Name: _____ Date: _____

When Voters Write the Law Themselves

Circle group

Most laws in the United States are written by elected lawmakers. In about half the states, though, voters have another choice. They can use a process called a ballot initiative. With it, they can propose a law or a change to the state constitution. Then they decide on it themselves at the polls. In these states, ordinary people can act as lawmakers for a day.

The steps are usually hard. First, the supporters write the exact words of their plan. An official often reviews it. Then they collect signatures from registered voters. State law sets how many are needed. It is usually a percentage of the voters in a recent election. If enough valid signatures are checked, the plan goes on the ballot. Voters across the whole state vote yes or no. If a majority says yes, it generally becomes law.

A related tool is the referendum. It is a vote on a law the legislature has already passed. In some states, voters can collect signatures to ask for such a vote. In others, the legislature sends a measure to the people. Either way, the voters get the last word.

Supporters say these tools give citizens a direct voice when lawmakers are slow to act. Critics warn that a long, complex ballot can be confusing. They also say a campaign with lots of money can sway the result. Both points are worth thinking about. There is no national ballot initiative. This power exists only in states and in many cities and towns. If you see one on your ballot, read the full text and the official voter guide. That is the best way to vote wisely.

Questions

1. What is a ballot initiative?

_____

_____

2. What must the supporters of an initiative collect?

_____

_____

3. What is a referendum?

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4. Is there a national ballot initiative?

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5. Why do supporters like these tools?

_____

_____

6. Why does the passage suggest reading the full text and the voter guide?

_____

_____

Words to know

initiative: a way for voters to propose a new law themselves
signatures: names that people write by hand to show they support something
referendum: a vote by the people on a law already passed
legislature: the group that makes the laws for a state or nation
critics: people who point out the problems with something

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: _____

When Voters Write the Law Themselves

Triangle group

Most laws in the United States are written by elected lawmakers. In about half the states, however, voters have another option. They can use a process called a ballot initiative to propose a law or a change to the state constitution, and then decide on it themselves at the polls. In these states, ordinary people can act as lawmakers for a day.

The steps are usually demanding. First, the supporters write the exact wording of their proposal, and an official often reviews it. Then they collect signatures from registered voters. The number required is set by state law, and it is usually a percentage of the voters in a recent election. If enough valid signatures are verified, the proposal is placed on the ballot, and the voters of the whole state vote yes or no. If a majority says yes, it generally becomes law.

A related tool is the referendum, which is a vote on a law the legislature has already passed. In some states, voters can collect signatures to ask for such a vote, and in others the legislature itself sends a measure to the people. Either way, the voters get the final word.

Supporters say these tools give citizens a direct voice when lawmakers are slow to act. Critics warn that a long, complex ballot can be confusing, and that a well-funded campaign can sway the outcome. Both points are worth thinking about. There is no national ballot initiative, so this power exists only in states and in many cities and towns. If you ever see one on your ballot, reading the full text and the official voter guide is the best way to vote wisely.

Questions

1. What is a ballot initiative?

_____

_____

2. What must the supporters of an initiative collect?

_____

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3. What is a referendum?

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4. Is there a national ballot initiative?

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5. Why do supporters like these tools?

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6. Why does the passage suggest reading the full text and the voter guide?

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Words to know

initiative: a way for voters to propose a new law themselves
signatures: names that people write by hand to show they support something
referendum: a vote by the people on a law already passed
legislature: the group that makes the laws for a state or nation
critics: people who point out the problems with something

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: _____

When Voters Write the Law Themselves

Square group

Most laws in the United States are drafted by elected lawmakers. In roughly half of the states, however, voters possess an additional option. They can use a process known as a ballot initiative to propose a law or an alteration to the state constitution, and then decide on it themselves at the polls. In these states, ordinary citizens are able to serve as lawmakers for a day.

The steps are usually quite demanding. First, the supporters write the exact wording of their proposal, which an official often reviews. Next, they must gather signatures from registered voters. The number required is established by state law, and it is typically a percentage of the voters who took part in a recent election. If enough valid signatures are verified, the proposal is placed on the ballot, and the voters of the entire state cast a yes or no vote. If a majority answers yes, the proposal generally becomes law.

A related instrument is the referendum, which is a vote on a law that the legislature has already passed. In some states, voters can collect signatures to request such a vote, while in others the legislature itself sends a measure to the people. In either case, the voters have the final word.

Supporters contend that these tools give citizens a direct voice when lawmakers are slow to act. Critics warn that a lengthy, complicated ballot can be confusing, and that a well-funded campaign can sway the outcome. Both concerns deserve serious thought. There is no national ballot initiative, so this power exists only in the states and in many cities and towns. If you ever encounter one on your own ballot, reading the complete text and the official voter guide is the surest way to vote wisely.

Questions

1. What is a ballot initiative?

_____

_____

2. What must the supporters of an initiative gather?

_____

_____

3. What is a referendum?

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_____

4. Does a national ballot initiative exist?

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5. Why do supporters favor these tools?

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_____

6. Why does the passage recommend reading the complete text and the voter guide?

_____

_____

Words to know

initiative: a way for voters to propose a new law themselves
signatures: names that people write by hand to show they support something
referendum: a vote by the people on a law already passed
legislature: the group that makes the laws for a state or nation
critics: people who point out the problems with something

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: When Voters Write the Law Themselves

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

Circle: When Voters Write the Law Themselves

Easier · 276 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 5.7

1. A process where voters propose a law and then decide on it themselves at the polls.
2. Signatures from registered voters.
3. A vote on a law the legislature has already passed.
4. No, this power exists only in states and in many cities and towns.
5. They give citizens a direct voice when lawmakers are slow to act.
6. A long, complex ballot can be confusing, and reading helps a voter choose wisely.

Triangle: When Voters Write the Law Themselves

This passage · 279 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 8.5

1. A process where voters propose a law and then decide on it themselves at the polls.
2. Signatures from registered voters.
3. A vote on a law the legislature has already passed.
4. No, this power exists only in states and in many cities and towns.
5. They give citizens a direct voice when lawmakers are slow to act.
6. A long, complex ballot can be confusing, and reading helps a voter choose wisely.

Square: When Voters Write the Law Themselves

Harder · 294 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 9.4

1. A process in which voters propose a law and then decide on it themselves at the polls.
2. Signatures from registered voters.
3. A vote on a law that the legislature has already passed.
4. No, this power exists only in the states and in many cities and towns.
5. They give citizens a direct voice when lawmakers are slow to act.
6. A lengthy, complicated ballot can be confusing, and reading is the surest way to vote wisely.