

4.6: Digital Games for Civic Engagement

Connecting to the Civics eBook

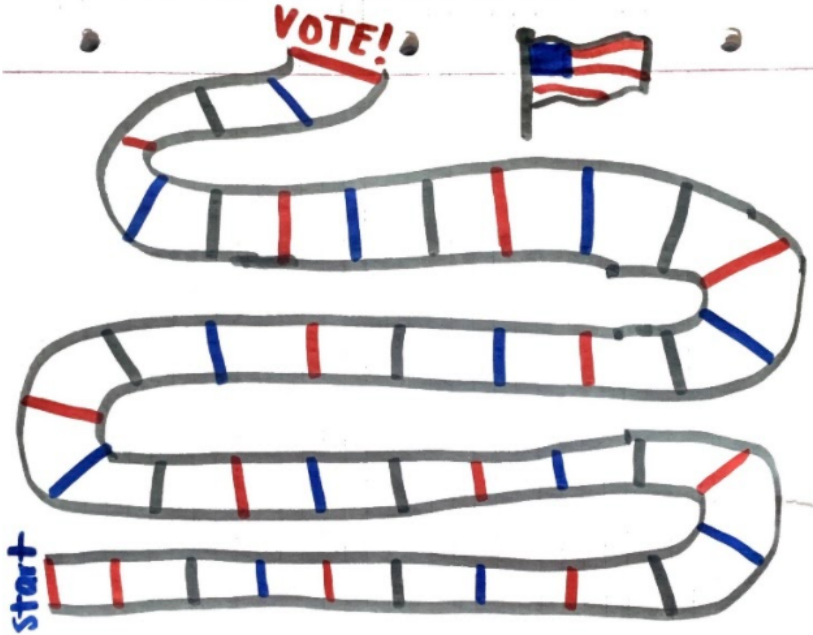
[Building Democracy for All: Voting by Mail and How Would You Get More People, Especially Young People, to Vote?](#)

Youngsters from elementary school to high school and college play digital games for entertainment on gaming devices, computers, and smartphones.

- NIM, the first mathematical game on a computer was introduced at the World's Fair of 1939-1940.
- NIMROD, the next version of that game, was created in 1951.
- In 1962, Spacewar! became the first game playable on multiple stations.
- Space Invaders arrived in 1980 in advance of a huge expansion of gaming on the then newly created Internet.
- Xbox was released in 2002; Nintendo Wii in 2006; Angry Birds in 2009; and Pokemon Go in 2016 ([The History of Online Gaming](#), *Medium*, January 20, 2017).

Online gaming is now everywhere, with mixed and virtual reality experiences emerging as the newest innovation in the gaming industry.

But how can game play influence young people to become regular voters and actively-engaged community members?



[VotingLand](#) by Elizabeth Mooney & Leanna Van is licensed under [CC BY NC SA 4.0](#)

Many educators and game designers believe so and are developing serious games to promote civic awareness and participation.

- [iCivics](#), founded in 2008 by former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, offers a wide-ranging collection of online games about all aspects of American government and law.
- In the run-up to the 2020 Presidential election, the organization Rock the Vote created the game [Build the Vote](#) in Minecraft.
- The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction published [Stop Disasters!](#) - games that challenge players to take governmental and environmental actions to prevent floods,

earthquakes, and other natural calamities.

- [Spent](#) is an online game about surviving poverty and homelessness.
- [Gerrymandering Mini Golf](#) - A Washington Post interactive game to spread awareness about gerrymandering.



Watch on YouTube <https://edtechbooks.org/-okN>

In the following activities, you will evaluate a currently available, politically themed online digital game, then design your own game about voting and politics.

Activity 1: Evaluate a Politically Themed Digital Game

- Choose a politically themed digital game from iCivics, Minecraft, Stop Disasters!, or another source and play it enough so you understand its purpose and structure.
- Critically analyze the purpose, design, and structure of the

game, using the following prompts as a guide:

- What do you think young people will learn from the game?
- Whose stories are told in the game? Whose stories are left out?
- How credible and trustworthy is the information in the game?
- What type of language and visuals are used in the game? How might the language and/or visuals influence the players of the game? Why do you think the game designers chose the specific language/visuals?
- Why is the game designed the way it is? How do you know this?
- Do you believe this game can influence young people to vote or to become more engaged as citizens in their communities?
- Then, complete the following activities:
 1. **Create a screen recording video** in which you present your findings.
 2. Identify at least 3 ways to improve the game to increase voting and civic participation by young people and **share these ideas with the game designer** (e.g., write a letter, Tweet to the game company).

Activity 2: Design Your Own Game

- Imagine you have been asked to design a game for elementary, middle, or high school students that would influence their thinking about voting and/or civic engagement.
- First, explore gamification principles:
 - [Gamification principles for user engagement.](#)
 - [Gamification Trends in 2019.](#)
 - [How To Succeed With Gamification By Including Social Learning And Epic Meaning In Your Learning Strategy.](#)

- Consider the following prompts:
 - How would that game function?
 - How would you balance competition for points with social problems to solve?
- Then, **design a pencil and paper or digital prototype of the game.**

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

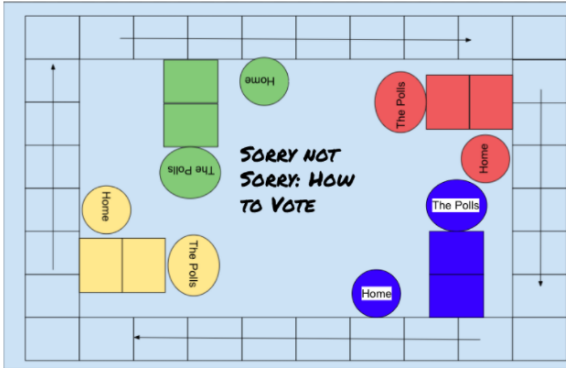
Example 1: [Sorry not Sorry: How to Vote](#) by Caroline Gabriel, Ruihan Luo, & Sara Shea

Example 2: [VotingLand](#) by Elizabeth Mooney & Leanna Van

Example 3: [Memory Matching Game: Voting 101](#) by Sophia Hajjar and Kayleigh Francis

Example 4: [CivicsLand](#) by Liv Sanfacon, Brendan Sarles, & [Christopher Spinozzi](#)

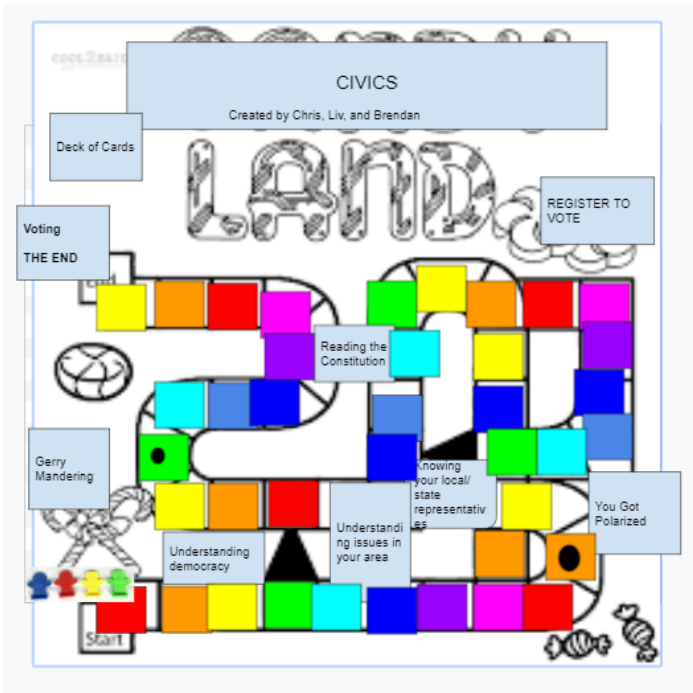
Game Board:



Card Example:

Uh Oh!
One of your opponents sent in an absentee ballot, but they missed the deadline! Choose an opponent to send back to home.

[Sorry not Sorry: How to Vote](#) by Caroline Gabriel, Ruihan Luo, & Sara Shea is licensed under [CC BY NC SA 4.0](#)



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Reason to Not Vote: Lack of interest	Some people aren't interested in politics on a regular basis. They think this means that they don't need to partake in voting, even though they should.	Reason to Vote: Speak Your Voice	If a person is of age and is registered to vote, it is important to exercise their right to vote and speak their voice.	Candidate	A person who is nominated for an election.
Vote	to make an official choice for or against someone or something by casting a ballot, raising your hand, speaking your choice aloud, etc.	Reason to Not Vote: Election Day is on a Tuesday	Election Day is on a Tuesday, and it is not a national holiday. People might not have the option to take time off from work to vote during the day.	How to register to vote:	Visit vote.gov to register to vote and read through your state's voter restriction rules.
Reason to Not Vote: No photo ID	If a person does not have a valid, government issued ID, they can't vote. This means that even if someone wants to vote, they might not be able to if they don't have a photo ID.	Polls	The places where people vote during an election.	Reason to Vote: Elections have consequences	If you don't vote, you aren't standing up for what you believe in, and if you don't stand up for what you believe in, the changes that you want to see in the U.S. may not be made.
Reason to Not Vote: Lack of knowledge	Some people do not have enough knowledge about candidates or pressing issues in order to make an educated choice about who or what to vote for. Therefore, they may not vote.	Reason to Vote: Opportunity for Change	There is an opportunity for change if each individual exercises their right to vote.	Ballot	The piece of paper used to record someone's vote.

[Memory Matching Game: Voting 101](#) by Sophia Hajjar and Kayleigh Francis is licensed under [CC BY NC SA 4.0](#)

Additional Resources

- [Serious Games for Government & Politics](#)
- [Serious Game To Experience Leading A Country In Political Turmoil Wins German Award](#)
- [Why You Should Teach With Celeste](#) (video game design)
- [Children’s Engagement with Digital Devices, Screen Time](#), Pew Research Center (July 28, 2020).

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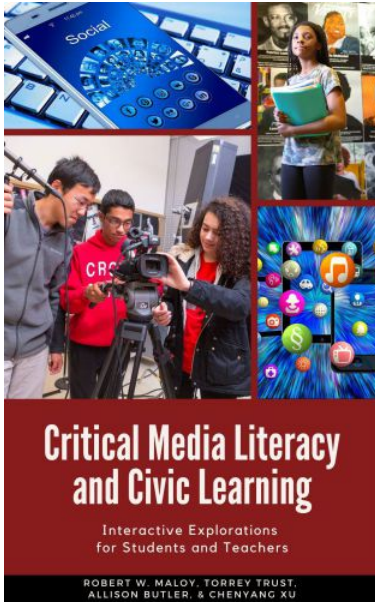
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Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - Describe how a democracy provides opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process through elections, political parties and interest groups. (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T4.5]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Digital Citizen
 - 2c: Students demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the rights and obligations of using and sharing intellectual property.
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.

- 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Innovative Designer
 - 4a: Students know and use a deliberate design process for generating ideas, testing theories, creating innovative artifacts or solving authentic problems.
 - 4b: Students select and use digital tools to plan and manage a design process that considers design constraints and calculated risks.
 - 4c: Students develop, test and refine prototypes as part of a cyclical design process.
 - 4d: Students exhibit a tolerance for ambiguity, perseverance and the capacity to work with open-ended problems.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6c: Students communicate complex ideas clearly and effectively by creating or using a variety of digital objects such as visualizations, models or simulations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)

- Ethics and Laws (CAS.b)
- Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
- Digital Tools (DTC.a)
- Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
- Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7



Maloy, R. W., Trust, T., , & Xu, C. (2021). *Critical Media Literacy and Civic Learning*. Equity Press.
<https://equitypress.org/mediaandciviclearning>