

Reading Comprehension- Elections

Name _____ Date _____

ELECTING THE U.S. PRESIDENT

Every four years, on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November, the people of the United States do something very special. On that day, the presidential election is held. Voters from all across the U.S. go to the **polls**, or voting sites, to say who they think should be the next president. They don't say it out loud! They use **ballots**, voting forms, which are filled out secretly inside voting booths. You can tell anybody who you vote for, but you don't have to tell anybody.

A lot happens before the election. The United States has several different political parties. These **political parties** are groups of people who have joined together and share a core set of values. They may not agree on everything, but they usually agree that this core set of values is very important to their party. These core values are sometimes called the party's **platform**.

Each party must choose who it wants to be president. The choice should be someone who represents that party's platform. It should also be someone who represents the values of the American public in general. Choosing a person who can do both is sometimes difficult. The parties each choose their **candidate**, or person running for president, in various ways. Larger parties usually have a **primary**, which is a competition among the strongest candidates in their parties. The presidential primary is usually held several months before the presidential election. In the primary election, members of the party vote to choose the party candidate.

After the primary, the candidates of each party start the process of persuading all Americans that they are the best candidate, not only for their party but for the whole country. Choosing the best candidate can be very difficult, because it is not always easy to know where all of the candidates stand on all of the **issues**, or important topics. If your opinion of the issues is the same as one political party, you can choose that party's candidate. But sometimes you agree with one party for one issue and with one party for another. This means you must watch all the candidates carefully and choose the best one.

Before the election, the presidential candidates give speeches and debate the other candidates for president on many of the issues. People listen to these speeches and debates to understand what a candidate believes. Information is also available through television, newspapers, and the internet to help people decide.

After the election, the votes are counted. This is called the **popular vote** - the vote of the people. Special representatives from each state, a group called the **electoral college**, then gather together to vote again. The electoral college vote is almost always the same as the popular vote, but when the two are different, the electoral college decides who will be president.

The elected president will serve for four years as the leader of the United States. In four years, there will be another election. The President often runs again, for **re-election** (this can only happen once with each president).