



Parliament and Elections: Part 1

Every vote makes a difference



Introduction

This unit is the first in a two-part series that examines our parliamentary system and the importance of voting. In Part 1 we will consider elections and their importance to government in Australia. In Part 2 (to be included in the next issue of *Teachers' Toolkit*) we will take a closer look at the federal parliamentary system and the forthcoming federal election.

Elections and voting

In Australia, governments are determined by voting at elections. Voting is compulsory for every Australian citizen aged 18 years or older.

There is one national, or federal, parliamentary system and separate parliaments in the different states and territories of Australia; all rely on a voting system. Although primary-aged students are not old enough to vote, it is important they understand the election process and what that responsibility involves for their future roles as electors.

It is vital that elections are conducted fairly so that each person's vote will count, and there are strict laws in force to ensure this. A fair election in which all eligible

citizens vote will better reflect 'the will of the people'. One of the important roles of the **Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)** is to ensure that our federal elections are fair and follow the correct procedures.

Website resources

www.aec.gov.au

(Look under 'How')

(Australian Electoral Commission)

www.peo.gov.au

(Parliamentary Education Office)

www.eca.gov.au/systems/index.htm

(Electoral Council of Australia)

www.ifes.org

(IFES, an international organisation that works to give people a voice in the way that they are governed)

Democracy Rules – An electoral education resource (delivered to all schools in Term 2)
Contact: education@aec.gov.au



Discussion questions

1. Have you ever had to vote for someone or something? Describe the process.
2. What are some of the different ways of voting? Are some ways of voting more effective or accurate than others?
3. How do authorities in Australia ensure that:
 - votes are counted correctly?
 - each person votes only once?
4. What are the qualities of a good representative?
5. Persons who stand for election in Australia are called candidates. How is the elected or successful candidate determined? Is the best person always chosen in an election?
6. Where may people go to cast their vote in Australia? Try to name two or three polling places in your suburb. (Hint: your school may be a polling place!)
7. Imagine that the students of your school had to choose a school council, made up of two students from Year 5 and two students from Year 6. The students would be responsible for ensuring that the process of choosing the council was fair and that the candidates chosen for the council represent the preference of the majority of the students of the school. How should the students choose their council? How would you ensure that this process was fair?

Curriculum focus

PDHPE: Decision-making

HSIE: Living in Communities, Roles, Rights and responsibilities

English: Reading, Writing, Researching, Presenting

Visual Arts: Design

Mathematics: Tallying, Graphing

Science and Technology: Using technology, Design and make

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- recognise and describe their responsibilities as a family, school and community member
- investigate rights, responsibilities and decision-making processes in the school and in the community
- demonstrate how participation in decision-making can contribute to the quality of school and community life
- demonstrate an understanding of representation and democratic processes by participating in class and school decision-making.

Activities

'Scissors, Paper, Rock'

Explain the rules of this game then play a few games with the class. Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to invent their own version of 'Scissors, Paper, Rock' using different objects and hand movements. This exercise will encourage group interaction and decision-making.

Who goes first?

Discuss different ways of deciding 'who goes first' in a game or sport—for example, tossing a coin, choosing the youngest player, etc.

- Ask the students to come up with 10 different ways to decide who goes first in a game or sport.
- Take a class vote to find out the most popular, the least popular and the craziest ideas.
- Use tally marks to record the votes and discuss why tally marks are a good counting method.

Speech writing

Ask the students to write and present a short speech on why they would make a good class captain or sports captain. Encourage them to talk about themselves and their interests as well as why they would be the best candidate for the job. Invite a few students to become 'candidates' and present their speeches to the rest of the class. The other students could 'vote' for their preferred candidate on the basis of the speeches.

Circle meeting

- Sit the students in a circle. Explain that only one person may talk at a time and that no one will be judged for his or her opinions.
- Give the class the topic 'The most popular student should be school captain'. The first time around the circle, ask the students to say Yes if they agree or No if they disagree with the proposition.
- The next time around, ask the students to justify their initial response.
- Go around again, asking the students to further develop their argument and to add interesting facts.
- Repeat this activity using the topic 'Voting should not be compulsory'.

Decision-making: who decides?

Break the class into groups and present them with the following matters for decision:

- Select a theme for a school dance or formal.
- Select a charity to give money to.
- Choose which sport to do in class next week.

Ask each group to work together to make the final decision. After 10–15 minutes discuss the decision-making process, any problems and how the decision was finally reached.



Democracy Rules the School

Looking for ideas to stimulate your students' interest in the election process? Look no further than *Democracy Rules*, a new electoral education resource developed by the Australian Electoral Commission and delivered to all primary and secondary schools during Term 2.

Democracy Rules uses investigations that stimulate students by connecting with broader themes such as participation, representation and developing democracies.

Democracy Rules comprises a print-based resource for teachers and a fun, interactive CDROM for students. The resource is aligned with the *National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship*.

With the federal election likely to occur in the second half of 2007, there is no better time to introduce *Democracy Rules* into your classroom.

If you can't locate the resource in your school, email education@aec.gov.au. Also, for lots more, check out our website www.aec.gov.au



Students can meet the 'Professor' and many other lively characters in the *Democracy Rules* interactive CDROM