

Voting by Mail: Civil War to Covid-19

A companion lesson plan to the *Voting by Mail: Civil War to Covid-19* exhibition and its online site by the National Postal Museum

Recommended Grade Level: 6th-12th grade.

Essential Question: How have mail-in ballots been – or not been – part of the election process?

Learning Objective: Students will compare voting by mail ballots and envelopes from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries to analyze the historical and contemporary role voting by mail has in the United States.

Duration: 75 minutes.

Common Core Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3
Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9
Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.



Texts/Materials:

- *Election Day* illustration, by Thomas Nast.
- Primary Source 1: *Civil War election cover, 1864.*
- Primary Source 2: *Absentee ballot sheet, 1944.*
- Primary Source 3: *Absentee ballot sheet, 2020.*
- Comparing Primary Sources worksheet
- Conversation Kit

Notes:

- This lesson is designed to serve as a learning extension for the onsite exhibition *Voting by Mail: Civil War to Covid-19* and its online site. To best prepare your students for this lesson, it is suggested to visit the exhibition (August 24, 2024 - February 23, 2025) at the National Postal Museum or view the online companion site (<https://postalmuseum.si.edu/voting-by-mail>) with your students to build background knowledge.
- To continue teaching and learning about this topic further, use the *Conversation Kit* discussion prompts to facilitate a discussion. This can be done as a whole class, in small groups, or in partners.

Lesson Plan:

1. Warm Up, 10 minutes.

- a. Display the detail of Thomas Nast's illustration titled "Election Day" (Appendix A) in a place all students can see. Using the *I see, I think, I wonder* thinking routine from Project Zero, instruct students to identify what they see in the image, what they think about the image, and what they wonder about it.
- b. Have students share their answers with the class. Ask students to identify the methods soldiers are casting their vote in this illustration.
- c. Explain that students will be learning about the history of voting by mail in the United States.

2. Primary Source Analysis, 40 minutes.

- a. In small groups, have students work together to analyze Primary Sources 1-3, completing the Primary Source Analysis worksheet as they work. To differentiate this activity, you can have students work independently and/or adapt the number of primary sources provided. A jigsaw-style collaboration would also work well.

3. Class Discussion, 15 minutes.

- a. As a whole class, have students share and discuss their answers to the Primary Source Analysis worksheet. Push students to identify the similarities and differences between each source and how it contributes to the history of voting by mail in the United States.

4. Check for Understanding, 10 minutes.

- a. Independently, have students write an answer to the essential question. Their answers should include a clear claim, two examples of primary source evidence, and a clear analysis of evidence.



Civil War election cover, 1864. National Postal Museum.

The state of Ohio created envelopes for their registered voters in the military to vote absentee and mail in their votes for both the presidential and state elections of 1864. This envelope, sent from a Union army field hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, contained a tally sheet recording the votes of Highland County soldiers for the Ohio state election. The museum does not have in its collection the tally sheet that was carried in this envelope.



USWBC Form No. 2
UNITED STATES WAR BALLOT COMMISSION

Instructions

FOR VOTING PROCEDURE OFFICIAL FEDERAL WAR BALLOT

BEFORE MAKING OUT BALLOT

1. Follow carefully each instruction on ballot and on official inner (smaller) and outer (larger) envelope.
2. Be sure no names have been filled in on ballot when furnished to you.

AFTER MAKING OUT BALLOT, TEAR ALONG PERFORATED LINE BELOW. SEE OTHER SIDE FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS

MAKING OUT BALLOT

3. Fill in ballot *in secret*.
4. Vote only for those offices for which there is an election in your State.
5. The law does not provide for your writing in the name of your choice for Vice President. (See instruction on ballot for voting for President.)
6. If there is more than one candidate of similar name for the same office, clearly identify your choice.
7. Include the name of your choice, for each office for which there is an election, *inside* the appropriate box on ballot.
8. Write or print *plainly* in CAPITAL LETTERS. Spell *correctly*.

Official Federal War Ballot

Instruction.—To vote, write in the name of the candidate of your choice for each office

Electors of President and Vice President of the United States
(A vote for President includes a vote for Vice President of the same party, and shall be deemed to be a vote for the candidates by name for Presidential and Vice Presidential electors of his party in your state)

Write in the name of your choice for President.

United States Senator (ONLY if a Senator is to be elected in your State)

Write in the name of your choice for Senator.

United States Senator, Unexpired Term (ONLY if a Senator is to be elected in your State for an unexpired term)

Write in the name of your choice for Senator.

Representative in Congress for Your District

Write in the name of your choice for Representative in Congress for your District.

Representative at Large in Congress (ONLY in the States entitled thereto)
(Vote for one or two as the case may be)

Write in the name or names of your choice for Representative at Large.

16-30823-1

Absentee ballot sheet, 1944. Object 2024.2001.4, National Postal Museum. Image 1 of 2.

Members of the military were allowed to vote absentee in the 1944 election thanks to an act of Congress. The War and Navy Departments supported this adoption of a universal ballot, where soldiers had to write in the names of the people they wished to vote for. This ballot was only good for federal, not local, elections. Not everyone in Congress supported the bill and, in the end, states were encouraged to amend their own absentee ballot procedures to allow soldiers to vote and not all states accepted this ballot.



AFTER MAKING OUT BALLOT

9. Place ballot inside inner envelope. Securely seal inner envelope.

10. Fill in (print *plainly* in CAPITAL LETTERS) each appropriate space on front and back of inner envelope. Leave blank the space for your signature and the spaces for use of person taking your oath.

11. Fill in (print *plainly* in CAPITAL LETTERS) each blank on outer envelope. Do *not* at this time seal outer envelope.

12. Bring both envelopes to person authorized to take your oath. *In this person's presence*, take your oath and sign your name where provided on the inner envelope.

13. Then place inner envelope inside outer envelope and seal securely. Deliver it to the person designated by proper authority to receive executed ballots for transmission to your home State.

Notes: 1. Sec. 302, P. L. 277, 78th Cong., restricts the distribution and use of official Federal war ballots. Use this ballot only if furnished to you by proper authority.

2. Any commissioned officer, any noncommissioned officer not below the grade of sergeant, or any petty officer, in the armed forces, or any member of the merchant marine designated by Administrator of War Shipping Administration, is authorized to take the oath on inner envelope.

**Official Federal
War Ballot**

**Official Federal
War Ballot**

☆ U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1944 10-39523-1

3034, 5001, 4

Absentee ballot sheet, 1944. Object 2024.2001.4, National Postal Museum. Image 2 of 2.



Franklin County		WORTHINGTON 01-A 01
November 03, 2020		
<p>Instructions to Voter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To vote: completely darken the oval (●) to the left of your choice. Note the permitted number of choices directly below the title of each candidate office. Do not mark the ballot for more choices than allowed. If you mark the ballot for more choices than permitted, that contest or question will not be counted. To vote for a write-in candidate: completely darken the oval (●) to the left of the blank line and write in the candidate's name. Only votes cast for candidates who filed as write-in candidates can be counted. Do not write in a candidate's name if that person's name is already printed on the ballot for that same contest. If you make a mistake or want to change your vote: return your ballot to an election official and get a new ballot. You may ask for a new ballot up to two times. 		
<p>For President and Vice President (Vote for not more than 1 pair)</p> <p>A vote for any candidates for President and Vice President shall be a vote for the electors of those candidates whose names have been certified to the Secretary of State.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> For President Howie Hawkins For Vice President Angela Walker</p> <p><input type="radio"/> For President Jo Jorgensen For Vice President Spike Cohen Libertarian</p> <p><input type="radio"/> For President Donald J. Trump For Vice President Michael R. Pence Republican</p> <p><input type="radio"/> For President Joseph R. Biden For Vice President Kamala D. Harris Democratic</p> <p><input type="radio"/> For President</p> <p>Write-in _____ For Vice President</p> <p>Write-in _____</p>	<p>For State Representative (21st District) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Beth Liston Democratic</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Mehek Cooke Republican</p> <p>For County Commissioner (Full term commencing 1-2-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Andrew C. Littler Republican</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Kevin L. Boyce Democratic</p> <p>For County Commissioner (Full term commencing 1-3-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> John O'Grady Democratic</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Luis Gil Republican</p> <p>For Prosecuting Attorney (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Gary Tyack Democratic</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Ron O'Brien Republican</p> <p>For Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Maryellen O'Shaughnessy Democratic</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Jarrod M. Golden Republican</p> <p>For Sheriff (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Dallas I. Baldwin Democratic</p> <p>For County Recorder (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Danny O'Connor Democratic</p> <p>For County Treasurer (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Cheryl Brooks Sullivan Democratic</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Brandon Cross Republican</p>	<p>For County Engineer (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Cornell R. Robertson Republican</p> <p>For Coroner (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Anahi Ortiz Democratic</p> <p>For Member of the State Board of Education (6th District) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Alice Nicks</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Antoinette Miranda</p> <p>For Justice of the Supreme Court (Full term commencing 1-1-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> John P. O'Donnell</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Sharon L. Kennedy</p> <p>For Justice of the Supreme Court (Full term commencing 1-2-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Judi French</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Jennifer Brunner</p> <p>For Judge of the Court of Appeals (10th District) (Full term commencing 2-9-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Colleen O'Donnell</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Michael C. Mentel</p> <p>For Judge of the Court of Appeals (10th District) (Full term commencing 7-1-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Lisa L. Sadler</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Terri Jamison</p> <p>For Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (Full term commencing 1-1-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Josh Brown</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Carl Aveni</p>
<p>For Representative to Congress (12th District) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> John S. Stewart Libertarian</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Troy Balderson Republican</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Alaina Shearer Democratic</p> <p>For State Senator (16th District) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Stephanie L. Kunze Republican</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Crystal Lett Democratic</p>	<p>Page 1 of 2 Turn Ballot Over</p>	
WORTHINGTON 01-A 01	AB Style 1117	

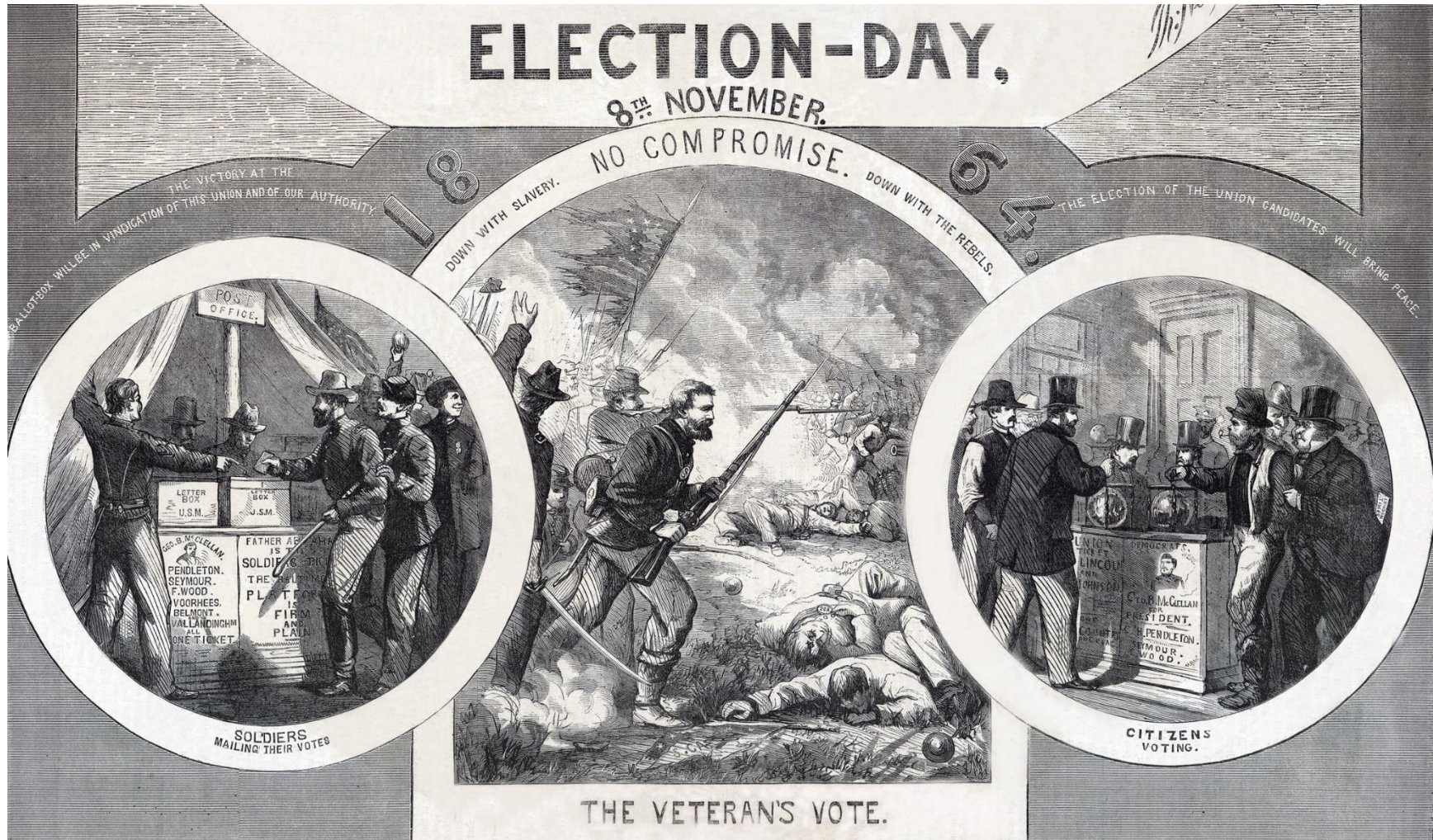
Absentee ballot sheet, October 2020. Object 2021.2003.1.2, National Postal Museum. Image 1 of 2. Images of contemporary election material are reproduced here solely for educational purposes. Any other use is prohibited.

Franklin County, Ohio, election officials sent ballots containing errors to about 50,000 of the county's 237,000 absentee voters at the beginning of mail-in voting period in the 2020 general election. The incorrect ballots listed at least one election race for a precinct other than that in which the recipient was registered.



<p>For Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (Full term commencing 2-6-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Andy Miller</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Jenifer French</p>	<p>#24 Proposed Tax Levy (Renewal and Increase) Franklin County Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health (ADMH)</p> <p>A majority affirmative vote is necessary for passage.</p>	
<p>For Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (Full term commencing 7-1-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> David Young</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Michael J. Cassone</p>	<p>A renewal of 2.7 mills and an increase of 0.65 mill to provide a tax for the benefit of Franklin County for the purpose of the operation of mental health, alcohol and drug addiction programs for children, adults, and families including crisis, residential and outpatient treatment programs, school and community based prevention programs, patient housing and recovery supports at a rate not exceeding 2.95 mills for each one dollar of valuation, which amounts to \$8,295 for each one hundred dollars of valuation, for 5 years, commencing in 2021, first due in calendar year 2022.</p>	
<p>For Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (Full term commencing 7-2-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Michael E. Carleton</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Chris Brown</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> For the Tax Levy</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Against the Tax Levy</p>	
<p>For Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (Unexpired term ending 1-5-2022) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Gina R. Russo</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Sheryl Munson</p>		
<p>For Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (Domestic Relations Division) (Full term commencing 1-2-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Dana Suzanne Preisse</p> <p><input type="radio"/> George W. Leach</p>		
<p>For Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (Domestic Relations Division) (Full term commencing 1-3-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Lasheyl Stroud</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Stephanie Hanna</p>		
<p>For Judge of the Court of Common Pleas (Probate Division) (Full term commencing 2-9-2021) (Vote for not more than 1)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Robert G. Montgomery</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Jeff Mackey</p>		
<p>WORTHINGTON 01-A 01</p>	<p>AB Style 1117</p>	<p>Page 2 of 2 End of Ballot</p> <p><i>D. J. ...</i> <i>...</i></p> <p>Board Member Signatures</p>

Absentee ballot sheet, October 2020. Object 2021.2003.1.2, National Postal Museum. Image 2 of 2. Images of contemporary election material are reproduced here solely for educational purposes. Any other use is prohibited.



Detail from "Election Day 8th November" by Artist Thomas Nast, published in *Harper's Weekly* November 12, 1864. Courtesy *Dickinson College*.

Graphic Organizer: Comparing Primary Sources

Essential Question: How was mail been – or not been- part of the election process?

Primary Source	Who created this source? Who is its intended audience? When and where is it from?	In what way(s) does this primary source help you answer the essential question? What specific evidence supports your claim?	How does this primary source fit in with your knowledge about the topic?	How is this source similar or different from the others you are examining?	What questions do you have about this source?



CONVERSATION KIT

After viewing *Voting by Mail: Civil War to Covid-19*, continue the discussion by digging a little deeper with these conversation starters.

✓ Question 1

How might voting by mail impact voter turnout?

- Consider the ways in which mail-in voting might increase or decrease participation among different demographics.

✓ Question 2

What role did mail-in voting play in historical elections?

- Is that role similar or different to the reasons behind why people might choose to vote by mail in the present day?

✓ Question 3

What are the logistical challenges and successes of implementing mail-in voting?

- Discuss printing and distributing ballots, training election workers, and ensuring timely ballot returns.

✓ Question 4

How do different states in the U.S. manage and regulate mail-in voting, and what can be learned from their experiences?

- How does your place of residence compare to others? Would you recommend any changes? Why or why not?

