

Introducing Presidential Elections

(from *Electing Our President* ©1988 David S. Lake Publishers)

What do you remember about the last Presidential election campaign? You might have noticed the **candidates'** ads on television. You might have heard your parents and their friends discussing the candidates. But the chances are that you were too young to pay much attention.

You won't miss the next one, though. The Presidential campaign is the most important race in our country. Election Day happens every four years – on the second Tuesday after the first Monday in November. But the race starts long before that day.

First, at least a year before Election Day, leading members of the political parties start to “toss their hats into the ring.” This means that they announce their plans to run for the Presidency. Then between February and June of election year, the Democratic and Republican party organizations in each state decide which candidate they'll support. In over 30 states, this decision is made in Presidential preference **primaries**. **Registered** Democrats and Republicans vote for one of their party's candidates. The state party will support the winners of the primary election. In the remaining states, the state party's candidates are chosen by party caucuses, or meetings of members.

In the summer, after the parties in each state have picked their candidate, they send **delegates** to the national **convention** of their party. Here, the state delegates vote to nominate the national party's candidate for the Presidency.

Once the national party **nominees** are chosen, the Presidential campaign begins. Each nominee tries to convince the voters that he or she is the best candidate. The nominees want as many people as possible to see their faces and hear their ideas. To do this they each spend millions of dollars, shake thousands of hands, travel thousands of miles, and make hundreds of speeches.

Then on Election Day, millions of Americans go to neighborhood **polls** to cast their votes for the next President. After the election is over, the happy face of the victor appears on television screens and front pages of newspapers around the world. But there is still one more step before the winner of the popular election is *officially* elected. That is the vote by the Electoral College in December. Later, you will learn how it works. Then the Electoral College vote must be counted by Congress.

Finally, on January 20, the new President is **inaugurated** and begins a challenging four-year term as the holder of the highest office in our nation.

As you will soon see, the process of electing a President has not always been so complicated. It has changed during the two hundred years that we have been holding Presidential elections. The purpose of these changes has been to give more people a say in who their President will be. There are still discussions about whether the election process is **democratic** enough.

Introducing Presidential Elections Worksheet

Name: _____

1. How often are U.S. Presidential elections held? _____
On what day are they held? _____
2. What do the following words mean? If you can't tell from how they are used in the article, look them up in a dictionary.
Candidate _____
Primary _____
Nominee _____
Polls _____
Inaugurated _____
Democratic _____
3. Number the following steps in the Presidential election process in the order in which they happen.
_____ Electoral College meets
_____ people "toss their hats into the ring"
_____ Inauguration Day
_____ national party nominating conventions
_____ Election Day
_____ state primaries or party conventions
4. In your opinion, what are some of the reasons a voter chooses one candidate over another?

5. Who have the Presidents been during your lifetime? And in what years were they elected?

6. When will our next Presidential election be? _____