Name: _____ Date: _____

Why Your Ballot Is a Secret

Circle group

Today, no one can make you tell how you voted. You go behind a screen. You mark your choices. You put the ballot in a box. That feels normal, but voting was not always like this.

Long ago, many voters said their choices out loud. In other places, each party gave out its own colored tickets. Everyone could see which ticket a person put in the box. A worker might fear the boss was watching. A shopkeeper might fear losing customers. If a vote could be seen, it could be pushed. People even paid money for votes, since they could check.

Then, in the middle of the 1800s, parts of Australia tried something new. The government printed one ballot with every candidate on it. Voters marked it alone. By the end of that century, many American states used the same idea. It was called the Australian ballot.

A secret ballot breaks the link between a promise and proof. No one can see your vote. So a person who tries to bribe or scare you cannot know if you obeyed.

There is one limit. You may keep your vote secret, but you can tell others if you want to.

Questions

1. How did many voters show their choices before secret ballots?

_____

_____

2. Where did the idea of a private government ballot begin?

_____

_____

3. What was on the ballot the government printed?

_____

_____

4. Why might a worker have feared voting in public?

_____

_____

5. How does a secret ballot stop bribes?

_____

6. Can a voter still tell others how they voted?

Words to know

ballot: the paper or form on which a person marks a vote
candidate: a person who is trying to win an election
bribe: to give money or gifts to get someone to act a certain way

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Why Your Ballot Is a Secret

Triangle group

Today, nobody can make you tell how you voted. You step into a booth or behind a screen, mark your choices, and drop the ballot into a box. It seems like the natural way to hold an election, but for a long time voting did not work this way.

In many places, voters once announced their choices out loud in front of a crowd. In other places, each party handed out its own colored tickets, and everyone could see which one a person placed in the box. A worker might worry that the boss was watching. A shopkeeper might worry about losing customers. Because a vote could be seen, it could also be pressured, and people sometimes offered money or favors for a particular choice, knowing they could check that it was delivered.

In the middle of the 1800s, governments in parts of Australia introduced a new system. The government itself printed one official ballot that listed every candidate, and voters marked it alone in private. By the end of that century, many American states had adopted the same idea, which became known as the Australian ballot.

The secret ballot works because it breaks the link between a promise and a proof. If no one can see how you voted, a person who tries to bribe or threaten you has no way to know whether you obeyed. That freedom protects every voter, whether they are popular or not.

Privacy has one limit. Voters may keep their choices secret, but they are always free to share them if they choose.

Questions

1. How did many voters show their choices before secret ballots?

_____

_____

2. Where did the idea of one government-printed private ballot begin?

_____

_____

3. What did the government-printed ballot list?

_____

_____

4. Why might a worker have worried about voting in public?

_____

_____

5. How does a secret ballot protect voters from bribes?

_____

_____

6. Can a voter still tell others how they voted?

_____

_____

Words to know

ballot: the paper or form on which a person marks a vote
candidate: a person who is trying to win an election
pressured: pushed or forced to act in a certain way
bribe: to give money or gifts to get someone to act a certain way
adopted: chose to take up and use as your own

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Why Your Ballot Is a Secret

Square group

Nowadays, nobody can compel you to reveal how you voted. You step into a booth or behind a privacy screen, mark your selections, and deposit the ballot in a box. Although this procedure seems like the natural way to conduct an election, voting did not always operate in such a manner.

In numerous places, voters once proclaimed their choices aloud in front of a crowd. Elsewhere, each political party distributed its own colored tickets, and onlookers could easily observe which one a person placed in the box. A laborer might worry that an employer was watching, and a shopkeeper might fear losing customers. Because a vote could be seen, it could also be pressured, and individuals sometimes offered money or favors in exchange for a particular choice, confident that they could verify that it had been delivered.

During the middle of the 1800s, governments in parts of Australia introduced a different system. The government itself printed a single official ballot that listed every candidate, and voters marked it alone and in private. By the close of that century, many American states had adopted the identical approach, which came to be known as the Australian ballot.

The secret ballot succeeds because it severs the connection between a promise and its proof. If nobody can observe how you voted, a person who attempts to bribe or threaten you has no means of knowing whether you complied. That freedom protects every voter, whether or not the voter is popular.

Privacy does have a single limit. Voters are entitled to keep their choices secret, yet they remain perfectly free to share them if they wish.

Questions

1. How did many voters reveal their choices before secret ballots existed?

_____

_____

2. Where did the idea of one government-printed private ballot originate?

_____

_____

3. What did the government-printed ballot list?

_____

_____

4. Why might a laborer have been anxious about voting in public?

_____

_____

5. In what way does a secret ballot protect voters from bribery?

_____

_____

6. Is a voter still allowed to tell others how they voted?

_____

_____

Words to know

ballot: the paper or form on which a person marks a vote
candidate: a person who is trying to win an election
pressured: pushed or forced to act in a certain way
bribe: to give money or gifts to get someone to act a certain way
adopted: chose to take up and use as your own

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Why Your Ballot Is a Secret

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Why Your Ballot Is a Secret

Easier · 198 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.8

1. They said them out loud or put a colored ticket in the box where others could see.
2. In parts of Australia, in the middle of the 1800s.
3. Every candidate.
4. The boss might see the vote and punish the worker.
5. No one can prove how a person voted, so paying for a vote cannot be checked.
6. Yes. The vote is private, but voters can share it if they want.

Triangle: Why Your Ballot Is a Secret

This passage · 259 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 7.9

1. They announced them out loud or placed a colored ticket in view of others.
2. In parts of Australia, in the middle of the 1800s.
3. Every candidate.
4. The boss might see the vote and punish them for it.
5. No one can prove how a person voted, so paying for a vote cannot be checked.
6. Yes. The vote is private, but voters may share it if they choose.

Square: Why Your Ballot Is a Secret

Harder · 271 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 10.7

1. They proclaimed them aloud or placed a colored ticket in view of others.
2. In parts of Australia, during the middle of the 1800s.
3. Every candidate.
4. An employer might see the vote and punish the worker for it.
5. No one can prove how a person voted, so the payment for a vote cannot be verified.
6. Yes. The vote is private, but voters may share it if they wish.