**Why Vote?**

**Pre-reading**

Questions:
- Do you feel it’s important to vote? Why or why not?

Definitions:
- Govern – to rule or lead
- Representative – a person who speaks or acts for a group or community
- Elected – chosen by means of voting
- Candidate – a person who is trying to get elected

**Reading**

Is there something you would like to change in your community? Voting is one of the ways you can make those changes. Your vote is your voice in the governing leadership of your country, state, county, and city. Elections affect who represents you in government. You have representatives in national, state and local government.

The U.S. President, Vice-President, and elected members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives govern our country. Your State Governor and elected members of the State Senate and House of Representatives govern your state. Elected county board members provide leadership in your county. A mayor and city council members are elected to represent you on city issues.

Your vote is also your voice at your local public school. School board members are elected by your vote. If you have concerns about school issues, read about the school board candidates in your local newspaper before the election. Vote for those you feel would make a difference on issues you are concerned about.

Elections affect how public money gets spent. In 2002 Marshall, MN residents voted yes to a raise in their property taxes for local public school improvements. Elections affect what laws are passed. In 1996, residents of the state of California voted to legalize the use of marijuana for medical purposes.

The right to an equal vote for every citizen is one of the basic values of the United States. We’re not all rich, or beautiful, or friends of the mayor. But we each have one vote. Many people, however, choose not to use their voting power. Less than 50% of Americans vote in most elections.

Why do some people choose to vote and others do not? Reasons to vote may include: to make a change, to support a candidate, it is our right, to have a say. Reasons not to vote may include: not a citizen, do not know how, do not understand the ballot, and do not think it makes a difference.

If you do not know how to vote or do not understand the ballot, help is available. You can ask a teacher, job counselor or city clerk for help with how to vote. At your polling place, you can ask for help to read and mark the ballot. If you make a mistake on the ballot, you can get a new one.

History tells us that every vote does count. In 1845 one vote brought Texas into the Union. In 1960 one vote per precinct elected John F. Kennedy President. In 1977 the mayor of Ann Arbor, Michigan (a city of over 100,000 people) was elected by one vote.

Over the past 100 years, women, people of color, and 18 – 21 year olds have all won the right to vote. Any adult citizen who is not in prison or on parole for a felony can vote. **Exercise** your right to vote! Let your voice be heard!

**Level 7.5**
Understanding

1. How many Americans vote in most elections? ____________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

2. Who are the elected officials at the state level of government? ____________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

3. What does “your vote is your voice” mean? _______________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

4. Whose vote has a greater impact: Dr. Olson, a well-known surgeon; Miss Ling, a store cashier; Ms.
   Sanchez, a lawyer; or Mr. Martino, a part-time waiter? _________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

5. What three areas do elections affect? ___________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

6. What does the word exercise mean in this reading? _______________________________________

7. Who are the elected officials at the local level of government? ____________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

Writing

In your opinion, is it important to vote? Why or why not?

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