Local League Civics Programs

For several years we have sponsored a Women's History Month (March) poster contest at either the elementary (4th and 5th grade) level or the middle school. The posters hang on the school walls for a month and then we honor the prizewinners at a televised School Board meeting. Although this is not directly about civics, it is largely about seeing women as active participants in making history.

At the high school level, we have worked with the AP US Gov't. teacher to have students attend and help out at our debates. This year, during our debates we had a segment where two very bright students presented the audience with the pros and cons of the Constitutional Convention issue. They did a great job of presenting the information.

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LWV of Larchmont-Mamaroneck

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The Schenectady League has started a Citizenship Mentoring Group to assist legal permanent residents in preparing for their naturalization interview. Last fall, we ran a 10-week civics class, with about 14 students, at the Phyllis Bornt Public Library in Schenectady (I taught the class; Ann Hatke chairs the Citizenship Mentoring Group). We also offered one-on-one tutoring and a conversation group for people to practice their English.

We are offering the second 10-week session of the civics class, starting Jan. 16 and will again offer tutoring and a conversation group. We have 22 volunteers signed up and trained for tutoring.

I use Lynne Weintraub's "Citizenship Passing the Test: Civics and Literacy" book for the class. It's organized into 10 chapters and the class closely follows the chapters in the book.

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LWV of Schenectady

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Constitutional Principles in an Age of Uncertainty

The League of Women Voters of Saratoga County is sponsoring a series of three programs on the core principles of the U.S. Constitution. One is scheduled for each of the next three months, covering topics such as protections afforded by the U.S. Constitution, increasing voter participation, and First Amendment rights to free speech and assembly.

The first session, Making Democracy Work: Constitutional Principles in an Age of Uncertainty, is scheduled for Tuesday, January 30 from 6:30-8:30pm. Dr. Katie Zuber, Assistant Director for Policy and Research at the Rockefeller Institute, and visiting professor at Skidmore College, will facilitate the discussion in the Ganett Auditorium, Palamountain Hall, Skidmore College.

On Tuesday, February 27 from 6:30 to 8:30 pm, Chris Deluzio, an attorney with the Brennan Center for Justice, will facilitate the second session, Dying to Vote: Countering Strategic Efforts to Suppress Voting Rights. He will review the history of voting rights in this country, efforts to strategically suppress votes around the country, and ways to effectively increase voter participation. This session also will be held in the Ganett Auditorium at Skidmore College.
The third session, scheduled for the end of March, is titled The First Amendment: Our Obligation to Assemble, Protest, and Protect the Free Press. Civil liberties attorneys will be presenting. Details will follow.

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WE THE PEOPLE (LWV of NYC Coordination)
The main goal is to learn and understand the basic foundations of our democracy and freedoms and to explore our rights and responsibilities as citizens. The libraries are places where people of all stripes gather. Many of us have not studied the bedrock of our country in many years, if ever. There is a groundswell of interest at this time. By-products of this type of study would hopefully be more participation in the political process, a way to address the 50% non-voter rate, and the start of respectful dialogue across “the great divide”.

TOPICS COVERED:
The Formal System of Government
1. The constitution: what do we mean by federalism, by checks and balances, branches of government? How democratic was the original document? How has the system changed?
2. State and Local Government: How does New York State function governmentally and politically? How does New York City work?
How Can Citizens Have a Say
3. Rights and responsibilities of citizens, opportunities for citizens to exercise power
How Democratic is our Present System?
4. Elections: freedom of the press, power of money in elections, electoral college, system of electing members of Congress, gerrymandering, lobbyists
5. Voting: who votes? History of the Vote. How easy/difficult is it for people to register to vote in various states? What are “voter suppression laws”? How does all of this affect elections? How do voters make up their minds, i.e., effects of media, advertising, groups and institutions?
6. The future: What is the state of our democracy? How to make it better, get more people involved. How to accomplish majority rule?

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES:
1. Heightened knowledge of the formal system of government
2. A better understanding of the forces that can change the balance of power.
3. A better understanding of how to be an active citizen, knowing our rights and responsibilities and how to get the government to respond.

HOW OUTCOMES WOULD BE MEASURED AND EVALUATED:
Before and after surveys along with the opportunity for participants to write their own evaluations of the program and what they got from it.
Request for more classes.
Number of participants attending classes. Increase or decrease in participation.
Number of repeat participants; those who sustain their participation by attending several classes.