/perspectives of young voters and their beliefs.</p> <p>Source #12- Anderson organizes his cartoon to suggest the magnitude, drawn by the sheer number of people that don't vote, of low voter turnout.</p>	

Teacher Key: Student Handout 3

During classroom discussion, list the different issues that impact youth voter turnout. Briefly describe how the issue impacts youth voter turnout. Rank each issue in order of importance.

Issue Identify the issue that impacts youth voting.	Importance Explain the significance of this issue.	Rank Rank this issue in terms of importance to the topic.
<i>Civics Education ≠ Voter Knowledge</i>	<i>Civics education courses help to support student understanding of voting and the election process. Education supports greater voter turnout.</i>	
<i>Voter Registration</i>	<i>The voter registration process is difficult and can negatively impact young voters who tend to move more frequently/attend college in locations other than where they are registered to vote.</i>	
<i>Political Candidates that don't represent youth values</i>	<i>Political candidates are out of touch with the experiences and needs of youth voters. Young people do not see themselves represented politically.</i>	
<i>Election Day Obstacles</i>	<i>Youth voters are more frequently unable to take off time to vote. They don't always know where they can vote because they have not lived in the same location for multiple election cycles. Absentee voting can be a difficult process to navigate.</i>	
<i>Pandemic Concerns</i>	<i>Concerns about Covid-19 and in-person voting can keep people from casting their vote. Absentee voting can be difficult to navigate/understand.</i>	
<i>Impact of Individual Votes</i>	<i>The impact of an individual's vote can seem inconsequential.</i>	
<i>External Motivations</i>	<i>Voting can be motivated by modeled behavior in schools or communities. Voting can become a habit if it is practiced.</i>	