



POLLS

Background research for students: **NBK, GME:** Search **Opinion Polls**
EA: Search **Public Opinion**

Explain to students that different polls may produce different results even though the same issue is addressed in both. Timing is an important element to polling. A poll about a specific event asked *before* and *after* an event will produce differing results.

For example, a poll's objective is to ask respondents about their concerns of a possible terrorist attack on U.S. soil. The poll was first taken on Sept. 10, 2001. Then, it was taken again on Sept. 12, 2001. What was probably the result of the poll taken BEFORE Sept. 11th and the attack on the World Trade Center? What would be the likely result of the poll taken AFTER the attacks of Sept. 11?

In most cases, results differ not because of a major event but as a result of the questions and the manner in which they are asked. Before you accept the results of a poll, therefore, you should examine the questions.

ACTIVITY:

Have students create four simple polls to determine the favorite color of the students. (For higher level students, pick a topic appropriate to interest level.)

POLL ONE: What is your favorite color?

Poll all students in your class. Calculate results.

POLL TWO: Which is your favorite color: Red or Green?

Poll all students in your class. Calculate results.

POLL THREE: What color do you dislike: Blue or Black?

Poll all students in your class. Calculate results.

POLL FOUR: What color do you like better: Blue or Black?

This is to be a "sampling" poll. Have students ask the poll of ten of their friends. Calculate each. Note results as "X out of 10 prefer the color _____."

All four polls are to survey students preference of color. But how many different ways can the results be stated? Let's see some examples:

POLL ONE may state students prefer the color purple.

POLL TWO may state students prefer the color green.

POLL THREE may state that students prefer the color black. (if more dislike blue than black)

POLL FOUR may state that 7 out of 10 students prefer the color blue.

So, what **IS** the favorite color of the students?

Discuss the poll results with students. Help students appreciate the importance of the structure of the question posed, i.e. how structuring a question in differing ways can produce differing results.

Have students research some of the latest polls from the Presidential elections. Review how, in a specific state, a candidate can be *ahead* in one poll but **behind** in another. Also, review **topic polls**, such as "*Who would better handle the economy?*" Discuss why the results of polls such as CNN, Fox News, Washington Post and Gallup Polls might differ.