TEXT SUMMARY

To nominate candidates for President and Vice President, each political party holds a national convention—a meeting at which party delegates vote. Many States use presidential primaries, or party elections, to help decide which delegates will go to the national conventions. The rules about primaries vary by State law. In some State primaries, voters choose convention delegates directly. In others, voters choose from among their party’s candidates and the results are used to help select delegates. For the 2000 elections, primaries were held in all but six States. In non-primary States, the parties choose their candidates in local caucuses and State conventions.

A few States allow winner-take-all contests. That means that the winner of the primary gains the votes of all State delegates at the convention. The Democratic Party no longer allows such contests. Instead, it uses a complex system of proportional representation that gives each candidate that wins at least 15 percent of the primary vote a share of delegate votes.

At the national conventions, each party adopts a platform, or statement of its principles and objectives. The party delegates also vote for presidential and vice-presidential candidates. A stirring moment at every convention is the keynote address, an opening speech glorifying the party and its leaders.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Selecting a Candidate for President

Parties choose their convention delegates by one of these two methods.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the basic purpose of a presidential primary election?

2. Diagram Skills At what four events may parties choose delegates to the national conventions?
TEXT SUMMARY

The presidential campaign ends on election day, which is held every four years on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Soon after, the electoral college elects the President.

When the electorate—the voters—vote for President, they are really voting for electors pledged to support a particular candidate. In 48 States, the candidate with the most votes from the electorate, or popular votes, wins all of the State's electoral votes. Maine and Nebraska use a district system to allot electoral votes.

Congress counts the electoral votes and declares a winner. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes, the House of Representatives elects the President.

The electoral college system has three problems. First, it is possible for the winner of the popular vote not to become President. If a candidate wins in a State by only a small majority, he still gets all its electoral votes. Also, the electoral votes are not divided according to State population and voter distribution.

Second, nothing forces a State's electors to vote for the candidate who wins the State's popular vote. Third, a strong third-party candidate could win enough votes to prevent any candidate from winning a majority, thus putting the election into the House.

Reformers have suggested four methods of changing the electoral system: the district plan, the proportional plan, direct popular election, and the national bonus plan. (See the Graphic Summary below.)

The Big Idea

On election day, voters choose the next President, but the election is not official until the members of the electoral college cast their ballots.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Proposed Reforms to the Electoral College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative Plan</th>
<th>Summary of Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The District Plan</td>
<td>Electors would represent congressional districts and support the popular vote winner in their district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Proportional Plan</td>
<td>Each candidate would receive the same share of the State's electoral vote as he or she received of its popular vote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Popular Election</td>
<td>The voters would directly elect the President.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National Bonus Plan</td>
<td>Would add to the current system by giving &quot;bonus&quot; electoral votes to the popular vote winner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proposals for changing the electoral college system have not been accepted because of much criticism against them.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What group officially elects the President of the United States?
2. Chart Skills Why might someone criticize the proportional plan?
THE PRESIDENT'S JOB DESCRIPTION

TEXT SUMMARY

The Constitution grants the President six of his eight roles. The President acts as the ceremonial head of the government, or chief of state. As such, he stands as the representative of all the people of the nation. The President is also head of the executive branch, or chief executive. As chief administrator, he manages the Federal Government. As the nation's chief diplomat, the President sets the nation's foreign policy. The President directly controls all U.S. military forces as the commander in chief. He determines Congress's agenda in his role as chief legislator.

Two presidential roles are not defined by the Constitution. The President is chief of party, the unofficial head of his political party. The President is also chief citizen and, as such, is expected to work for and to represent the public interest.

To become President, a person must be born a citizen, be at least 35 years old, and have lived in the United States for at least the last 14 years. In 1951 the 22nd Amendment limited the presidency to two terms of four years each. The President receives a salary and benefits.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: The Roles of the President

Established by the Constitution

- Chief of State
- Chief Executive
- Chief Administrator
- Chief Diplomat
- Commander in Chief
- Chief Legislator

Not Established by the Constitution

- Chief of Party
- Chief Citizen

Many, but not all, of the President's roles are established by the Constitution.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the three qualifications for becoming President?

2. Diagram Skills Which presidential roles are not expressed in the Constitution?
The plan by which a vacancy in the office of the President gets filled is presidential succession. The 25th Amendment says that the Vice President will become President if the President dies, resigns, or is removed from office. If the Vice President is unable to serve, the Presidential Succession Act of 1947 says the Speaker of the House and the Senate's president pro tempore are the next officers in line.

The 25th Amendment also outlines what happens if the President becomes disabled. The Vice President becomes Acting President if the President tells Congress he cannot do his job or if the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet tell Congress that the President is disabled.

The President may return to his duties when he thinks he is ready. If the Vice President and a majority of the Cabinet disagree, Congress must decide if the disability still exists.

Other than helping to decide about presidential disability, the Constitution assigns the Vice President only one role: presiding over the Senate. Political parties usually pick a candidate for Vice President who will balance the ticket, or help the presidential candidate appeal to a broader range of voters.

If the office of Vice President becomes vacant, the President chooses a replacement who must then be confirmed by a majority vote in both houses.

There is a specific line of succession to the presidency so that the office will never be vacant.

**Review Questions**

1. Who may decide that the President is disabled?

2. **Chart Skills** Who becomes President if the President and Vice President are removed from office?
Presidential Selection: The Framers' Plan

Text Summary

The Framers debated at length about the way the President would be chosen. Most Framers opposed electing a President by Congress or by a direct vote of the people. The Framers decided that a body of presidential electors, known as the electoral college, should choose the President and Vice President. Each of these electors cast two electoral votes, each one for a different candidate. The candidate with the most votes became President, and the runner-up became Vice President.

Problems with this system soon arose, partly due to the growth of political parties. In 1796, John Adams, a Federalist, was elected President. Thomas Jefferson, of the opposing Democratic-Republican party, came in second and so became Vice President.

In the election of 1800, the parties each nominated candidates for President and Vice President. Thomas Jefferson and his running mate, however, tied for electoral votes. The House of Representatives had to choose one for President; they selected Jefferson after many votes.

To avoid such problems, the 12th Amendment, passed in 1804, said electors would cast separate votes for President and Vice President. The election of 1800 also introduced the nomination of electors pledged to vote for their party's presidential ticket and the automatic casting of electoral votes in line with those pledges. Today, the President and Vice President are still formally elected by the electoral college.

Graphic Summary: The Framers' Plan for the Electoral College

John Adams, a Federalist, is elected President. Thomas Jefferson, from the opposing Democratic-Republican party, becomes Vice President.

The 12th Amendment eliminates the possibility of a tie for the presidency by having electors vote separately for President and Vice President.

1789 1792 1796 1800 1804
George Washington is unanimously elected President.

The Democratic-Republicans' presidential and vice-presidential candidates tie for electoral votes. The House must select one to be President. They choose Thomas Jefferson.

The Framers' original plan for the electoral college selecting the President was greatly modified after its initiation.

Review Questions

1. What is the purpose of the electoral college?

2. Time Line Skills Why did the House select the President in 1800?