



# Electoral College: Change Over Time



by  
Fran O'Malley

In this lesson, students will examine Constitutional provisions relating to the election of President and Vice-President to learn about the role of the Electoral College and how and why the method for choosing the President and Vice-President has changed over time.

Targeted Audience: grades 5-12.

Time to Complete: approximately 30-40 minutes.

Standards Based Topics & Concepts: change over time, causation, democratic methods, dynamic government, content of Constitution.

Essential Questions to Consider:

- How and why has the method of selecting a President and Vice-President changed over time? (History 1, 4-12 – change over time, causation).
- How might Article 1, Section 1 and Amendment 12 be used to illustrate the dynamic nature of the American political system? (History 2b, 9-12).
- What events in American history created pressures for change in the method of electing the president? How have the American political system responded to those pressures? Which constraints on change have limited the changes in our election system? (Civics 2b, 9-12)
- Does the Electoral College system represent adherence to or deviation from the fundamental principles of the American political system? (Civics 2b, 6-8)

Materials Needed:

- Class copies of Handout 1: Constitutional Provisions for Presidential Elections.
- Transparency 1: Results – Presidential Election of 1800.

Procedures:

1. Place students in triads.
2. Tell students that today they are going to be analyzing documents and data to learn how the President is elected in the United States and how and why that process changed over time.
3. Distribute copies of *Handout 1: Constitutional Provisions for Presidential Elections*. Tell groups to read, discuss, and summarize Article 1 (lefthand column) in their own words. Then, call on volunteers to share their summaries. Ask—Who elects the President in the United States?

4. Tell students to read, discuss, and summarize Amendment XII (right hand column). Ask students...
  - a. When was Article I ratified?
  - b. When was Amendment XII ratified?
  - c. How did the method of electing the President change over time from 1788-1804?
5. Ask students to speculate—Why might the Twelfth Amendment have been added to the Constitution?
6. Display (or distribute copies of) *Transparency 1: Results – Presidential Election of 1800*. Ask students...
  - a. What was unusual about the results of this election? [tie between Jefferson & Burr]
  - b. How did the Twelfth Amendment address this result? [provided for separate balloting for President and Vice-President. Previously, an elector received two votes and could cast them for any two candidates. The candidate receiving the most votes became President while the candidate receiving the second highest number of votes became Vice-President. If every elector cast ballots for the same two people, ties would be common]
  - c. Clarify and reinforce—Why might the Twelfth Amendment have been added to the Constitution? [to reduce the chances for a tie in the electoral college]

### Debrief

Ask students...

- How and why has the method of selecting a President and Vice-President changed over time?
- How might Article 1, Section 1 and Amendment 12 be used to illustrate the dynamic nature of the American political system?
- What events in American history created pressures for change in the method of electing the president? How has the American political system responded to those pressures? Which constraints on change have limited the modifications in our election system (e.g., preservation of the electoral college)?
- Does the Electoral College system represent adherence to or deviation from the fundamental principles of the American political system? (Civics 2b, 6-8)

**Handout 1: Constitutional Provisions for Presidential Elections**

<b>Article I</b> <b>Section 1</b> (ratified June 21, 1788)	<b>Amendment XII</b> (ratified June 15, 1804)
<p>The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. He shall hold his Office during the Term of four Years, and, together with the Vice President, chosen for the same Term, be elected, as follows</p> <p>Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress: but no Senator or Representative, or Person holding an Office of Trust or Profit under the United States, shall be appointed an Elector.</p> <p align="center">*****</p> <p>The Congress may determine the Time of chusing the Electors, and the Day on which they shall give their Votes; which Day shall be the same throughout the United States.</p>	<p>The Electors shall meet in their respective states, and vote by ballot for President and Vice-President, one of whom, at least, shall not be an inhabitant of the same state with themselves; they shall name in their ballots the person voted for as President, and in distinct ballots the person voted for as Vice-President,</p> <p>****</p> <p>The person having the greatest number of votes for President, shall be the President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed;</p> <p>***</p> <p>The person having the greatest number of votes as Vice-President, shall be the Vice-President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of Electors appointed,</p> <p>****</p> <p>But no person constitutionally ineligible to the office of President shall be eligible to that of Vice-President to the United States.</p>

# Transparency 1

## Results: Presidential Election of 1800

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Electoral Votes</b>
Thomas Jefferson	Virginia	Democratic-Republican	73
Aaron Burr	New York	Democratic-Republican	73
John Adams	Massachusetts	Federalist	65
Charles Pinckney	South Carolina	Federalist	64
John Jay	New York	Federalist	1