Choosing the President

Examine why the Electoral College was created and how it works.

8.C.3.2.E "Examine the rationales for the creation and functioning of the Electoral College."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two concerns that shaped the founders' choice, circle the passage's example of unequal power at the founding, and number two ways today's rules can affect the result.

Why Electors? Why Now?

1. In 1787, delegates drafting the Constitution disagreed about how to choose a president. Some favored a vote in Congress, but others feared that a president chosen by lawmakers would depend too much on them. Some favored a national popular vote, but delegates worried about distant voters getting enough information about candidates. They settled on electors chosen by states, expecting these people to use judgment. The plan also reflected unequal power: counting three fifths of enslaved people for representation increased slaveholding states' electoral votes, although enslaved people could not vote.

2. Today, voters in each state and Washington, D.C., vote for a presidential ticket. Their votes help choose a slate of electors pledged to that ticket. Each state gets as many electors as it has members of Congress, including two senators, and Washington, D.C., gets three. Most states award all their electors to the statewide winner; Maine and Nebraska can divide theirs. The electors vote in December, and Congress counts their votes in January. A candidate needs at least 270 of the 538 electoral votes to win.

3. This system gives states a defined role in choosing the president, one reason its supporters defend it. The two electors tied to each state's senators also give less populous states more electoral weight per voter. Yet winner-take-all rules in most states can make a narrow statewide victory worth many electoral votes. As a result, a candidate can win the presidency without winning the most votes nationwide. These effects raise a question about the founding compromise: should the system prioritize state roles even when the national vote and electoral result differ?

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What two concerns led delegates to consider electors instead of a vote in Congress or a national popular vote?

2. How did the rule about counting enslaved people affect the power of slaveholding states in choosing a president?

3. Why does the number of electors tied to senators give less populous states more electoral weight per voter?

4. How can winner-take-all rules help a candidate win the presidency without winning the most votes nationwide?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 4 to 5 sentence note to a school newspaper arguing whether to keep the Electoral College as it works now or change it. Weigh one original reason for its creation against one effect of how it works today, and explain which matters more to you.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.3.2.E

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two concerns that shaped the founders' choice, circle the passage's example of unequal power at the founding, and number two ways today's rules can affect the result. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What two concerns led delegates to consider electors instead of a vote in Congress or a national popular vote?	**They feared a president chosen by Congress would depend too much on lawmakers, and they worried distant voters might not have enough information about candidates.**
2	How did the rule about counting enslaved people affect the power of slaveholding states in choosing a president?	**It increased those states' electoral votes even though enslaved people could not vote.**
3	Why does the number of electors tied to senators give less populous states more electoral weight per voter?	**Every state gets two electors tied to its senators, regardless of population, so those electors represent fewer voters in less populous states.**
4	How can winner-take-all rules help a candidate win the presidency without winning the most votes nationwide?	**In most states, even a narrow statewide win earns all the state's electors. A candidate can collect enough electoral votes from those wins while receiving fewer votes nationwide.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would change the Electoral College so the national popular vote decides the winner. The founders used electors partly because they worried distant voters could not learn enough about candidates. Today, that concern matters less to me than the fact that a candidate can win the presidency while receiving fewer votes nationwide. The presidency represents the whole country, so I think the candidate with the most votes nationwide should win.

Accept either position in Part 3 if the student accurately weighs a founding rationale against a present-day effect and explains the choice. For the marking job, accept any two distinct present-day rules or effects identified in the passage.