

STUDY GUIDE FOR *VOTES OF CONFIDENCE, 3RD EDITION*

Created by Jeff Fleischer



ABOUT *VOTES OF CONFIDENCE*, 3RD EDITION

An in-depth introduction to the American election cycle, newly revised and updated. Every four years, coverage of the presidential election turns into a horse-race story about who's leading the polls and who said what when. Social media and the shift to online news have made it easy to spread false information (even by accident) and harder to know what's accurate. It's tough to get good information about how the election process actually works, why it matters, or how you can become involved. Civics education is becoming less common in schools, but young and future voters still need to know what's going on. This newly revised edition includes updates and statistics from recent elections, along with plenty of clearheaded, nonpartisan analysis and explanation. Author Jeff Fleischer uses a fun, casual voice and lots of real-world examples to provide an essential resource that will remain relevant long after the next president is chosen.

ABOUT THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed to help teachers, educators, and parents explore the book's content with students in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12, though the material can also be adapted for younger students. The guide is divided into two parts—Government and Elections—each with three sections. “Reading Response” provides questions that test reading comprehension. “Group Discussion” offers prompts for discussion that applies concepts from the reading. “Additional Projects” suggests ideas for papers or projects related to the reading.



I. GOVERNMENT

READING RESPONSES

- Before the Constitution, the United States had a government under the Articles of Confederation. What were some of the problems with that system?
- The book describes how the Senate and House of Representatives were created as a compromise and the differences between the two bodies. What are the important differences between the Senate and House? What powers does one have that the other does not?
- The executive branch includes the president and vice president, as well as several cabinet departments. What are examples of cabinet offices that did not exist under George Washington but do today?
- Many Supreme Court decisions have had major impacts on the country. Give two examples from the book.
- Chapter three explains how the Democrats and Republicans became the two dominant parties in the United States. Explain how that happened, using examples from the book.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Of all the political offices described in the book, which would you most like to have as a job? Think about the advantages and disadvantages of each office, and which powers each holds. Explain why that particular office is most appealing to you.

ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

Mock Congress

In small groups, students should write a sample bill they would like to see as a law in real life, then all groups should present their bills to the full class for a vote. Ask anyone who voted against the bill to think of an amendment that would turn the bill into something they would support.

Court Cases

In small groups, students should look up one of the Supreme Court cases cited in the book, and research the arguments that both sides used during the case. Students should explain both arguments, as well as the Court's reason for its ruling.

Write Your Congressperson

Students should individually brainstorm an issue that affects their community, but which the federal government has authority to change, and write letters to their member of Congress about it.

II. ELECTIONS

READING RESPONSES

- Chapter two explains the role of the Electoral College in presidential elections. What are some of the disadvantages of the system? Illustrate with examples from the book.
- The presidential primaries used to always begin with the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary. What are some advantages and disadvantages of those states voting first? Give at least two examples of each from the text.
- Problems with the Florida election of 2000 led to the passage of the Help America Vote Act in 2002. What changes did that law introduce?
- Groups such as 527 groups, Super PACs, and 501(c)(4) organizations all spend significant money on politics. Explain the differences between those groups.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The book explains the idea of “primary as a verb,” in which parties sometimes replace incumbents with more extreme candidates who might have a harder time winning an election against the other party’s candidate. Would you rather have a candidate who agrees with you almost all the time but might lose, or a candidate who agrees with you more often than not but will win? Explain why.

Many people in both political parties are concerned about the role of money in politics. Using examples from the book, which, if any, aspects of campaign financing do you find concerning? What would you change about the system?

ADDITIONAL PROJECTS

Electoral College Math

In small groups, assign students to make a map of the United States and fill in the number of electoral votes for each state. Give each group three assorted states at random for their candidate to win and three for them to lose. Ask them to draw a map so that a candidate with those results in those states can get to 270 electoral votes.

Conduct a Poll

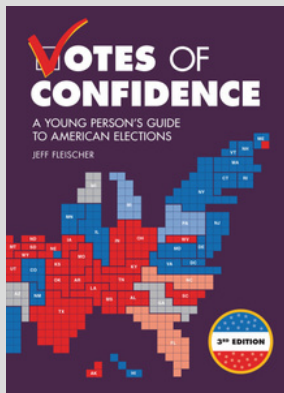
Students should each come up with a list of three poll questions to ask their classmates. One question should have only two pre-set answers, one should have four to seven pre-set answers, and one should be open-ended so that respondents can provide any answer.

Your Local Election Cycle

Students should research when elections are held in their state and locality. They should determine when the following elections will next take place: presidential election, state presidential primary, governor, US senator, US representative, state senator, state representative, mayor, local school board. They should also identify the incumbent official for each of those roles.

Redraw Your District

In small groups, assign students to research how your congressional district has changed over the last three decades. Ask them to research, using old news articles, to explain why they think it has or has not changed during that time.



Votes of Confidence, 3rd Edition ***A Young Person's Guide to American Elections***

Ages: 11 - 18

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Jeff Fleischer is a Chicago-based author, editor, and journalist. He is the author of several young adult nonfiction titles including *A Hot Mess: How the Climate Crisis Is Changing Our World* and *Civic Minded: What Everyone Should Know about the US Government*. He has written for numerous publications including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *National Geographic Traveler*, and *Chicago Magazine*.